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**Fatherhood and deconstructive knowledge:
Alternative ethical and methodological considerations for men interviewing men**

by

Thomas Dale Carlson

**A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

Major: Human Development and Family Studies (Marriage and Family Therapy)

Major Professor: Linda Enders

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ABSTRACT

Research and theorizing about fathering have lacked a critical focus on issues of power, privilege, and accountability in parenting relationships. The purpose of this dissertation is to introduce some new methodological issues for working with fathers that are capable of addressing these important issues. It is proposed that because of the problems of positionality and power in relationships, it is critical for research with fathers to engage in a deconstructive process of the ways that power and positionality affect the lives of children and women. A new methodology of deconstructive knowledge is presented to help address concerns with positionality. Important ethical and methodological issues are also raised regarding the problem of men researching men. New proposals for action are presented to help in this area by recruiting women as consultants to the project. New proposals for researcher accountability are also addressed and enacted throughout the research process. Two fathers were invited to participate in this new methodology. The main focus of analysis is to demonstrate the process of this new methodology as illustrated in the transcripts. Special attention is paid to the interactions between the father participants and the researcher and to the very personal affects of this research on the lives of the fathers and researcher.

INTRODUCTION

Much of my interest in research has come out of my personal experience working with women in therapy. The majority of women that I work with have suffered from the pains of abuse by men. As these women have shared with me the terrible experiences of abuse and how the powers of abuse have continually affected their lives in hurtful and destructive ways, I have felt a strong desire to stand with these women against the very personal affects abuse has had in their lives. These women have shared with me how their experiences of abuse have lead them to experience guilt, shame, depression, worthlessness, etc. as if they were the ones who brought the abuse into their lives. This has felt like a terrible injustice to me and I have worked with these women in ways that help them to stand up to the injustices of abuse and reclaim the sense of goodness and beauty that abuse and its effects have taken from them. My work in this area has been deeply personal and at the same time influenced by narrative therapy ideas. Narrative therapy has opened up ways for me to help these women experience a separation from the terrible effects of abuse and the subsequent experiences of depression and worthlessness and help them to begin the process of re-authoring the stories of their lives. The results of this work have been inspiring to me as I have seen these women transform their lives in ways that could never have been imagined.

While seeing these transformations has been personally inspiring to me. I have felt that as a man working with women alone to help them heal from the effects of abuse was not enough. I have felt a strong sense of accountability, as a man, to do something more. While working with these women is rewarding and meaningful to myself and the women I work with, it does nothing to stop abuse from occurring in other women's lives. This sense of

accountability, and the fact that I am a part of men's culture, has lead me to seek to transform abuse by working with men. These desires have encouraged me to seriously consider feminist theories and critically explore feminist proposals for my own life.

This exploration made me painfully aware that as a man I cannot escape the culture that I am a part of, nor can I escape the privilege that I experience from my position as a white man. Feminist ideas have helped me to see how the experiences of women and children and persons of color are marginalized and how as a part of men's culture I have and still continue to act in ways that may marginalize these persons. The abuses that I participate in are not at a conscious level but my experience with feminist ideas has helped me to realize that the abuses nonetheless happen. In my personal life I have been able to see how I have participated in practices that have been hurtful to my partner and children. I have found it personally important for me to embrace feminist ideas as a way of entering into accountability for the effects of my actions on the lives of my partner and children. This accountability is only made possible as I have embraced feminist ideas and as I view my actions in a larger relational and cultural perspective. And yet I am aware that as a man I can never be free from men's culture and thus can never claim to be free from acting in ways that are abusive. Accountability on my part must be a continual process of personal and relational reflection and must be understood from the experiences of my partner and children and not my own perceptions of how well I am doing.

This awareness has been influenced by the feminist idea of positionality (Harding, 1986). Positionality refers to the idea that we can only see and act out of our positions of privilege within culture. Feminists have argued that women may be better able to understand

the complexity of relationships and knowledge because of their marginalized position. Patricia Hill-Collins (1998) suggests that this is why, for women, gender and the abuses of power related to gender are ever visible in relationships. This is also the case for persons of color for whom race and racism are also visible. For persons who are in privileged positions it is extremely difficult to see abuses that are not related to their positionality. Therefore, According to Black (1999) white men would have a difficult time seeing any relevance to issues of gender and race and often take the position that relationships exist on an equal playing field. Therefore, as a man, I have felt a special sense of accountability to work with those who are in these privileged positions in ways that render issues of gender and power more visible.

One area in my own life where feminist ideas have been especially meaningful is in my relationships with my children and partner. As I have embraced feminist ideas in my life, I have experienced a greater desire to be with my children and partner in ways that are more sensitive to their needs and rights as persons. Feminist ideas have encouraged me to enter into a relational ethic (Gilligan, 1982) with my children and partner related to parenting. For Gilligan (1982), a relational ethic refers to an ethics that is centered in the relational experiences of others rather than an ethics based on universal principles. This relational ethic encourages me to be faithful to them as persons. Faithful not only in the sense of commitment to remaining in the family but being faithful to the relationship I have with them and the call I experience from them to be caring and accountable for the effects of my actions in their lives.

I have used these ideas in my work with men related to their relationships with children. It is common for parents to come to therapy with their children because their

children have some behavior problem. Their focus is often on the child as the problem. If we take positionality seriously, it is important to work with those persons who experience the most privilege in relationships. Therefore, I have begun to work with parents in ways that help them seriously explore the effects that their actions have in the lives of their children and how they might enter into a relational ethic with their children. These experiences have directed me to study men who are fathers and explore with them the possibilities of taking up a relational ethic with their children and partners related to their parenting. My desire to work in the area of fathering is also related to the concerns that I have about the direction of fathering research and the inability of that research to meaningfully address issues of gender, power, and accountability.

As I have approached this idea of helping fathers experience accountability in their relationships, I have struggled with how this can be done in a way that is capable of helping these men enter into accountability and at the same time do so in a way that is respectful of these men's experience. While I feel, as a researcher, a sense of accountability for women and children's lives, I also am accountable to the men I work with. More recent movements in narrative therapy, feminist theory and post-structuralism have opened up new ways of inviting persons to enter into accountability in ways that are respectful of persons and at the same time are able to accomplish the goal of change (Carlson and Erickson, 2000). The methodology proposed for this project, presents a way of working with men that is informed by these ideas and allows researchers to be accountable to men, women, and children.

Having seen the possibility of lives being transformed in therapy has lead me to hope for research to provide the same kind of transformative experiences. While traditional ethics

of qualitative research focus on the importance of the researcher not intruding on the lives of the persons they work with, these ethics have been revised by feminist and postmodern methodologists to include research as praxis (Lather, 1986). Feminist methodologists began to argue that research should be about changing lives and communities and not just about reporting what they are like. The introduction of feminist and post-structuralist thought made this change possible as it became apparent that all research was an expression of certain values and had a powerful constitutional effect on individuals and communities. Rather than unknowingly supporting certain value structures feminists decided that it was preferable for researchers to not only be explicit about their values but also to practice research that is committed to specific values. Since this project is informed by feminist thought, it is an expression of certain theoretical and methodological commitments. I also recognize that each research project is a new one and methodological practices should be a reflection of the commitments of the research. Therefore, I am proposing a methodology that is based on my commitments related to working with fathers.

I have asked myself important questions in regard to my commitments, desires and hopes: How can I construct an approach to research that represents the relational and philosophical values and commitments of postmodern and feminist informed qualitative research methodology?, 1) that addresses ethics as a way of being that I as a researcher personally embody and that provides the grounding for the purposes of the research?, 2) that addresses the ever-political nature of lives and relationships informed by ideas from narrative therapy, feminism, postmodernism, and post-structuralism, that addresses the very personal nature of research including my personal life and experiences as a researcher, and that centers

in the personal narratives of the lived experiences of those with whom I do research. And finally an approach that addresses my hope for lives, relationships to be transformed in the process?"

These questions have invited me to develop a "new" methodology. New in the sense of a reconfiguration, recasting, re-presenting, or reformulating of ideas that have been told and retold in other contexts under alternative demands and hopes. In this dissertation I embark on the construction of a proposal for the recasting of the meaning of research. I want to address three key areas. First, I want to privilege the significance of knowledge that is deconstructed, reflexively approached, and personally meaningful. Second, I will focus on the importance and desperate need for research with men to address issues of accountability in their relationships with women and children. And third, I seek to highlight and bring to the fore the very personal nature of research and the importance of it being situated in personal and relational ethics. The purpose of this project is to study the lives of fathers in ways that are consistent with the methodological commitments that have been expressed above. In essence, there are two proposals here. The first is a proposal to work with fathers in ways that have not been previously addressed and the second is to propose a new methodology that is capable of addressing these important issues as a part of the practice of research.

I feel cautioned by Laurel Richardson's statement, "How one writes one's theory is not simply a theoretical matter. The theoretical inscribes a social order, power relationships, and the subjective state of the theorist" (1997, p. 49). Adapting the words of Munro (1998; p. 17) I am also mindful that it is necessary to acknowledge my claims about men are not based on some reality but emerge from my own place within history and culture; they are

political acts that reflect the contexts I have emerged out of and futures I would like to see. In proposing a research theory, I am aware that I am in a position of power both as a researcher and as a white male and stand for a particular way of conceptualizing and doing research that is situated within my personal experience, values, and preferred traditions of thought.

In order to provide a coherent structure for these two proposals, a critical review of the directions of fathering literature will be presented. This review will highlight specific concerns about how research in the area of fathering has been taken up and the movements that this research has supported. Some significant positive trends in fathering research and theory will then be presented along with suggestions for future directions. The purpose of addressing both of these issues (theory and methodology) is to provide a rationale for the need to develop a new methodology for working with fathers. Following the review of fathering literature the proposals for a new methodology will be presented. After the theoretical issues of this new methodology have been addressed a detailed example will be provided for how this methodology will be carried out with fathers.

REVIEW OF FATHERING LITERATURE: CONCERNS AND CRITIQUES

Over the past 10 years there has been a dramatic increase in researchers interested in studying fathers (LaRossa, 1995; Pleck, 1987; Rotundo, 1985). During that same time there has also been a strong interest in fatherhood by the media and popular culture (LaRossa, 1995). As a consequence of this new focus, new images of fatherhood have emerged. For example, Rotundo (1985) argues that a new style of fatherhood has developed since the 1970's and he refers to it as "Androgynous Fatherhood." Pleck (1987) argues that a new image of father has emerged since the 1960's, which is the father as nurturer or the "newest father." This evolution into a new fatherhood has been characterized by Mead (1967):

We are evolving into a new style of fatherhood, in which young fathers share very fully with their mothers in the care of babies and little children. In this respect American men differ very much from their own grandfathers and are coming to resemble much more closely men in primitive societies. (p. 36).

This "new fatherhood" has also been adopted in the media and popular culture. The media routinely presents fathers as acting in ways that are consistent with this new image of fatherhood. What is problematic with these popular images of fatherhood, however, is that there is no evidence to support that fathers are acting in ways that are consistent with the definition of the new father.

LaRossa (1995), disagrees with the idea that a new father has emerged. He argues that there is a difference between "the culture of fatherhood and the conduct of fatherhood" (p. 448). He speaks of there being incongruence between this cultural image of the new father and the actual conduct of fathers. For example, most of the research that suggests that fathers

have changed drastically in recent years uses self reports from fathers as evidence of this shift. However, when researchers use qualitative approaches to research in this area by actually watching the parenting behaviors of fathers, little or no change in father participation is observed (LaRossa, 1995). For example, Lamb (1987) in his study of fathers' engagement with children reports that between 1975 and 1981 there was a 26% increase in fathers' engagement levels while mothers' engagement levels increased only 7%. La Rossa (1995) further examined the results of Lamb's study and found that in 1975 the number of hours per week that fathers spent in child care was 2.29 hours, and shifted to 2.88 hours in 1981. An increase of 35 minutes a week and 5 minutes a day. He also reported that the mothers spent 7.96 hours per week caring for children in 1975, and in 1981 they spent 8.54 hours per week. The increase being the same as fathers (35 minutes per week or 5 minutes a day). So while the percentages reveal a significant leap in father engagement a further examination of the results reveal not only identical increases in engagement by mothers but also glaring differences in the amount of time that men and women spent engaging with their children.

La Rossa (1995) believes that there are some serious consequences of the asynchronicity of the culture of fatherhood and the conduct of fatherhood. While Rotundo (1985) and Pleck (1987) are aware that they are talking about a shift in the culture not conduct of fatherhood (the popular view of men as parents), the presentation of this new culture of fatherhood has lead both fathers and mothers to believe that there has also been a dramatic shift in the conduct of fathers. This myth has real consequences for fathers and mothers in that it encourages men to feel good about their current involvement in families and

discourages men from thinking critically about their parenting practices. This is highly problematic for La Rossa (1995) who states:

Only when men are forced to seriously examine their commitment to fatherhood (vs. their commitment to their jobs and avocations) can we hope to bring about the kinds of changes that will be required to alter the division of child care in this country. (p. 457).

In order for real change to occur in the conduct of fatherhood, it is critical that the myth of the new father be deconstructed and for research to better address the actual conduct of fathers.

Silverstein and Auerbach (1999) in their review of fathering research present their concern about the direction research in this area is taking. They are concerned about how neoconservative social scientists have begun to interpret past research and produce new research that is essentializing the need for fathers. This research has been taken up in the new men's movements and calls for the necessity for men to return to traditional leadership positions in their families. The majority of research that has been used to support this position has been in the area of father absence and violence in children. Researchers have tried to demonstrate a connection between lack of father presence in the home and later violence by children (Blankenhorn, 1995; Poponoe, 1996). Silverstein and Auerbach express their surprise that Blankenhorn and Poponoe rely on father absence research because the limitations of this research have been well documented over the past few decades. Father absence co-varies with other family characteristics such as lack of income from a male adult, absence of another adult, and lack of support from extended family. It has also been pointed out by

McLoyd (1998) that because single mother families are over-represented in poor families, it is hard to distinguish between the effects of father absence and the effects of low income.

A popular image of the results of this research can be seen in the media. An educational commercial on the need for fathers to be involved with their children describes the problem that resulted among elephants in Africa when the male elephants were removed from a certain area to control overpopulation. When the males were taken away, the young elephants began to demonstrate violent behaviors that had never been seen in young elephants. When the problem was discovered the male elephants were returned and the violence soon ended. The conclusion of this commercial is that without a male presence, children will likely become violent. While the message that fathers should be involved with their children is a good one the overemphasis of this point has been problematic. Silverstein (1996) calls this a problem of overstating fathers influence. Her concern with the direction of the new men's movement is that while it was initially influenced by men taking up a pro-feminist position (which seeks to address issues of inequality in men's relationships with women and children) it quickly shifted to making men or fathers the central focus. These new movements have interpreted this research as indicating that fathers need to return to their traditional roles as leaders in the home and that children need to have a distinctly male influence in their lives. The research in this area has been used to support father's rights movements which seek to "reestablish the patriarchal family as the dominant model of family life" (Silverstein, 1996; p. 6). The message that this movement has carried with it is that other family forms (especially single mother and gay and lesbian families) are deficient and pathological environments for children. Silverstein (1996) argues that "this is a serious concern that must be addressed" (p.

7) by feminists. She argues that research in the area of fathering must cease to be studies exclusively by males and that fathering must become a central feminist issue.

Ironically, what began as a call for men to embrace more nurturing and caring positions in their homes has led to men embracing a return to masculinity. If fathering research continues to be taken up by men in ways that promote 1) the myth that there is a new nurturing father, and 2) a return to masculinity, theorizing and research in this area will fail to help men to be accountable for examining and changing their commitment to the women and children in their lives. I agree with Silverstein (1996) that work in the area of fathering needs to be centered in a feminist critique of fathering practices. This would require research to shift from self reports from men or simply watching fathers interact with children to a more critical examination of the real effects that the current practices or conduct of fathering have on the lives of children and women.

Current Trends in the Area of Fathering Research and Theory

Recently, there has been a movement among some theoreticians and researchers on fathering that have begun to integrate the philosophies of social constructionism and post-structuralism into fathering literature (Dienhart, 1998, Hawkins and Dollahite, 1997, Lupton and Barclay, 1997). These movements offer some refreshing ways of understanding fathering that move beyond traditional modernist philosophy that has limited an understanding of fathering to a social role perspective. This section explores some of the advances in fathering literature that calls for new ways of understanding and researching in the area of fathering.

Generative Fathering

Hawkins and Dollahite (1997) have called for a new way of working with fathers to help them increase their commitments to their relationships with children. This new approach is called “Generative Fathering.” They argue that traditional approaches to fathering focus too much on a deficit based view of fathers. Dollahite et al (1997) believe that this negative focus does not capture the complexity of fathers’ lives and is unable to help fathers enter into a real and meaningful commitment to fathering. Generative fathering is an attempt to move beyond a deficit focus on fathering toward a focus on fathers’ competencies, successes, and desires for commitment.

Dollahite, Hawkins, and Brotherson (1997) refer to generative fathering as “fathering that meets the needs of children by working to create and maintain a developing ethical relationship with them” (p. 18). They see their approach to fathering as a conceptual ethic where “ethics precedes and grounds all scholarly understanding of fathering and professional practice with fathers” (p. 19). Four main assumptions guide the conceptual ethic of generative fathering:

- a) fathers are under the obligations of an ethical call from their children and their communities to conduct the multidimensional work of caring for the next generation in ways that attend to the fundamental conditions and constraints of children’s lives within families, b) generational ethics rather than adult relational ethics should be preeminent when considering the needs of children,
- c) fathers have contextual agency in their relationships with the next generation, and d) a responsibilities-based and capabilities-based perspective

according to which fathers should and can care for their children in meaningful ways. (p. 19).

These major assumptions directly contrast traditional assumptions of fathering that are rooted in deficit and role inadequacy theories. For example, the ethical call to fathers is centered in the belief that “fathers are called by the next generation to meet their needs and labor for their well-being” (Dollahite et al, 1997; p. 19). This generative ethic calls fathers out of convenience fathering (La Rossa, 1995) and into both a rewarding and challenging work of caring for their children in an ethical and moral relationship. Another major assumption that challenges this deficit view of fathers is that “generative fathering assumes that men have both the obligation and the ability within themselves to be good fathers. We assume that most men can and want to become the kinds of fathers their children need for them to be.” (Dollahite et al, 1997; p. 20).

Generative fathering challenges the view that fathering is a social role. Dollahite et al (1998) argue that theorizing about fathers has relied too heavily on social role theories of fathering. They express their concern that if fathering is seen as only a role than it will not invite men to enter into the important ethical commitments of fathering.

It is important that generative fathering be understood from an ethical and relational perspective (Dollahite et al, 1997; p. 29). This approach (while borrowing some ideas from Erickson), is centered in social constructionist/relational philosophy. The ethical imperative of generative fathering is centered in the relational ethics between father and child with the father responding to the ethical calls from his children. This is not a top down approach to ethics

where the father acts upon the children based on what they need, but rather a relational ethic calls for the father to act with his children based on a commitment of care.

While the work of Dollahite et al (1997) offers a refreshing break from traditional approaches to fathering by integrating ideas from social constructionism and relational ethics in regard to fathers' relationships with children, it does not expressly call for fathers to enter into this relational ethic with their parenting partners. La Rossa (1995) and other have clearly demonstrated that serious inequalities still exist in couple relationships in regard to caring for children. Therefore, it would be important for a theory of fathering to specifically address issues of inequality in parenting relationships. Another limitation of this approach to fathering is that it ignores important cultural influences and discourses that privilege men and make it difficult for men to be critically accountable for the effects that male privilege has on the lives of women and children. Without this critical component, generative fathering may lead to a reproducing of male privilege in relationships. I am certain that this is not the intent of Hawkins and Dollahite (1997) and I am also certain that much of their work with fathers has lead to significant changes in both men's and women's (and children) lives. However, La Rossa (1995) reminds us that when fathers are left to self report their behavior, they tend to exaggerate their involvement as parents. From a feminist perspective this is understandable because these men are only able to see their involvement from the perspective of their privilege and not from the experience of women and children. Returning to La Rossa's (1995) earlier statement:

Only when men are forced to seriously examine their commitment to fatherhood (vs. their commitment to their jobs and avocations) can we hope to

bring about the kinds of changes that will be required to alter the division of child care in this country. (p. 457)

For this critical examination to take place, it is necessary that issues of power, oppression, male privilege, and accountability be made a central part of working with fathers. The philosophical perspective of post-structuralism may be helpful in this regard. It would also be important for women or the partners of fathers be included in the research process.

Social Constructionism and Fathering

One of the current movements in fathering research uses social constructionist philosophy in both the theorizing and research on fathering. A social constructionist perspective views reality as being constructed in social situations. Reality is a relational endeavor and as such is constructed through language (Gergen, 1987). Rather than seeking to find one truth, social constructionism asserts that there are multiple realities. For an extensive review of social constructionism see (Gergen, 1987, Gergen, 1994). As researchers have taken up a social constructionist position new ways of theorizing about and researching fathering have opened up. For example, Gerson (1997) uses social constructionism to move away from the traditional role theories of fathering by exploring the many cultural and contextual issues that fathers face. She also uses social constructionism to look at how fatherhood has been constructed throughout the years based on historical and contextual issues of the times. Dienhart (1998) argues that research and culture has produced a view of an essential fatherhood that presents it as the only possible fatherhood that limits fathers from taking up alternative ways of being fathers. The purpose of a social constructionist approach is to challenge the notion of an essential fatherhood. If fatherhood has changed over time, and

there are currently multiple fatherhoods, than it makes it possible for men to challenge traditional essential discourses related to fathering.

Anna Dienhart (1998) takes the idea of social constructionism further by using it to explore the dominant discourses in culture that have shaped fatherhood over the years and constrained fathers from entering into alternative fathering practices. By discourse Dienhart (1998) is referring to:

. . . more than a simple description of a set of behaviors. A discourse may be considered a set of ideas; a main-line story that conveys common values, constructs and reflects a specific worldview, and consists of ideas and practices that constrain what we feel, think and do. (p. 10)

A dominant discourse on the other hand, “is a set of explanations, or a generalized story, that gains prominent status or privileged position” (Dienhart, 1998; p. 10). Dienhart argues that the theories and knowledge about fatherhood become a type of discourse. From a social constructionist perspective these discourses are more than mere ideas, they have power to shape our lives and limit our understandings. What we can see and know about something is constrained or limited to the dominant discourses that surround us. Dienhart (1998) sees a social constructionist view as embracing:

. . . a reexamination of popular or dominant discourses. A social constructionist view encourages us to look beyond surface similarities across people’s lives. A social constructionist view opens the exploration to diverse and pluralistic experiences of people in their daily lives. (p. 11)

The purpose of Dienhart's (1998) work in the area of fathering was to use social constructionist ideas to study men who practice alternative fathering as a means of breaking down some of the dominant discourses that portray fathers in a negative or deficit light. Dienhart argues that family science researchers have been largely responsible for the creation of the dominant discourses of the traditional and nontraditional father and that these discourses related to how men should parent support the values that are inherent in our culture. Values that largely favor a continuation of male privilege (i.e. fathering and the possibilities of fathering are understood from perspective that supports traditional divisions of labor in the home). Dienhart argues that these discourses do not explore in detail the experiences of men who may not be adequately represented by these dominant discourses. Therefore, Dienhart uses social constructionism in her research by studying men who participate in a discourse of shared parenting. By researching these men, new alternatives for fathering were presented that challenge dominant notions of fathering and open up space for men to choose among these alternatives.

Dienhart (1998) also argues that traditional quantitative methodologies are incapable of providing this critical exploration of both dominant discourses and alternative discourses related to fathering. For Dienhart (1998) "qualitative methodology facilitates tapping into complex constructions of the participants' worlds, and opens the research inquiry to an explication of how men and women make sense of their lives" (p. 16). She points out that these ideas and research practices match the foundational beliefs of social constructionism.

At the beginning of her research project, Dienhart relied on the grounded theory approach to qualitative methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). While at first Dienhart

believed that qualitative methodology was consistent with social constructionism, she later recognized that traditional qualitative methodology is informed by a post-positivist philosophy and therefore, still suggested that interpretations could approximate reality. This recognition lead her to incorporate the emerging ideas in qualitative methodology by Denzin (1989, 1994) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) that are more explicit about the value-laden nature of research and the inability of research to approximate reality. The purposes of Denzin's work is to remain faithful to the experiences of the stories of the participants rather than to the methods that will render a work credible (Denzin, 1994). Dienhart's recognition of these differences raises an important issue. Just as theories about fathering or any other phenomenon represent certain value laden discourses, so too do research methodologies. Since research methodologies represent dominant cultural discourses related to the nature of reality, it is important that research methodologies be critically examined before a researcher uses that methodology.

Dienhart's (1998) work in the area of fathering is important because it represents a shift in not only new theoretical explanations of fathering, but it also offers a critical examination of the research methodologies that have contributed to the construction of dominant cultural discourses related to fathering. Dienhart clearly indicates the need for new research methodologies to be developed and utilized in fathering research. While Dienhart relied on methodologies of qualitative research that were current during the time of her research, many new critics and methodologies have emerged that more completely incorporate social constructionist philosophies. These newer methodologies have begun to introduce

post-structuralism as a viable methodology for qualitative research. Most of the work in this area has been developed by feminist methodologists.

Post-structuralism and Fathering

The work of Lupton and Barclay (1997) was the first to introduce post-structuralism into theory and research on fathering. They argue that while social constructionist ideas have been integrated into post-structuralism, social constructionism lacks the political and sociocultural perspective necessary to address the construction of fatherhood. They describe their work as:

. . . developing an understanding of fatherhood that sees it as a sociocultural phenomenon. In doing so, society and culture are not seen as things that exist outside fatherhood, shaping it externally, but rather as central to and productive of its very nature. (p. 4)

Post-structuralism is a fairly new concept in the field of marriage and family therapy. Therefore, before proceeding with a description of how Lupton and Barclay use post-structuralism in their theorizing and research on fathering, a review of the major tenets of post-structuralism will be presented.

The post-structuralist perspective is influenced by a variety of theorists including Foucault, Derrida, Marx and Lacan. Post-structuralism has been especially influential in the areas of cultural studies, education, and feminist theories. While post-structuralism draws on many social constructionist principles (i.e. reality is constructed through language and multiple realities), it moves beyond social constructionism in that it focuses on how political and cultural discourses construct and constrain persons identities. Post-structuralism can be seen

as the political extension of social constructionism. This, perhaps, is why feminist theorists have been at the forefront of bringing post-structuralism into the mainstream of their respective disciplines (Bloom, 1998; Munro, 1998).

Discourse and subjectivity are perhaps the most central concepts of post-structuralism. Subjectivity is very similar to the concept of multiple/relational selves presented by Gergen (1994) and can be defined as “the varying forms of selfhoods by which people experience and define themselves” (Lupton & Barclay, 1997; p. 8). In contrast to humanist assumptions that humans have an essential essence, post-structural theory takes the position that the self is non-unitary (Bloom, 1998). Nonunitary subjectivity is “an ongoing process of engagement in social and discursive practices . . . a continuous process of production and transformation and . . . a doing rather than a being” (Robinson, 1991, p. 11). Post-structuralism rejects the notion of selfhood as pre-existing to cultural and social processes (Lupton et al, 1997). Therefore, subjectivity refers to how identities are produced through social and cultural processes. Post-structuralism is a movement that is concerned with how persons are produced as subjects and involves a critical exploration of the specific cultural and political practices that are involved in the production of subjects. The concept of discourse offers an explanation for how this takes place.

The concept of discourses and dominant discourses have been shared in the previous section. While discourses are basically ways of speaking about or giving meaning to a situation and are open to challenge from other discourses (in this sense discourses can be seen as theories) “some discourses are hegemonic over others, taking charge of the definition of what is considered to be truth” (Lupton et al, 1997; p. 9). Because persons are produced by

the social and cultural discourses available to them at any given time these discourses “do not simply reflect or describe reality, but play an integral and inextricable role in *constituting* reality, our knowledge of the world” (Lupton et al, 1997; p. 5; original emphasis) and, I would add, our own selves. Munro (1998) argues that “all meanings are culturally and historically contingent meanings and are created by and in social life. We don’t create stories; they are fashioned from the discourses available to us” (p. 2). From this position it becomes absolutely critical to examine the discourses of our time, the values they support, the stories, theories or facts they are fashioning us to create, and how they are producing us as subjects.

The notion of power is also central to an understanding of subjectivity and discourse in post-structural theory. Lupton and Barclay (1997) interpret Foucault’s understanding of power as follows:

For Foucault, power is everywhere, part of every social relation and representation. Power is not conceptualized simply as an external influence seeking coercively to repress human action . . . nor as located solely in institutions, groups or particular individuals, but rather as a system that may also be seen as productive. Power relations, that is, serve to bring things into being. From this perspective, power and discourse are interrelated and work together to constitute subjectivity and social relations. Discourses both reflect and reproduce power relations, while power produces discourses. (p. 11)

Foucault’s view of power relations implies that dominant discourses rather than coercing persons into action, incites persons to act, or in other words, they invite or persuade persons to conform to the particular norms supported by the particular discourses of the time. The

post-structuralist view of power offers some different views regarding agency. Most theoretical and philosophical perspectives fall into two categories in regard to agency: 1) indeterminism, or 2) determinism. Both of these perspectives offer a one way analysis of understanding human agency. The self of a person is either completely free from structural influences or the self is determined by these influences. Post-structuralism presents a view of the self that is “neither passively enmeshed in power relations nor are purely free agents” (Lupton & Barclay, 1997; p. 11). Agency or subjectivity is produced both by power relations (dominant discourses) and resistance to those discourses. Based on these tenets, post-structuralism has been used by researchers and theoreticians as a tool to explore how persons are produced as subjects by analyzing the dominant cultural discourses of our time, how they require persons to act, and how persons engage in practices of resistance against these dominant discourses.

Lupton and Barclay utilize post-structuralism in a number of ways in their investigation of fatherhood. They begin with an analysis of the dominant discourses of fatherhood in society. They argue that

... a central focus of Foucauldian-informed research into parenting is identifying the ways in which the state and other agencies, supported by expert knowledge systems such as science, medicine, and public health and the social sciences have sought to measure, monitor, and hence regulate the physical and mental characteristics of individuals in the attempt to manage and govern populations. (p. 35)

Lupton and Barclay, therefore, use techniques of post-structural literary theory to produce a historical overview of the dominant expert knowledges related to fathering and how those knowledges have constructed and thus limited the possibilities of fathers. They pay particular attention to the 'expert' knowledges (produced by social sciences, etc) because of the powerful weight of authority that these disciplines have in the construction of knowledge.

Some of the 'expert' knowledges include: Experts and the Regulation of Parenting, Psychological research, Family Health and Welfare Literature, Sociological Research, and Academic Masculinity Research. A brief review of the regulating discourses of these 'expert' knowledges will be presented below.

