Mothers' Experience of Parenting with a Former Spouse

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I complete this dissertation with a deep and satisfying sense of accomplishment, accompanied by a profound sense of gratitude and not a little relief. It has been a journey filled with life's surprises, unexpected turns, and a tremendous amount of learning and growth. But what is brilliant in its clarity is the fact that I did not get here on my own.

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Dedication

CIRCLES

The life of man is a self-evolving circle
Which, from a ring imperceptibly small,
Rushes on all sides outward to new
And larger circles and that without end.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

To Frank J.:

I thank God for sharing you with me for as long as he has, my brother, my friend, my hero. And, as one of many whose life is blessed by your presence in it, I complete this work in your honor. You have lived a life with wide and wonderful circles of unimaginable reach and profound impact; circles that, as Ralph Waldo Emerson said, will continue "without end." You have created these circles of your life with love, beauty, truth, integrity…and sheer brilliance.   When it's time for heaven to claim you, please journey with the absolute certainty that you leave the world a better place than it was before you lived in it, and all of us richer than we were before knowing you or being loved by you. May I have the grace and wisdom to try to follow your lead.

Abstract

Continuing to share parenting with a former spouse following divorce, commonly referred to as coparenting, is rapidly becoming a favored custody choice of many families, professionals, and family court systems, affecting the lives of millions of individuals each year. In spite of its rapidly growing popularity, there is still much we do not understand about the nature of the coparenting relationship at the heart of this new parenting arrangement. What we do know is that developing a coparenting relationship that is healthy for all family members is difficult has a profound influence on the well-being of mothers, fathers, and children of divorce, but especially on the well-being of children. Among the many ways a child may be impacted negatively by divorce, research has shown that a negative and conflicted coparent relationship stands alone in its power to do harm to children. It is considered to be the root cause of many adjustment difficulties, producing predictable, direct, and far-reaching consequences throughout the remainder of children's lives. By contrast, a cooperative and supportive relationship between former spouses can minimize divorce's potential harm to children.

Using Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological approach, this study seeks to ground our knowledge about parenting with a former spouse in a deep understanding of the experiential meaning of this phenomenon for mothers in their everyday lived worlds. The study explores the experiences of nine mothers who are coparenting with their former spouses. In-depth interviews were designed to draw out pre-reflective descriptions of their everyday experiences with regard to this phenomenon. Analysis of the mothers' naïve descriptions incorporated Giorgi's phenomenological principles, his procedural guidelines, and an incorporated phenomenological research process of my own that evolved during the analysis. The analysis revealed an everyday world characterized by inescapable and relentless threats to mothers' emotional and psychological equilibrium stemming directly from their experiences as coparents. In addition to revealing this unity of experience, the analysis also uncovered individual constituents of meaning and explored each of them at length. The meanings discovered in this study can benefit parents, professionals, and indeed all who are interested in the well-being of children and parents.

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*Phenomenology asks for the nature of a phenomenon, for that which makes a some-"thing" what it **is** – and without which it could not be what it is* (Husserl, 1982, p. 208)

MOTHERS' EXPERIENCE OF PARENTING WITH A FORMER SPOUSE

The current study is a phenomenological exploration of a particular aspect of divorce for mothers, i.e. their lived experience of parenting with a former spouse. The goal of the study is to describe the essential meaning structure of this experience for mothers. The central research question is:

What is mothers' experience of parenting with a former spouse?

As with all phenomenological research, the most fundamental purpose for such an exploration is to increase our understanding of the ways in which human beings experience their everyday world and to reaffirm our own connection to the phenomenon at hand and to the experiencing persons themselves as human beings. As we explore the meaning structure of a particular phenomenon, we "come to a fuller grasp of what it means to *be in the world*[1] as a man, a woman, a child, taking into account the sociocultural and the historical traditions that have given meaning to our ways of being in the world" (van Manen, 1997 p. 12).