Experts and the Regulation of Parenting

Lupton and Barclay argue that during the 1960's and 1970's there was an "explosion in the production of social-scientific knowledge" (p. 36). Miller and Rose (1993) argue that the effect of this explosion of social-scientific knowledge was the creation of systems of monitoring and regulating populations with the strategy of normalization. This knowledge produced norms that encouraged persons to measure their own behavior against the 'expert' norms and to change their behavior if they were outside the norms. The explosion of social-scientific knowledge and the authority over knowledge claims that these social science agencies achieved, led to a view of parenting where "both fathers and mothers have been portrayed as requiring professional assistance to carry out their parenting role, and as possibly neglectful if they fail to do so" (Lupton and Barclay, 1997; p. 41). Parenting, and thus fathering, became something that was best understood by the professionals and this created a reliance on "expert" knowledge in regard to parenting practices.

Psychological Research

The vast majority of research in the area of fathering has been performed by child developmentalists. Lupton and Barclay (1997) offer three main themes or discourses that have emerged out of psychological knowledge. The dominant belief in child development literature is related to the primacy of the mother infant bond and how this bond is necessary for normal development. From this perspective, motherhood is assumed to be “natural and instinctive, programmed by the genes” (p. 42). Other research in this area draws upon comparisons between mother-child attachment and primate research. This view also supported the mother-child bond as instinctive and natural. Both of these views (medical and biology) have claimed a ‘truth’ status based on their foundation in ‘science.’ Lupton and Barclay (1997) argue that the bonding discourse privileges the mother over the father as primary caregiver. This discourse has had some significant effects on how fatherhood has been produced. Since knowledge can only be produced within the frame of the dominant discourses of our time this discourse has limited the scope of research this area. It has also constructed and supported an image of the father as not being essential to child development and as not having natural instincts to care for children.

Another discourse that has emerged in the psychological literature is “the children need their fathers discourse” (Lupton and Barclay, 1997; p. 47). This discourse is largely based on role theory and has emphasized the role of father as a sex role. This discourse implies that children need a distinctly male influence. Since definitions for what constitute sex roles are heavily tied to dominant societal discourses and values related to masculinity and femininity, men are encouraged to believe that they need to relate to their children in

particularly masculine ways. This research has not discovered a fact about men and fatherhood but has actually produced a fatherhood that is bound to specific roles.

Family Health and Welfare Literature, Sociological Research, and Academic Masculinity Research

These three areas have tended to produce similar discourses related to fathering much of which have already been reviewed earlier in this paper. Lupton and Barclay (1997) argue that the main focus of research in these areas is “father absence” or “mother only families.” A discussion of father absence research and the pathologizing of single-mother families has been introduced earlier. The main discourse research has produced in this area has placed men at the center of importance in families and called for men to return to leadership and traditional roles in their families. Lupton and Barclay (1997) confirm La Russo’s (1995) position that despite the accepted view that fathers are more involved in the family, little research has supported this view. In fact, they quote a number of sources that indicate that very little has changed in regard to father’s caring for their children (Honra and Lapri, 1987; Moss and Brannen, 1987).

Lupton and Barclay critique the use of structuralism as the foundation of knowledge on fathering and parenting. Structuralism makes the assumption that people enter into well-defined norms naturally and that these norms are part of the structure of life. Structuralism as a foundation for research can only reproduce the values and norms that are already popular in culture but cannot offer a critique of the necessity for those norms. Based on this concern, Lupton and Barclay (1997) propose that research in the area of fathering needs to be able to move beyond a reliance on statistical methods toward a research of experience and also a

research that is able to uncover the dominant discourses that have informed accepted knowledge in fathering literature.

Based on the proposals, Lupton and Barclay (1997) pursued their research using phenomenology (a type of qualitative research that attempts to access lived experience of participants) with post-structural ideas about research. Lupton and Barclay (1997) are influenced by the work of Holstein and Gubrium (1994) who view research interviews as “an interactional and discursive accomplishment, in which language is viewed not simply as a neutral conduit for description, but rather as the very action through which local realities are accomplished (p. 265). Post-structural research does not seek to find the truth of persons experiences but rather is concerned with eliciting and uncovering patterns in the ways people articulate their feelings, experiences, and conscious options. The emphasis of the analysis is upon the structure of people’s explanations, the words, phrases, concepts and belief systems they use to describe phenomena and beliefs and represent their experiences including other texts they draw upon in their explanations. (Lupton and Barclay, 1997; pp. 94-95).

The influence of post-structuralism, therefore, has moved researchers away from relying solely on participants experiences for knowledge, toward a critical analysis of the dominant discourses and contextual constraints that have contributed to the production of their knowledge and experiences. Rather than trying to make research methods more scientific, post-structural research turns the attention of research towards “understanding the conditions which produce accounts and how meaning is to be produced from them” (Hollway, 1989; p. 42). Therefore, the focus of research “is not so much on to what extent respondents are conveying an objective reality, but how they express their understandings and experiences

of reality incorporating both contradictory and overlapping discourses. Such discourses may be identified and theorized with the understanding that they are ways of positioning subjects and allowing them to make sense of their experiences" (Lupton and Barclay, 1997; p. 95).

The research of Lupton and Barclay (1997), therefore, involved interviewing fathers about their experiences and then analyzing their responses according to the discourses that they supported or resisted. Their main concern was how these men were being produced as fathers. Applying post-structuralist ideas to qualitative research can answer some feminist concerns about fathering research because it is a critical approach that is able to offer an analysis at the cultural level, including cultural discourses related to gender, race, power, and oppression. It also seeks to move beyond and perhaps breaks down the taken-for-granted truths related to fathering and opens up new discourses for men to enter into related to their parenting.

The current movements in fathering research point us toward further developments in both theorizing about and researching with fathers. The early critiques of La Rossa (1995) and many feminist researchers regarding fathering research and the men's movement point us toward a greater need for work with fathers to address issues of inequality in their relationships with women and children. It seems vital for research in this area to be informed by feminist ideas so as to avoid the myths of the new father and the calls by men's movements for a return of the traditional father. It is important that feminism remain at the heart of fathering research not because men need to be more feminine but because feminist theory is a critical theory that addresses issues of power and inequality in relationships. Also, because

men are in a position of privilege in culture it makes it difficult for them to be critical of how their actions influence others in less privileged positions.

In summary, the work of Dollahite et al (1997) highlight the importance of helping fathers enter into a relational ethics with their children. A relational ethic moves fathers away from a top-down power-based relationships with their children where they know what is best toward a relationship of accountability for their effects of their actions on the lives of their children. The missing piece in Generative Fathering is the lack of focus on encouraging fathers to enter into a relational ethic with parenting partners and a critical evaluation of how issues of power and gender are played out in parenting. A post-structuralist perspective would argue that people can only act in the discourses that are available to them and that men can never escape men's culture. Because of this, it is not enough to call men to be more involved with their children, if there is no evaluation of the effects of their behavior on the lives of women and children. Dienhart (1998) points us toward a social constructionist approach to theory and research in the area of fathering. She argues for the need for researchers to perform research that demonstrates the experience of fathers who resist traditional discourses of fatherhood and live according to alternative discourses. This research opens up new possibilities for action for fathers that stand outside of the constraints of traditional notions of fathering. Her movement has a political purpose in that it seeks to use research to actively create new discourses. Finally, Lupton and Barclay (1997) suggest that a post-structuralist methodology for fathering research is able to address the important cultural discourses related to fathering and how those discourses have produced fatherhood.

While these current movements in fathering research have been highly influential in my theorizing and plans for research in this area, it has also raised some important concerns that have lead to a desire to propose a new way to incorporate feminist, social constructionist, and post-structural ideas more fully into research. These new movements have taken the literature a long way from traditional fathering research but have they taken it far enough? Some of the even more recent work in the area of feminist methodology and post-structuralism seems to point us in even further directions. In the following section, a brief review of the most recent trends in qualitative research will be presented, after which a new proposal for research will be offered based on these most recent trends. This proposal will especially address concerns related to men researching men who want to conduct research from a pro-feminist perspective. Following this new proposal for research a specific practice of research with fathers will be outlined.

Recent Trends in Qualitative Methodology

The major advances in qualitative methodology in recent years have taken place in the areas of feminist methodologies (Bloom, 1998; Guba, 1998, Munro, 1998; Richardson, 1994) and interpretive post-structural methodology (Denzin, 1994). These new approaches to research methodology address three main areas: 1) the political nature of research or research as praxis, 2) ethics and accountability, and 3) community.

The Political Nature of Research

While the idea of research as praxis (Lather, 1986) is not new to feminist methodology, the emergence of postmodernism has allowed for new ways for this practice to be understood. While many argued that qualitative methodology was directly informed by

postmodernism, this argument has recently been refuted by a number of researchers (Denzin, 1994; Lupton and Barclay, 1997). Some of the tenets were related to postmodernism but the practices of qualitative research were still rooted in positivist or post-positivist claims. For example, all of the data gathering and interpretive practices were specifically designed to produce approximations of internal and external validity. In an effort to gain credibility in the area of research, qualitative researchers tailored their methodologies in a way that sounded like quantitative research. In the mid to late 1980's Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Denzin (1989, 1994) created an alternative language for qualitative methodology in an effort for it to more approximate postmodern ideas and move away from the requirements of reliability and validity. They began to use terms like credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to describe the purposes of qualitative research and to demonstrate how they adhere to "cannons of good science" (Denzin, 1994; 508). Most recently there has been a movement away from even these descriptions of qualitative research in an effort to come closer to postmodern ideas. Denzin (1994) argued that meanings and experiences are best given by the persons who experience them, and thus a pre-occupation with validity must be set aside in favor of a concern for meaning and interpretation. These most recent movements shift away from reliance of specific procedures and methods toward an embracing of multiple and alternative procedures.

The introduction of postmodernism in feminist informed qualitative research made it more possible for research to become more centered in a political purpose. Even though feminists had long encouraged research as praxis, it was not accepted as an appropriate practice until postmodernism made its way more fully into the practice of qualitative

methodology. Because researchers did not have to rely on exact procedures of good science, they could embrace a more political purpose since “good science” is considered to be an apolitical act.

Ethics and Accountability

As postmodernism was more fully accepted into qualitative research, it opened the doors to a reconsideration of the ethics that guide research. Feminist and post-structural methodologies began to support relational ethics rather than professional ethics (Lincoln, 1995; Richardson, 1997). These methodologist argued that hiding beneath the guise of professional ethics was a commitment to the discipline and not to the participants involved in the research.

Lincoln (1995) has outlined a number of commitments that inform her work that are related to a criteria of fairness, sharing knowledge, and fostering social action. These commitments include a commitment to: 1) emergent relations with respondents, 2) a set of stances, and 3) a vision of research that enables and promotes justice. Based on these commitments, Lincoln considers the following to be important ethical considerations for researchers: 1) positionality, 2) community (research should serve the community and be for the informants), 3) reciprocity between researcher and those being researched, 4) sacredness of relationships in research to action continuum, and 5) sharing of privileges with participants (i.e. royalties, publications, etc). These ethics call for a more relational concern for the lives of participants. The commitment of the researcher is not to the profession or academia but rather to the participants and the community. Thus, research is literally for the participants first, the community second, and the profession third.

Community

Laurel Richardson (1997) proposes that “the kinds of stories that we can write, the kind of lives that we can thereby live, are thus most strongly linked to the types of communion we can create, not the hegemonies that we can resist. It is through association, community building, sharing, and empathy that we have some hope of repairing and transforming culture” (p. 79). The transformation of culture (and dominant discourses), therefore happens as people join together in communities where they can enter into and live narratives that offer them alternative ways of being and relating with one another. Transformation, then, comes through the living of alternative narratives and the living of alternative narratives needs to take place in communities where these narratives are supported and embraced.

Richardson refers to this is a type of community where persons value association, empathy, care, and mutuality; a community that is involved in practices that are honoring and reverencing of one another, and that participates in non-hegemonic communication (Richardson, 1997). This is a type of communication that values lived experience over professional or theoretical accounts of knowledge; a communication that continually brings forth alternative narratives and with that, alternative possibilities for living. According to Richardson:

. . . by emotionally binding people together who have the same experiences, whether in touch with each other or not, the collective story overcomes some of the isolation and alienation of contemporary life. . . Once linked, the possibility for social action on behalf of the collective is present, and, therewith, the possibility of societal transformation.” (p. 33)

For Richardson, researchers should be actively involved in helping establish communities where alternative knowledges can be lived and shared with the larger community.

While I embrace many of these commitments to research, I have noticed that these new practices have largely been unexplored and have often only been utilized in the interpretive part of research not in the actual interactions with participants. For example, post-structural methodology has been used primarily as a tool for analyzing the dominant discourses and alternative discourses of resistance of life narratives, but has not been used in the actual practice of conducting research. Since post-structuralism argues that knowledge is only a product of discourses available to individuals, it would seem important for post-structural ideas to be taken a step further by using the process of deconstruction in the actual interviewing process to allow participants to produce new knowledge that stands outside of the dominant discourses that constrain them.

My interpretation of post-structuralism and feminist methodology calls for a more direct connection between the practice of research and praxis as a purpose of research. This means that there will be a blurring of the lines between research and the purpose of changing those we work with. The discussion that follows addresses these new proposals related to the practice of research. The first proposal for a new approach to research is centered in making post-structural ideas a central practice of research. In the following section, I will explore the need for an emphasis on deconstructive knowledge.

DECONSTRUCTION AND KNOWLEDGE

While the concept of deconstruction is central to post-structural theory, it has been taken up by researchers as a tool for analysis and not as a tool for the construction of new knowledge in the actual practice of research. My reading in the area of post-structuralism and feminist methodology has lead me to question what the definition of knowledge is. Since post-structuralism problematizes the concept of expert knowledge, I am especially interested in what constitutes knowledge in relation to research. If research is about the discovering of knowledge, then it is important to consider what constitutes meaningful knowledge. It is common practice in our culture to accept as knowledge those things that are commonly believed as normative based on empirical evidence. Research is conducted based on established theories in order to provide support for those theories and knowledge claims are made based on the 'new' discoveries. A post-structuralist perspective raises some important questions as to whether these 'new' discoveries constitute 'new' knowledge. If research is being conducted under the influence of dominant discourses without being critical of these discourses, can the knowledge this research produces really be considered new knowledge? I propose that for knowledge to be new or meaningful it needs to be produced outside of dominant discourses. Otherwise, the knowledge produced is only a different version of the same discourse– the other side of the coin. Therefore, research should be about constructing deconstructive knowledge. This is a term that is new to qualitative methodology and to post-structural theory and a description of the implications of such a knowledge is presented below.

Deconstruction as a concept and practice has meant different things to differing groups and academic disciplines. The ideas came originally from Jaques Derrida (1974, 1978,

1981, 1988) in the 1960s in the field of literary criticism. Deconstruction has had an impact on almost all academic disciplines and has had some impact on our culture at large. In fact, the term has gained enough acceptance to have a definition in most dictionaries, “a philosophical movement and theory of literary criticism that questions traditional assumptions about certainty, identity, and truth, asserts that words can only refer to other words, and attempts to demonstrate how statements about any text subvert their own meanings” (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition, 1992). We define deconstruction more broadly as a reflexive and critical process that involves a type of unpacking of the ideas, theories, discourses, etc. that inform our thinking and our actions; a critical examination of the traditions of thought that inform us.

The approach to deconstruction I am defining is also informed in part by the work of Michel Foucault (1965, 1973, 1979, 1980). Deconstruction in a Foucauldian sense is an attempt to be informed and cautious about the ideas that use us. It is to critically examine, investigate, and remain reflexive about the ways in which cultural discourse, discourse communities, and various “technologies of the self” (Foucault, 1988) have produced us as subjects in our present culture. It is to ask what the operations of power and knowledge are on our conceptualizations of life and relationships. I would like to propose a deconstructive approach to knowledge and research which offers a departure from the definitions of such as currently constituted, especially within our predominantly modernist language and culture.

I view knowledge as discourse bounded. Any knowledge is ever a part of various, and often competing cultural discourses. Discourse is used here in the Foucauldian and the feminist sense of constituted knowledge/power practices and traditions of thought in language that

privilege certain ways of being, thinking, and relating (with feminism, especially masculine ways of being, thinking, and relating) over alternatives. "Knowledge is always situated, embodied, and partial" (Richardson, 1997 p. 58, citing Haraway, 1988). Any supposed discovery or new knowledge that any type of research may bring forth is likewise situated, embodied, partial, discourse bounded, etc.

Knowledge is intelligible only through "our interpretive frameworks" (Goffman, 1974). The power of the dominant discourses of our society and culture seem both flagrantly and subtlety omnipresent. My proposal understands these grand narratives of our modern culture as having a definite stake in each of our lives. The dominant cultural discourses are hegemonies positioned and awaiting each of us at the door of our consciousness, our participation in the world. Additionally, in this proposal I take up the significance of narrative as the means by which we make sense of our lives, thus narrative is my interpretive framework. Narrative therapy centers in viewing story as the frame of intelligibility we each have of making sense of our lives,

. . . in order to make sense of our lives and to express ourselves, experience must be 'storied' and it is this storying that determines the meaning ascribed to experience". . .

"The success of this storying of experience provides persons with a sense of continuity and meaning in their lives, and this is relied upon for the ordering of daily lives and for the interpretation of further experiences. (White & Epston, 1990, p. 10)

Each of us are able to intelligibly inhabit the world because of our ability to story our lives. But such storying is always imperfect and problematic. First, the dominant discourses of culture are continually writing, inscribing, and producing us as specified subjects, acting at

least as co-authors. Second, each of our lives are filled to overflowing with lived experience. There is so much for us to take in, to story, that much is left unstoried. "Some experiences are inchoate, in that we simply do not understand what we are experiencing, either because the experiences are not storyable, or because we lack the performative and narrative resources, or because vocabulary is lacking" (E. Bruner, 1986, pp. 6-7). The performance of our stories, the tellings and retellings are attempts to render intelligible our lived experiences to others and to ourselves. Such tellings and retellings act to inscribe or shape our lives. "People live by stories (Heilbrun 1988). They attempt to shape their lives by the available narratives. If the available narrative is limiting, people's lives are limited, textually disfranchised" (Richardson, 1997, p. 58). In similar thought, Edward Bruner asserts,

Narrative structures organize and give meaning to experience, but there are always feelings and lived experience not fully encompassed by the dominant story. Only after the new narrative becomes dominant is there a reexamination of the past, a rediscovery of old texts, and a recreation of the new heroes of liberation and resistance. (1986, p. 143)

Thus, narratives are never complete, always partial, and always in production throughout the span of our lives. Yet rather than this being a negative, this "relative indeterminacy" (J. Bruner, 1986, p. 25) and ever negotiable nature of narratives "allows a spectrum of actualizations" (p. 25) a place for human agency in the telling of, and re-authoring (White, 1995) of our lives.

My hope is to look at knowledge that is deconstructive, meaningful, personal, and centered in the lived experiences of those who participate in this research. Such knowledge

would not be new, but more importantly this knowledge would be meaningful to those who tell and those who share similar experience. To “get at” such knowledges some sort of deconstruction of dominant discourse will be necessary. When persons speak to their experiences, the influence of dominant discourse may easily become “first author” of their story. Such tellings would simply constitute reproductions of dominant discourses in more complex or differentiated ways; which would serve to maintain the status quo. I find it hard to accept these common applications of post-structuralism as being consistent with the spirit of feminism and post-structuralism. This is where recent applications of post-structuralism have fallen short. Deconstructive practices have been relegated to the analysis and interpretive stages of research after the interviews with participants have been concluded. For new knowledge to emerge for the participants rather than the researcher only (this is the purpose of research), deconstructive practices need to become a central part of the research project. It is proposed here that deconstructive knowledge be at the center of the practice of research so that the new alternative knowledges that are produced come from the participants and not from an academic pursuit of the researcher. The aim of this research is to provide an invitation for the fathers I interview to critically examine the grand narratives and dominant discourses of our culture and how those grand narratives constrain and limit their desires for fathering, to reflexively consider these influences in their understandings of self, relationships, and life, and to assist in providing space for them to separate from these destructive discourses and inhabit alternative, more preferred descriptions.

What this proposal means is that rather than simply inviting fathers to share their stories of the fathering experiences (as is the case with traditional qualitative research),

deconstructive research would engage fathers in an exploration of the dominant discourses related to fathering and how those discourses have produced themselves as fathers. These fathers will be engaged in a re-searching of these dominant discourses. Since an important part of this work is related to accountability, this exploration of dominant discourses would also involve a critical exploration of the effects these discourses have in fathers' lives and the lives of their partners and children. For example, deconstructive research would engage fathers in a discussion about how certain ideas about fatherhood and masculinity have invited them to act as fathers in ways that may be hurtful to their children and partners and in ways that go against their preferred desires as fathers.

From a post-structural perspective this type of exploration is necessary because discourses have the ability to produce people as subjects. If fathers were only asked to share their desires as fathers without a deconstruction of dominant knowledges related to fathering, the responses would most likely be a reflection of the expectations that are required of them as fathers based on the dominant discourses available to them. The knowledge that would emerge from such research would lack a critical exploration of the discourses that keep men from engaging with their partners in more egalitarian ways related to caring for their children. Research that seeks to produce deconstructive knowledge serves three main purposes. First, as participants are asked to explore the dominant discourses related to fathering, new knowledge will emerge related to the main cultural discourses related to fathering. It is not the purpose of this research to tell fathers what the dominant discourses are but rather for the participants of the group to explore for themselves what those discourses are. Another purpose of deconstructive knowledge is as fathers agree upon certain dominant discourses,

they will be invited to explore the specific effects that these discourses have on their lives as fathers and on the lives of their children and partners. The third purpose of producing deconstructive knowledge is once these dominant discourses have been explored along with their effects on the lives of fathers their preferred desires related to their fathering can then be explored.

The Practice of Deconstructive Research

Based on this proposal (that meaningful knowledge is deconstructive knowledge), how can deconstructive research be incorporated into the practice of research? Since this is a proposal for new research practices, what would these deconstructive practices look like?

I have found practices of narrative therapy to be helpful in producing knowledge that is deconstructed. Narrative therapy (to very briefly explain) is a therapeutic approach that addresses the influence of cultural discourse in the constitution of selves, relationships, and society. Offered are ways of being with and relating with persons in therapy that allow for the deconstruction of dominant discourses and provide space for persons to re-author their lives and relationships (White, 1993; 1995; White & Epston, 1990). Deconstruction, in this sense, is somewhat different from the strict Derridaian sense, in that it is not an intellectual or cerebral process. Rather, it is a deeply personal way of relating which addresses the conflicts, problems, and difficulties that persons experience, and that has a liberatory aim— to the betterment of person's lives and relationships. Michael White describes his approach to deconstruction in narrative therapy in the following passage,

According to my rather loose definition, deconstruction has to do with procedures that subvert taken-for-granted realities and practices: those so-called “truths” that are split

off from the conditions and the context of their production; those disembodied ways of speaking that hide their biases and prejudices; and those familiar practices of self and of relationship that are subjugating of persons' lives. (1993a, p. 34)

Such procedures are enacted through externalizing conversations (White, 1995) that seek to invite persons to feel a sense of separation from the problems they experience and the discourses operating in their lives. Externalizing conversations involves a way of speaking with persons that refers to the problems they have experienced in their lives (especially those problems, stories, or discourses that are impoverishing of their lives) in an externalized way. This practice of externalizing conversations is consistent with post-structural ideas about how subjectivity is produced by power relations and the discourses that support those power relations. The purpose of externalizing conversations is to,

. . . make it possible for persons to experience an identity that is distinct or separate from the problem. Through externalizing conversations, the problem is to an extent disempowered, as it no longer speaks to persons of the truth about who they are as people, or about the very nature of their relationships. (White, 1995, p. 23).

This practice is directly influenced by the Foucauldian idea of subjectivity and is a practice that is designed to help persons liberate themselves to some extent from their being produced as subjects in ways that go against their preferred desires for life.

A few major assumptions about persons inform narrative therapists. These include:

(a) the narratives in which they are storying their experience and/or in which they are having their experienced storied by others do not sufficiently represent their lived experience, and (b), in these circumstances, there will be significant and vital aspects

of their lived experience that contradict these dominant narratives” (White & Epston, 1990; p. 40)

This then, is the space for externalizing conversations to provide that separation from problems and dominant discourses, to the end that persons may inhabit alternative more preferred discourses through a resurrecting of lived experience that has gone unstored. Such externalizing conversations seek to bring about an internalizing of personal agency (Tomm, 1989). In this light, externalizing conversations have a similar aim as feminist methodology. Petra Munro (1998) (with regard specifically to gender, and the way discourses function simultaneously as liberatory and oppressive) states:

. . . the complex and contradictory ways in which subjects take up or choose not to take identities made available to them through discourse become the site for mapping the local and relational dynamics of power and agency. The ‘discursive subject’ rather than being seen as a passive subject wholly determined by social forces, entails according to Heckman (1995), subjects finding agency within the discursive spaces open to them in their particular historical period. (1998, pp. 34-35)

Externalizing conversations is a practice that seeks to open up new discursive spaces for persons by making dominant discourses and the affects of those discourses more visible to persons. It was developed to extend the use of deconstructionism to the personal level. Since this project is about bringing post-structuralism more fully into the practice of research by creating an interview process that is of itself interpretive, externalizing conversation questions represent a good fit with the purposes of this methodology.

METHODOLOGY

Methodological Approaches

In research, it is important to make a distinction between the methodologies that inform research and the methods that are used in the research (Bloom, 1998). Methodologies are particular theories and philosophies about research and about how it should be conducted. Methods are the specific procedures that are used to accomplish the task of research. Since a central focus of this project is to present an alternative methodology (based on an integration of current methodologies) for research it is important that a discussion of the methodologies that guide this project be presented. A theoretical discussion of deconstructive knowledge has already been presented. This is one of the main alternative methodologies that informs this project. The second alternative methodology proposed in this project is related to researcher accountability. These alternative proposals for research were informed by a number of current methodologies in qualitative research that have been particularly influential to me as a researcher. These methodologies include feminist and post-structural methodologies. The alternative methodologies of deconstructive knowledge and researcher accountability do not necessarily represent an integration of feminist and post-structural methodologies as much as they represent an extension of these methodologies. The following discussion will provide a description of how feminist and post-structural methodologies have influenced the development of the methodology that informs this project.

Post-Structural Methodology and Interpretive Interviewing

While post-structural methodologies are fairly new to qualitative research there appear to be two main ways that post-structuralism has been incorporated into research. These are

interpretive methodology (Denzin, 1994) and post-structural phenomenology (Lupton & Barclay, 1997). Interpretive methodology is centered in using post-structuralist ideas to analyze the texts of interviews to explore a persons' subjectivity. Denzin (1994) uses approaches from literary criticism (informed by post-structuralism) to deconstruct the texts of interviews in ways that render a persons' subjectivity visible. Denzin's use of deconstruction as a legitimate practice of research has influenced me to bring deconstruction more fully into the practice of research. Rather than using deconstruction as a literary tool, my understanding of post-structuralism has invited me to extend the practice of interpretive methodology into the actual interview process. By integrating externalizing conversations, as proposed earlier, as a method of deconstruction, I created a method of interpretive interviewing to help fathers engage in deconstructive conversations about the discourses that influence their lives. The specifics about this method will be presented later.

Interpretive methodology is committed to preserving the integrity of the experience of the participants. Remaining faithful to the experience of the interviews is central to interpretive methodology. This commitment to the experience of individuals takes precedence over the professional commitments to validity and reliability. Therefore, more emphasis is given to the actual expressions of participants. Interpretation is secondary in importance to the words of the participants. This commitment of interpretive methodology has led me to develop a practice that I call "interpretive interviewing". Rather than being the primary voice of interpretation the interviews themselves are seen as interpretations. Therefore, this alternative methodology requires alternative writing styles that are committed to preserving the integrity of the interviews.

Post-structural phenomenology (Lupton & Barclay, 1997) has also had a significant influence in the development of this project. Traditional phenomenology seeks to gain access to the lived experience of individuals related to a common event or experience (Cresswell, 1998). While traditional phenomenology utilizes practices that are reductionistic in nature (i.e. trying to get at the essence of the experience) and procedures are related to specific practices that seek to uncover the invariant structure of the experience (Cresswell, 1998), post-structural phenomenology is more concerned with exploring individuals multiple and varied experiences related to the common experience (Lupton and Barclay, 1997). Although common themes may be brought forth, special focus is paid to the diversity of experience and ways of dealing with the common event or experience. Post-structural phenomenology represents the organizing methodological framework for my interviews with fathers. The common event or experience that I explored was their personal experiences with these discourses or messages related to fathering, how they invite them to act in relation to their children and partners, and the very specific effects those actions have on their lives and the lives of their children and partners.

While I rely on post-structural phenomenology to inform the structure of my interviews, its reliance on the researcher as primary interpreter is problematic for me. The practices of interpretation of post-structural phenomenology are similar to those of Denzin (1994). However, the focus is not on the subjectivity of the participants, but rather on the experience of the participants related to a particular event. The major framework of interpretation employed in this project is again the interactions and experiences produced in the interviews themselves.

Feminism and Researcher Accountability

As I have mentioned earlier, feminist ideas have invited me to develop a way of interviewing men that encourages them to experience accountability in their relationships with women and children. As a man doing research with men, I am aware that it is very possible that the knowledge that emerges from this research may reproduce men's privilege and power. White (1995) takes the position that:

It is never possible for us, as men, to be secure in the idea that we are not inadvertently reproducing ways of being and thinking that might be experienced as dominating by those who have been in the subjugated position. We are of men's culture, and we can never wholly stand outside of it. (White, 1995, p. 161)

Since embedded within this project is a desire to help men be accountable for the effects of their power in the lives of women and children, important accountability structures were built into this research project. Rather than relying solely on the knowledge, desires, and experiences of men, women consultants were invited to review the knowledge produced by this research.

Consultants were used in two different ways. Before the initial interview, each participant was invited to have their own partner serve as the consultant to their interviews. If they agreed, the partner was then asked to participate in the project. If the participants did not want their partners to serve as consultants or the partners themselves declined to participate, a women consultant who is familiar with feminist ideas was used. The specifics of how the consultants were used will be described in detail in a later section.

Another issue related to researcher accountability is my own relationship with the fathers and my own position as a man. Feminist methodology encourages researchers to be more involved in the interview process by not only asking questions but also sharing in the interview experience. Throughout the interviews, I participated in a personal exploration of the discourses that have influenced my life in negative ways and have contributed to possible abusive or hurtful effects on the lives of my children and partner. Also, as a man, I cannot afford to take a position as being other than the men involved in the project. I agree with Michael White's (1995) position that:

When I meet with men who have perpetrated violence, I cannot afford to see them as aberrant. To see them as aberrant, to regard them as 'other,' would enable me to obscure the link between the violence of these men and the dominant ways of being and thinking for men in this culture that venerate aggression, domination, and conquest.

To see them as aberrant would enable me, as a man, to avoid confronting the ways that I might be complicit in the reproduction of these dominant ways of being and thinking.

To see these men who perpetrate violence as aberrant would enable me, as a member of the class of men, to avoid facing the responsibility that I have to take action to contribute to the dismantling of men's privilege that perpetuates inequality of opportunity, and that supports domination.