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[1] This term comes from the philosopher Martin Heidegger and reminds us that as human beings we are always in the world with others and that this world cannot be separated from the self. To *be-in the world* is to *be-with others*. It describes a personal world rather than an objective world and one is always immersed in it. It cannot be otherwise. One is at all times "surrounded by its manifestations as revealed through an always pregrasping, encompassing understanding" (Palmer, 1969, p. 132).

This purpose is firmly situated within a holistic human science perspective that sees meaning as an "inherent, irreducible aspect of human experience" and believes firmly in an "irreducible interconnectedness between the individual, other people and the universe as a whole" (Dodson, 2004). By uncovering and articulating as faithfully as possible the ways in which mothers experience the complex human phenomenon of parenting with a former spouse, this study seeks first and foremost to expand and deepen our understandings of, and connections to, this phenomenon and to other beings-in-the-world. Such understandings may, in turn, benefit the participant mothers themselves, other divorced parents, educators, therapists, legal professionals, faith communities, policy makers, and indeed all who live or work with, or are concerned about, parents and children of divorce.

Traditional experimental psychological research relegates human experience to a status of "not quite acceptable" for scientific study because it cannot qualify as objective--i.e. observable, replicable and measurable--unless it is first operationalized (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 51). However, the process of operationalizing human experience depersonalizes it and creates a great distance between theory and human phenomena. Such a perspective effectively eliminates the possibility of understanding a crucial dimension of human psychological existence on a deeper level. Phenomenologists argue that the study of human experience need not ignore the issue of objectivity and in fact, should proceed objectively. However, they define objective as "infidelity to phenomena…a refusal to tell the phenomenon what it is; but a respectful listening to

what the phenomenon speaks of itself…in short, [it is] a method that remains with human experience as it is experienced" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 52) .

The phenomenological method used in the current study seeks then to remain with the mothers' experience of parenting with a former spouse *as it is experienced* by them. As Morse (1994) has written in the dedication page of his book on qualitative research methods, we might say to the mothers who participated in this study, "We are trying to find ways to communicate what you know so that others may understand" (Morse, 1994).

Rationale

The divorce context

It is not the intention of this study to incorporate a comprehensive analysis of the divorce literature in general, the divorce literature related to child outcomes, or even the literature related to parental conflict after divorce. However, some key points related to the divorce context, in which the present study was undertaken, are believed to be essential to the reader's understanding.

Throughout the western world, divorce rates have escalated dramatically in recent decades, but nowhere have they reached the rates seen in the United States. Far from the approximately 5% of marriages that ended in divorce in the 19th century and the early 20th century, statistics show that somewhere between 40% to 50% of all first marriages can be expected to end in divorce (Amato, 2000; Bergman, 2002; Forste & Heaton, 2004; University of Kansas Children's Center, 2003). This projection reflects both the highest

rate of divorce (50%) that occurred during the 1975-1980 period and the gradual decrease to the most recent rate of 40%; a decrease that demographers warn us may or may not be sustained.

Of particular interest for this study are the divorce rates and related statistics for families with children. The following statistics about children and divorce have been culled from a variety of sources, including Amato (1997), Bergman (2002), Case, Lin, and McLanahan (2003), Hughes (1996b), Marriages and divorces (2004), Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service (2003), Plateris and National Center for Health Statistics (U.S.) (1979), and U.S. Census Bureau (1992).

- Approximately two-thirds of all divorces involve children, and approximately half of all children can expect to experience a divorce during their childhood.

- As of 1997, over a million children per year can be expected to experience divorce for the first time.

- Between 1970 and 1996, the proportion of minor children living with only one parent grew from 12 percent to 28 percent. This means that at any given time, approximately 20 million children under the age of 18 are living with only one parent. (Children who have experienced divorce but are living with two parents in stepfamilies are not reflected in this number.)

- Between 1970 and 2000, the proportion of children living with two parents decreased from 87% to 68%. (Children who have experienced divorce but are living with two parents in stepfamilies are reflected in this number.)

- Every 13 seconds a divorce is finalized in this country.

- One out of every four students in our nation's K-12 schools lives in a household affected by divorce.

- The average cost of divorce in 1997 was $15,000.