To see these men who perpetrate violence as aberrant would enable me to avoid taking action to play a part in destabilizing the structures of oppression, and to

avoid challenging the practices of power that are subjugating of and marginalizing of others. And it would enable me to continue to leave it to those people in the least powerful position to raise issues of disqualification, exploitation, abuse, and so on, and to continue to leave it to these people to take action to end this. For me to see these men as aberrant would be all too convenient, a 'cop-out.' (p. 158)

Therefore, during these interviews, when referring to the privilege and abuses of men, I purposely took up a stance to include myself in this description. Rather than asking "how is it that you have acted in ways that may be experienced as abusive?" I would ask "how is it that we have acted in abusive ways?"

During the project I realized that if I were to take accountability seriously, I needed to provide a way for my own explorations of these ideas to be shared with my partner for review. Doing this allowed me to be more faithful to my desire to include myself in the project in a way that was honest and not separate from the men I interviewed. It also provided a way for me to receive feedback from my own partner about her experiences with me and how I might change my life and relationships with her. I invited my partner to review the transcripts paying special attention to times when I shared my own experiences. We planned a meeting to talk about her concerns and comments. This is included in a later section of this project.

Participants

For the purposes of this study two different types of fathers were sought out. I selected two fathers to participate in the study who have been struggling with parenting issues but have been trying to make changes in their lives. I also selected two fathers to participate who are already engaged in some accountability practices in their relationships. I decided to

include the first group of fathers because of the closeness of their struggles. I felt this would make the process of deconstructive questioning more visible and offer these fathers some new possibilities for accountability. I also wanted this project to help these fathers find ways to enter into more preferred relationships with their children and partners. I decided to involve the second group of fathers because I thought their involvement in accountability practices would offer a rich description of alternative fathering practices.

In order to find fathers that fit into these two categories, a purposeful sampling method was used to select the four fathers to participate in the project. I asked therapist colleagues and two local clergy members for referrals for the first type of father (struggling with parenting issues). One participant was referred by a therapist colleague and another participant was referred by a local clergy member. I had personal knowledge of a father who fit the second category of fathering (involved in accountability practices) and another father was referred to me by a colleague. A more thorough description of each father will be given during the review of the father interviews.

Phenomenologically, the focus of this project was in favor of depth over breadth (Starr, 1983). While gathering data about fathering experiences was one of the purposes of this project, it was secondary to the larger political purpose of interviewing fathers in ways that were accountable to the experiences of women and children and to address important issues of power and accountability in relationships. In order to have the type of depth that I desired, I limited the number of fathers to four.

Because of the different accountability structures that were part of this process, five other participants were involved in the project. Two of the participants' partners chose to

serve as consultants to the project. Another women consultant was also involved in two of the interviews where the participants chose not to have their partners involved. I tried to choose a non-partner consultant that was in a similar situation as the wives of the fathers that were interviewed. At the same time, I wanted a consultant that was familiar with feminist ideas. I knew a woman who fit this criteria and invited her to participate in the project. While it was my preference to have the partners of the fathers serve as consultants, I felt like having the voice of a woman consultant was necessary to meet the purposes of this project. The non-partner consultant's name was Shannon. She is 30 years old and a mother of two children. Like two of the mothers involved in the project, she works in her home taking full-time care of her children. She is very interested in feminist ideas and took some courses on feminism in college. My partner, Shelly, also participated as a consultant to my involvement in the project.

Researcher as Participant

Due to the commitments that I have expressed earlier, I consider myself to be both the instrument as researcher and an active participant in the project. A detailed description of the beliefs and experiences that have influenced my desire to be involved in this project were included in the introductory pages of this dissertation.

Structure of the Interviews

I utilized individual ethnographic interviews with the fathers to guide them through the process of deconstructive knowledge, accountability, and alternative knowledge. Each of the interviews was held in the home of the participants except for the interviews with Dale which were held in his office. The fathers participated in four different interviews lasting approximately one hour each. Two interviews were conducted with partner consultants

lasting approximately two hours each. A final accountability interview (two hours in length) was conducted between me and my wife to explore her experiences of the interviews. A total of twenty-two interview hours were spent on the project. In addition to these interview hours, approximately one hour was spent talking with the non-partner consultant to the project. These conversations were not transcribed and my conversations with the non-partner consultant are not included as interview time.

In order to accomplish the main purposes of deconstructive knowledge and researcher accountability, this project was broken down into three main parts. The first process of this research with fathers was to engage them in an exploration of the dominant discourses related to fathering and the specific effects these discourses have in their lives and the lives of their children and partners. The second process was to invite fathers to enter into discussions about their preferred ways of fathering that may stand outside of these dominant discourses. The third process of this project involved using women consultants to the interviews as an accountability practice. Each of these processes will be introduced in detail in the following section.

Part 1: Exploration of Dominant Discourses

The first part of this process of research was accomplished by individually interviewing each participant in two one-hour segments. In order to accomplish the task of deconstructive knowledge, I purposefully departed from traditional practices of research that seek to ask open ended questions to explore an experience. Rather, in order to achieve the political purposes of accountability in the lives of fathers toward their children and partners, the first interview involved a brief discussion about the concepts of discourses and alternative

knowledges with the participants of the study. Since post-structural ideas are very new, it is necessary that this type of discussion take place to allow the research to enter into the space of deconstructive knowledge. Once this conversation had taken place, methodological practices from externalizing conversations, relational accountability questions, and post-structural phenomenology were introduced.

The experiences of fathers living within these discourses were explored using externalizing conversations as suggested earlier in the paper. Since the discourses that would come forth from the interviews could not be known at the time of the interviews, it was important to be open about the types of questions would be asked. Externalizing conversation questioning is consistent with the purposes of post-structural phenomenology and is also faithful to my purposes of being respectful to the men in the interviews. Some examples of possible questions are included below:

- When you follow this message that fathers have to be tough on their children what specific ways does that encourage you to relate to your children and partner?
- How does this message get you to see your purpose as a father?
- How does this message invite you to see your children?
- What types of behaviors in your children does this message get you to focus on?
- What types of behaviors does this message blind you to?

The second interview followed a similar line of questioning but extended the questions to include a specific exploration of the effects these discourse have on the lives of their

children and partners as well as their own lives. These questions were informed by relational accountability questions (Carlson & Erickson, 2000) which seek to help men have an intimate understanding of how their actions affect, in a very personal way, the lives of their children and partners. There is a significant relational component to these questions. It is not enough to simply explore a discourse. From a social constructionist perspective, everything is relational, therefore, every action has relational consequences. Some examples of questions asked include:

- How do you think your children experience themselves when you follow this idea that you have to be tough with them? When you act in this way (relating to a specific experience) what do you think this says to your children about how you feel about them?
- When you go along with toughness ,what affect does it have on your wife?
- As you have followed this idea of toughness what has it taken from your relationship with your children? What types of experiences have you missed out on?

Part II: Exploring Preferred Fathering Practices

The second part of this project is to help fathers explore their preferences related to what discourses they would want to inform their parenting and how they prefer to be with their children and partners. While exploring dominant discourses and their effects is important, the hope of this research is to enable fathers to enter into new spaces for action related to their parenting. The knowledges that are produced in the two interviews in this part of the project were designed to bring forth alternative knowledges.

The first interview in Part II helped fathers explore their hopes and desires for how they want to be in relationship with their children and partners. The focus of this interview was to specifically invite fathers to consider alternative discourses and desires that may not have been available to them prior to the deconstruction of dominant discourses. Externalizing conversations were also used in this interview. While they were previously used to deconstruct possible negative discourses, in this interview they were used to invite fathers to consider the possible benefits of embracing alternative discourses. For example, “love” is being used as a discourse or preference that fathers would hope to bring into their lives.

Some examples of questions asked follow:

- How would you prefer to be with your children?; your partner?
- What are your desires and hopes for how you want to be toward your children?
- If you were to step outside of these discourses related to fathering, how would you choose to be with your children? What type of ethic would you hope to take up with them?
- What are your desires and hopes for how you want to be with your partner related to issues of parenting?
- How would love have you deal with issues of equality in your relationship with your partner?
- How would love have you deal with issues of discipline with your children?
- How would love have you change in regard to your relationship with your children?

The second interview in Part II focused on exploring the implications of these desires and hopes in their lives and in the lives of their children and partners. The work of Dollahite et al (1997) has particular influence here as questions will invite fathers to enter into a relational ethic with their children and partners. It is important that fathers' preferences be explored in respect to their relational effects so that they can experience accountability for their new desires and hopes. Accountability is not only about admitting that you have done something wrong but it is about living differently.

- Have there been any moments in your relationship with your children where you have been able to follow what love would have you do? If so, what was this experience like for you? How did you feel for your children? How did they feel about themselves?
- If you were to take on this discourse of love in your life, what effects would it have on your children?; your partner?; yourself?
- What influence would love have on how your children see or experience themselves?
- What things might come into your own lives if you were able to enter into this way of fathering?

Consultant Interviews

There were two procedures for how the consultants were included in the interview process. When the partners of the participants agreed to serve as consultants to the interviews, a final fifth interview was scheduled where both the partner and the father were present. One week before the final interview the partner consultants were given a copy of the

interview transcripts. I shared with them my purpose in having them involved in the project and invited them to prepare to share their experiences in reading the transcripts and what was most meaningful to them.

While the interviews with the fathers had focused on the experience of their partners, the purpose of these consultant interviews was to provide an opportunity for the women to confirm what their husbands had shared and also allow space for alternative messages and desires to be discussed. The consultant interviews allowed the fathers to have an even more intimate experience with accountability as they heard their wives share their own experiences of the messages. While some of these conversations were difficult, the experience was not disrespectful to the fathers or blaming of them. The partner consultants were typically genuinely touched by the thoughtfulness of their husbands. As one partner consultant put it:

I knew that he cared about those things and was concerned about those things but I didn't know that he thought about it and that it really hurt him as much as it does. There is a lot of things here that I didn't know he was so aware . . . I didn't know he remembered our conversations.

These interviews also provided openings into further deconstructing conversations that identified alternative actions that the fathers did not consider. For example, when the partner consultant identified a preferred desire that was meaningful to her, I would invite her to reflect on other things her husband might do to encourage her to feel that way. This, after all, was the purpose of the interviews, to create possibilities for change in the lives of the fathers, their partner and their children.

In the event that the participants chose not to involve their partners in the process, a non-partner consultant was used. Since the non-partner consultant did not know the participants in a personal manner, her involvement in the project was much different. She was given a copy of the summary notes after each visit and prepared some reflections for the participants and myself to discuss during our next meeting. Specifically, the process went as follows 1) a summary of the main points of each interview were given to the consultant, 2) the consultant would then review the summary notes and prepare some thoughts or topics for discussion and send it to me via e-mail, 3) once I received her comments we talked together by phone to make sure I understood her thoughts, and 4) her comments were taken to each subsequent interview for discussion. The purpose of the non-partner consultant was to help us as men to be more mindful of the experiences of women in the project. Since she did not know the participants or their wives, her role was to only give some general comments and concerns to help us be accountable for the effect of our conversations on the lives of the women and children of the participants.

Data Collection Procedures

Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed. Summary notes of each session were also recorded. In the two cases when a non-partner consultant was used, the summary notes were given to her to review. Her comments were reviewed at the beginning of each interview. In the event that the participants wives were used as consultants they were given a copy of the transcripts for review and then an interview with the partner and the father was audiotaped and then transcribed. Notes were taken during each interview and used as a reference when studying the transcripts.

Data Analysis

The analysis of transcripts involved two main steps. The first step of analysis is the bottom-up strategy of social constructionist grounded theory (Charmaz, 1993). This process is consistent with traditional practices of data analysis. The procedures include: 1) reviewing the text by listening to the audiotape while reading the transcript, 2) underlining emphasized words and making initial coding notes in the margins, 3) re-reading the text and highlighting words in the text and organizing them into categories, and 4) re-reading the text again and organizing the categories into larger themes.

While this main formula for analysis was used, it was modified to meet the purposes of the project. The main purpose of coding in this project was to identify 1) the specific messages fathers experience, 2) how those messages influenced their parenting, 3) the specific effects those messages have on their children and partners, and 4) fathers' preferred desires for how they want to relate to their children and spouses. Another purpose of coding was to identify conversations that demonstrated the affects of this new methodology. Therefore, coding was not used to generalize but to reveal the unique experiences of fathers and the unique interactions between the participant fathers and myself as researcher.

Writing Methods of the Project

In order to remain consistent with the philosophical commitments that I have proposed, the writing style of this project needed to be different than traditional qualitative research. Following post-structural, feminism, and the proposed methodology of accountability, I felt it necessary to allow the transcripts to speak for themselves rather than relying on them to support my own conclusions. This type of writing while different than

most writing in research, is consistent with a number of current trends in qualitative methodology that have been mentioned earlier in the paper (Denzin, 1994, Richardson, 1997). Denzin (1994) argues that researchers need to give up the concern with validity and generalizability in favor of staying true to the experiences of the participants and I would add to the actual experience of the entire research process. A methodology that privileges deconstructive knowledge and researcher accountability requires that the focus of writing demonstrate both the process of the interviews and the personal affects of the interviewing on the lives of the father participants and the researcher. Therefore, my writing will mostly demonstrate the interactions that took place in the transcripts and let these interactions speak for themselves as much as possible.

Richardson (1997) argues for the need for transgressive writing in qualitative research. Transgressive writing for Richardson involves breaking the traditional rules about how research should be written. She calls for qualitative researchers to use more creative and inventive writing styles that draw upon poetry, drama, and literature rather than science. Feminist methodologists (Harding, 1986, Bloom, 1998) also call for a writing that is deeply personal. Therefore, in my writings and reflections about the interview process, I share a number of personal stories that demonstrate how my life has been changed by these interviews. For feminist methodologists like Richardson, the most significant result of the research is the personal experiences and interactions that take place throughout the research process. My desire to write in this way also represents my desire to be accountable to the participants by demonstrating how they have changed my life. This also reflects an

accountability on my part to included myself in the same personal reflections that I invited the fathers to experience.

Legitimacy Practices

Legitimacy practices are those practices that are designed to render credibility to a research project. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that qualitative research needs a criteria of trustworthiness. Those criteria include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. While postmodern feminist researchers have introduced the new criteria of fairness, sharing knowledge, and fostering social action, the earlier criteria are still important aspects of qualitative research. As was noted earlier, Denzin (1994) argued that a pre-occupation with validity needs to be set aside in favor of greater concern for meaning. The standards of verification that were used to meet the criteria of trustworthiness include triangulation, peer review, reflexivity, member checks, and thick description. Each of these practices are informed by the criteria of fairness, sharing knowledge, and fostering social action.

Triangulation

Triangulation involves the uses of multiple sources and methods of gathering data (Cresswell, 1994). From a modernist perspective, triangulation is used to seek a convergence of results. Since this project is informed by the criteria of postmodern methodology, postmodern triangulation serves a different purpose. While multiple sources and methods are still used, postmodern triangulation is about seeking a diversity of results. Therefore, the different sources used in this project were each participant, the consultants to the project, and

my own partner who reviewed the transcripts with the purpose of sharing her thoughts about my involvement in the project and how I represented myself throughout the interviews.

Peer Review

Peer review traditionally involves the researcher recruiting colleagues to review his/her interpretations and determine if they are on track. Based on the commitment of research being for the participants, peer reviews were performed by the participants themselves. This was an ongoing process throughout the research as summary notes were constructed by the participants after each interview. Additionally, a copy of the chapter of each father that presents the process of their interviews and my reflections was given to each participant for review. They were invited to provide any comments, suggestions, or changes they felt were important. I also invited a colleague to look over the transcripts and my selection of the transcripts used in the writing of the project.

In addition to these practices, I also engaged the participants in a debriefing process throughout the interviews. Half way through each interview, I asked each participant to reflect on their experience of the interviews up to that point. At the end of each interview I also invited the participants to reflect on what that particular interview was like for them and asked for any suggestions or concerns they might have. At the beginning of each subsequent interview, I invited the participants to share how the experience of the previous interviews influenced their lives. And finally, during the two fifth interviews that were conducted with the partner consultants, time was spent reflecting on the entire process of the interviews and getting feedback about what was helpful and what was less helpful. The information that was

gathered during these debriefings led to some of the changes in the methods or practice of the methodology that will be highlighted in a later section.

Self-Reflexivity

Self-reflexivity calls for researchers to constantly be aware of their positionality (location in culture) and how that positionality is influencing every aspect of research. In traditional methods of qualitative research, this idea of reflexivity was practiced in a different way. Initially this was done by having the researcher write a section called “Researcher as Instrument.” This section involved having the researcher explain some information related to their position in culture (i.e. race, religion, etc) and some of the values and biases that shape the research. While this was a radical departure from traditional professional research writing, more current methodologies questioned this practice because it was only addressed in this one section and then never addressed throughout the rest of the research. For feminist researchers, reflexivity could only be accomplished as the researcher integrated her feelings, experiences, values, biases, and positionality throughout the entire project of writing. From this perspective, it is more important for the researcher to share throughout the writing of a project, the philosophies and methodological positions that she is taking.

Sandra Harding has argued that the continual practice of reflexivity is actually “strong objectivity” (1986). Rather than pretending that objectivity is possible, as is common in most research, feminist methodologists believe that the continual positioning of self in the research makes the research more objective because the values and biases of the researcher are no longer hidden. Therefore, throughout the writing of this project, I tried to introduce my own positionality and how it influences the entire process of the interviews and the interpretations

that were made. My commitment to this practice made it necessary for me to keep my writings personal. Throughout the write-up of the project, I was committed to staying as close to the experience of the transcripts as possible. I purposefully used first person accounts in the writing so as to keep myself tied to the experience of the interviews and to not separate myself in any way from the fathers I interviewed.

While I am talking here about using self-reflexivity as a legitimacy practice, I am also aware that reflexivity needs to be a central process to all three aspects of the research process: 1) conceptualization, 2) data collection, and 3) data analysis. This is another area where I have tried to extend the influence of post-structuralism in my work. It is quite common to employ the practice of reflexivity in both the practice (data collection) and analysis of research. However, it is less common for these ideas to be used in the initial conceptual process of research. Extending the practice of self-reflexivity into the conceptualization of research would be an important step to making the entire research project consistent with feminist and post-structural principles. This practice would include being reflexive about the many different events and experiences that have shaped one's life and how those experiences have created a desire to be politically involved in a particular research project. While it is less common to see this practice, the feminist commitment of the researcher being involved in a research that is value committed calls for this practice to be more central to the research process. In the writing of this dissertation, I began by sharing how the events of my life and professional experience have led me to be committed to this project.

Thick Description

Thick description is a practice that seeks to provide a rich account of the multiple experiences and meanings of the project. The purpose of thick description is to describe in meaningful detail the many varied experiences of participants in a way that is able to display the connections of these experiences to larger categories and themes. Thick description is a way of honoring the experiences of the participants as primary to the interpretations of the research. Thick description also involves a way of writing that offers other readers an experience of the project. Therefore, my writing involved thick description as I included as many quotations and interactions from the interviews as possible. It was important for me that the interviews speak for themselves with as little interpretation as possible. My understanding of thick description was also influenced by my commitments to self-reflexivity. Throughout the writing of this project, I tried to include personal stories that demonstrated the connectedness of these interviews with my own life.

FINDINGS

The purpose of this project was to explore with fathers how they personally experience certain discourses and how those discourses affect their lives and the lives of their children and partners. Rather than writing a summary of the common discourses fathers experience (to remain faithful to the purposes of this project), the writing and analyzing of the interviews will remain personal. As I have mentioned earlier the focus of analysis is on the actual experience of the interactions between the father participants and myself and the very personal effects this interviewing process had on our lives. The focus of this analysis is to highlight how this methodology is carried out in the interviews and the types of experiences with accountability that it produces. Therefore, rather than breaking the analysis down into interpretation related to themes, the experience of each individual father will be described in rich detail so as to demonstrate the unique methodology and each father's experiences with it.

As a reminder, I will review the different parts of the project and the purposes of each interview.

Part I: Exploring Dominant Discourses Related to Fathering

Part I of this project involved asking participants to think about and explain from their own experiences the dominant cultural and personal discourses that influence their lives as fathers. Initially, the plan was to separate this section into two interviews with two separate purposes: 1) invite fathers to talk about the discourses they experience in their own fathering and how those discourses require them to act toward their children and partners including how those particular discourses affect them personally, and 2) invite fathers to explore the very specific effects these discourses have on the lives of their children and partners. During

the interviews, it became apparent that it was more beneficial not to separate these topics but to explore all of these things together as each discourse was discussed. Separating the conversations about discourses from the very specific effects they have on the lives of their children and partners had the effect of diminishing the intensity and intimacy of accountability. Therefore, this section still included two interviews but they were not separated by topic rather they were separated into two sessions as dictated by time.

Part II: Exploring Fathers' Preferred Desires for Parenting

The two main purposes of this part of the interviews were to explore with the participants their heartfelt desires as fathers and how they prefer to be in relationship with their children and partners. The first interview was initially planned to focus on fathers preferred desires and how those desires would influence their parenting. The second interview was planned to address the relational messages or effects their children and partners would experience as a result of their acting on these preference. Again, as in part one of the interviews, it was more helpful to integrate these two interviews rather than separate them according to the topics outlined. Therefore, the participants were invited to explore each preference and its specific effects before moving on to another preference.

BRIAN

Brian is married and is a father of four children. He and his wife, Tammy, have three boys and one girl. Their oldest boy is 12, the twin boys are 11 and their daughter is 2 and half years old. Brian is 40 years old. He wanted to have Tammy serve as the consultant to our interviews. Tammy was excited about the opportunity because she is working on finishing her master's thesis and thought it would be nice to participate in a research project. "Besides," she said, "this is also a chance for our relationship to get better."

Brian was referred to me by a colleague at the clinic. My colleague had worked with Brian and Tammy for a few months and he felt like Brian would be a perfect person to interview because of some of his past struggles with parenting and his current commitments to caring for his family. I had actually met both Brian and Tammy on a few occasions at the clinic. What I remembered about Brian was that he was a very thoughtful person. He didn't speak very often but when he did it was usually powerful. My experience with Brian during our interviews together was no different. He didn't give long, in-depth answers or stories but what he did share was very meaningful, personal and often times powerful.

Interviews One and Two

During our first two interviews, Brian and I explored some of the messages from culture or discourses that affect him as a father. The flow of these interviews were a little different from the other interviews. Brian and I were able to shift between talking about the influences of discourses and his desires and preferences very naturally. Therefore, there was even less of a separation of topics in my interviews with Brian than there were with the other

fathers. While our conversations shifted between discourses and preferences, I still tried to keep the main focus of the interviews as with the other fathers.

Brian highlighted two main discourses as having an influence in his life as a father. These discourses included: 1) father deserves time for himself and 2) discipline and negativity.

Discourse One: Father Deserves Time to Himself

The first discourse or message that Brian identified was the idea that, as a man, he deserves to do what he wants to do. I began by sharing with Brian the idea about discourses and how culture sends certain messages to fathers about how they should parent and relate to their children. In the other interviews, it took some discussion for the fathers to understand the idea about discourses and deconstruction. Brian, however, jumped right into a conversation about the first message he experiences.

Brian: One of the things that comes to my mind first is the message that I should do what I want to do; get all the material things that I think I should have and that my family should come second. That message seems to be everywhere.

Interviewer: And is that a message that you have felt before?

Brian: Well I think that I've felt it for a long time before I realized it. I never noticed the message was that prevalent until I had fallen into it. It is in every bit of advertizing there is.

From the beginning of our interview Brian was willing to speak about his experience in very personal ways. In the above excerpt from the transcripts, Brian refers to the influence of this discourse in the first person, using the pronouns "I" and "my". Brian also recognizes that

this discourse has had an influence in his life for some time and that it wasn't until he was completely caught up in it that he realized what was happening.

Since Brian was able to name this discourse so quickly, I decided to jump right in and invite him to consider the effects of this discourse on his own life. I was particularly interested in exploring the specifics about how it would encourage Brian to act toward his children. Our conversation about the effects of this discourse in Brian's life went as follows.

Interviewer: I'm wondering if we were both to follow this idea that we deserve to do what we want, what would be some of the things that we would be doing? How would you be acting toward your kids?

Brian: I would be gone all the time and I have been at times.

Interviewer: If you weren't able to be physically gone would this still have an affect in your life when you are home?

Brian: Well, I spent a better part of a year putting that addition on the house, so I was here everyday but I wasn't really here.

Interviewer: Do you think that this might be what it is like for the kids when you are going along with this message, that you are just not there?

Brian: Yeah, you can be gone and sitting in the living room.

Brian began to share how he sees this happening when he watches football on TV. He says that when he is watching football, he might as well not be there. Next, I invited Brian to reflect on other ways that this discourse gets him to be home, but not there with his family.

Brian: I can hide out in the garage. I've done that lots. I've gotten a lot better with that. There's been a lot of years in the past . . . it was worse with Zach,

he's the oldest. When he was a baby, I really had to force myself to spend any time with him at all. I guess I went through that again with the newest one.

When she was really small, I was working on the addition and just never bonded with her.

While Brian has gotten much better at spending time with the children and fighting this message over the past two years, he is still willing to enter into a personal reflection on how this message has affected his life. I was curious about his experience with his son Zach and asked him to consider what the effect of his following this message might be in Zach's life and the lives of his other children.

Interviewer: I'm wondering when you're in those moments when you are feeling like what you want is more important than the kids, what message would that send to them about how you feel about them?

Brian: That they are not important. Then they go find other ways to get that sense that they are important. Being a bully.

Interviewer: Have you had any experience recently where you felt like there maybe was some time you could have spent with the kids but you were caught up in this belief?

Brian: Sunday I went for a ride. Tammy said it was a nice day and I should go for a ride. They went to the park then after I got back I wished I had gone with them.

Interviewer: Did you know that they were going to the park?

Brian: Yeah, but one more time it was more important to go for a ride.

Interviewer: What might have been different if you had decided not to go riding and go to the park instead?

Brian: That's a powerful message. I know because I have done that, turned down a ride to be with the family. It is always a good thing. I still get the idea that the rides is going to be a better thing.

Interviewer: That doing something for yourself is better than doing something with others?

Brian: Right, and I know good and well that it is just the opposite. I used to spend every weekend on a bike. A few years ago I kind of told myself that I am going to put this on hold a least until the kids are grown up.

Interviewer: How did you come to this decision?

Brian: Well, I could see that I wasn't much of a father being gone all the time. Even after being forced in to being a father, I found out how much good comes of that. It wasn't the chore I guess I thought it was going to be. We have got an awfully good relationship that I would really miss.

In this excerpt, Brian's comments show how he struggles with this discourse and how he has made choices to resist its influence in his life. Since Brian was sharing times when he has gone against this message, I wanted to explore what these actions say in regard to who he is as a father and his desires for his life. My inviting him to consider these preferences for his life represent the shift that took place in my interviews with Brian compared to the other fathers. Normally, this type of question would have been saved for interviews three and four,

but I felt like if I waited the closeness and power of these explorations might be lost. Brian's reflections about this invitation and our conversation follow:

Interviewer: I am wondering what this says about you as a father, about what you want, that you were able to make that decision to put motorcycles and other things on hold?

Brian: It made me feel a lot better as a father. And it does every time I reaffirm that decision. My kids should be more important than going for a ride.

Interviewer: It sounds as if there have been many times when you have been able to see that and go alone with it.

Brian: Yeah, the majority of time in the last five years.

Unseen in this conversation is the expression on Brian's face as he hears his own words express his desires as a father and how he has committed to his children to be with them. This conversation expresses things that were in direct contrast with his experiences with the message that he should do what he wants first.

The shape of our conversation, going back and forth between the struggles with the discourse and his resistance to it is a good representation of this methodology and how it uses post-structuralism differently. The common practice of researchers influenced by post-structuralism is to use post-structural tenets to explore a person's non-unitary subjectivity (the struggle between oppression and resistance). Traditionally, this is done by analyzing an interview and finding points that represent these struggles. In this process, the purpose of interviewing is to produce a text that can then be analyzed in a way that reveals the different

sites of a persons' subjectivity. My aim was to bring post-structuralism into the practice of interviewing. Therefore, my questions seek to guide persons through an experience of their subjectivity. When this process is central to the practice of interviewing, the experience of the interview becomes the analysis, not the text.

After exploring with Brian the messages his actions send to his children, I shifted the conversation to explore how this discourse influences his relationship with his wife Tammy. I invited him to reflect on the following question:

Interviewer: I am wondering about how this might affect Tammy?

Brian: It puts the whole load of parenting on her. She thinks that she's unappreciated and taken advantage of and she's doing all the work and I'm having fun.

Interviewer: So, is there any message that gets sent to Tammy when you find yourself caught up in this idea?

Brian: She gets the same message that she is not important. She also gets the message that she is unattractive. . . that I am just using her and nobody likes to feel used.

Interviewer: Are these messages that you want to be sending?

Brian: No. I am not thinking about the messages when I am watching football. I am not thinking about them [the kids] at all. I am just thinking about getting mine, what I want.

Interviewer: Even though you are not thinking about sending those messages, do you think that they are sent anyway?

Brian: Oh, definitely. I've seen the opposite too when I drop what I am doing to spend time with the kids. No matter how many times I drop what I am doing to do something with them, they are always surprised.

Interviewer: What happens to them when you do that?

Brian: They light up. They are the center of the universe. Life is good.

Interviewer: What do you think that says to them when you drop something?

Brian: That they do matter. That they are important. That I do care about them, especially if I do something that I don't want to do.

In this conversation a number of things occurred. Brian again was able to move back and forth between his struggles and his preferences. He reflects on how his actions influence his wife Tammy in negative ways, sending her messages that he does not want her to hear. After Brian shared how he is able to go against this message and drop what he is doing, I invited him to consider the effects this has on his children and the message this sends to them. Wanting to extend this conversation further, I invited Brian to reflect on the shaping effects that these actions have on their lives. This further exploration was important to me because I wanted Brian to have a sense of the positive influences he has on his children's lives.

Interviewer: Do you think that there are any specific feelings that you bring into their lives when you do something like this?

Brian: Oh Yeah. They probably feel like there is nothing they can't do, confidence. They will know they are important, that they matter. . . It is the littlest things too. It only takes ten minutes to turn their whole day around.

Interviewer: Are you thinking about any examples of what those little things might be?

Brian: They are always trying to get me to jump on the trampoline with them.

Something I hate to do because it just about kills me. But if I go out there for five minutes they are happy the rest of the day.

Brian then shared some other examples of little things that he has done with the children. In this conversation Brian was invited to see how his doing the little things with them bring his children confidence and help them to feel like they matter. The practice of deconstruction is evident in this exchange. By inviting Brian to do more than tell a story about spending time with the kids, the powerful shaping effects of his actions are revealed to him.

In summary, our conversation about this discourse, that men should be able to do what they want, revealed a number of influences in Brian's life. Brian shared how this discourse blinded him to the needs of his family and his responsibilities in caring for them. This discourse, according to Brian, "stole time away from my family." The messages that Brian sends to his children when he acts on this discourse are that they are not important and to his wife Tammy that she is unappreciated and that he is just using her. Brian was very clear that these are messages he does not want to be a part of. He shared a number of examples of times when he has put this discourse aside in favor of being with his family and seeing the importance of his influence in their lives.

Discourse Two: Discipline and Negativity

The second discourse that Brian thought influenced his life as a father is the idea that he has to be tough on this kids. Unlike the first discourse, Brian's experience with this discourse was complicated in that he was still struggling with this idea in his life and was not sure about whether he wanted it to be part of his life or not. Because of this, our conversations about this message were more in-depth and involved more deconstructive questioning to help Brian be clear about whether he wanted this discourse to be part of his life. In the conversations that follow, I will highlight Brian's struggle with this discourse and how I used deconstructive questioning to help Brian explore the effects of this discourse in his life.

Interviewer: What are some other messages that you struggle with?

Brian: Something I have noticed is the discipline thing. I just always have felt like I had to let them know that they weren't getting away with something and sometimes I went too far with that. I have gone to far with that where I am just griping on them.

Interviewer: So if you were to take up this idea, which I think I have as well, how does it get us to act toward our kids?

Brian: One I've always had the most trouble with is just pointing out everything that they do wrong. I am not one to give compliments anyway but when I just constantly point out everything they do wrong, that has a really negative effect on them. And they get so they don't even want to come in the room because I am just going to pick on them for something. It really sends a

strong message to them and you can see them walking around the house with their heads down.

Initially, Brian struggled making this discourse personal. He called it “the discipline thing” and being tough but those names didn’t fit his experience. In order to help him give a name to this discourse, I invited him to consider how it encourages him to act toward his children. He was then able to talk about his personal experience with this idea as leading him to point out all the negatives. Being critical or pointing out the negatives then became a name that fit for Brian.

During the conversation above, Brian mentioned that it seemed to him that this negativity discourse was even more powerful when he is not around very much. This comment led us to explore how the two discourses (men should do what they want and negativity) might work together or support one another. Brian’s reflections about the influence of these two discourses and how they work together are included below:

Interviewer: I am wondering if you think these two messages might work together?

Brian: One builds on the other. I guess I hadn’t really thought about it until just now but yeah, when you are gone a lot, everything they are doing wrong just jumps out at you.

Interviewer: So not only are you not there but you are there in negative ways?

Brian: Yeah, you gotta catch up for all that lost time you weren’t griping about something.

At this point in the interview I wanted to explore the messages this negativity discourse sends to his children. He began to reflect on how it sends a message that they are not important and that he doesn't care about them. Immediately after saying this, Brian shared how he didn't want everything to sound negative because there are good things too. This was a moment where I felt an accountability to be sensitive to Brian but at the same time felt an accountability to explore the effects of negativity on the lives of his children. The conversation that follows demonstrates how I attempted to be sensitive to Brian and accountable to his children at the same time.

Interviewer: I am glad that you have plenty of good experiences with your children and I want you to know that I believe that you have more good experiences with your children than negative ones. I also want you to know that I have struggled with the negative things that you have talked about too. I have experienced the idea that I need to be tough with my son even though I really don't believe it at all. Sometimes I find myself in these stupid struggles with him. I get home late and its after he has gone to bed but he is still awake and he wants to spend time with me. "Daddy can I come downstairs" he says. For some reason I get this idea that his staying in bed is what is most important. "No," I tell him. "You have to stay in bed." So we get in these arguments and the little interaction that we do have is negative. Every once in a while the light will go on and I'll think he just wants to spend time with me. What is wrong with that? So I get caught up in this idea and what I really want in my heart is to spend time with him and let him know that I care about

him. Not only is that what he needs but I need it too. I struggle with that and I think for me it is connected to this idea of needing to be tough.

The different accountabilities I have in this interview led me to share my thoughts with Brian that I believe he is a good father and my belief that he has more good experiences with his children than negative ones. I wanted Brian to know that I struggle with these ideas as well. My hope in sharing this was that it would help Brian feel more comfortable about our conversation, knowing that I struggle just as he does and that I believe in him as a father. After sharing this with Brian, he continued to share some of the effects pointing out all the negative things has on his children.

Brian: I just get where all I can see is the negative and the poor kid can't win.

They can't do anything right, so why try?

Interviewer: Do you think that is something they feel?

Interviewer: Yeah, I can see it mostly with the twins because I am not their real dad. I have adopted them but I was just too hard on them at the beginning and that is exactly what happened, they just wanted to quit.

Interviewer: What is that like for you to think about?

Brian: Terrible. I still see some of the effects.

Interviewer: I am sure I have sent that message to my son too.

Brian: Actually, I don't think I was any harder on them than I was Zach. I always made sure I wasn't harder on them but I had no idea that it is just a totally different situation with step kids.

Interviewer: Have you noticed things being a little different with them over the years?

Brian: Yeah, that has changed quit a bit but I still see the affects from when they were younger. With step-kids it is just not accepted that you care about them. They are always looking for those messages that I cared about them. With Zach he already had the assurance that I cared for him.

Interviewer: The twins didn't have that assurance?

Brian: They know now. But I think everyday they were looking to see, is he going to care about me today?, where do I stand today?, and probably wondering if I was going to be there tomorrow. They already lost one dad, how long was this one going to be around? It would be good to ask those questions everyday.

Interviewer: I wonder what might happen if we did . . . ?

Brian: I knew you were going to make me think about hard things. It is a good thing, these interviews, they make me think about things I need to think more about.

This conversation invited Brian to think about his relationship with his twin boys in a different way than he had before. He recognized how they were probably more aware of the messages he was sending than his oldest son because they didn't have the same assurances that he had about his love for them. This was a very personal sharing on Brian's part. He was willing to enter into the personal reflection I had hoped for. He shared how terrible it was for him to think about sending those messages to his sons. While he is looking back into his life

when he was sending those messages to them, Brian was able to remain connected to his present relationship with them and expressed in a powerful way that they know that he cares about them now.

Next, we began a conversation about discipline and how it is often connected to being tough. Brian shared that for him he has been so concerned and committed to not being abusive that he hasn't had a problem with being tough. Brian equated toughness with force, so he felt like he didn't have a problem with being tough. I used this as an opportunity to enter into a deconstructive conversation about toughness. I invited Brian to consider what tough would be like if it wasn't connected to physical force.

Interviewer: So what if tough doesn't mean force, but maybe it means a way of talking to them, a way of disciplining?

Brian: I remember this happening a lot. They would complain that I was yelling at them when I didn't even raise my voice, but however it was that I was talking to them they felt like I was yelling at them.

This reflection represented something important to me. Brian was taking a relational perspective. Even though he wasn't really yelling at his kids, Brian realized that what matters is how they experience it. This is an example of accountability. Being willing to look at our actions and their effects even if we never intended for them to hurt others. Brian, in our interviews, was always willing to enter into this space of accountability.

Brian was talking about the idea that he needed to let his kids know that they weren't going to get away with things and how he feels like he needs to stick to the punishment he gives them. Brian had always connected the two together. In order to discipline, punishment

must be a part of it. While we had already spent some time deconstructing this idea about discipline and negativity, we kept returning to conversations that were further deconstructions of this discourse. I invited Brian to enter into a deconstructive conversation about discipline and punishment and what it is they both really mean for him.

Interviewer: What do you think the purpose of discipline is?

Brian: My thinking most of the time is that it is a punishment. Now see I figured out along the way that too much punishment just gets them mad at you. Whatever it is they did is forgotten, they are just mad.

Interviewer: So what if discipline was not about punishment? What if it didn't have to be connected to punishment?

Brian: I know what you are saying.

Interviewer: What if discipline could be about teaching kids the best or most helpful way to go about living?

Brian: Like pointing out positives.

Interviewer: Right. I am wondering if being positive with the kids, letting them know that they are doing the right kinds of things, if that could be seen as discipline?

Brian: Yeah, it sure could. I do try to point out the positive things and they go a lot further. I have been fumbling around with that trying to find new ways. I think that I had already made that connection that it doesn't have to be punishment. I never made the jump to pointing out all the good things they do as being discipline. You are getting into some pretty heavy stuff here.

My purpose of leading this conversation in this way was to again bring deconstruction into the process of interviewing; to bring alternative possibilities to the accepted definitions to discipline. Even though Brian has always connected discipline with punishment or this message has often been with him, he recognizes that at times he has separated the two. The idea about pointing out positives as a form of discipline was a new idea for Brian. At this point in the conversation, Brian shared a very personal story about an experience with his son and how it related to this idea.

Brian: That brought my mind to a couple of events. One with Zach and one with Al. The one with Zach, I can't even remember what it was now but he did something that made me really mad and I was really hard on him, said a lot of mean things. Then he went down into the basement and was down there crying. I felt terrible so I went down there. I knew I was too hard on him so I went down there to talk to him. We got to talking and we just ended up hugging and I was telling him that I really loved him. It took a lot of talking to him to get my thinking turned around. That's when it came to me. I just loved him and I told him that I wasn't mad at him anymore. Just a few simple words and he got the message. It went a lot further than all the mean things I said. I remember at the time thinking I wish I could do that all of the time.

Interviewer: Is this something that fits with how you would like to be as a father?

Brian: Yeah, I also remember thinking, how did this happen anyway. How do I do this again? The other thing was with Alex. He was fighting with his

brother on the living room floor and it just got out of hand. I got mad and grabbed him and shoved him up against the wall and held him there. I am sure that I was yelling at him at the time. He ran upstairs. As soon as he ran out of the room I knew that wasn't the right way to handle it. I went right upstairs and talked to him and told him I was sorry and that what I did wasn't right.

By sharing this story Brian connects the ideas that we had been discussing to his personal experience. He reflects upon experiences where he felt the pull of the message that he needs to be tough, acted on that pull, and then recognized the effects of his actions on his children. He was able to follow his preferred desire to let his children know that he loves them and apologized for his behavior. Our conversation about this represents the purpose of these interviews, to encourage fathers to explore their interactions with their children in ways that helps them connect the conversations to their personal experiences.

Personal Reflections

I felt very comfortable with Brian and felt like our conversations went smoother than the other interviews. I also found myself able to share more about my own experiences as a father with Brian. My interview with him had a significant influence on my life as a father.

As Brian was sharing his experience with the message that fathers need to be tough and how that leads him to be negative with the children, I found myself thinking about my interactions with my son Andrew. I began to see things in my own behavior that had been hidden to me. I could hear myself being more negative and critical to him than I had thought. Like Brian, I felt terrible. One comment from Brian that pointed this out to me was when Brian shared how his children think he is yelling at them when he hasn't even raised his voice.

When I heard those words I felt a prick in my heart. I had heard my son say the very same words, but had never really thought about the seriousness of those words until that moment talking with Brian. Before that moment I just thought he was just misinterpreting me.

I had the same pricking experience as I read through the transcripts. The night before I read through the transcripts, I was driving in the car with my son. I was telling him that he needed to do something and he said, "Dad why are you yelling at me." I hadn't raised my voice so I told him that I wasn't yelling. "You were yelling at me," he said. I couldn't see it. I couldn't see the affect that my tone of voice was having on my son. The next day, as I was reading the transcripts, I could see it and it was all too clear. I had been yelling at him. No, I never raised my voice, but I had used a tone that was not warm and definitely not loving. Since that moment, I have tried to be more sensitive to how I am saying things to my son. And every few days I get a reminder from my son, "Daddy you are yelling at me."

Interviews Three and Four

Before entering into a discussion about Brian's preferred desires as a father, I wanted to find out what his experience of our first two interviews was like and if anything in particular had stuck with him. What was especially meaningful to Brian was our conversation about discipline and negativity. He shared a few experiences about how our conversation about this made his negative and critical comments much more apparent to him. I used these experiences as an entry point into a conversation with Brian about his preferred desires as a father. Some of the excerpts from our conversation about this are included below.

Interviewer: I am wondering if you have any thoughts or questions about our last conversation or if anything stuck with you?

Brian: Yeah, I did think about it quite a bit. One thing that crossed my mind is I notice how every time I am critical of somebody it was just a lot more apparent to me.

Interviewer: You could see it happening? What was different?

Brian: I was just more self-aware. I just noticed myself doing it and I've gotten a lot better over the years about not being so critical that I didn't notice how bad I still am.

This is the purpose of deconstructive questioning, to make the influence of a message apparent so that it is no longer hidden. Another important part of this project was the importance of including the exploration of negative messages even when fathers have made significant changes in their lives. As Brian mentioned, even though he thought he was doing better, our conversation about negativity allowed him to see that he still struggles with it.

Brian: The other thing that I noticed is how far a compliment goes. Just how much more of an impact that has on kids. One compliment can go farther than ten negative things.

Interviewer: How was it that you noticed this?

Brian: I made a conscious effort to give more compliments after we talked last time.

Our conversations changed the way Brian thinks and acts as a parent. His comments reflect the purpose of these interviews; to offer possibilities for participants to change their behavior as fathers.

Since Brian was sharing different ways of relating to his children, I wanted to give him a chance to reflect on the effects that his giving compliments has on the kids. Brian shared how he can see a visible difference in how his kids look at him and how they look at themselves. I also invited Brian to think about the messages that his giving compliments sends his children. Some key points from our conversations follow.

Interviewer: Do you notice any kind of difference in the kids when you give them compliments?

Brian: Oh yeah, for one thing they will look at you. They act like they actually hear you. When you are critical they're just, "Yeah, yeah. We have heard this a hundred times." The expression on their faces; they are not looking at the ground, they're smiling.

Interviewer: So I am wondering what kind of messages go along with compliments? What does that say to them about how you feel about them?

Brian: It is hard to put that into words, you can see it in their eyes.

Interviewer: What is it that you see?

Brian: You can just see their eyes light up. They know they didn't do anything wrong.

The purpose of asking questions about the messages that his preferred actions send is to help Brian hear in words the shaping effect that his actions have on his children. In the above comments, Brian is having a visual experience with the effects of giving compliments with his children. He is seeing his children smiling and their faces lighting up. He is struggling with putting it into words.

I wanted Brian to think more about how his children personally experience themselves when he gives them compliments. I felt that it was important for him to move beyond describing what they look like when he does this. I wanted him to know how they feel.

Interviewer: So if you were Zach, and I said something nice to you, what would that say to him?

Brian: That I am alright.

Interviewer: What do you think it means to a kid, that his father thinks he is alright?

Brian: It means a whole lot. One compliment like that can change their whole day.

Interviewer: On a level of importance in their life, where does your opinion as a father stand do you think?

Brian: I guess at that age they don't really know. It is a constant struggle for them to know whether they are ok or not. I think they are always up in the air about where they stand. So, I think my opinion is worth so much to them.

They always know their mom loves them, but with me I am not so sure. It must be that tough thing coming in.

Interviewer: Is that something you want to come in there; that tough thing where the kids aren't quite sure about your feelings?

While this question may seem obvious, its purpose is to help Brian define a preference for his fathering related to the conversation we were having about giving his kids compliments.

Brian: No, I would like them to know how I feel about them. . . That just set a light bulb off in my head when that came out of my mouth, that they always know their mom loves them. How are they going to know if I don't tell them? I want them to know how much they mean to me and how important it is that they grow up to be decent people. I think I have had a chance to tell all of them that, just not very often. That is a hard thing for me to do for some reason. It shouldn't be.

Brian's answer reveals his first preferred desire as a father. He wants his children to know how he feels about them.

Preference One: I Want Them to Know How I Feel About Them

This thought, that he wants his children to know how he feels about them, set off a light bulb for Brian. Brian defined this as one of his preferred desires as a father. While Brian had already talked about giving more compliments to his children, he had not yet explored how this particular belief would influence his parenting. During this next part of our interview, I invited Brian to explore how this desire would encourage him to act toward his kids.

Interviewer: If you were to be mindful of this desire to let them know how much they mean to you, what would be some of the things that you might find yourself doing?

Brian: The best one I know is trying to find something they did well that day and point it out. I picked this up in coaching little league. If you point out something they are doing well and give them some praise it goes a long way.

The purpose of asking this question was to help Brian deconstruct his desire to let his children know how much they mean to him. It is important for this exploration to reveal as many possible actions as possible.

Since Brian referred back to pointing out positives, I wanted Brian to think of as many different ways that he could let them know cares as possible. Since he has four children I invited him to consider how he might express this message that he cares about them to each individual child. Some highlights from our conversation are included below.

Interviewer: What would be some other things you would do?

Brian: Paying attention to them. Being interested in what they are doing.

Interviewer: What would some specific ways that you could do that?

Brian: Asking about what they are reading, who their friends are, what the latest trouble was at the bus stop.

Interviewer: So to be able to do those things, paying attention to them and being interested, what would you find yourself doing, when you came home from work, if you were guided by this idea that you want them to know how much they mean to you?

Brian: Ask them what they did today.

My hope was that these questions would help Brian be more specific about how his desire would have him act with his children. Since our conversation was not going in that direction, I decided to ask him to consider the different ways that his desire could be expressed to each individual child. This focus seemed to be helpful to Brian as he began to identify actions that would individually affect each of his children.

Interviewer: How would this desire express itself when you are with your daughter?

Brian: She wants to play. That usually means throwing her around. Tickling her. Yeah, she looks forward to that. She's usually looking out the window when I pull in.

Brian now has some specific examples of things he can do with his daughter that would express to her how much she means to him. While these are things that he already does, by placing these activities within his preference to show her how much she means to him, it is possible these activities of playing and tickling her will have more meaning to Brian. He won't be just playing with her anymore, he will purposefully be telling her how much he cares.

At this point, I invited Brian to reflect on the personal meaning this activity has for his daughter. This is something that Brian had not thought about before. He had not made the connection that playing with his daughter sent her any personal messages beyond the fact that it was fun for her. A few examples of our conversation are included below.

Interviewer: What do you think that means to her when you play with her?

Brian: That this person really cares about me. I am important to him.

These are words that Brian had already used to describe other messages he sends to his children. However, Brian was moved by making this connection.

Interviewer: Did you know you were sending her this message when you were playing with her?

Brian: No, I haven't made that connection. It makes me feel really good.

Brian and I shifted our conversation to exploring how he might express his feelings to his other three children. Exploring the specifics of how he might express his feelings for them was tough for Brian. However, it was an exploration that he wanted to participate in. Brian indicated that he knew this was going to be hard but that he was glad because it was helpful to him. Our discussion about this led Brian to identify two specific things that he can do to let Alex know his feelings for him. Some excerpts from our conversation about the different children are included below:

Interviewer: Knowing each kid individually as you do, I am wondering what each of them might like to have you do when you come home that would send this message that they mean a lot to you?

Brian: That's tougher than just the usual asking them what they did today.

Alex is a quiet, withdrawn guy. Actually he is more like I am than any of them.

Interviewer: So, what would give him that sense that he means a lot to you?

Brian: Just asking him to help me do something. He likes it when I try to make him a part of something. Last night I had him help with the laundry. I was trying to help Tammy get some stuff done around the house.

Interviewer: Are there any other things?

Brian: Yeah, if I joke around with him. Right before you showed up I was sitting on him on the couch and tickling him.

After naming a few specific things that would be meaningful for Alex, we then had a similar conversation about his son Adam. Brian shared how Adam likes it when he asks him to work on projects. Brian also shared how he has taken Adam to work with him a number of

times and how Adam really enjoys doing that. During this conversation something interesting happened. Usually, after Brian had indicated an activity that he could be involved in with the kids, I would ask him about the meaning of that activity for his kids. In this conversation, however, Brian did this on his own.

Brian: I've taken him to work with me too in the summer. That's something he really enjoyed if I would let him do something that he thought was important. Yeah, that lets him know that he's capable of doing things, that I trust him to do something that is important.

Brian then shared how this is something he really wants Adam and all his kids to know, that he trusts them.

Our conversation then shifted to Brian's other son, Zach. Brian believed that what was most important for Zach is for him to just spend time talking with him. I was interested in knowing what types of things they talk about so I asked Brian if he could share that with me.

Brian: He is just full of questions and wants to know my philosophy on life, or he will bring something home from school and will ask me what I think of it. . .

A lot of history stuff too because I like history.

I wanted Brian to think about why this was meaningful to Zach. I asked him a question about that and at first Brian just thought that Zach asked him those things to prove his teachers wrong. Since this project is about helping fathers recognize the significance of their influence on their children's lives, I asked Brian the following question.

Interviewer: Why is it important or meaningful for him to ask you these questions?

Brian: My opinion means a lot to him.

Interviewer: Do you think that having these talks with you offers him something in his life?

Brian: I guess it could give him some security, knowing that I am there for him.

Again, the purpose of continuing to push further with these questions was to help Brian have a deeper sense of what he offers his children and to allow these common experiences with his children to have more meaning for him.

Our conversation then shifted to talking about all of the kids. Brian shared a story about his involvement with little league. He shared how he attended all their games and most of their practices. He also talked about how some of the parents of the other children rarely show up. As he was talking about this, I thought about my own experience as a child. When I was little (8 - 12 years old) my dad was my coach most of the time and when he wasn't he was always at every game. I remembered what it was like for me to look into the stands and see his face. It gave me a sense of confidence and security. I also remembered what it was like when I was older (14 - 18) and my dad rarely came to any of my games. I remember seeing my friends after the games going to talk to their dads. My own experiences with this lead me to ask Brian to reflect on the importance of his commitment to be at every game. As it turned out, Brian also had a similar experience as a child, except his dad never came to any of his games.

Interviewer: What happens do you think when they are playing the game and they look up in the stands and see you? What do you think that means to them?

Brian: I don't know how to put it into words. I just know from when I was a kid and my parents didn't come to anything. I think what I am doing is important. It matters when you are a kid. I just know from not having them there. I always felt like what I was doing didn't really matter to them.

Interviewer: So what are you saying to them by being there?

Brian: That they are important. That they do matter to me.

Interviewer: How important is that for you to have them believe that about themselves?

Brian: It's real important.

Preference Two: Close and Involved

Up to this point in our interview, I had used deconstructive questions to extend the influence of Brian's preferences in his own life and the lives of his children. This allowed Brian to discover a number of ways that he could express his preferences to his children. I asked him if he could think of a word that would capture his desires for what he wants in his relationship with his children. Brian thought that this would be a difficult thing to do. To help him with this I asked him the following question.

Interviewer: What word would best capture that. As a father I want . . . ?

Brian: I just want to be close to them; be involved. I want to know what they are thinking about, what's going on with them.

Brian was able to come up with two words that were meaningful to him, close and involved. He believed these words captured what he wanted. I wanted to offer him a way to have those words be meaningful to him on a daily basis so I invited him to place those words into the following question.

Interviewer: So, if you were to put this word “close” in a question that you could ask yourself, “How can I be close to my kids today?” Do you think that is something that for you would capture the other desires you have talked about?

Brian: Yeah, I think it really would. That might be the trick, to have something like this to remind me.

Our time was running short and I felt it would be important for us to talk about his preferences for his relationship with Tammy. We had talked about this somewhat throughout the interview but not as specifically as I would have liked. Brian shared how the word he would use for Tammy would be the same as the kids, that he wants to be close and involved with her. He also shared how he not only wants to be close to her but that he wants her to have that feeling of closeness in her life. Brian shared some stories about how he has tried to follow this desire in the last week.

Brian: I have been working on that [closeness] ever since counseling. That is kind of what I did last night with the laundry and helped with the supper, cleaned up the kitchen while she was doing something before supper. Oh, and mother’s day we have her the day off. Me and the boys that was something, we cooked the breakfast and supper and cleaned up.

As Brian was speaking he was getting more and more excited. He continued:

Brian: She really enjoyed that. I drug her out to buy books while the boys baked a cake because it was her birthday too so she got surprised with that when we got back. The cake the boys made for her, it was all a secret plan that we had.

Since I hadn't yet had a chance to use deconstructive questions to explore how this preference would invite him to act toward Tammy, I invited him to consider how this desire to be close to her would have him act on a daily basis. Brian shared a story about how the night before this interview he came home and Tammy was not there. Rather than sitting down and relaxing he decided to clean up the kitchen. This experience for Brian was an example of acting on his desire to be close to Tammy.

Brian: I think that is what happened last night. She worked with me yesterday and when we got home she had to run her mom home. Normally, I would have just sat down, but I didn't. I picked up the kitchen, put away some clean dishes, I cleaned off the table then I did some laundry later on. It felt so good to help a little bit that I wanted to do more.

I invited Brian to give meaning to this experience. I asked him to reflect on what doing something like this for Tammy would tell her about how he feels about her. During our first interview, Brian shared how when he follows the message that he should be able to do what he wants, it expresses to Tammy that he doesn't appreciate her and that he takes her for granted. Brian also admits that he has been guilty of sending her those messages.

Interviewer: When Tammy came home and noticed what you had done, what do you think that said to her about how you feel about her?

Brian: That she is appreciated, that I don't take her for granted. I have been guilty of taking her for granted.

Brian began to share a few examples of other things that he has and can do to help her feel that he is close to her. This was a conversation that he initiated on his own. This was not the first time this happened in our interviews. Brian was either able to anticipate my questions by this time or he was beginning to think in more relational terms. One of the purposes of this project was to help fathers take on a relational ethic with their children and partners. One way to know if this was happening was to hear about how the interviews had influenced their lives in between visits (which had been the case with Brian). Another way to know if this was happening was when the fathers, like Brian, began to answer questions that had not yet been asked. Here are some of Brian's comments about following his desire to be close to Tammy.

Brian: Recently, I have gotten in the routine of bringing her coffee in the morning too. I did it once and she made a big deal about it. At times I have called her in the middle of the day for no good reason. The first time I did it she kept waiting to find out why I had called.

Interviewer: When you do those types of things what do you think that feels like for Tammy?

Brian: Her eyes light up.

Interviewer: Is that something that you want for her?

Brian: I want her to feel confident and loved, appreciated, important. And those little things go a lot further than the big things.

Our interview ended with Brian sharing how he would like to be able to remember these ideas more often in his life. He talked about writing the word “close” down on a piece of paper and placing it on the dashboard of his car to help him remember. Brian felt a strong desire to bring closeness to Tammy and his children. Not only did he want this closeness for them, he also wanted it for his life. He liked how it felt to do things for them. When he did, he felt a desire to do even more.

An example of the affect of these interviews can be seen by looking at what happened in the weeks in between our interviews. During interviews one and two, we talked almost exclusively about the messages that influence his life and the effects of those messages on the lives of his wife and children. While we didn’t talk specifically about any of Brian’s preferences, he was more actively engaged in sending positive messages to his family. The major premise of a methodology informed by deconstructive knowledge is that involving participants in deconstructive thinking opens up space for persons to begin to act differently. This is what happened with Brian.

Personal Reflections

When our forth interview was finished, I felt a strong sense of appreciation for Brian. Since I had some knowledge of Brian’s situation and his efforts to change his life, I was impressed by the changes that he had made in his relationships since my initial contact with him.

During one part of our conversation (not included in the write-up) Brian shared how it is hard for his older boys to understand his relationship with his new daughter. He talked about how they get jealous of the time he spends with her. He thought it was especially hard because there are so many years in-between his youngest boys and his daughter. As he was saying, this I thought about my son Andrew. When my youngest was born Andrew was almost 5 years old. While we tried to prepare him for the changes that would happen in our family when Christian was born, I don't think we really understood how hard it would be for him. When Brian shared his experience with me, I realized that I had not been very aware during the past few months of Andrew's experience. Christian is at an age where he probably requires even more time and attention than when he was born. Christian wants to play with Andrew and sometimes he wants to play rough. When Christian gets hurt, Andrew is the one who gets in trouble not Christian because he is too little. Brian's story about his daughter made the unfairness of Andrew's situation more clear to me. It encouraged me to be more aware of spending time with him and watching out for times that he might be feeling left out.

Partner Interview: Brian and Tammy

Due to some complications, this final interview with Tammy and Brian took place about a month and a half after my last interview with Brian. At first, I was a little worried about the large gap in time between these interviews. I thought that if too much time passed the accountability interview might not be as effective. Tammy was given the transcripts some time before the interview. Because of the amount of time between the time she got the transcripts and our interview, Tammy began to talk with Brian about the things he had discussed in the transcripts. She was pleasantly surprised at many of the things that Brian

shared and this sparked some conversations together that have been helpful for their relationship.

I began by inviting Tammy to share the things that were most meaningful to her. Even though Tammy had read the transcripts some time ago, she was still amazed at many of the things that Brian shared. The main thing that impressed her the most was the level of awareness that Brian demonstrated in the interviews. While Brian talked about many things that he wanted to do for her and the children, his awareness of the messages that influence his life and how those messages affect the family meant more to her than anything else. She especially remembered Brian talking about the differences in his relationships with his oldest son Zach and his adopted twin sons.

Tammy: I talked with him about this [the transcripts] and some of the things that came out of it and I was really surprised that he had an awareness that in the beginning he lacked the bonding with Adam and Alex. I was really surprised that he was aware of the lack of bonding and how it affected their relationship.

Tammy was also surprised at how Brian was aware that his life had been influenced by the idea that men should be able to do what they want. This was surprising for Tammy because for many years Brian would put himself and other things before his family. While she has seen Brian make changes over the years, it was meaningful for Tammy to hear Brian admit that selfishness had been a part of his life and that he still struggles with it.

Tammy: I was also surprised that he was able to talk about that selfish stuff, wanting what he wanted. For him to come out and say it, that in the past he

has been selfish, that really meant a lot to me. It was really surprising. I was also really surprised when he said that he would rather have gone to the park with us that one day rather than go riding, because at one time in our marriage he was gone all the time and I was home with the kids. So for him to have figured out that our children are happier and healthier when he is a part of their lives. . . I was really surprised that he figured that out.

Tammy was also surprised that Brian was able to talk about the affects that his criticism has on the kids. Again, this was something that had been a part of his relationship with Tammy and the kids for many years. While he has changed over the past few years and tried to be more positive with them, it was important for Tammy to hear that Brian knew he had hurt them and that he didn't want to hurt them.

Tammy: I was shocked that he knew that [criticism]. I didn't even know if he knew that. I wanted them to have a good relationship but you can't make something like that happen. I couldn't make him change. I had to be patient. It is a lot better now. When he started taking the to work and he started telling them, "You're doing a good job." That started to really change things.

After Tammy shared some of the things that surprised her, I wanted to find out if the interviews had affected their lives in any way. While the purpose of this interview was to further discussions about accountability, I also used it as a way to see if the interviews had the transformative affect that I hoped for.

Tammy: Well, I wish that you interviewed him every week because he cooked a meal that week [Tammy says laughing]. I can laugh about it but I think from

doing the interviews he was more aware of his behavior and how he interacted with us. I think it made him conscious of what he was doing.

Interviewer: Did you notice anything in particular?

Tammy: Yes I did. He started talking about a lot of things that you guys were talking about. It was a couple of days after the first interview. He says, "You know that really got me thinking." So he talked about how much of the kids childhood that he missed and how now with Cassie it is such a joy.

At this point in the interview, I decided to take a more active role in directing the conversation to explore her thoughts about the specific negative messages that Brian talked about. I was especially interested in exploring Tammy's thoughts about the personal messages that Brian thought he was sending. This exploration is important because it gives Brian a chance to hear in Tammy's own words, how his actions affect her life. Therefore, I asked Tammy to talk about her experience of the hurtful messages that Brian shared.

Tammy: What happened before was that I had a little baby and I'd have to cook supper and do all this stuff and he'd just sit on the couch. The baby is screaming and I'd have to take care of her and he wouldn't help. I was angry. "Can this person see the crisis I'm in and why do I have to ask him to help me?" It's almost like you're in the same house, in the same room, "Why do I have to ask you to do this?"

Interviewer: Brian thought that these types of things sent a message to you that he didn't care about you; that you are not important. What do you think your experience is?