- In 1961, there were an estimated four million women in the U.S. raising children on their own, including both widows and divorcees. By 2000, that number had more than quadrupled to 16 million.

It is clear that divorce has become a common human experience within our families and our society. The mere fact of its astonishing prevalence in our society could justify further exploration of some aspect of this broad phenomenon. However, these numbers are just the beginning of the story. In spite of decades of intense examination and thousands of studies, there is still no clear consensus as to whether or not parents and children are better off now as compared with the past when divorce was more frowned upon and more difficult to obtain. Even researchers who have spent their entire careers studying divorce and its impacts on children are not in agreement regarding how to interpret their findings. Twenty-five years ago, there were researchers who supported the view that divorce had as many positive outcomes for parents and children as negative ones and should be viewed as a vehicle for positive and innovative growth and change rather than merely as a cause of loss and trauma. Simultaneously, other researchers supported the view that, for children at least, divorce could never be viewed as anything other than "a shattering and crippling experience from which they [the children] will never fully recover" (Galper, 1978, p. 26). The same diversity of professional opinion exists today,

and the extent of the debate is reflected in a recent news media article which frames the

issue in the following way:

> The divorce wars are heating up. Not those between divorcing parents, but among those who study what happens to the children. With more than 1 million children yearly experiencing the divorce of parents, the futures of these youngsters are of concern from the halls of Congress debating funds for marriage programs to the homes of parents. Divorcing parents are worried, often awash with guilt. And they are confused by conflicting studies that tell them different things about what to expect for their children. (Peterson, 2003)

Regardless of the conclusion one might reach about the ultimate benefits or harms

to individuals and society, there are several points about which there seem to be universal

agreement. The first is that the experience of divorce, regardless of the reasons and the

circumstances, and regardless of any ultimate benefits that might accrue, is usually

associated with profound emotional, social, psychological, practical, and frequently

economic stresses and turmoil for both the parents and the children involved, but

particularly for the children (Ahrons, 2001; Ahrons & Rodgers, 1987; Amato, 2000;

Bienenfeld, 1995; Hetherington, 1989; Hetherington & Blechman, 1996; Hetherington &

Kelly, 2002; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Wallerstein, Lewis

& Blakeslee, 2000).

The second point of agreement is that virtually every aspect of our society has been

impacted in powerful ways by the prevalence of divorce and the resulting shift away from

our traditional family structure. The pervasive impacts have generated great debate and

frequent change in our neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, marketplaces, courts, social

service agencies, communities of faith, professional training institutions, and governing

bodies at all levels. The change has encompassed attitudes, policies, practices, values, and

norms in all of these arenas. It has been characterized by an inexorable demand for new

information and services and a proliferation of responses to meet these demands. It has

spawned an entire industry encompassing educational programs, mediation services,

counseling specializations, legal specializations, childcare innovations, school innovations,

food preparation and packaging alternatives, web calendaring systems, and many more

such responses. An indication of the extent of public demand for information and

resources related to divorce and coparenting can be seen in the data tables in Appendix

A1. Similarly, the data table in Appendix A2 provides an indication of the degree of

scholarly interest in divorce and coparenting.

  A final point of agreement is that the research of recent decades, in spite of not yet

having achieved a consensus about the causes and effects of divorce, *has* in fact become

more nuanced and refined, produced new understandings, and is continuing to teach us

more about the phenomenon of divorce and its impacts on all involved.

  Marshall and Rossman (1989) state that to be worthy of continued study, a

phenomenon must promise (a) a contribution to knowledge, (b) usefulness and meaning

for relevant policy arenas, and (c) usefulness for practitioners. According to these criteria,

the far-reaching impact of divorce in the United States today, combined with the fact that

there are still some fundamental questions about its impact that are yet unanswered, easily

qualifies it as a phenomenon worthy of continued study.