Tammy: Well, he hit it right on the head. It is like you're unpaid labor; you're a slave; that the whole load is put on me. At one time at night, he would tell me what I was doing wrong with the kids but he would not do any parenting and I would be very very angry. It's almost like he is giving me my marching orders to discipline the children in a certain way, but he wouldn't do it. I had a lot of anger about that.

The words that Brian used to express the affects of his actions fit for Tammy. While she was talking about some negative things, the experience of the conversation was not negative because Tammy was pleased that Brian understood her experience.

While Brian and I talked about a few other potentially hurtful messages, Tammy was more interested in talking about Brian's preferences and some of the good things that he does as a father. At first, I tried to get Tammy to return to talking about some of these negative messages but decided to go in the direction that she wanted. It was a common experience in our interview, for Tammy to follow up any negative comment with a positive one. I asked Tammy about this and she wanted me to know that Brian has made so many changes in his life it is hard for her not to appreciate him. Tammy talked about Brian's experience growing up. She shared how his father was the type of man that thought he was god and that women and children were nothing.

Tammy: I think that he loves me and he's doing the best that he can and he's a lot different than he used to be. He's a lot different than the role models he was fed. It is very hard not to appreciate that.

Out of respect for her desire to appreciate Brian, I asked Tammy to reflect on some of the actions that Brian thought would send her the message that he cared about her. Most of the ideas that Brian came up with were related to him being more involved with the housework. I reminded Tammy about the night that Brian came home and did the dishes and the laundry before she came home and asked her what that meant to her.

Tammy: I was very surprised by that. I was shocked. I had worked with him that day and I was really tired. I grouted a whole floor of tile and I was very tired. I expected all this stuff to be here when I got home and he had started the laundry and even dinner. I was just shocked.

Interviewer: What do you think he was thinking about when he saw the dishes and the laundry?

Tammy: I think he thought, "Man, if I'm tired, she's got to be twice as tired." I thought he was thinking of me. It gives me the message that he cares. When he did the laundry and made the supper that's when the message hit, "I appreciate what you do. Thank you for doing this."

While this example was meaningful to Tammy, she surprised me by saying that it is not his involvement in the housework that tells her that he cares. I asked Tammy to share what Brian could do to really let her know that he cared for her.

Tammy: I don't think it's [the housework] is all that important. Him doing the dishes doesn't tell me that he loves me. Personally, to me it's a thank you, it's holding my hand when I least expect it. It's saying, "Do you want to go out some night and I'll get a sitter?" It's never anything extravagant.

Interviewer: So anything that would express to you that he's been thinking of you or appreciates what you are doing?

Tammy: I read [in the transcripts] about when he called and I did think he was up to something. I kept asking him, "What do you need?" and he kept saying, "No, I just called to talk." This is not normal. Then he called back and asked me to come to lunch with him.

Interviewer: Are those the types of things that really mean the most to you?

Tammy: Yeah. This sounds crazy but it's going to do something that I like to do, like going to the bookstore. I kind of get selfish when I hit those doors and I forget he is there. Then I get worried that he is getting bored. But when he goes, it's almost like he is being selfless when he walks in the door because he says, "Go, I'm fine." It's the little things.

My purpose in asking this question was to further deconstruct Brian's desire to care for Tammy. This conversation opened up a number of alternative possibilities for Brian. While previously Brian could only connect his desire to care for Tammy with house work, Brian was able to see that what meant the most to Tammy were little expressions of appreciation.

I wanted to continue to deconstruct what care meant to Tammy. I invited her to think of more actions that Brian could participate in that would let her know that he cared.

Tammy: We were doing something the other day and he reached over and held my hand. He doesn't usually display affection openly and for him to have done that was a shock.

Interviewer: Is that something that means a lot to you?

Tammy: Yeah, because I am really a touchy person.

Besides housework and appreciation, Brian now knew showing affection as another way to express his desire to care for Tammy.

Tammy also talked about another way that Brian could let her know that he cared. She talked about how important it is for her to have Brian involved in the family. For Tammy this was perhaps the most important expression of care.

Tammy: The most beautiful thing that I have ever seen are those really great bonding moments with him and the boys. There are times when I walk in and he and Cassie are giggling and rolling around on the floor. That to me is a sign of love and not just to them but to me too. He is saying that families are important and that you people are important to me.

This was a surprise to Brian. He had no idea that his commitment to the kids was also an expression of love to Tammy.

Brian: It has taken a lot of effort and change on my part. It is nice to know that it means so much to Tammy.

At the end of our interview Tammy again wanted to talk about how far Brian has come. She talked about how his desire to be a good father has become more central to his life and how he is doing many things that go against the messages and role models that he received growing up.

Tammy: He took so much pride in being a coach or volunteering and he was at every practice [little league] and he was a part of it all. He would tell everybody what our kids were doing and that was so much fun to watch

because it was like he was allowing himself to be proud of his achievements at home, not just on the bike. And he's got pictures of the baby in his truck, up on the dash, and of the boys. And he listens to Dr. Laura. It's all about parenting and he listens to it everyday and he'll come home and we will talk about it. The best part about it is that he is attracted to it and wants to listen to it.

These descriptions did not fit with the messages that Brian received about what a man is, so I asked Tammy about this.

Interviewer: Those sound like things that would be unexpected based on the messages Brian has received about what should be important to men.

Tammy: Yeah, I think the message he's sending now is, "Regardless of what anybody thinks I'm going to do what I want to do, which is be a good father." There was a time when somebody wanted him to go do something and he said, "No, I'm going to stay home and go swimming with the kids." I was just shocked that he was willing to put that fun on hold.

Interviewer: What does this say about how he feels about the family?

Tammy: Well instead of us being a sideline business, we're like the main thing. It's like we are partner again. He didn't even renew his football package on DSS [satellite], I was shocked. He told me this summer, "Don't renew it, I am not going to watch football."

Having Tammy take time to share these changes in Brian's life was important. Not only was it nice for Brian to hear her say these things about him, it also helped Tammy to see some of the changes that he has made more clearly.

I ended the interview by asking Tammy what it was like to talk about these things and to have read the transcripts.

Tammy: It reaffirmed that the thought he was important in that position [as a father]. He would rather choose playing games with his kids than riding with his friends. He chooses to do this because he thinks it is so important because he wants to not because he has to. I think that was a good thing for me to read and talk about.

PAUL

Paul is 36 years old and a father of three children. Two of his children live with their mother while his oldest son, Spencer, lives with him. He was divorced two years ago and is currently involved in a committed relationship with a woman who shares in parenting responsibilities of Paul's oldest son. Paul was chosen to participate in the project because he has struggled in the past with parenting (acting in sometimes aggressive ways) and has recently made some significant changes in his life related to parenting. Paul was referred to me by a local clergy member.

Interviews One and Two

Paul found it fairly easy to come up with common discourses or messages that fathers experience related to parenting. However, since the purpose of this project is to pursue a careful and thorough exploration of discourse and how they effect fathers lives we focused our conversation around two main discourses: 1) father as disciplinarian and 2) the father is in charge of children. Paul also identified a few secondary messages that were not thoroughly explored due to concerns with time. These secondary messages will be addressed following the review of the major discourses. The first discourse we discussed took up the majority of our conversations, especially related to how this discourse influences children.

Discourse One: Father as Disciplinarian

The first message that Paul decided that he and other fathers experience was the message that the father is the disciplinarian. Once Paul identified this message he was invited to explore how this discourse has/would encourage him to act toward and think about his children and partner. Some of Paul's comments related to this conversation include:

Paul: If the father's expected to be a disciplinarian and is going away from the other idea of a shared venture, then that person ultimately is going to be more hard, cold, rigid. There will be justice but not necessarily mercy.

Interviewer: If you, or both of us as fathers, were to take up this message what are some of the things that we would miss out in our relationships with our children?

Paul: I think that if you are in the justice without mercy role the opportunities that would come up as far as your children trying to emotionally connect with you and tell you what's going on are not going to happen. So, I think that emotionally you would be more distant and disconnected from your children. It would be a relationship of fear.

Interviewer: I'm thinking about my own life when I have felt that pull, "Oh, I better be this way because it is my responsibility to be tough." Have you had experiences where you have been caught up in that?

Paul: I know that there have been many times in my life when I've definitely felt like it was expected of me to make sure the children are disciplined; whereas, what I really felt inside was, "This does not have to be me."

Beyond the simple description of the disciplinarian discourse, Paul was able to share and admit that he has been caught up in this message many times in his relationships with his children. In his last comment, Paul noted something that is important related to the topic of deconstructive knowledge. He shared that while he has definitely experienced the pull of this discourse he has

also felt an opposite pull that goes against this discourse when he stated, “This does not have to be me.”

An important part of deconstruction is to try to connect a particular discourse with common cultural beliefs. I invited Paul to consider what possible cultural beliefs could be used to support or influence this notion of the father as disciplinarian. Paul felt like the idea of fathers needing to fill the role of disciplinarian comes from the idea that men need to be tough. After Paul identified this idea of toughness I invited him to consider how this idea encourages us to act as fathers. Our conversation about these topics follow:

Interviewer: Do you think that there are messages in culture and society about how men are supposed to be men that may influence this discourse of father as disciplinarian?

Paul: I guess another thing is that men just in general have to be tough. Men aren't supposed to show emotions. . . In effect we are taught that we are tough. We are not supposed to cry. We are not supposed to show emotion other than we can get mad. That is acceptable.

Interviewer: Do you think this has an influence of how we father our male children?

Paul: Yes, from this perspective boys are supposed to be men and tough so we treat them harder.

Once a conversation about this message was established we began to explore more of the specifics about how it invites us to act and think about our role as fathers. The purpose of extending this conversation was to allow us to more completely deconstruct this message of

the father as disciplinarian especially related to the relational affects this discourse has on children and partners. Paul identified this discourse as “the biggest thing that fathers have to overcome.” He also mentioned this specific discourse encourages us to look at discipline as having to be harsh and tough. Paul expressed how his experience of this discourse has invited him to think that he “has to be in control of the kids . . . to be in charge of the kids.”

The interview then turned to specifically explore how this idea would have him act toward his children. Some excerpts from our conversation are included below:

Interviewer: I’m wondering if we take up this discourse as father as disciplinarian, how would it encourage us to see our children?

Paul: I think you see your children as perhaps the worker ants and you’re the queen ant. I think that it makes children less personable.

Interviewer: Less than people?

Paul: Exactly, we wouldn’t have to be sensitive to their experiences. Seeing children as less than people, as worker ants, is just a small step away from physical force.

Throughout the interview I continually invited Paul to speak more about how this discourse has personally affected his parenting. For example, after he would share an idea about how this idea affects fathers in general I would ask “Has there been a time when this discourse has gotten the best of you in your relationships with the children?” However, Paul had a very difficult time specifically addressing how he has personally acted in these ways even though he readily admits that he has been influenced “many times” by the disciplinarian discourse. Since I realize it is not easy for people to talk about times when they have hurt

others, I shared a number of examples of how I have acted in ways that have been hurtful to my son and partner in hopes that he would feel some permission to talk about his own experiences. My concern about continuing to pursue this personal reflection is related to my desire to help Paul experience accountability in his relationships. If this is to happen, the exploration of discourses and their affects cannot remain distant at the level of fathers in general but rather they need to be explored at the very personal level. This is especially true when talking about the personal messages our actions have on children.

After exploring how this disciplinarian discourse invites Paul to think and act toward his children, we shifted our focus to the specific messages that the living of this discourse sends to his children.

Interviewer: I'm interested in talking about some of the shaping effects these things [discourses] have on our children when we take up these ways of fathering?

Paul: Well, if we start with the father being the disciplinarian. The direct impact that I see is a child that is more cold and disconnected from his father and that I'm not speculating, that I'm relating from personal experience.

Paul starts by talking about personal experience then begins to go back to general scenarios and analogies about fathers in general. I continue to try to bring the conversation back to the personal.

Interviewer: Let me ask you this. You talked about how the child can become cold and disconnected. I'm wondering about this in a real personal way, when we go along with this idea that we have to be disciplinarians and that we as

men have to act in ways that are tough, I'm wondering what that says to our children about how we feel about them. About who they are?

Paul: We are telling them that the rule is more important than they are, so obviously their self-esteem, their self-worth is going to be hurt.

Interviewer: Have there been times when you have told your children (through following this discourse) that they are less important than the rules?

Paul: Yes, I have definitely done that.

Interviewer: Can you share with me a time when this has happened?

Paul: I can't think of any particular incidences, but I know I have made the rules seem more important than what my child was asking of me.

Here Paul was able to reflect for a brief moment about the message that he sends his children when he goes along with the discourse of disciplinarian. However, he was not able to speak of any specific experiences when he had acted in these ways even though there had been many of these experiences in his relationships with his children.

Later in the interview, I returned to this topic and asked Paul to reflect on how the connection of discipline equaling punishment affects how he sees his children.

Paul: Well, the way that I have looked at that one is that the child is lazy and dumb or the child is just doing it to be defiant. The fact is, that I as a parent, could easily leave the milk out and I have. I have spilled many things as an adult, it happens, its called an accident. . . but with kids it is somehow purposeful.

Interviewer: You spoke about the shaping effect that takes place if we're caught up in these things. That you need to yell when things happen that are a bother without regard to how the yelling is going shape the child. How is your child going to experience himself in the yelling? What message is it going to send to him about how you feel about him?

Paul: It's interesting the reaction that kids can get and the fear that can develop or just complete emotional withdrawal. My third son Tyler, and I believe firmly that it is a direct result of this influence that we are talking about here, went into this withdrawal mode and just became kind of numb not feeling anything at the time. And to this day he has almost two sides to him. One where he is a "couch potato" or the other mode where he is just zany. . . I am a lot better and continuing to be better trying to change . . . There was a point in my life when I couldn't see that other side [positive side of parenting]. I had no idea.

Here Paul was able to make his reflections more personal both with his children and with accepting accountability for his actions. He speaks of how he can see how going along with these discourses has hurt his children and how there was a time in his life when he was unable to see how hurtful his actions were toward them.

In summary, by exploring this discourse of father as disciplinarian we were able to uncover a number of specific ways that this message, from Paul's experience, invites fathers to act and the many different affects these actions have on children. Paul was also able to make connections with ideas within culture that support this message, particularly the idea

that men need to be tough in relationships and parenting. This connection led to other connections between discipline and punishment and how from within this discourse, discipline is a necessarily harsh endeavor.

Discourse Two: Men are in Charge in Families

Another discourse that Paul believes has influenced his life is the message that men are in charge in families. Paul believes that this idea is very centrally tied to culture and also in some church cultures. He spoke of how this discourse encourages men not to see the experiences of women and children as being valid and actually encourages men to believe that they are more important than women. One interesting thing about this according to Paul is that, "As men we are not even aware that we believe it but our actions certainly reflect this message." Here are some examples of the conversations we had related to this particular discourse.

Paul: I think the message generally is the man is supposed to be in charge; that the man is in charge of the family, that he oversees the wife instead of having it be a team based relationship.

Interviewer: Are there any beliefs about women that this idea is tied to?

Paul: I think that it is tied to the belief that men are leaders and women are subservient in some way to the husband. That's a message that is definitely out there.

Interviewer: If men are in charge, what does that say about men and women?

With this question, I was trying to help Paul consider what this message says about men and women and in particular how it shapes gender.

Paul: Obviously, the man is more important and the woman is of less importance.

Interviewer: Is this a belief that you want to go along with?

Paul: Absolutely not, but at times I have.

In this next exchange, I wanted to shift the conversation to a more personal level. I invited Paul to think about times when he has acted in ways that express this belief that men are more important than woman.

Interviewer: Has there been a time when this belief has acted on you in your relationships with your wife and children?

Paul: This belief had a significant impact on me. I used to say things like 'I let my wife work, reflecting the belief that I was in charge of her. I have changed now. I believe it should be more equal, an equal partnership.

Paul began to shift the conversation toward a more general discussion about how men act on this message. I again invited him to enter into a personal reflection about this message and how it influences his children.

Interviewer: What about your children?

Paul: I think that this is similar to how I experience the message of being a disciplinarian. It encourages me to be more controlling and to see them as less than persons.

It was harder for Paul to enter into a personal exploration of this discourse. Paul found this was a message (father in charge) that was strongly connected to the first discourse we discussed (father as disciplinarian). He believed that both of these discourses reinforce one

another and contribute to fathers believing that it is acceptable or necessary to act forceful ways with their children.

Secondary Messages and Discourses

Paul shared that he notices that men tend to exaggerate their involvement in family life. His comments reminded me of LaRossa's critique of the myth of the new father and how men exaggerate on self-reports. I shared this with him and we began a conversation about exaggeration.

Paul: I think that comes to another problem with us as men that overall we always want to make, it like a fish story. When you tell the story about the fish it keeps getting bigger and bigger.

Paul then begins talking about another example.

Interviewer: I was thinking back to what you were talking about this fish story as fathers. Do you think as fathers or men that we have the tendency to say that things are better than they really are?

Paul: The perception of being a good father is more important than actually doing it.

Interviewer: Do you think that this belief would keep us as men from seeing or being accountable in our relationships?

Paul: Sure. If you try and fabricate that you're better than you are then obviously you don't have to improve. If you try to pretend that things are better than they are . . . it is going to have the same effect as weeds growing in our garden which overshadow what you're actually trying to grow.

As he mentioned, exaggeration is a way to maintain the status quo. This is the concern that feminist researchers have about fathering. If fathering research only focuses on the good that fathers are doing it will not be able to address issues of power and inequality in relationships.

Personal Reflections

I experienced a number of different feelings and thoughts during these first interviews with Paul. At times I was appreciative of Paul, while other times I was frustrated with him. I was not sure whether I was frustrated at myself for not asking the right questions or with Paul for not being able or willing to enter into the place of accountability. My hope in these interviews is for fathers to begin to reflect on the actual experiences of their lives and how they have acted in ways consistent with the discourses. I tried to do this by asking questions like, "Can you think of a time or experience when you have acted in these ways with your children?" When the conversations turn toward actual events, the discussion about the messages become very personal. They cease to be reflections about possible general messages to other children and become reflections about the actual hurtful messages that the father has sent to his very own child. My own experience interviewing Paul was that we were not able to get to this level that would allow him to experience the type of accountability I have discussed. This does not however, mean that the interviews were not successful. As I will discuss later, the interviews had some important effects in Paul's life related to his parenting.

I also found myself thinking a lot about my own relationships with my two children and my partner Shelly. During these moments of personal reflection, I felt some joy, pain, and frustration with my own fathering. As we were talking about the idea of laws being more

important than children, my mind turned to just two nights before when I had struggled with my own son trying to get him to go to bed. I had just returned from a late night of work (which is common) and he asked me to come upstairs to spend some time with him. I went to his room, talked with him in bed for about five minutes and then told him that he needed to go to sleep and I had some work to do. After I had been downstairs for a few minutes I heard his voice call from upstairs asking if he could come down. Actually, I must not of heard him because if I had I would have heard a boy missing his daddy who just wanted to be with him for a while. What I actually heard was a boy trying to get around his bedtime. So I told him he had to stay upstairs and go to bed. Over the next 15 -20 minutes we struggled back and forth as he kept pleading to come down and I kept saying no. As I asked Paul to think about what messages he was sending to his children, I found myself thinking about what I was telling my son. My heart sunk as I thought about what I was saying to him; that he was not important to me, that the rules were more important than he was. This is the last thing I want him to feel. Since that night I have had a change in hearing. When I hear my son call down to me at night, I try hear a boy wanting to be with his daddy. When I successfully do this, I invite him down to be with me and watch the Brady Bunch or just talk.

Comments from Non-Partner Consultant

Paul chose to use the women consultant to the project rather than his partner to review and offer comments about our conversations. Paul and I prepared a summary of our conversation and I gave the summary to the consultant. I also gave the consultant a copy of the tape to listen to. The consultant appreciated Paul's willingness to explore these difficult issues and shared some positive comments about our conversation. Her main concern about

the conversation was the lack of critical personal reflection. She expressed her desire for Paul to speak more about times when he had acted in potentially hurtful ways and speak much less about general ideas and analogies. She also encouraged Paul to be more willing to speak from personal experience in our next conversation rather than relying on general examples.

Interviews Three and Four

I began this interview by reviewing the concerns the consultant had about our first two interviews. After sharing her concerns about only talking in generalities and not about personal experience, Paul made an interesting comment. He said "That is a good way of sidestepping accountability." His response gave me the sense that he understood the concern and I invited him to speak in personal ways during our next two interviews.

Before beginning to explore Paul's preferences for parenting, I wanted to find out what effects our initial interviews had on his life. I asked him if anything had stayed with him or influenced him since we last talked. Paul said that he thought a lot about how he might be sending his son the message that the rules are more important than he is. This was something that stuck with Paul. This was a message that he did not want to send to his son and he tried to do things differently during the week between our interviews. Paul's thoughts about this follow.

Paul: I've thought a little bit since the last time and I was thinking about some of the things about consistency . . . There were a couple of times he wanted to watch a T.V. show and I said 'Well I'll watch it with you and we stayed up. One time he wanted to go to Wal-mart and it would have made him late for his bedtime. I thought about the consistency thing and said 'You have been doing

good so let's go.' So the idea that the child is more important than the rule has stuck with me. I have been thinking about that.

Preference One: The Child is More Important than the Rule

Paul's reflection about what he had been thinking about since our last interview led us into identifying his first preferred belief that the child is more important than the rule. Since Paul had already talked about some of the things he had done with his son, I invited him to consider the messages that following this belief would send to him. Our conversation about this went as follows:

Interviewer: I am wondering what message that sends to your son about how you feel about him as a person when you do something like that?

Paul: I think that he would have to feel like he is important if dad is willing to set aside a rule. . . You know, I think that says a lot. It says that he is important. He is more important than the actual rule. I think that idea alone can help me build a better relationship with my son.

Interviewer: When you send him those messages, what do you think that offers him in his life?

Paul: I think by him being shown that he is important, that he is cared about, that he is more important than the rules that will build security for him.

Paul was also able to reflect on a more personal level in this conversation than he was during the first two interviews.

Preference Two: The Nurturer

Another desire that Paul has for his life is to be a nurturer to his. The process for how Paul came to this desire was interesting. I invited Paul to think of a specific quality that he could embrace that would encourage him to see his children more important than the rules. Our conversation about this follows.

Interviewer: So what would be some kind of quality or feeling that would tell you that your children are more important than the rules?

Paul: The nurturer.

Interviewer: By nurturer what are you meaning?

Paul: Being more loving, being more kind, more gentle.

In this conversation, Paul was able to come up with a name for his preferred way of parenting. He was also able to begin to deconstruct how this preference would invite him to act toward his children. What began as a belief that children are more important than rules turned into a way of being with his children in loving, kind and gentle ways.

As in the first two interviews, Paul enjoyed talking about different ideas and scenarios that moved away from the focus of this project. While I wanted to be respectful and listen to him, I also felt an accountability to return the focus back on his parenting and his relationships with his children. After listening to one of Paul's stories I found a place to interrupt and asked Paul if we could return to the conversation. At this point in the interview, I was feeling a strong pull to be accountable to the concerns of the consultant. I invited Paul to enter into an contrasting exploration between his preference of being the nurturer and the discourse of disciplinarian. I invited Paul to consider the following question, "How would the

disciplinarian have you see Spencer?" Paul's comments and our conversation about this topic follow.

Paul: As an object or you know the rule being more important than the person.

I guess it means something a little different when I talk to you about Spencer than just a child. See when I talk about just the child I just lump all children together. When I talk about Spencer specifically now that is more tangible.

One of the concerns of the consultant was Paul's inability to personally reflect on the impact of these discourses in his life and his children's lives. My hope in revisiting the disciplinarian discourse was that it would help Paul to enter more into this personal reflection. Paul's comment that when he thinks about these things being said to his son Spencer it makes it more tangible, demonstrates that his reflection was becoming more personal.

After Paul was able to enter into this personal reflection, I invited him to now consider the effect that his taking up his preference to be the nurturer would have in his life. I invited him to consider the same question that I had just asked him about the disciplinarian but replaced disciplinarian with the words "the nurturer." Paul responded "That obviously makes Spencer more of a person, more real, more important to me."

In another conversation Paul was talking how fathers can become control freaks and the negative effects that this has in their lives. He reflected on how this is connected to the disciplinarian discourse but was again talking in general terms lumping all fathers together. The following conversation is another example of my attempts to try to shift from the general to the personal.

Interviewer: I'm curious Paul, when you are saying control freak - you are saying they when you say that - I'm wondering if you have had some experiences with this in your life?

Paul: I am saying that was me in one point in time. I guess I am lumping that into a general category but that was me.

At this point in the conversation, Paul was able to engage in a personal reflection. He admits that when he was saying they he was really talking about himself. As our conversation continues it again shifts from personal to general and I again try to bring the conversation back to the personal.

Paul: I have heard men talking about giving their wives the opportunity to choose something. That sounds funny to me because who's to say that she gave you the choice to be in charge of her.

Interviewer: Have you ever felt or acted in that way before?

Paul: I guess I have felt that I was in charge. And when things weren't happening as if I were in charge then it just made me madder.

Here the conversation is personal again. Paul reflects on how he has acted according to this belief. In the very next phrase, he again shifts right back to the general.

Paul: See and so the guy who's the disciplinarian, the guy who is the control freak is going to get more and more upset and he's not ever going to be happy.

This same type of struggle continued throughout the interviews with Paul. This is not to say that the interviews were not informative or helpful to Paul and myself but it represents the very dilemma that this project is trying to address, which is that research with men and

about men needs to be committed to helping both the researcher and the participant to engage in very personal conversations and reflections about our own lives. If deconstructive knowledge is to be meaningful deconstruction cannot be relegated to a professional or objective endeavor. By doing so the knowledge gained from such reflection does not invite a sense of personal accountability. By constantly looking at how “the others” act in hurtful ways may keep us to see how our action hurt others.

Returning to an exploration of the effects of his preference to be the nurturer. I invited Paul to reflect back on the week and share an experience where he had acted in ways that were consistent with this preference. Paul shared with me a story about taking his son to the dentist just the day before. Here is the story in Paul’s own words.

Paul: Just yesterday I had to bring Spencer to a dentist appointment and I was thinking you know that this is completely different than how I used to think of things. First of all, I would have thought that it’s unfair to have to bring him to this appointment. “Why is it me that has to do this?” Then I would have thought “I am using my vacation or my sick leave from work on this kid. Is the kid worth spending time on. I mean this is my vacation. I earned it I should be able to be doing what I want to do on this time not be wasting it on something like bringing a kid to a dentist appointment. I mean what a waste.” And my thought yesterday was, “I am going to pick up Spencer from school. This doesn’t bother me.” What better thing to spend your vacation on than on my son. I was happy at that point because I am looking at things 180 degrees differently.

This story illustrates the changes that have occurred in Paul's life over the last two years (since his divorce). It also illustrates that Paul was able to share a very personal story about his own life that included both a positive reflection about where he is and an honest discussion about how he used to feel as a father. While there was a constant struggle during the interviews to bring the focus back to the personal Paul was able at times to speak in very personal ways. The story he shared above is a good example of this.

During this interview, I also shared with Paul the main idea behind the narrative metaphor (as described earlier in the paper). I shared with him about how we story our lives and how our interactions with others, and the messages that are shared, shape the stories that we develop about our lives. I then invited Paul to reflect on how his actions as a nurturer would contribute to his son's story of who he is as a person. Our conversation about this went as follows.

Interviewer: So I'm thinking about when Spencer asks you, "Dad, I want to stay up late and watch this show with you." And you say "Ya, let's do this together." What is that going to contribute to his story?

Paul: I think it would be a positive thing in his story. I think it would build confidence and security.

Interviewer: What is it like for you to hear that you are bringing confidence and security to his story, his life?

Paul: This is what I hope for. It makes me happy because it is a change I have wanted to make in my life.

The purpose of inviting Paul to consider the effects of his actions on his son's story was to help Paul develop a sense of the good that he brings to his son's life and also to make the connection between his preferences and how they benefit his son. These types of conversations were meaningful to Paul. He has made some very significant changes in his life as a father and it was meaningful for him to hear and reflect on these good messages he is sending his son.

Personal Reflections

While it was a struggle in these last two interviews to continually bring the focus back to the personal, it had a number of positive influences on my life. At one point in our interviews, Paul began to talk about how much time he spends with his son compared to how it was before. That is when he shared the story about the dentist. As I was listening to him tell that story, I began to think of my 6 year old son Andrew. I thought about how busy I had been during the last few months working on this project along with my other work commitments. For a brief moment, I began to see things from his eyes. I saw a dad who wasn't home very much. I saw a dad who wasn't taking time to play with his son. I saw a sad little boy. He tells me that he understands that I am busy working on my dissertation. He even asks me how many pages I have written every day. I missed him and he missed me. I shared this story with Paul. I told him how busy I have been and how I felt like I needed to spend more time with him no matter how busy I am. This desire has stayed with me since my interviews with Paul. For the most part I have been able to see past my busyness and see a boy who wants to be with his daddy. As I am writing, the deadline for my first deposit is drawing near. I don't have much extra time available. This morning my son asked me if we could go

ride our bikes together. My first thought was that I was too busy, but somehow as I thought about it I saw that little boy who wants and needs time with his dad. I thought to myself, "The time I give to him right now is more important than anything else I could do." Our half an hour went by like it was 5 minutes. But for some of those minutes time seemed to stand still. During those moments I could really see my son and I could truly feel who I am - a father who loves his boy.

I am grateful to Paul for the feeling I had as he shared his story with me. Even though he wasn't planning on helping me, our conversation allowed me to more clearly see what is most important to me as a father.

Concluding Comments from Non-Partner Consultant

After our last interview, I gave the consultant a copy of the transcripts and she made some final comments for me to share with Paul. I called Paul on the phone to share with him her feelings about the interviews. The following is a summary of what the consultant wanted me to express to Paul.

The struggle that I experienced in these last two interviews with Paul was very apparent to the consultant. She appreciated this struggle in a number of ways. She shared how the struggle meant to her that I was trying to be attentive to her concerns. She wanted me to think about how I could have taken a more active role in this struggle. She noticed that I was trying to be respectful of Paul and mostly tried to bring him back to the personal through thoughtful questions. While she appreciated these questions, she felt like I might have been able to be more helpful to Paul if I had been more direct about the need to be personal. She thought the time when Paul was talking about fathers who are control freaks

and I asked Paul if this was something that he experienced in his life was a good example of how I could have been more directive at times.

The consultant also expressed appreciation for the struggle because it suggested that Paul was willing to consider the effects of his actions on a personal basis even though it was difficult. She wanted Paul to know that she is glad to hear of the changes that have come into his life and that he has been able to offer his son experiences that will help him feel confidence and security in their relationship together. She encouraged Paul to continue to stay close to his desire to nurture his son.

DALE

Dale is a father of one child. He and his wife were married for 12 years before having him. They both planned very carefully about when to have their child and also how they wanted to parent him. Dale was a pastor for about 8 years. When their son was born, his job as a pastor allowed him to be home with his son while his wife worked outside the home. The past few years he has changed jobs and it now gone from the home while his wife works part time. Dale was referred to the project by a colleague who knew him and thought that he was the type of father that fit with the second category of fathers that I was seeking. Dale invited me to interview him in his office. I told him that I would rather meet in his home but he didn't want to take the time away from his family. Because of his schedule, it was easier for him to meet in two hour blocks rather than four one hour blocks.