The coparenting relationship

  Over the past twenty-five years, researchers have examined the relationship

between divorce and dozens, if not hundreds, of negative child outcomes, including

such wide ranging outcomes as poor school performance; troubled sibling relationships; increased incidence of delinquency, incarceration, drug use, and teen pregnancies; poor parent-child relationships; decreased physical and emotional well-being across the life-span; difficulty establishing long-lasting marital relationships; lower socioeconomic attainment; and increased incidence of morbidity, whether from illness or suicide. The discovery of positive correlations between divorce and particular negative outcomes for children has in turn given rise to numerous research study replications, use of alternative research methodologies to study the same factors from a different perspective, and a new category of research studies that attempts to explain the reason behind the correlation. While a variety of causative factors have been suggested or indicated, the one that appears to be the most uncontested in its power to do harm to children is that of parental conflict.

An African proverb states that "When two elephants fight, the grass gets trampled," suggesting that only so much trampling can occur before the grass no longer grows. This could well be an appropriate metaphor for the conflict that is frequently seen between former spouses during and after divorce and the resulting negative consequences for children. Many speculate that it is parental conflict itself, *rather than* the break-up of the marriage per se, that is a primary cause of the many adjustment problems experienced by children (Amato, 1993; Amato & Keith, 1991; Cherlin, Chase-Lansdale & McRae, 1998; Emery, 1999; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Simons, 1999). It follows then, that parental conflict *prior to* divorce may be just as significant in terms of child well-being as parental conflict *during* and *after* divorce. It also

follows that conflict-ridden marriages that end in divorce are likely to generate conflict-ridden parental relationships after divorce. In fact, both of these arguments appear to be supported by the literature (Ahrons, 2004; Amato & Keith, 1991; Amato, Loomis & Booth, 1995; Cherlin et al., 1998; Emery, 1999; Grych & Fincham, 2001; Johnston, 1994; Long, Slater, Forehand & Fauber, 1988; Shifflett & Cummings, 1999; Simons, 1999), indicating that a consensus may be emerging that supports a perspective that it is the nature and extent of the cumulative parental conflict before, during and after divorce that is most responsible for poor outcomes for children of divorce. Furthermore, when comparing the relative impacts on children of custody schedules, shared parental responsibilities, and the quality of the coparent relationships, Whiteside and Becker (2000) found that "Neither the shape of the caregiving network nor the time-sharing schedule has the most potent effects on [young]children's development. Rather, the quality of the parental alliance and the parents' warmth, sensitivity, good adjustment, and discipline style make the difference between a well-adjusted child and one who is angry, scared, or limited in cognitive and social skills" (p.24).

Rather than suggesting that the future is bleak for children of divorce, this emerging consensus regarding parental conflict and its destructiveness to children's well-being actually carries with it seeds of hope and empowerment. By clearly identifying parent behaviors and patterns that consistently lead to negative outcomes for children, it begins to provide direction to parents and professionals seeking to minimize harm to children during divorce. It makes it possible to focus on constructive and healthy ways for parents to manage interpersonal conflict following separation and

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divorce and provides some measure of reassurance that such efforts will have positive outcomes for our children. Too often, factors that contribute to the disintegration of marriages are beyond the control of individual parents. And for too long, nobody was clear precisely what parents could do differently that would help their children through this difficult life transition. Not only is there greater clarity now about the consequences of specific parenting behaviors and patterns, but, in theory at least, all parents has within them the potential to learn from others' experience, try to eliminate or reduce patterns of behavior that harm their children, and choose parenting behaviors that are most likely to lead to a healthy adjustment and a promising future for their children.

In response to the growing body of knowledge about desired parent behavior following divorce, a rapidly growing number of educational intervention programs began to evolve in the 1990s to help parents understand the serious impacts of coparental conflict on their children's well-being and to assist them in developing more enlightened ways of interacting with their former spouse. Some constructive reviews of these programs can be found in Grych and Fincham (2001), Centre for Community Child Health (2004), Buehler, Betz, Ryan, Legg, and Trotter (1992), Geasler & Blaisure (1998), Kramer and Washo (1993), McKenry, Clark and Stone (1999), North Dakota State University Extension Service (1996), Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service (2003), Schools for Splitsville (1995), and United States Department of Health and Human Services (2003).