My interviews with Dale were much different than the rest. While his commitments to equality in his parenting relationship with his wife were evident, it was very difficult to engage him in any personal reflection about his parenting, especially related to accountability issues. For some reason, even though I tried throughout our entire interviews, Dale would only discuss messages that children experience from their peers and was not able to talk about any messages that influence him as a parent. During the interviews, I returned again and again to the topic of deconstruction messages he experiences as a father but he was only able to briefly discuss two behaviors that effect his son and wife. After trying for some time, I decided to end part one of our interviews and move to part two. Since this was what Dale seemed to be most comfortable sharing, it seemed to be the only option. Therefore, rather than having four interviews together we only ended up with two. I can only speculate about why it was so

difficult engage Dale in conversations about accountability. I understand that these conversations are hard but I have never had an experience in this project or in the many men I have interviewed in therapy like this one. Even though the interviews with Dale were frustrating and difficult, I don't consider them a failure. In fact, I think that they represent important feedback about the interview process and also some interesting interpretations related to accountability.

Part One

While Dale mostly focused on messages that his son might experience from other children or from society (aggression, violence, etc) he did mention two messages or behaviors (it would be hard to classify these messages as discourses because they are not related to any ideas about fathering from culture) that he is involved in that have an influence in the lives of his wife and son. The first message Dale addressed was what he called "zoning out" and was related to his relationship with his son. The second message or behavior that he discussed was passive-aggressive defiance toward his wife. Each of these topics were discussed only briefly as the focus of our conversations shifted away from Dale's personal struggles toward general parenting issues.

Discourse One: Zoning Out

It was quite some time into our interview that Dale was able to shift from the focus on his son to his own life. Like Paul, Dale enjoyed sharing stories and long examples to illustrate his points. After trying a number of times to encourage him to shift from talking about the good things he does as a father toward issues of accountability, Dale finally made the shift. At the end of one of these stories, I shared with Dale that I too have strong desires to be loving

and caring with my children but that many times my actions send them messages that do not fit with these desires. I asked him if he could share with me some of the times that has happened in his life with his son. Our conversation about this follows.

Dale: There are times with all the work pressures that I get stressed out and don't pay attention to my son. When I remember this is happening and tell him that I am stressed out because of work, it is usually ok. But when I don't notice it, that is when he feels really ignored.

Interviewer: What do you think that is like for him?

Dale: Another thing that happens is because of my chronic illness. I have Chron's disease and it really takes the energy out of me to where I start zoning out. I haven't talked about this with him and I think he doesn't understand that yet. I need to talk to him about this.

Interviewer: So, in your relationship with your son, you experience zoning out both from your illness and when you are stressed from work?

Dale: Yes.

Interviewer: When this happens, when you are zoning out, how do you think your son experiences that?

Dale went on to talk about another topic. This exchange was common in our interviews together. For some reason, it was hard for Dale to think about the effects of his actions on his son. I continually tried to return to helping Dale reflect on how this might effect his son before eventually giving up and moving onto another topic.

Discourse Two: Passive-Aggressive Defiance

The next behavior that Dale identified as a potential struggle in his life was related to following through with things he and his wife agree on in regard to raising their son. Dale said that after he and his wife have agreed on how they are going to deal with a certain situation with their son, he will often not go along with what they have talked about. While Dale states that he is not aware that he is doing it at the time, he thinks there may be a little passive-aggressive defiance involved. His comments about this topic follow.

Dale: One thing that really bothers my wife is sometimes after we have consulted and agreed to do something a certain way with our son, I will change my mind and go the other way. . . She has told me that she feels this [raising the kids] is her job and if there is a major difference in opinion, we should go with what she thinks. I mostly agree with that, but I admit that sometimes I passively-aggressively derail that.

I again shared with Dale the idea that our actions send messages to others about how we feel about them and asked Dale what message he might be sending to his wife, Mary when he goes against their agreement. Dale changed the subject and shared a long story unrelated to the topic. While I tried to listen to the story, by this time I was frustrated by his inability to reflect on how his actions affect others. While at first I did not get the sense that he was purposely trying to avoid issues of accountability, I was beginning to wonder. After a break in the story, I again invited him to consider the effects of his actions on his wife.

Interviewer: So when you do this, when you change your mind after just agreeing on something with your wife, what message does it send to her about how you feel about her?

Dale: It is devastating to her. She feels like I don't take her seriously.

This is what I was looking for. He was able to see the affects of actions. I wanted to continue this conversation and invited Dale to enter into a more personal exploration of how this affects his wife, but my attempts to do so did not work. While we had not discussed all of the things that I had hoped for, I decided to end part one of the interviews at this point.

Part Two

It was much easier for Dale to talk about his desires and commitments as a father than it was to discuss his struggles. It was easy to tell that Dale was very concerned about being a good father and from what he shared with me, it seems like he and his wife consider their son to be equal with them in many ways. He shared how it is important for them to include him in their decisions and to treat him as part of the family and not just a child. During these interviews, it was again hard for Dale to reflect on the messages that his actions send to his son. I was surprised by this because I had assumed that the reason Dale couldn't do this during part one of our interviews was because of the difficulty of the topic. However, it was equally difficult for him to take a relational perspective in regard to the positive effects of his actions on his son. While Dale talked about a number of positive things that he tries to do with his son, he only discussed one preference that he has for his relationship with him.

Preference One: Loved and Cared For

The first preference Dale identified was his desire for his son to feel loved and cared for. This, for Dale, was the most important thing he could offer his son. Dale shared a funny story about this desire and also the main reason why he wants his son to know that he is loved.

Dale: Every night before bed I tell him, "I will always love you. Your mommy will always love you." One night I asked him, "What do I always say to you?" and he said, "Gees Kid!" And I said "No not that one the other one." I want that to be so ingrained in him that when he gets older and gets into difficult times he can say, "Dad always loves me." This is number one on the list of things I want him to know. I always try to re-affirm my love to him.

At this point, I wanted to help Dale explore what specific things he might do with his son if he were to follow his desire to love and care for him. Dale believes that he is already able to follow that desire on a daily basis. He shared how his son gets a lot of attention and how they involve him in everything they do.

I tried to invite Dale to reflect on what doing those things offers his son or what messages they send to his son, but Dale again shifted the conversation to another story. While the story was related to another way that he shows love to his son, Dale could not make the type of personal reflection that I was hoping for. However, he was able to discuss a number of things that he does to express love to his son including making sure he plays with him every morning before he goes to work and having him help with cooking dinner. Dale was very committed to this desire in his life and has found many ways to express this to his son.

What normally took four hours to accomplish took less than two hours with Dale. I was so perplexed by the interview that I felt like another meeting would not serve any purpose. I did not see how meeting another time to try to encourage him to answer the same questions over and over again would do any more good than it did the first time. We mutually decided that we would let the consultant decide whether another meeting was necessary. Dale felt like there really was nothing more that he could say.

There are a number of different things that could have led to our interviews together turning out the way they did and I do not presume to know the answer. It is quite possible that I was interviewing Dale in a very different way than the other fathers. Maybe I didn't explain the purpose of the interviews very well or I didn't give a good explanation of the types of conversations I wanted him to participate in. In looking over the transcripts, it didn't appear that I had asked or explained anything differently to Dale than the other fathers. I asked him the same types of questions that I asked the other fathers.

I was tired during our first interview. I met Dale at 1:00 p.m. just before heading to Des Moines for an evening of therapy sessions. I had gotten up early that morning to work on a project. Maybe my being tired influenced the direction of the interview. It is also possible that Dale was tired. He too had been at work since early in the day.

Our interview also took place in his office and not in his home like the other interviews. While the office was quiet and private, maybe it was harder to reflect on personal things. Perhaps if the interview were at his home the possibility of having his partner walk into the room or overhear our conversation would have helped Dale to better reflect on the effects of his actions on his wife and children.

In my work as a therapist, I have been tempted to believe that men who can't enter into these conversations about accountability are more likely to engage in abusive behaviors (however unintentional they may be) than those men who are willing to seriously reflect on the effects of their actions. However, my experience with Dale tells me that this would not be a fair assumption. I did not get the sense that Dale was purposefully avoiding my questions. It just seemed to me that these questions were foreign to him. This is especially apparent since he was also not able to personally reflect on the positive effects of his actions on his son. My clinical experience has shown me that for some men, it takes some time before this way of thinking about relationships sinks in. Perhaps Dale just needed more time than this methodology allowed. This leads me to believe that perhaps this methodology was not good for Dale. If this is the case, then I probably needed to be more careful in screening the participants before accepting them for the project. However, just as certain therapies do not fit with certain clients, certain methodologies will not always fit with participants and sometimes there is no way of knowing this beforehand.

Comments from Non-Partner Consultant

After reviewing the summary notes and listening to the tape of our conversation, the consultant was also confused about what had happened. She said that she couldn't understand why it was so hard for Dale to consider the effects of his actions on his wife and son. This was especially confusing for her since she also felt that Dale was committed to equality in his relationships. While she admired his commitments, she was concerned about his lack of ability to enter into discussions about accountability. She said "If he can't think

about how his actions may affect others, how can he be sure that he is going along with his commitments?"

I shared my frustrations about the interview with the consultant and asked her whether she thought another interview would be helpful. She stated "I really would like for Dale to talk more about accountability in his relationships, but I don't think you can explain it or ask questions any other way to make a difference." We both agreed that another interview just wouldn't be beneficial for this project or for Dale.

Our next decision was whether or not we should share the consultant's comments with Dale. Since we would not be meeting another time, we were concerned about the effect of sending Dale comments without being able to explain them or place them in context. The consultant did not want her comments to come across too critically and decided that it would be better to not share them with Dale.

Personal Reflections

My experience with Dale in these interviews was confusing. While I found him to be a person who was very committed to his son and his wife and I admire him very much, I was frustrated by how our interviews went. I left my interviews wondering what had just happened and why we couldn't have the types of conversations that I had with the other fathers. These frustrations, however, did not keep me from having some positive experiences with Dale.

I was touched by how much he involves his son in his daily life. I thought about how much my son likes to help me when I am doing a project. Sometimes, when I get too busy I forget just how meaningful it is for him to work beside me and help me accomplish something.

As Dale was talking about his commitment to doing this, I thought about a time a few months ago when I was finishing putting up drywall in my basement. I needed some help and asked my son if he wanted to help. As I stood on a small stool holding up the drywall, my son stood below me handing me the screws to secure it. It only lasted for about 15 minutes, but I will always remember the look of pride on his face when he was handing me the screws. My interview with Dale reminded me of this experience and because of that memory, I have been reconnected to an activity that will keep my son and I connected.

BARRETT

Barrett is a father of two children (ages 4 and 2) and has been married to his wife, Tina, for eight years. Barrett was invited to participate in the project because he appeared to be a father who was very reflective and thoughtful about his relationship with his children and wife. In some previous conversations with Barrett, I had a sense that he shared many similar desires that I have in regard to equality in relationships and parenting in ways that are warm and caring. My hopes for interviewing Barrett were that he might offer some meaningful alternative discourses related to fathering and also be very open to exploring his own failures in meeting his ideals.

Interviews One and Two

Throughout the interview, Barrett was able to be critical about his own fathering and the significant consequences his actions have on his children and partner. At times this was painful for Barrett and me but it motivated us to be more committed to our desires as fathers. His willingness to enter into conversations about accountability and not worry about the need to portray himself as a good father lead to an interesting transcript.

Our conversations centered around three main discourses or messages: 1) a father should be able to get obedience from his children, 2) the father's responsibility is to work outside the home and the women's responsibility is to take care of the things inside the home, and 3) men's privilege in relationships. Besides speaking about these discourses, our conversations also touched many topics related to power, accountability, and the importance of deconstruction in relationships. These other conversations will be explored after the three main discourses have been discussed. Again, in order to remain faithful to the purpose of this

project, the descriptions shared below will remain as personal as possible and as close to the actual conversations in the interview as possible.

Discourse One: A Father Should be Able to Get Obedience from His Children

The first discourse or message Barrett identified that he struggles with is the idea that a father should be able to get and demand obedience from his children. In the exchange that follows, Barrett is able to articulate how this message has had a place in his life and how it gets him to act in ways that go against his desires as a father.

Barrett: The first thing that comes to my mind that has come as a road block to me many times is that a father should be able to get obedience from his kids. I have this idea in my head that I am supposed to be able to elicit obedience from him which makes me behave in controlling ways sometimes. Tina will be dealing with him and saying put on your shoes and he's bucking her and I'll just walk through the room and say "Davis your Mom's telling you to put on the shoes, put on the shoes!" And I am expecting him to go "Oh, Dad said do it so I'll just jump up and do it."

Interviewer: So that is something that is there but you're not sure where it came from?

Barrett: Not sure where it's come from but I've tried it though because when I start to act on that presumption, I do things that I am not proud of . It comes to mind because I think about it often.

After talking further about this idea, I shifted my questions to explore some specific ways that this discourse encourages him to act toward his children.

Interviewer: You shared how that [discourse] has gotten you to do some things, you are not proud of. So I'm wondering what are some things that it encourages you to do toward your children?

Barrett: Talk to them in more cold, judgmental, authoritative type way. "Davis put on your shoes. Your mom has asked you. Did you hear your Mom ask you? Then put them on" [He says raising his voice]. You know stupid things like that. Cold and harsh and I lose the warmth and I withdraw some love from them.

Barrett then shares a story that has been meaningful to him as a father that will be included here because of the meaning it has for him and the impact it also had on me.

Barrett: I get that term from Jeffery Holland. I remember an article by him where he said he withdrew his love from his son one time. It just devastated him. He remembers being next to his bed in the middle of night with the little boy asleep, praying and repenting and saying "I'll never withdraw my love from you again." That phrase, "I'll never withdraw my love," has stuck with me. When I find myself being demanding or expecting compliance and I'm laying down the law, that phrase always comes back to me and I always think, "No matter what he does, no matter what I my expectations are I should never withdraw my love from him." But I do and I know it hurts his soul a little bit every time I do it but yet I still do it. [I do it] less often now since I read that

article which was about a year ago. That's what I do, you're asking what I do, it seems like a withdrawal of my warmth.

There appeared to be much emotion involved in the sharing of this story. Barrett was moved by the retelling of the story as was I at the thought of how I have removed my love and warmth from my own children. The emotion seemed to be connected to two things: 1) a realization that we as fathers have at times removed our love from our children (a realization that is hurtful) and 2) a heart felt desire to never remove our love from our children again.

The conversation continues:

Interviewer: That sounds like something that goes against what you want as a father?

Barrett: It's definitely against what I want because what I want is a warm give and take, to care about each other we work through problems together and then sometimes what I do is get stern and say, "Get on the ball buddy." I think discipline is certainly good but to remove the warmth is the big mistake.

Expecting compliance, that expectation is the catalyst for me removing the warmth.

Interviewer: Could you share a time when that has happened?

Barrett: In fact just tonight, we went swimming and he wouldn't get out of the pool and I heard Tina over and over saying "Get out of the pool," and eventually I turned around and said "Davis, get out of the pool" and he still didn't get out of the pool and I went over I got real stern and I said, "Davis, if you can't get out of the pool when we ask you to get out we're not going to

be able to come here,” and it wasn’t warm, it wasn’t caring about him. It was about comply or else kind of thing and I don’t like that feeling and I do it probably several times a week, which I don’t like.

During this exploration of the specific ways this message encourages him to act, Barrett is able to enter into a very personal reflection of not only how this message gets him to act in cold and harsh ways, but he also reflects on some deeply personal experiences between him and his son.

During the interviews, I also wanted to find out if this type of interviewing was helpful to the fathers in making connections to behaviors in ways that were different and meaningful to them. I asked Barrett about whether he had made the connection before between this particular discourse and his behavior. Our conversation about this went as follows:

Barrett: I’ve thought about the escalation, I’ve thought about withdrawing love. I’ve never made the connection to the idea in the way that you’re framing it but I’ve thought about it being a behavior that I don’t like and Jeffrey Holland always comes to my mind and I think, “Oops, stop and get your heart back and whatever you have to do, do it with your heart, don’t back out, don’t withdraw your love from the kid” and sometimes I catch myself in time, usually I don’t, it’s a half hour later and then I go say I’m sorry.

Interviewer: And you’re able to say sorry?

Barrett: Yeah, sometimes he’s asleep and I go pat his head and say, “I’m really sorry, I wish you were awake. Hope I get some time with you tomorrow so

we can have a good time together.” I’ve often gone back to him and said, “If it sounded like I was mad at you, I wasn’t mad at you I was just...”

Interviewer: Just under the influence of this idea.... You talked about how it hurts his soul or hurts his heart or something like that.

Barrett: A little bit every time I think.

After thinking about the connections between this discourse and his behavior, Barrett was able to begin to speak about issues related to accountability in his relationship with his son and also begin to think about how his actions have a relational effect on his son. He speaks about how he has gone into his son’s room at night and asked for forgiveness for how he has acted toward his son. Barrett is willing to take a difficult and painful look at some of the effects that his actions have on his son’s life, how his actions “hurt his heart . . . a little bit every time.”

Barrett’s discussion about how his actions hurt his son was a natural transition for us to consider the specific messages he sends to his son when he goes along with this. I introduced the idea about our lives being relational and how our interactions have a shaping effect on one another and invited him to consider the shaping effect his actions have on his son. Our conversation about this went as follows:

Interviewer: So part of what I am interested in is exploring how when you get caught up in this idea that you need to be able to demand obedience, that Davis should be compliant, what message do you think that sends to him about how you feel about him?

Barrett: That's a profound question. I'm trying to put myself in his shoes. If I can read him correctly, and I may not be able to, I think that he gets a sense that I'm disappointed in him or something because when things like that happen, it seems like he's almost shy around me for a couple of minutes or . . . I don't know where to go to get a read on how he experiences except for his facial expressions, things he says and things he looks, almost kind of ashamed or sometimes a little extra defiant but with a nervous smile which reminds me of an idea of being ashamed.

Barrett is speaking here about the effects that he sees in his son's behavior, his outward expressions, but is not able to express the very personal message that he may be sending his son. Since this is a different and difficult concept to consider I continue to ask the same type of question in slightly different ways to help him enter into a personal discussion about the feelings his son might experience.

Interviewer: Well let me ask this a different way that might make it a little easier to answer. We're just speculating. We don't have to get it exactly right, but when that happens, what do you think that says to him about how you feel about him?

Barrett: What I am actually saying to him, so I'm not guessing about his experience. . .

Interviewer: You're kind of guessing about what he's thinking but when you're doing this, you're saying something to him.

Barrett: I think that what I'm saying to him is you're an object or an obstacle or something that needs to get in line or something like that. I don't mean to say that to him, it almost makes me choke up to even say that, but I think what I may be implicitly or what I may be saying without meaning to is that you're a thing that's getting in my way right now and I need to get you out of the way the same way I would kick something out of the sidewalk if it was in my way.

Interviewer: Those sound like things you probably wouldn't want to be saying. You're not saying those things but that's what he might be hearing.

Barrett: I hope that he's not hearing that but I believe that he certainly might be.

Interviewer: It's possible. The intent's not to have you feeling that he's taking all this on but some of the possible effects that it might have.

Barrett: Yeah, and I really think he might be taking some of that on.

Interviewer: If you were to say that in a kids way of thinking about things, when you get in this escalation, "DAVIS", I don't know that's raising your voice a little bit but, "if you don't do this you're going. . ." If he were to say something like "Daddy, how does daddy feel about me right now as a person?"

Barrett: As a 4 year old, I'm bad.

Interviewer: Daddy thinks I'm bad.

Barrett: Right, I think that's what he would say or I'm being bad at least.

That's my worst nightmare to say something like that to him.

As can be seen by Barrett's responses, this was a painful and difficult realization. Seeing his son as feeling bad or seeing how he may be telling his son that he was bad represented Barrett's "worst nightmare" as a parent. While Barrett sends the message that he loves and values his son with much more regularity than he sends this message, he is willing to put aside the need to present himself as a good father and critically explore the times when he acts in ways that are hurtful to his son.

At this point in the conversation, I shift the focus from his son to his wife, Tina. I invite him to consider how taking up this discourse might effect Tina's life in ways that he would not desire. An important part of this project is to also explore how our fathering (I use "our" as a way of including myself as a father) effects the lives of our partners. Our conversation about this follows.

Interviewer: Well this idea that your the one who should be able to have them come in line, does that say anything about Tina's relationship with the children in any way?

Barrett: Certainly, I guess it makes an implicit assumption that, as I said, I don't know if I said it or just thought it a while ago, the big idea I'm talking about is that kids can push around moms but the dad can come in and sort of set things straight. So it does have an implicit sort of idea that they can push Tina around which actually they can't. The fact is she's better than I am so the idea is completely on its head when in reality . . .

Interviewer: That's the assumption behind that message. . .

Barrett: But I think it does send that message that for some reason they can push her around or she can't get the compliance so I better come in and rescue the situation, rescue her. Maybe I'm going at it a little bit different angle but it would be a service to Tina to butt out and let her deal with her own relationship with her kids. In that sense, it is affecting her relationship with her kids. It would certainly send the right message to Tina, it would send the message that I think she's a competent, effective mother if I would allow her to go through that experience with the kids and get or not get compliance however she wants to do that and I don't do that. Instead I but in and you can't handle this so I better get on my horse and do that. I am sending that message, I don't know that she's picking that up. She's never given me the sense that she's defensive about it, but I am sending that message and I'd rather it not get across.

Interviewer: And you think that's tied back to that same message ...?

Barrett: Very much so.

Here Barrett is willing to reflect on the possible messages that he may be sending his wife. Even though she has never outwardly mentioned this to him, Barrett does not give up his position of accountability. He takes the position that "I am sending that message and I'd rather it not get across."

Discourse Two: The Mother is Responsible for Work Inside the Home

The second discourse that Barrett identified as influencing his life is a message that it is his wife's responsibility to take care of all the things around the house. What is interesting is

that while Barrett expresses his complete disbelief and disagreement with this message, he finds himself acting in ways that support it. Again, Barrett is willing to enter into an intimate exploration of his failures to live up to his beliefs, he talks about how this discourse has personally influenced his life, and how it has led him to act in relationship with his wife and children. During this conversation, Barrett was able to talk about how this idea speaks to him constantly even though he does not believe it and often speaks out against it. This realization led us into a conversation about how the idea of deconstructive knowledge is important within the research process.

The conversation about this particular message began as I shared with Barrett some of my concerns about fathering research and how they have focused on men's own perceptions about their efforts in the home rather than relying on both men and women's accounts. I shared how most of the research relying on self-reports of men overstates their commitment and effort in the home when compared to research that actually observes men's behavior. Barrett then shared an idea that he struggles with and we began a conversation about it.

Barrett: This brings to mind a huge idea that I have and that I'm bound with constantly and that is that, I'm embarrassed to say it, but I have an idea that I do not agree with that speaks to me constantly which is that Tina is basically responsible for keeping the house clean; doing all that stuff, all of the traditional womanly duties. Even when I'm sitting on my butt doing nothing, it's still basically her responsibility to do these things and the problem I run into is I don't even think about getting up and helping. That's the problem because as soon as I think about it I'm fairly good at doing it because it's just a thing

you do. Something needs to be done so you just do it. My problem is I'll be sitting there watching her do it. Sitting there for an hour watching her clean up the whole house and I'm talking to her and we're talking about whatever happened today and she's running back and forth cleaning all the dishes and doing everything and I'm sitting there with my feet on the table watching. That idea speaks to me constantly because that is what I do and that one does affect Tina and she comes to me and says, "I feel like the bottom line assumption is that the house is totally my responsibility and you'll help out if you get the chance" and that affects her very deeply. She's cried about it and she's said to me, "I don't want this job I don't want to have everything on my shoulders" and the truth is that I ultimately do behave at least as if it were all on her shoulders. And you ask me if I intellectually believe that it should be, of course I don't, but that is exactly how I act, that it is all on her shoulders and if I get the chance, not even if I get the chance, if I feel like it I'll help out and that includes while I'm sitting around with my feet on the table. That's a bad message.

Interviewer: That message speaks to me as well even though intellectually and belief-wise I would definitely not believe this, it's almost like it more than speaks it even acts upon me or constrains me in some way. Now one thing I'm wondering, is taking care of the house a parenting issue?

Barrett: Everything's a parenting issue because Davis is sitting there watching, and so that's why it's a parenting issue. . . he's heard us, he's watched Tina get

upset about it. He's seen us discuss it. He's seen us argue about it. He's seen us and he's watched me sit around doing nothing while she's working and so I'm sending him the same message.

Again Barrett is willing to reflect upon how his actions as a husband and father go against his beliefs. He is not pretending here that because he believes in equality, that everything is equal. In fact, he directly challenges this idea a few moments later during the interview. Since I personally am concerned about the movement in fathering research regarding the image of the new father, I directly challenged this idea in my interview with Barrett. I told him about the exaggeration by fathers on the self-reports and asked him if he would have the same experience if he were to sit back and observe himself. Barrett responded in the following way:

Barrett: Oh you better believe it. If you asked me in a more public forum whether or not I'm sort of the equal, non-traditional guy I would say, "Oh yeah!" But if you put a video camera out you'd see me with my feet on the table while my wife cleans the dishes.

Interviewer: I can see myself doing the same things. It hurts when I think about that. Even though I absolutely do not believe in this idea that housework is her work, I still act in ways that suggest I do.

I then shared with Barrett about the idea in feminist theory and narrative therapy related to power and how it is important for those who are in positions of power to always be mindful of how they may be acting in ways that are hurtful or abusive even though they may not ever intend to do so. Barrett agreed with this position and added:

Barrett: The position from which to talk is whichever one is accurate and in my case the true one would definitely be we're not equal. There are unequal expectations without a doubt.

Interviewer: Is that something you would rather be more equal, more shared.

Barrett: Absolutely, it's only fair. I mean Tina's a human being and has desires and needs like I do and I get to sit around sometimes and she doesn't and that's definitely an archaic idea that I think is outdated.

I then invited Barrett to consider if this idea that the housework is Tina's responsibility could be related to the idea that it is his job to earn money and work outside the home that a few of the other fathers talked about in their interviews. At first Barrett had a hard time seeing the connection because this is not an idea that he believes in. However, after a few moments of thought he responded:

Barrett: In fact, maybe I do experience it more than I think because I think I've even said that before you know where Tina's said, "You don't do anything around the house" or whatever and I say, "Well I work all day." I don't actually say this but I think what comes across is, "Unlike you." Which of course, is ridiculous. She works harder than I do. I'm sure their connected. They're related in that sense that I see myself as the bottom line as far as working. If work needs to be done; work that earns money needs to be done, that is my job, that's up to me and if work needs to be done in the house that's up to her. And the truth is I don't really believe in either one of those. I'd love

if she went out and got a job. That would be fine with me. If she was happy doing it and enjoyed it, great.

Barrett makes the connection between these two discourses and is able to find experiences or examples from his own life where he has gone along with them. As he was talking about these things, it appeared as if a light went off in his mind. Barrett realized (not for the first time) that he doesn't really believe in these discourses and is able to state that what he really wants for her is whatever would make her happy. This realization led us into a conversation about the idea of deconstruction and the importance of deconstructive knowledge. Our conversation continues:

Interviewer: So even though you don't believe it, it still speaks to you?

Barrett: I don't believe in any way shape or form in my brain but I live by them.

Interviewer: That's what I think is interesting, how we can have beliefs that are contrary to something and yet experience the. . .

Barrett: It's actually fascinating and I've never thought of it until now, but it's fascinating, in the sense that I do not believe those things and yet they are right there and I act like I believe them and so why would you act in a way that you don't believe?

Interviewer: And this gets back to the idea of what discourses can do.

Barrett: I am sort of . . . explicitly making the connection between or making the realization that I have very definite beliefs and yet my behavior is totally inconsistent with it.

This conversation offers support for the applicability of the idea of deconstructive knowledge in Barrett's life. Speaking about discourses and exploring how they invite us to act was meaningful to Barrett. He was able to see how his own behaviors are not always consistent with his beliefs and he was also able to locate the ideas that support these types of behaviors.

At this point in the conversation, I decided to invite Barrett to explore the specific effects of this message (that it is Tina's responsibility to care for the house) has on Tina's life and also the lives of his children. I asked Barrett the following question, "I'm wondering if we can talk a little bit about some of the affects those messages might have on Tina."

Barrett: Tina's told me the message is that it's not equal, I work for 7-8 hrs a day. She works pretty much all day. The message to her is that it's o.k. that it's not equal. Which a level further than that is somehow she is an indentured servant. The assumption is that she's supposed to do things that I don't have to do and she's supposed to work when I don't have to work. She's doing something wrong if she doesn't clean up this thing in the middle of the floor and I'm not doing anything wrong if I don't do it. So it's a message of inequality and servitude and that's what she says. I wonder to what degree of sophistication Davis gets that same message about Tina, and about women in general.

Interviewer: I wonder since that's something you experienced in your family and your father probably experienced. I'm wondering even though we're not consciously trying to teach our children that it still comes across?

Barrett: In fact, I fight not to say it to him. When I all of a sudden become conscious and notice what Tina's doing and notice Davis sitting there watching us, I jump up and try to sort of counteract the message, but it probably comes across as little more artificial because it's not sort of the natural way that things happen. It's more like I'm involved when I notice.

Interviewer: It seems like a message that's probably a little beyond something we just learn in families because it seems like it's just always present somehow. I've noticed Andrew saying some things and I think, "Wow, where does that come from."

Barrett: It's amazing where they get those stereotypes so early and so definitively. I'm not doing my part to destroy that message.

Without prompting, Barrett thinks about how his actions might influence his son and the messages his son may be getting about women. The statement that he is not doing his part to destroy the message also represents Barrett's awareness of the affects of his actions and his desire to take a more active stance against this message in his own life and especially in the life of his son.

While Barrett began to think about the messages his actions send to Tina on his own, I wanted to make this reflection more personal. In order to help Barrett reflect on this level, I asked him the following question, "You talked about with Tina this feeling of not being equal, kind of a servant. Do you think there's a personal message that might go along with that, that she might experience, that would speak to how you feel about her or toward her? What might that be?"

Barrett: That her time, which is hers, is not very important to me. The message I send to Tina is that I don't value her time, I don't value her energy, her work. It's the same with the whole thing with Davis. What an awful thing to say.

Interview: And even though you're not verbally saying it. . .

Barrett: When Tina and I argue about it, that's what it eventually comes down to, me saying, "I'm really sorry to say that to you. I don't want to say that to you." We've never said it in explicit terms like you and I are, but I've said, "I don't believe that we should have this arrangement and I'm sorry that we do."

This discussion was a difficult one. Barrett was being asked to talk about sending messages that he would never want to send to his wife. Even though it was difficult he was still able to take a personal look at his wife and see how he has hurt her in the past. At an emotional point in this conversation, after realizing the extent of the messages he sends to his wife, he painfully states "What an awful thing to say."

After this difficult conversation, I was concerned with how Barrett might be feeling having faced some very difficult realizations. I decided to take a short break to ask him how things were going; about what this experience was like for him so far.

Barrett: What my present experience is? It makes me feel kind of melancholy and kind of...

Interviewer: Not uplifted...?

Barrett: No, you're not making it a better day, but you're not depressing me or anything. But it does make me feel melancholy to put it into such deliberate

and explicit terms; to say those words to the people I love more than I love anything in the world; to say the words to myself that the message I am sending Davis is that he's bad and he's not important and that I'm sending this parallel message to Tina. I'd rather kill myself than send messages like that to these people who I care about.

Interviewer: I've been involved in this type of conversations with parents in therapy, so I'm always involving myself in this way of talking and my experience has been that it's a kind of a prick in some ways not in a depressing type of way, but I feel a longing to be more like I want to be.

Barrett: It has increased my motivation several times. I'm just not going to do that anymore, which I've said to myself before and realistically, I probably will but I feel renewed energy to do better with that.

Interviewer: The purpose of these interviews is not to be a depressing type of thing but more of something that's a moving experience.

Barrett: Especially when we were talking about Davis, I felt motivated again to expunge that finally from my life, but there is definitely an element of melancholy in there too because I'm sad that I'm sending this message and there it is it's out there. I can't take it back. It's already shaped 5 years of his life to some degree. It's not constant and it's not the only message I'm sending, but it's been there and so there's a degree of melancholy there.

Interviewer: This way of thinking about things, that everything's constantly shaping I think can be a very helpful one. Taken to an extreme it can be really

depressing thing to think about. The purpose isn't for that to happen. The purpose is to encourage us to be more accountable in our relationships.

Barrett: That's definitely been an element in my experience, especially when we were talking about Davis. Putting my finger on the message. My experience of that was I don't want to send that message and so tomorrow I will not send that message.

While I was concerned about how hard this type of reflection might be for Barrett, I was also hoping that the conversations were motivating. I hoped they had increased in Barrett an awareness of his own desires and help him experience a renewed sense of commitment in his parenting. Barrett's words convey that he felt both sorrow and a renewed sense of commitment. As I have mentioned before, from my perspective, accountability happens when men can enter into an intimate awareness of how their actions have hurt those whom they love, and at the same time, feel a sense of commitment and desire to change as parents and husbands. Barrett was able to enter into this intimate awareness as he shared how he would rather kill himself than send those messages to the people he loves more than anything else in the world.

Discourse Three: Privilege and Power

Another discourse that Barrett and I agreed influences our lives is related to how men experience privilege in relationships. Since I am committed to feminist values as a researcher, I felt it was important for me to introduce the idea of privilege and power. I am taking a position here (along with other feminist researchers) that research should be committed to certain values. The topic of privilege would probably not have been brought up by Barrett but

I felt a sense of accountability to invite Barrett to consider how privilege might play out in his relationships. While at first this was hard for Barrett to see, later in the interview experiences of his privilege became apparent to him.

I introduced the idea of privilege by sharing some personal experiences in my relationship with my wife. My wife and I have often talked about how there are things that she has to think about and worry about that I just do not have to think about. For example, if I have a meeting at school I do not have to make plans for someone to watch the kids. In fact, I don't even have to give a thought to who will watch the kids because Shelly has decided to work at home. Shelly, on the other hand, cannot make any plans without thinking, "What I am going to do with the kids? Can Tom watch them?" We have talked about this many times and tried to make plans for this to be more equal and fair and yet it continues to be a struggle. I asked Barrett how he thinks privilege might play out in his relationship with Tina. Our conversation went as follows:

Barrett: It's there. I don't think that one is terribly salient in my relationship with Tina. . . there is some privilege there that I guess I sort of take as mine that obviously shouldn't be mine.

Interviewer: Like if you're going to go do something at night, which doesn't sound like you do very often, but if you were to you would just assume that Tina was going to be around and you wouldn't need to think about taking care of the kids at all, whereas she would always have to think, "what am I going to do with the kids", which is a responsibility that's not always present on your

mind, right? Shelly's shared how that just becomes weighty sometimes.

Always have to think about that, it's never. .

Barrett: She says even when she's out, and I'll make no implication that it's a burden on me. She'll go see a movie or something and even when there's no sense that it's inconvenient for me at all, she still feels that weight hanging there. Even when it's a foregone conclusion she's going, she still feels it and knows that ultimately she's still responsible for the kids and they're almost with a babysitter or something when their with me. I've heard father's say, I couldn't do x or y last night because I was babysitting the kids. That's a hilarious thing to say, "I'm babysitting my kids." That definitely exposes the assumption.

Interviewer: And even if we don't say it, that's a statement that I don't want to be a part of because it's my responsibility, it's shared, but do we say it in other ways like...

Barrett: Like you better clear it with me before you leave. . . and Tina says, "Can you take care of the kids while I go do this?" I never say that to her. Can you take care of the kids. Of course she can take care of the kids. I would never think to say, "Can you take care of the kids while I go do this." I might say, "Can I go do this," but it's nothing about can you take care of the kids.

Interviewer: I'm wondering if that would be an important thing to add to asking that, "Can you take care of the kids?"

Barrett: What a foreign and loving and caring message that would send. "Can you take care of the kids because they're obviously my responsibility as much as anybody's in the world." I would never even think of saying that and what an interesting message that would send. What a nice message that would send.

Interviewer: I'm thinking about the difference between gender a little bit, mostly related to power and privilege. Maybe that burden shouldn't be placed on them to ask us that but we would be the ones that should ask that.

Barrett: It really illustrates how well layed out the arrangement is. Without even knowing they ask, "Can you take care of the kids," because the arrangement is there. We all know what the arrangement is even though we don't say it and even though we didn't deliberately set it up, we all know what it is.

Interviewer: So this goes back to the discussion at the very beginning about choice. Remember we talked about choice and how discourses could limit our choice. I was talking about how if we don't deconstruct these ideas they can have power to act on us. But when we talk about these messages and deconstruct them, we can choose not to go along with them.

Barrett: Because we haven't been able to decide not to do it, because it's just there. That's a beautiful idea.

In this conversation I purposefully took an active role to guide the conversation toward addressing issues of power and inequality in relationships between men and women. While I want Barrett to bring up those ideas that are meaningful to him, I also feel an

accountability to bring up some things that may be hidden from us as men. As these ideas of privilege and power are brought forth in our conversation, Barrett is able to see instances of privilege and inequality that may not have been visible to him before. This is evident when he shared how he thinks he would like to take a more equal position in regard to caring for the children, but the idea had never entered his mind.

During the final minutes of this interview, Tina came into the room. Earlier in one of our conversations Barrett had mentioned that he would like to hear Tina's perspective about the idea of privilege in their relationship. So, we invited her to share some of her thoughts about this. The main thing Barrett was interested in knowing was if things were as equal as he originally thought they were. After Barrett shared with Tina some of the examples of privilege that we discussed, I invited Tina to consider how equal she thinks things are in regard to caring for the children. Our conversation went as follows:

Interviewer: Do you think it's as equal as he thinks it is?

Barrett: Yeah, that was the question.

Tina: We've kind of had a conversation like this before, where I've said if I want to do something I have to ask permission. I feel like I have to arrange it and I have to find a sitter and if you want to do something you announce it. I don't feel like I'm not allowed to do anything or that you would. . . You are a very present father and so I feel like it's not a big deal for me to find a sitter because you're usually available.

Interviewer: Part of what we were talking about, even if you guys do a pretty good job, it feels pretty equal comparatively, there still is a difference in

privilege. As men we can say, I'm going to go do something and assume that you're going to be there for the kids, but you can't make that assumption. You have to ask.

Tina: We have that a lot, like you feel like you can just run to Target after work and if I did have some place to go, if I went to work I would feel like I had to hurry home and make sure I could go do one more thing or something like that where you feel like, "I can run to target." Yeah, I feel like I would have to arrange it.

Again, in this conversation with Tina I wanted to encourage them to seriously consider how privilege may influence their relationships. Tina agrees that she does feel that privilege has a part in her relationship in regard to who is responsible for watching the kids. She shares how in her experience Barrett can announce that he is going to go somewhere while she has to always ask permission. Tina went on to explain how this feeling of responsibility probably would not go away.

We then shared with her some of our ideas about asking her if she would be available to watch the kids or plan to have someone watch the kids. Our conversation about this idea went as follows:

Tina: But I don't know if it would change my feelings... I think I will always feel like I need to make sure it's ok and it would probably make me feel better, but I don't know if it would really change the situation because I would still always feel like I needed to ask permission.

Interviewer: We were wondering if maybe over time those feelings could change. Part of what we were wondering is if you would feel free to say, 'No, I couldn't take care of the kids.' That's why we were thinking maybe we need to go a step further so that you could feel more free because otherwise you're going to feel the same constraint that, 'No, I need to be with my kids.'

Barrett: Maybe instead of actually calling the babysitter I could ask you first, "Could you take care of the kids on Thursday night? If you can't I was thinking about calling a babysitter," or something like that.

Tina: Yeah, something like that would be ok.

Interviewer: But if you get the message that it's perfectly fine if you say, "No, I was planning on working on my art stuff" and you can't really do that with the kids here and so that might be funny to have a babysitter upstairs, but why not.

Tina: Yeah, that would be nice

Interviewer: So we're trying to figure out ways to not only deal with this privilege thing going on but how we can change that and how you experience that too because you're on the opposite end.

Tina: I feel like I am the caretaker and it's a special occasion when you bring the kids down while I make dinner or you do something with the kids while I do some other family thing. Sometimes he'll relieve me of my responsibility and I think that if instead of relieving me occasionally if it was just like a sort of mutual thing, when we're both home, we're both caretakers. I'm not

unhappy with how our situation is but I think if when we were both home we were both in charge of the kids and I didn't feel like it was a special occasion that I could lose that feeling when I want to go out, but I don't know how that would happen.

Although Tina initially shares how she believes that her constant feelings of responsibility could go away, after our proposal she does admit that it would be nice if she could feel free to say no to watching the kids. She then shares how she would like things to be more equal at home when they are both home. After talking about this for a few more minutes Tina asked if she was interrupting the conversation and I told her that it was perfect for her to be with us. It was important for us to have this conversation. We were making some proposals for acting in ways that were more equal and we were able to find out her opinion about these proposals and what she wants to see change in their relationship.

Personal Reflections

These conversations with Barrett seemed to strike a cord with me. The messages and discourses that Barrett identified seemed to resonate with my own personal experience with my children and partner. I have experienced the pull from the discourse that I, as a father, should be able to get obedience from the children. This particular discourse has effected my life and the lives of my children in negative ways. Even though I do not agree with it, it has me acting in ways that are powerful and forceful with my children. Barrett's sincere reflection of the messages that his actions send to his children and partner moved me. As he shared how his actions sometimes send the message that his son is bad, I could literally see myself sending those messages to my son. I could see myself not only sending those messages through my

actions, but also verbally. It hurt to see my son's soul hurting. I found myself again thinking about the struggles my son and I have had with bedtime. At one point during the conversation I shared this struggle with Barrett.

Interviewer: I am experiencing some of those feelings running through my mind. I experience this type of struggle with Andrew. The rule for him is that he is supposed to be in bed by 8:00 p.m. When I get home late at night he wants to spend time with me and he asks me to come upstairs. I go up and talk with him and lay with him for a few minutes and then go downstairs. He usually sneaks out of his room and asks if he can come down. This is when we get in this back and forth struggle. He will sneak closer and closer down the stairs. I tell him to go up. He starts to get angry. Every once in a while it escalates into an argument where we are both yelling at each other. He's mad and upset . . .

Barrett: And he is feeling rejected 'cause all he wants is to be with you. You've been gone and he want to be with you.

Interviewer: And so once in a while it will just click, "He wants to spend time with me" and I say, "Of course you can come down." But I still feel the struggle when of course I would rather say, "Come down and let's spend time together" but I still feel the pull. . . It hurts to think about it.

This was the second time I shared this story during these interviews. Each time I have felt a prick in my heart as I thought about what my son was feeling and at what I was telling him. Since this second telling of the story my struggles with my son about bedtime have

significantly lessened. I have found that I have been able to see my son and what he wants more and the discourse has less of an influence.

I also have felt pulled by the discourse that it is Shelly's responsibility to take care of the house. Like Barrett, this is an idea I absolutely disagree with but if I am to be honest about how things are, I can see myself watching Shelly work while I talk with her or while watching television. The times when this pull is strongest is when Shelly is out and I am home with the kids. I get caught up being with them or relaxing and fail to see that there is a lot that I could do to take care of the house. I know the affect that it has on Shelly when she comes home and the house is clean. I know that it sends her a message of love and care and yet I fail to act on that sometimes (more than I would like).

The main area that moved me was the conversation related to privilege in relationships. This is one that I struggle with on a continual basis. Although I am very aware of privilege and Shelly and I talk about it very often, privilege is hard to see. Shelly and I have talked about how hard it is for her to be home with the children. We have talked about how important it is for us to make our relationship more fair in regard to time away from the children. I try to keep this desire close to my heart. We make plans for things to be more equal. It feels like it is a constant struggle, but we don't give up. I would like to think that I have become more aware of privilege in our relationship and have become more actively involved in lessening, it but I can never assume that it will disappear. This is something that I must always be mindful of.

Last weekend I went golfing early in the morning with some friends. We played a few holes and then were told that we had to stop playing because they were having a tournament

in an hour and had to get the course ready. My friends wanted to stay and play in the tournament. They asked me to wait and play with them. I told them that I needed to be home. They began to talk about how I was “whooped” and I should just call her and tell her I was going to be a few minutes longer. I told them again that I needed to be home with my wife and kids. They started talking about how I was smart to go home because if I didn’t I would have to deal with an angry wife. They each shared how their wives are mean to them when they go golfing. “I am not going home so that Shelly won’t be angry. I am going home because I want to be with her and my kids,” I told them. After some more subtle joking I went home. I shared the conversation with Shelly. As I told her about what they said about their wives being angry she began to cry. “They shouldn’t talk about that,” she said. She continued, “Don’t they understand how hard it is to be home with the children when they are away having fun after being away at work all week?”

The next week I went golfing again. I knew Shelly wasn’t excited about me going but she wished me good luck in the tournament. On the way to the course, I had a feeling like I wasn’t doing the right thing. I didn’t feel comfortable. I decided not to listen to this feeling as I told myself, “It is alright for me to play in a tournament every once in a while.” Maybe this was true but probably not at this time when I have been gone so much. Again I felt the pull of privilege in my relationship telling me I deserve to play in the tournament. I also felt the pull of love and commitment. This time I let the pull of privilege win. I played horribly.

Interviews Three and Four

The focus of interviews three and four was to explore the preferred desires that Barrett has as a father, how those desires would invite him to act toward his wife and children,

and the specific effects his acting in these ways would have on them. Barrett chose to have Tina serve as the consultant for these interviews so our accountability conversations with the consultant took place in a final fifth interview rather than at this time. Before beginning a conversation about Barrett's desires as a father, I wanted to know if any of the ideas we talked about during our last interview influenced his life in any way. Our conversation went as follows:

Interviewer: I guess before we do that I'm wondering if anything's stuck in your mind about what we talked about last time?

Barrett: The thing that really came back to me over and over again was the stuff about Davis. That's really kind of affected me but not for the first time but it was for the first time that I put it together in that succinct of a way or that deliberate of a way. I've often felt guilt over some of the interactions I've had with him and a desire to improve. I've felt that a lot this week.

Interviewer: You felt that in which kind of way, a guilt kind of way?

Barrett: A positive way. I have completely, this week at least, had no negative interactions with him of any kind and I'm feeling at the moment committed to never having another. That's good. And I feel that every time I slip, which is I don't know how often, I always recommit. I feel recommitted now and I have felt recommitted before, but it was just interesting in our last conversation to put it into such concrete terms, so it made it especially powerful to me.

The type of deconstructive language that we used seemed to offer Barrett a new way of looking at his life and encouraged positive feelings of re-commitment to his children. One

of the purposes of this project was to be able to have conversations with fathers that helped them experience a sense of accountability in their relationship and at the same time be respectful of their experiences and selves. Barrett shared how this way of talking, while difficult, was not experienced in a negative or disrespectful way but was motivating and had a positive influence in his life.

I wanted Barrett to know how our conversation had influenced my life and helped me in a number of ways. I shared with him how one of his ideas really helped one of the people that I counsel. I also told Barrett how our conversation helped me to be more centered in my own desires as a father. Here are some excerpts from that discussion.

Interviewer: This conversation that we had really helped me to recommit to just being more how I want to be with them, more loving and caring. . .

Barrett: I felt really motivated.

Interviewer: It has helped me also to just see the times when I might be not giving him as much time or attention and I can see it. Sometimes when I am so busy it is easy not to see it, so that conversation helped me just to be aware and to see him and say, "Ok, go over and spend some time together."

Barrett: That's what kids like and that's the stuff that makes them tick.

Interviewer: Yeah, just being together. Yeah, we went out and played baseball the other day and Andrew said "Yeah, can we do that again" and he just loved it. I haven't had lots of time lately doing all this stuff, so it's really helpful to have these conversations for me.

Sharing these things with Barrett is an issue of accountability for me. Just as Barrett shared how our conversation was motivating in his life, I wanted him to know that our conversation together motivated my own life.

Preference One: Safe and Warm

The first part of our conversation focused on the desires that Barrett has for how he wants to be as a father and how he wants his children to experience him. The questions in part two are very similar to the questions in part one of the interviews. Rather than exploring discourses and messages that may produce undesired and negative effects, the questions were altered to invite Barrett to consider the positive and beneficial effects of living according to his preferences. I will again remain as faithful to the actual conversations as possible.

I invited Barrett to consider the following question, “What are your beliefs about how you should or want to parent or what are your hopes for how you want to be toward your children, relate to them, how they experience you?” Our conversation about this went as follows:

Barrett: My fondest wish would be for my children to experience me as safe and warm. Those are the two words that come right to my head. I would love it if they would believe I was completely safe and always warm. Someone they could go to receive comfort if they needed it or just someone to talk to or hang out with if they needed it. I would like them to feel no fear whatsoever, no apprehension at all about approaching me with anything in the world. That would be my fondest desire for my kids. That would definitely be what I want.

Here Barrett chooses the words safe and warm to describe his “fondest dreams” for how he wants to be as a father. Just like in part one of the interviews, once a message has been brought up (or in this case a preference) I began a conversation about the specific ways that this preference would invite Barrett to act toward his children. In order to begin this type of conversation, I invited Barrett to consider the type of expressions he would give to his children if he were to be safe and warm. Our conversation around this idea went as follows:

Interviewer: To have them feel safe and warm; that you are safe and warm. So what types of ideas or what ways would you go about relating to them that would express this to them; that you are safe and that you are warm?

Barrett: Well I think safety comes from being noncritical. At least one component of it would be being noncritical, being able to use sort of a Rogerian sort of a thing. Having unconditional positive regard for my kids so that they always knew that regardless what I thought of their behavior, I had positive regard for them. So I suppose being noncritical of them altogether would make them feel more safe. If they knew that no matter what they came to me with, I was going to love and accept them and try to work out the best solution for them, that’s what I would think would probably help to accomplish that. I think warmth comes from involvement, even facial expressions like smiling at them and to them, being empathetic to what they’re experiencing.

The purpose in asking Barrett these questions was to help him deconstruct what safe and warm would mean in regard to specific behaviors he could be involved in with his

children. Barrett came up with a few possible actions that could express this warmth and safety like smiles, being non-critical, and being interested in what they are doing.

In the next exchange, I invite Barrett to situate his preference for being warm and safe with a personal belief that he has about children.

Interviewer: Are there any beliefs about parenting or about children that you would have about your children that would help you to act in these ways?

Barrett: I do have unconditional positive regard for them. I do love my kids and literally no matter what they did I always have their best interests in mind.

The truth is I love and care for them no matter what they do. That is a true belief that I have that I wish was expressed more saliently and more often. Is that what you mean cause that's a belief that I do have.

By asking Barrett this question I was also trying to invite Barrett to shift from a theoretical explanation to a more personal description of his beliefs about his children. I wanted Barrett to situate his beliefs in something very personal so that it might have more meaning for him. I tried again asking another question.

Interviewer: What do you think that this idea father's should get obedience from children says about what children are?

Barrett: They're obstacles.

Interviewer: And so this new belief says something different about what children are?

Barrett: Another belief that I have, you just led me right into it, is that I believe they're children of god and I believe that they are exactly coequal to me

and coeternal with me and have the same value in the heavens as I do. So if I really believe that about them, then there's no place for any of that stuff we were talking about last week.

Interviewer: Sometimes it seems like a hard belief just to keep in mind?

Barrett: Oh yeah, it is. We used to have in our old house a little picture of him in his little green shirt and he's just sitting there with his goofy smile and underneath it is says, "I am a child of god" and we had it hanging next to our refrigerator in our old house so every time I walked in the door, I'd see it and it really affected the way I thought about him and treated him. I'd look at him and think, "You are a child of God," and I saw his funny little smile and just this sweet little guy. And I thought, "He's the most precious thing in the universe" and that little picture just reminded me of it every time I saw it. There were a lot of times when I would kind of see it and I'd be walking out too fast and I'd think, "Well hold on just a minute" and I'd go back in because it would remind me of that profound idea of who he actually is in the eternities and when you get that idea in your head it changes the whole way you want to treat your family.

In this conversation Barrett connects his desire to a very personal belief that his children are children of God, that they are co-equals with him. The personalization of this belief is reflected in the story that he shares about his son Davis with the message

At this point, I was interested in exploring how keeping this belief close to him on a daily basis would invite him to act toward his children. I invited Barrett to consider the following question:

Interviewer: When there's a belief like this, one thing I'm interested in is how that belief will invite you to act?

Barrett: You mean like going back for a long goodbye?

Interviewer: Yeah, when this belief is present in your life and you really feel it, what does it invite you to do?

Barrett: Another thing that comes to mind is every night Davis wants to do this ridiculous thing which is he calls it tell his dreams but that's just a word he's been saying now for over a year. What it means is I have to say that I'm going to be a certain animal and then he figures out what animal lives with that animal and says he's going to be that other animal and then that's what he's going to be that night. It's a real nice little thing and it started off being real nice and then it started getting longer and longer and longer, longer and longer. We would be in there for 15 minutes doing this stupid thing and it would just go on and on and so one of the things that has happened to me on some nights I've said, "Davis it's time to go to bed, think of your animal and say it because we've got to do it now" and so it just becomes this chore that we have to get through. Then now finally in answer to your question, there are other times when I do have a sense for his value and for who he is in my life and when I have that belief in my mind I'll just kneel right there; I sit there; I let him take

as long as he wants and eventually he does it and he doesn't lay there all night long. It's a big difference because when I start pushing him through it, it just becomes this stupid thing we're doing. He doesn't like it and I don't like it and it takes all the warmth away from it and the safety too I guess, going back to those two words.

In the above segment Barrett makes some connections between this belief (that his children are children of God) and his desires as a father to be warm and safe. Looking through this particular excerpt reveals that Barrett appears to be having a dialogue between his fondest desires and the discourses discussed in part one of the interviews. He speaks of his desires to be warm and loving, share times when he has acted in that way, and at the same time remains honest about the times when he fails to do so.

Since the purpose of part two of the interviews is to help fathers have an intimate experience with the messages that the following of their desires has on their children, I invited Barrett to consider what the interaction discussed above might say to his son about how he feels about him as a person. This type of question in part one of the interviews was a painful question to answer. Remember how Barrett shared that he would rather die than say those hurtful things to the people he loves more than anything in the world. In this interview, these questions now become very different. This time he will be able to hear himself saying beautiful things about how he affects his children.

Interviewer: What does this say about how you feel about him?

Barrett: That I value him; that I love him; that I want to be with him. I enjoy my interactions with him. He's important to me. I think he does get that too.

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significant and meaningful ways. This belief influenced my desire to ask Barrett to reflect on how his son has contributed to his life in meaningful ways.

Barrett: I don't know beyond the obvious factor, or maybe it's not obvious but it seems like the one thing that comes to my mind is an intimate close relationship with someone I can care about who loves me or still at this age loves to do things with me and loves to see me walk in the door. That's all very rewarding for me. If you're talking about what am I getting from it.

Interviewer: Maybe on a deeper level. You talked about wanting to offer safety and warmth to your children? Is it possible that Davis offers that to you?

Barrett: He offers me a sense of warmth without a doubt. I don't think safety is as much an issue for me, I wouldn't expect to get a feeling of safety or security from Davis. I think that should be the other way around. But a sense of warmth certainly, which is something I need to be happy and need to be alive.

Barrett was able to begin to reflect on how his relationship with his son offers him warmth in his life. Inviting Barrett to think in this way encouraged him to make a connection that his son offers him something that he needs to be happy in life.

I wanted to explore with Barrett some issues of accountability related to letting his son know when he has influenced Barrett's life in some way. My reasoning for exploring this is connected to the belief I shared earlier in this chapter that I as a researcher have a responsibility to let those who I interview know when they have touched my life. I believe

that as fathers we also have a responsibility to notice when our lives have been touched by our children and to let them know. I shared this idea with Barrett and asked him to think about whether it was an idea he agreed with and what affects this practice might have in his son's life.

Interviewer: I'm wondering what it would mean to Davis if he knew how much he brought to your life, if you were to tell him after one of those moments?

Barrett: I'm sure it would. I tell him I love him probably 10 times a day, but that's so general. He hears it so much that he's actually started to reply, "I know, I know that," like it's just kind of this thing and so it really would be meaningful to say something more specific to him.

Interviewer: What would that offer our children if we were to let them know almost on a daily basis?

Barrett: I think it would be very powerful. I'm thinking of one experience.

Davis gave me a tie once and I went to him afterwards and I told him it made me feel really special to get that from him, and I remember that he totally glowed. Somehow he affected me and like you're saying, it's like the wrong direction. I'm supposed to be affecting him positively but he couldn't believe that he made me feel special and he even mentioned it for weeks afterwards. He says things like, "I sure am glad you like that tie." When he would bring it up and remember it, he gets this big grin on his face. So I think that really did kind of hit him. That's good. I should let him know how he touches me more

often probably. . . I had a good time with him tonight. I can tell him about that tomorrow; that it was really fun for me to be with him.

This idea was a new but meaningful one for Barrett. Asking him to reflect on this idea led Barrett to remember a personal experience he had with his son where something similar to what we were discussing happened and how that experience has had a lasting effect on his son even to this day.

Preference Two: Cherish

Our time was beginning to run short and both Barrett and I wanted to explore some of his specific desires for his relationship with his wife Tina. This was something that Barrett had specifically asked to address during our last meeting. The shift in the conversation came naturally as Barrett was reflecting on how great his life is at this point and how he feels like as a father this is the best time for him when his children are younger. This led both of us to reflect on whether our partners would agree with this or not. It turned out that both of us have had conversations with our wives and other women that we know in common who have expressed how difficult it is for them during this particular time in their lives. All of these women have young children and have chosen to be home with them. I shared with Barrett a story about a focus group that was done with young mothers who are members of our religious faith (Barrett and I share the same religion). During the interview these mothers were asked what it was really like for them to be home with the children and how they were doing. Each of the mothers began to cry as they shared feelings of isolation, loneliness and sadness. Barrett and I reflected on how our own partners have expressed these same feelings and then I opened up a conversation about accountability in the following way.

Interviewer: So, I am wondering what kind of accountability might we have to address that? What might we be able to do to make that less of a burden or less painful?

Barrett: I think we ought to have an obligation there because it is the most difficult job. I've been home with the kids alone for a little over a week and I mean it is just hard work. It is hard because you are isolated, you are not sure what to do from one minute to the next. It happened in the summer when Tina left. I can't even imagine the winter. It has to be so rough.

Interviewer: Think about this day after day, year after year. . .

Barrett: Yeah, because what I was doing was the equivalent of riding around in a wheelchair for an hour.

Interviewer: I guess what I am wondering is, as fathers, what we might be able to do or some beliefs that we might hope to have that could help us ease some of that burden?

Barrett: The belief that I already have that I don't live by enough is that what Tina is doing and what other mothers are doing is the most sacred and honorable sacrifice that there is. I believe that but once again it's kind of like those other ones where sometimes I act on that belief and sometimes I don't. But that is the belief that I should hold in consciousness more often.

My purpose in leading the discussion in this direction was again to directly bring issues of accountability into the interviews. While it ended up that Barrett agreed that men should have more of an obligation to help with the burden of mothers who stay at home, we probably

would not have had this conversation if I hadn't initiated it. Initiating conversations like this is an example of a methodology that is value-centered.

This conversation led us into a discussion about Barrett's preferences or beliefs that he wants to have for Tina. He shared how it was his desire to believe that Tina's sacrifice to be home with the children is the most sacred and honorable sacrifice possible. I wanted to explore more about this belief and how it might help him to ease the burden. I asked him to consider the following question:

Interviewer: So, if you were to hold this belief closer to your heart, what would you find yourself doing with Tina; for Tina?

Barrett: Easing her burden as much as possible all the time. Coming home and taking over everything that my energy would allow me to take over. Saying, "Thank you for doing this." Giving her every break that I can.

Interviewer: So what are some of the specific things that you would do if you were to follow this belief?

Barrett: I would come home from work and say, "You've been at this all day. Why don't you take off for a couple of hours and do whatever you need to do." I probably would do more of my share of the housework. I think I would show appreciation for her. I mean, I never tell her that I appreciate what she does. I can't remember the last time I did that, if I've ever done that. But yet I deeply appreciate it.

Interviewer: What ways of letting her know how you appreciate her would be the most meaningful to Tina?

Barrett: I think giving her time would be profoundly helpful and meaningful to her.

This discussion is a good example of a deconstructive conversation. Barrett is encouraged to define the specific things that this belief would invite him to do for his partner. He then comes up with a list of examples of things he could do for Tina. The purpose of this type of questioning is again to help Barrett connect behaviors to desires and beliefs that he has for Tina.

After further discussions about this desire, I wanted to find out if Barrett had any other preferences or beliefs that he would like to have more present in his relationship with Tina. While it may seem like the same questions are being repeated again and again (which they are) my hope is to extend these explorations as far as possible until there is nothing more that he can think of.

Barrett: I believe husbands should be affectionate and warm and kind, soft-hearted. . . Empathetic. I believe that those are the best things I can offer Tina. A loving companion, somebody who loves and supports her in whatever she tries to do, whatever road she decides to take.

Interviewer: So it sounds like this is something that you have thought about, something you try to offer her.

Barrett: I try. I fail miserably. I am less successful there than I am with my kids. I get muddled in the details with Tina sometimes and I start trying to figure out what she wants rather than just thinking about the bigger picture. So I fail more with Tina than I do with the kids, but that is what I wish I was

to her. I think sometimes I maybe am. You will have to ask her. But typically I am probably not all those things. That is what I wish I was. That is what I would like to be and that is what I try to be usually. It is always what I try to be.

This was an important part of our conversation. Barrett was able to express his desires to be warm, kind and soft-hearted and admit that he struggles with following them more in his relationship with Tina than he does with children. The struggle can be seen as he works through the last part of this conversation. Barrett ends by saying that he wishes that he was this way, that he would like to be this way, that he usually tries to be this way and finally states that he always tries to be this way. This struggle is important because it represents Barrett's willingness to both admit his failures and at the same time declare his clear commitment to being the type of companion that he desires to be.

At this point I felt a desire to help Barrett find a way to make it more possible for him to offer these things to Tina. I have found in my clinical work that if persons are able to give their desires and preferences a single name that encompasses what that desire represents, it can help them to keep this desire more present in their lives and better inform them of what to do in their relationships. I invited Barrett to consider the following question that comes from the relational accountability model (Carlson & Erickson, 2000) that was mentioned earlier.

Interviewer: What type of quality or what type of feeling would you have in your heart that would allow you to more fully express these things to her?

Barrett: That I cherish her. I think that is the main thing that she needs that I fail to give.

I shared with Barrett my desire to be loving toward my wife and told him a question that I ask myself to help me to act in loving ways toward her. The question I use is, "What would love have me do?" We talked about how Barrett's word "cherish" could be put into a question like this. The question we came up with was, "How can I have Tina feel cherished today?" This idea was interesting to Barrett. His comments and our conversation about this follow.

Barrett: Yeah, I like that. I like that question. It gives me more of an intuitive sense for what to do too, because when I said I get caught in the details with Tina that is what I do. Instead of asking a general question, what I do is try to decipher or read her mind and try to figure out what I should be doing. . . Then I try to reason it out and that's always wrong. So I think coming at it more intuitively would be a better approach.

Interviewer: Do you think that word 'cherish' would invite you to do some of the same things you talked about before?

Barrett: Yeah, it is a meaningful word to me and it would lead me exactly to everything that we have talked about.

Before placing his desires into a single word like cherish, Barrett struggled with living according to his desires because he would try to rationally decipher what to do rather than having a feeling for what to do. Barrett expressed how coming at things more intuitively would make it easier for him to keep his desire more present in his life and lead him to do exactly what he wants to do in his relationship with Tina.

Our interview ended after this conversation. Before leaving I asked Barrett what this experience was like for him. He responded "It's nice. It's uplifting and good. It seems right."

Personal Reflections

My experience in these interviews was similar to my experience in interviews one and two with Barrett in that I felt a renewed commitment in my relationships. This time however, I found myself thinking more about the good desires I have as a father and reflecting on the times that I have been able to offer my children and Shelly the types of expressions of love and kindness that I desire. As Barrett was talking about his desires to be warm toward his children, I found myself thinking about the night before when my son and I played "Uno" before bed. It was past his bedtime and I had just come home from work. He called down the stairs for me. I went up to talk with him for a few minutes about his day. I rubbed his head and told him "Goodnight." He asked me if I would stay with him for a few more minutes and play Uno. I was tired and felt that pull to tell him it was bedtime but remembered my desire to do as love would have me do. I grabbed the cards and sat down next to him in the bed. We played together for about half an hour. I felt the warm feelings that Barrett spoke about. After our last game I heard the words, "Daddy, I really like it when we spend time together. It makes me feel good."

I shared this experience with Barrett. As I was telling the words of the story I had a new experience with the feelings that were present. These feelings connected me even further to my desires to be loving and kind toward my son and to help him feel and know that he is loved. Writing these words again here has also brought forth these same feelings in my heart.

During these interviews with Barrett, I particularly found myself thinking about my relationship with my wife, Shelly. As Barrett was talking about his desire to cherish Tina, I was struck by the meaningfulness of that word. I felt a strong desire to have Shelly feel cherished. This word helped me to feel more of an appreciation for her goodness. Since that conversation, the good things she does have become more apparent to me. Just a few nights ago I was watching her interact with some young children. I saw her attentiveness toward them. How she took the time to make each one of them feel special. She took one of the children in her arms. The little girl just stared at Shelly with her face less than an inch away from Shelly's face. Shelly's eyes never looked away.

That experience reminded me of many others where I have seen her kindness. I remembered a time when an older woman was slowly walking past our home in tears. Shelly walked up to her and put her arms around the woman. She led the woman to our steps and sat down with her. They talked for a few moments and the woman walked away with a smile on her face. I could not hear the words that were shared but I could see the love in Shelly's eyes. I felt a deep sense of love for her.

I share these stories because I want to illustrate the reciprocal effect of research in the life of the researcher. My conversations with Barrett about his preferences led me to not only feel a connection to my own preferences but led me to experience Shelly in ways that I might not have without these conversations. In our final meeting together, I shared how he had influenced my life in these ways and thanked him for that influence.

Consultant Interview: Barrett and Tina

Barrett chose to have Tina serve as the woman consultant to our interviews. I gave Tina a copy of the transcripts and we scheduled a time to meet together a week later. I invited Tina to think about the ideas we discussed in our interviews and share her experience. I was also especially interested in hearing what it was like for her to hear Barrett talk about his relationship with his children and her in these personal ways.

Tina began by expressing her appreciation for Barrett. She wanted him and me to know that she thinks that he is a wonderful husband and father and that his depiction of himself in our interviews might not have been fair. She shared how she can see some of those things that he talked about but wanted him to know that the good and wonderful things he does far outweigh the bad.

Tina: The examples he gives, they really happen. I know what he is talking about and I know those are concerns but I think it is such a small part of his relationship with Davis. He seems like he is really, every day working on every part of his relationship with Davis. And so, the examples he gives are real, but he is just so on top of that I don't worry about it. I don't feel like he is too hard on the kids.

At first, Tina had a hard time knowing what to talk about. She had in her mind that I needed certain things for my dissertation and she wanted to talk about those things. I told her that what was most important for me and my dissertation was to hear what was most important to her, to hear the things that touched her, and would mean the most for her life.

Tina was moved by Barrett's desire to have her feel cherished. The word cherish was especially meaningful to Tina.

Tina: I was thinking the other day before I read any of this stuff, I was thinking that I want to feel cherished. And so, when I read this I was thinking, "Wow. How weird," that was the exact word I was thinking. I was thinking that I want to feel cherished, I want to feel like you look at me and love me and just hang on every word and just care so much about my emotions.

What is interesting about this is that when Barrett said the word "cherish", it really meant a lot to him. It was as if he knew at that moment that this was what Tina wanted in her life.

I invited her to talk about the specific things Barrett thought would help her to feel cherished. Tina reflected on two of the things that Barrett mentioned (sharing more of the housework and giving her more time for herself) and added a third (affection) that we had not discussed in our interviews.

Sharing in the Housework

Tina agreed with Barrett that the lack of equality in sharing the housework has been a struggle and a burden for her.

Tina: I have a lot of strong feelings about me being in charge of the whole house. I hope that doesn't hurt your feelings, but the laundry, the cooking, the cleaning, shopping, and paying the bills; I feel like my full time job is taking care of the kids and all that other stuff is extra. While I am taking care of the kids I can get some of that stuff done but what usually happens is when I get a break from the kids I get caught up on the housework that I wish we were

splitting, so when I am off of work and he is off of work, I could actually have a break. What happens is I get a break from the kids so I can work on the house.

Obviously, Tina has some strong feelings about how the responsibilities are divided in regard to housework. Barrett, in our interviews, knew that this was hard for Tina. He also tried to guess what it was like for Tina when he does not share in these responsibilities. Since Barrett and I could only guess in our reflections about the messages that his actions sent to Tina, I asked her to talk about what it is like for her to carry the burden of the housework. Tina was very open about her feelings and at the same time tried to make sure that she was not hurting Barrett. Her comments about this follow.

Interviewer: In our interviews, Barrett and I tried to reflect on what this is like for you when he fails to act on his responsibilities to care equally for the home. Could I ask you how this feels? What messages that sends?

Tina: The fact that it is my responsibility and he doesn't help very much. Is that ok for me to think? The fact that I am responsible for most of that stuff makes me feel disrespected and it makes me feel not cherished; the opposite of cherished. Like when I am trying to keep the house clean and you [talking to Barrett] come home and leave a dish in the sink. It's insulting to me. It feels like you can put your own dishes in the dishwasher and it feels like he expects me to do it. He assumes he has no responsibilities at home and that's insulting to me. Does that hurt your feelings?

Tina's words here may seem very harsh and difficult for Barrett to take. However, Barrett already reflected about the messages he is sending Tina so this was not a surprise to him. Our previous interviews had prepared him to not take her comments personally. When Tina asked him if what she was saying hurt his feelings Barrett said "No, this is important to talk about. The more truth that comes of this the better."

After exploring these experiences with Tina, I asked her to talk about how she would like their relationship to be different in regard to the housework. My purpose in asking Tina what she would like was two-fold: 1) I wanted her to have a chance to express her desires and 2) I wanted to see if what Barrett thought would be helpful fit with what Tina wanted. In the next segment from the transcripts, Tina shares with Barrett that she would like the housework to be an equal responsibility for both of them. She sees her full-time job as caring for the children when Barrett is away at work, but the housework is not part of her job, it is their job.

Interviewer: How is it that you would like things to be in regard to the housework?

Tina: I would like it so he has part of the responsibilities as far as the housework and dishes and cooking and laundry and cleaning. I would like to split that.

Interviewer: You also mentioned before that you would like to take a break . .

Tina: Yeah, and I just want to come home and read the paper or something. I need to just take a break and do nothing. I never feel like I can have a break.

After Tina shared her feelings about her experience with the inequality in their relationship, she took a position of accountability for her actions. While she was open and

honest about her feelings and didn't hold back sharing how she felt, she was also sensitive to Barrett's feelings and willing to take responsibility for her actions. The following quote is an example of this.

Tina: I have a lot of responsibility in it because I get my feelings hurt easily. I think that it is mostly not personal and it is my responsibility to look at it and think it is not personal. There is a balance, he does have to change in some ways but I have to be reasonable. Of course, if he is in a hurry, he'll eat lunch and put his dish in the sink and I put my dish in the sink, but for me, if I don't have time I know I am going to do it and for him if he doesn't have the time he doesn't think about who is going to do it. It's not personal but I take it personally and I have a responsibility not to do that. He has a responsibility to try to avoid those situations.

Since we explored Tina's experience when Barrett does not participate fully in the housework and the messages that she experiences from Barrett, I shifted the focus of our conversation to explore how she feels or would feel if he did participate more fully. While it is important for Barrett to have an experience of what it is like for Tina when he doesn't share in the housework, it is equally important for him to understand the messages he sends to her when he does share in the housework. Since we were talking about the example of leaving dishes out I asked Tina what it would say to her if he put the dishes away.

Tina: I would feel he was thinking of me. If he were to do it I would think, "Oh, he cares about me." The other day, all the dishes were done and I was thinking, "Oh, he was totally thinking about me and hearing my needs." I

don't know if you really were but I took it that way. When I notice that he has tried to clean up, even if it is not perfect, even it is lousy, it still make me feel like he cares about me.

Having Tina share, in her own words, how she would feel when Barrett shares in the housework more is extremely important. It allows Barrett to connect an activity (like putting the dishes away) to an expression of his desire to cherish Tina. The housework then, becomes more than a chore, it becomes a means of helping Tina feel cherished and loved.

Giving Tina Time

The next thing that Tina wanted to discuss was Barrett's idea that giving her time would be the most important thing he could do. We reviewed Barrett's comments about this and the messages that he thought it would send to Tina. I invited Tina to share her feelings about the importance of this in her life and the messages that she would experience.

Tina: So, if giving me time makes me feel cherished? That is so important, I mean he is absolutely right that if he were to give me time, like on Saturdays we split up the day so I get three hours where I don't have any responsibilities with the kids or the family. . . that's the best experience ever. It's the greatest.

Interviewer: When did you start doing this?

Tina: About a month ago and it is great. It is a great experience. The first time we did it, it was like, "Wow, this is the best day of my whole life."

I am not sure if planning to give Tina three hours of free time had anything to do with our interviews together. The timing would be right, but this is not what is important. What is

important is that they decided to make an effort to make things more equal in their relationship and Barrett was given a chance to hear just how meaningful this is for Tina.

Affection: Tina's Version of Being Cherished

Since Barrett and I could only guess at what things would help her feel cherished, I felt it would be important to ask Tina to define what being cherished means to her. This conversation led Tina to identify affection as another important thing that Barrett could offer her. Affection was something that Barrett had not thought about during our previous interviews. As it turned out, affection was perhaps the most significant thing that Barrett could offer her that would lead to her feeling cherished.

Tina: You mean how would I feel cherished? Affection is really big for me; non-sexual affection like touching my leg or rubbing my back or standing behind me with your arms around me, like you were doing tonight, totally makes me feel cared for and really loved, that makes me feel cherished.

Barrett: I know that I need to do more of that.

Without this interview with Tina, Barrett would not have known how important affection is for Tina. He also would not have been able to make the connection between affection and his desire to help her to feel cherished.

At the end of the interview, Tina asked Barrett if the things we had talked about really had an affect on his relationship with Davis. She also wanted to know if the interviews led him to think more about how he could cherish her.

Tina: Do you think any of your interactions with Davis have changed because of that conversation?

Barrett: Oh, yeah! The things that affected me most was the message I am sending to Davis. That seemed to be the most urgent or more painful than anything else I was doing.

Tina: What about me?

Barrett: I realize the messages I'm sending you aren't any good either. I have thought about cherishing you during the past few weeks. Not as much as I would like but it does make a difference.

ACCOUNTABILITY INTERVIEW

Since accountability is a major part of this methodology this section includes the major ideas that came from an interview between my partner Shelly and I. It was important for me to hear Shelly's comments about the ideas that I addressed in the interviews and how she thinks they play out in my relationship with her and the children.

Besides thinking that I use the word "wonder" way too many times, Shelly was surprised at how much I included her in the interviews. The experience of reading the transcripts was personally meaningful to Shelly. She shared how as she typed the transcripts she could not help but put herself in the situations that were shared by the fathers. The conversations had her thinking about the messages that she is sending our children and myself and also about the preferences that she has for her relationships. What moved her the most was the question that I posed to Barrett, "What would love have me do?" This question had an immediate effect in her life. She shared with me how when she heard that question she thought, "This really makes a difference. This is something that I can do." This question has stayed with her over the past few months and during certain situations it has really changed how she has acted toward me and the kids.

Since the main purpose of our interview together was for Shelly to share with me her concerns and help me to be more accountable to her and the children, I felt a need to shift the conversation. I did not want it to seem like I wanted her to be involved so that it would change her behavior. This is not the message I wanted to send. I wanted to hear her concerns and thoughts about some of the things I shared in the interviews.

During the interview with Barrett he talked about it being important to stay away from intruding on Tina when she is trying to discipline the kids. Shelly wanted me to know that this is not something that she wants from me. Rather than butting out she would like me to be more involved in helping her with the discipline.

Shelly: I really feel like you need to support me more with discipline.

Sometimes I feel that by not stepping in you are giving the kids the impression that you don't agree with what I am doing. I want you to butt in and I want you to stand by me in the discipline.

Shelly is exactly right about this. I have a hard time taking a stand with the kids and the effect that has is not good for Shelly or the kids. They begin to see her as the bad guy and me as the good guy. This is not fair to Shelly.

Shelly thought that at times the entire process was a bit ironic. One morning a few weeks ago I came home from golfing and she said, "Don't you think it is humorous that I am home working on your dissertation about fathering and accountability and taking care of the kids while you are out golfing." This is something that I have struggled with. I am working on a project to encourage fathers to experience accountability in their relationships, while my involvement in this project has changed my life in many ways and helped me to be more sensitive to the messages I am sending to my family, it has also led me to be painfully aware that I am still blinded to many issues of privilege that exist in my relationships.

Another thing that has been difficult has been that this project has created a paradox for me. While it has reconnected me with a desire to be spend more time with my wife and family, it has also required me to be away from them more often than I usually have to. It is

the night before I have to turn in my dissertation to my committee and I had to leave home to do some final editing. I was gone from home on a day that I would normally be home. When I came home it was easy to see that it had been a tough day for Shelly. She wanted me to be home, but didn't call me because she knew I had to keep working. We are both very tired of me being gone. This is an example of the dilemma of this project.

Shelly had shared what she wanted to talk about but there were a few things that I thought were important for us to discuss. I was concerned about how I presented myself throughout the interviews. I wanted to be as honest as possible and didn't want to come across in a way that made it sound like I was a better father and husband than I really am. I asked Shelly what she thought about this.

Shelly: I thought you were pretty honest about things.

Tom: One of the concerns I had was how I came across in writing about my theoretical positions compared to my actual personal experiences.

Shelly: Yeah, I told you to take out a few paragraphs because they sounded arrogant. I remember writing in the margins, "This sounds pompous, and I know you don't want to come across that way." Sometimes you make the recognition of your failings sound heroic. You know that you are a great father and husband, don't pretend that you're not.

Tom: To me this was an important part of the methodology, but there were times when I felt uncomfortable doing this so much. The experiences and feelings weren't fake but I can see how they might come across that way.

As I read through my personal reflections about the interviews, I was a little concerned about writing some of the positive experiences. I think that it was because of the concern I mentioned above. But after some thought, I realized that it was just as important for me to share those good experiences as it was for the fathers I interviewed. I tend to think more about my challenges and failures and it felt good to think about some of the good messages I am sending Shelly and the kids.

To end our interview, I asked Shelly if there were any things that were discussed in the interviews that she would like to bring into our relationship. Shelly really liked the idea of having 3 hours on Saturday for herself like Tina and Barrett. I asked her if this was something that she wanted to start doing. She responded, "Maybe we can start next Saturday, since you will be done with your dissertation."

COMMON THEMES AND EXPERIENCES

Even though I did not set out to look for common themes between the fathers, I was struck by how similar their experiences were. I was also struck by the similarity of the discourses that they identified as influencing their lives. There were also a number of preferences that were shared by the fathers. In this next section, I will review some of these common discourses and preferences.

Discourses

The first discourse that influences these fathers is a discourse related to how fathers should be involved in discipline. While the fathers each called this by a different name, the affects this discourse had in their lives were very similar. Paul referred to this as “the father as disciplinarian discourse.” Barrett referred to it as the idea that “fathers should be able to demand obedience from his children.” Brian referred to it as “the discourse discipline and negativity.” Dale, however, did not talk about this as being a discourse that influenced him. I shared with him how other fathers felt influenced by this idea and he felt like it was one that he has escaped.

These three fathers also had shared ways of describing how this discourse encourages them to act toward their children. Paul shared his belief that there was a strong connection between this message and the idea that men have to be tough. He explained how it encourages him and other fathers to act in ways that are tough with the children in regard to rules and obedience. Paul also shared how this idea encouraged him to be harsh and distant from his children.

Barrett shared how this discourse has led him to act in ways that he “is not proud of.” He discussed how it encouraged him to withdraw his warmth and love from his children and to act with them in ways that were harsh and cold. Like Paul, Barrett also believed that this message would lead him to see his children as objects.

Brian shared how his experience of this discourse is that it invites him to parent in ways that are tough. For him part of this toughness was to parent in particularly negative or critical ways. He shared how this idea has led him to focus almost exclusively on the negative things that his children do so that they don’t “get away” with doing wrong.

Another shared experience of this discourse with these three fathers was the affects that they described it having on their children. Paul believed that when he acts in these ways toward his children it sends a message to them that they are “less than people.” He shared how it encourages them to feel like objects. Another message that Paul believed that his actions send to his children (related to this discourse) is that the “rules are more important than they are.” He believes that his actions also strip the children of any sense of confidence in who they are and effects their ability to love and trust others.

Barrett had some similar beliefs about the affects of this discourse on his children. He believes that when he acts according to this discourse, it sends a message to his son that he is bad. Barrett also believes that it leads his children to feel like objects and not as persons.

Brian also shared some similar beliefs about the affects of this discourse on his children. He shared how when he acts in ways consistent with the belief that he needs to be tough or negative, it leads his children to feel like they can’t do anything right. This leads, he believes, to them losing self-esteem and the belief that they can accomplish their goals. He

also recognized that by following this discourse he would be sending the message to his children that he didn't believe in them.

The other message that was similar among the fathers was the idea that it is the father's responsibility to work outside the home and the mother's responsibility to work inside the home. While this is a very traditional belief that none of the fathers agreed with, they each expressed how it spoke to them and encouraged them to act in ways that were inconsistent with their beliefs. Again, this discourse was mainly shared by the three fathers mentioned above. Dale did not believe that this influenced his life very much and in fact believes that in his relationship they have taken steps to go against this belief. He did share that as they have gotten into more traditional job roles (Dale used to have a job that allowed him to be home most of the time) he has noticed that it is much more of a struggle to be equal in taking care of the home and children.

Paul explained this idea as "the father as wage earner" discourse. Included in this message for Paul was the idea that it was the mother's primary responsibility to nurture and care for the children and the house. Paul shared how this message encourages him to believe that his work is more and more important than it actually is and also encourages him to begin to define his role as a father in this limited capacity. Paul also described how this discourse encourages him to be more distant to the children and be less involved in their personal and emotional lives.

Brian referred to this as selfishness or the idea that men deserve to have time to themselves. Brian believed that this idea encouraged him to see his responsibility as being his work outside the home and when he came home it was his privilege to spend time as he

wanted. At times Brian shared how this led him to see his children as a nuisance or to not see his children at all. Brian believed that this idea has the biggest affect on his relationship with his wife. He shared how when he feels this privilege or selfishness he doesn't see parenting or taking care of the children as his responsibility.

Barrett also expressed a similar experience that it is the mother's role to work inside the home. Even though this is a belief that Barrett very much opposes, it is one that has an influence in his life. For Barrett this discourse has the effect of blinding him from seeing what he can contribute to caring for the home and also blinding him from seeing Tina working while he is resting in a chair. Barrett shared that this message also blinds him to seeing the privilege that he experiences in their relationship related to child care.

Preferences

There were also a number of shared preferences expressed by the fathers involved in this project. In contrast to the father as disciplinarian discourse each of the fathers expressed desires for being loving and caring toward their children. While each of the fathers did not refer to their specific preferences in this exact way, they all indicated that their preferences would lead them to be loving and caring toward their children. Barrett referred to this as a desire to be warm and gentle with his children. Paul expressed a desire to be a nurturer for his children. Brian expressed a preference for his children to always know how much they mean to him. Dale referred to his desire to be attentive toward his son.

Another shared preference for the fathers was related to their relationships with their partners. While each of the fathers talked about discourses that discourage them from being

jointly invested in the care of the home and the children, three of the fathers interviewed expressed a desire to be more committed to sharing the responsibilities at home.

Barrett expressed this in his preference that Tina feel cherished. For Barrett, this desire would mostly be expressed by being more directly involved in the housework. It would also be expressed by giving Tina more time to do what she wants while he cares for the kids and the housework.

Brian shared his desire to be more loving toward Tammy. For Brian love would invite him to see her needs and also see the housework as his work. He shared a story about how thinking this way about Tammy during our interviews invited him to do the dishes and laundry one night.

Dale expressed a preference for equality in relationships. For each of these fathers another motivating factor behind their preferences in this area was the positive effect that this would have on their children.

As a researcher, a common experience that I had with each of these fathers was an appreciation for the sincerity of their desires to care for their children and to be more fair in their relationships with their wives. I experienced each of these men as good men who desire to live better lives and who are committed to being fathers.

One thing I noticed in each of the interviews was the difficulty and sometimes pain that came as they explored the hurtful messages they were sending their children and partners. The pain they experience was an expression of their desires to not hurt their children and partners. It did not appear to be experienced as guilt but it brought forth feelings of renewed commitment in their relationships. I also noticed the joy that was expressed (through verbal

and facial expressions) when they heard, in their own words, the loving and caring messages they were sending to their partners and children.

SOME CONCERNS AND LIMITATIONS

Since this project was proposing some alternative methodological ideas, I want to address some of the concerns I have about this process and some of the things that I would like to have done differently. One of the main concerns I have is that I didn't require the involvement of the participants' partners. Originally, I thought that it would be more respectful to give them the option of choosing their partners or another consultant. The two interviews that involved the partner consultants fit much more with the purposes of this project. Both of these fathers were willing to enter into discussions about accountability in ways that were deeply personal and appeared to be deeply honest. One reason why the involvement of the partners is important is because it creates an atmosphere where honesty on the part of the fathers is more possible. If the fathers know that their partners are not only going to be involved in a final interview but they are going to read everything they have said, it is more likely that the fathers will give a more accurate picture of their actions. Also, rather than just hearing some general comments from a person they did not know, the fathers were able to hear the words of someone they love and care for talk about how their actions have both positive and negative shaping effects in their lives. This made the process much more personal. Without the direct involvement of their partners, my desires for these interviews to be accountable to the experiences of women and children were hampered.

While I was attempting to create accountability structures that would allow this research to be more accountable to women and children, after reflecting on this project I noticed an important issue that I was blinded to. The two partners who served as consultants to their husbands' interviews both stay at home and depend on their husbands for financial

support. This potentially creates a terrible difference in power in their relationships which may have made it extremely difficult for them to feel safe to share their true feelings about their husbands involvement in their lives. Before I began the interviews, I knew that both Tammy and Tina were in positions where they could support themselves (each hold master's degrees) and have deconstructed their desires for being at home at this time in their lives (both have studied feminist ideas in their education). Therefore, I didn't think it the power imbalances in their relationships would be a problem in our interviews. However, I don't think it is safe to ever make this assumption (even if it turns out to be true). One way to avoid this would be to make the deconstruction of discourses related to mothering a shared purpose of this project. This would allow mothers to deconstruct some of the discourses that may be limiting their lives and also help them see how issues of power and gender influence their lives in oppressive ways.

Because of the difficulty of the types of reflections these fathers were asked to make, I have thought about whether a screening process should be added to this methodology. This idea came to me because of my experience interviewing Dale and to some degree, Paul. Initially, I thought this would be a good idea. However, the more I thought about it the more I realized such a process would go against the purposes of this project. These interviews are not only designed to bring forth meaningful information, they are also designed to address issues of accountability and offer change to the lives of the participants. If I were to only select fathers who would bring forth interesting information I would be neglecting the larger purpose of the project. Therefore, I have decided that one of the results of research that has a political purpose is that it may not always fit with all of the participants involved.

Another concern I have is with the accountability interview between me and my wife. While it was good for me to hear her comments, I think that it would have been better if this interview had been done by a third party. Again, there are important issues of power that were not considered at the time of the interview. Shelly was not involved in any type of deconstruction of mothering discourses. If issues of power imbalances in our relationship were more clear to her and she was interviewed by another person before talking to me, then she would perhaps have more freedom to express her feelings. I believe that this practice would also help me to be more accountable as a researcher.

FUTURE POSSIBILITIES FOR THIS METHODOLOGY

While the purpose of deconstructive knowledge as used in this project was not to develop a common list of discourses that fathers experience, this could be a potential use for this methodology. For this to occur, the intimate focus of the research would change. Rather than interviewing a few fathers, a larger number of individual interviews (25 -30) could be conducted to explore (using similar questions as were used in part one of this project) the discourses that they experience as fathers. The focus of analysis would then be on common discourses expressed by fathers. The knowledge gained from this research could be used to inform other research with fathers or in developing theoretical and clinical models. It could also be used to develop groups to help fathers who are struggling with parenting issues.

Another possibility would be to involve children in the accountability interviews. I struggled with whether or not I should involve children but decided that because some of the fathers had younger children it would be too hard for them to be a part of the conversations. I think that an accountability interview between a father and his children would be an important contribution to this methodology.

As pointed out in the limitations section, I believe that involving the participants' partners more fully would be an important part of future research using this methodology. Not only should the partners be involved in exploring mothering discourses but I also believe that the fathers should also participate in some type of deconstruction of these discourses as well. Adding this process would better enable this research to meet its goals of accountability.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions, according to Bloom (1998), should be open leaving the reader to draw their own conclusions about the experience of the research and how it influenced their own lives. Rather than making general summary statements about what was discovered in this project, I feel a need to also make this conclusion section a personal reflection on the process of this project and how it has and will continue to change my own life.

From the beginning, this has been a project about personal experience. The entire purpose of introducing deconstructive knowledge as a methodology was to make personal experience the center of research. At the center of this project has been a reconstruction of research in a way that is more consistent with the philosophies of post-structuralism and feminism. This was accomplished by using deconstruction as a methodological practice in the actual interview process rather than utilizing it as an interpretive tool by the researcher. When deconstructive knowledge is placed at the heart of the research process, it becomes a way of generating personal experiences for the participants and the researcher. From this perspective, what is considered meaningful knowledge is not how generalizable the findings are or even how common or shared the experiences are but rather what becomes meaningful are the experiences that the fathers and the researcher are having throughout the interviews.

Since this project has been committed to post-structural and feminist principles, accountability in relationships is at the center of the research process. This includes the accountability I have for the fathers I interviewed and also to the women and children in their lives. My accountability also extends to my own relationships with my wife and children. This requires me to make a personal investment in the research process by being willing to let

my own life be changed and transformed in the process. It also requires me to share with these fathers how they have touched my life and improved my own relationships.

During the formal writing of this dissertation I have felt the pull of traditional discourses about research telling me how and what I need to include in my writings. These messages have been very powerful especially since this dissertation is a requirement for finishing my doctorate. Even though I have felt the influence of these traditions, I have taken a position of resistance against them. These commitments have required me to write in very personal ways. In many ways I have practiced the type of transgressive writing that Laurel Richardson (1997) calls for when one is engaged in feminist post-structural methodology.

Therefore, in the tradition of transgressive writing, I will end by sharing some personal stories that reflect the influence these interviews have had on my own life and relationships. Each of the stories I will share have occurred during the interviewing and writing process of this project. One of the major affects of this project has been that I have felt a renewed sense of commitment to my own preferences as a father. By engaging these fathers in the process of deconstructive knowledge, the messages and shaping affects of my actions on my children and my wife Shelly have become more visible to me. In a very real sense, I have been able to see them much more clearly.

Just a few nights ago, my six year old son Andrew was saying his prayers before bed. Some nights I am not very attentive to what he says as he often uses the same words night after night. But that particular night, for some reason, his words were close to my heart. He asked for God to bless him to be good and to be able to listen to his mom and dad. Then came the words that pierced my heart. "And help me to not be bad," he said. I immediately

began thinking about whether I had ever told him this, that he was bad. And while I may have never used those words, my heart knew that I had told him that a number of times through my actions. Tears filled my eyes. I felt a powerful feeling of love for him. He finished his prayer and I immediately lifted him up into my arms. "I love you so much," I told him. With a sense of urgency I added "Andrew, I want you to know that you aren't bad. I have never thought that you were bad. Do you know how much I love you?" My son softly replied "Yes, dad. You love me a whole lot," as his arms reached around my neck and squeezed me tightly.

I laid him down in his bed and then laid next to him for a few minutes. As I laid there my heart was filled with love for that little boy. My heart was also filled with a desire to never send that message to him again. Since that night, I have felt an urgency to let him know that he is loved and that he is precious to me. This desire has stayed close to my heart and I have seen more goodness in my son and felt more love for him than I ever have in my life.

This experience was directly related to my being involved in these interviews. Barrett spoke about how he may be sending a similar message to his son and how he would rather die than send that message. I felt the same type of pain that night that Barrett felt in our interviews. If I have not shared that experience with Barrett I am not sure if I would have felt those words expressed by my son.

Last night after putting my son to bed, I heard a quiet voice call down the stairs. "Daddy, I just want to be with you" he said. I smiled, walked up the stairs, and lifted him into my arms. "I want to be with you too," I told him. He smiled back at me. We sat together on the couch with my arms around him. "I love you Andrew" I said. "I love you too Daddy."

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