As we learn more about parent behaviors that can facilitate or hinder children's development, and learn more about effective ways of educating parents about these behaviors, we are still left with the following question: Why is it still so difficult for parents who have divorced to create a successful coparenting relationship? While there is no expectation of a simple answer to this question, it is the underlying question that stimulated the current study. The way in which parents handle their relationship with former spouses is arguably the most central factor of all for their own well-being and that of their children. And yet there are no studies aimed at developing a deep understanding of this complex human phenomenon. What is it like to experience this phenomenon on a daily basis? What meanings does it hold for the parents in their everyday world? How does it affect their lives--both internally and externally? What does it mean to be a divorced parent sharing parenting roles and responsibilities with a former spouse? This kind of foundational knowledge about the experience of parenting with a former spouse is crucial if, through individual and collective efforts, we want to transform the legacy of harm that has unwittingly been wrought upon children of divorce by their parents into a legacy of informed parenting behaviors that contribute positively to the health and well-being of these same children.

The purpose and hope of the current study is to discover and faithfully describe the meaning of parenting with a former spouse for mothers. ***What is it like to be-in-the-world as a mother who is parenting with a former spouse?*** It is expected that uncovering the experiential meanings of this phenomenon for mothers will generate new insights and expand the existing knowledge base regarding coparenting relationships so that parents,

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educators, counselors, policy makers, and others interested in the well-being of children and parents can draw upon such knowledge to help create healthy environments for all concerned.

The choice of descriptive phenomenology

Descriptive phenomenology is a type of human science research that seeks to answer *meaning* questions, that is, it explores the meaning and significance of certain phenomena and attempts to describe how individuals *experience* and *understand* those phenomena. It seeks to develop a deep understanding of the ways in which people subjectively experience their social world (Bredo & Feinberg, 1982; Hultgren, 1989). In turn, this allows the researcher to "become better able to reflect upon and understand the meaning of our own experiences [by] understanding the breadth and depth of other's experiences" (McClelland, 1995). As a parent, a divorced parent, and a parent educator, there is a desire to better understand my own experiences as well as those of others.

In her ground-breaking work that provided important direction for the future of family education research and practice, Marjorie Brown described this kind of research as that which allows us to "understand and illuminate the social realities [individuals] have created through their lived experiences" and, further, it allows us to develop--both individually and collectively--"a better understanding and agreement regarding the conduct of life as individuals and as social beings" (Brown, 1989, p. 280). What more appropriate arena in which to seek this understanding and agreement than in the difficult dynamics of parenting with a former spouse?

In describing the way individuals experience and understand their world as real and meaningful, phenomenological research makes no attempt to predict or prescribe. Rather, it merely probes to uncover the meaning of phenomena in the everyday world. While it is hoped that this study will produce knowledge that can be beneficial to both parents and children, there is no attempt to predict research outcomes. It is sufficient that a deep exploration of the phenomenon of parenting with a former spouse during divorce will provide a greater understanding of this experience for the participants, the researcher and interested readers.

Finally, a standard for human science research, including phenomenology, is that it be relevant in "helping us to preserve or repair communication" (Brown, 1989, p. 280). Certainly, the broad phenomenon of divorce, with its complex and widespread impact on individuals, families and society, meets this standard. Within this broad phenomenon, the phenomenon of parenting with a former spouse also meets this standard. Understanding this latter phenomenon better can only help us in the "conduct of life" and the preservation and repair of communication--for parents and others who are interested in the well-being of families and children.

Underlying Assumptions and Beliefs

As stated above, the research question selected for the current study was based on a perceived gap in knowledge about the experience of parenting with a former spouse. However, as is always the case, my own personal beliefs, values, and assumptions also contributed to the selection of the research question. It is important at this point to articulate those assumptions and beliefs.

Perhaps the most critical assumption underlying the current study is that *children* experiencing divorce would be the greatest beneficiaries of the knowledge gained. Even though the study clearly has the potential to benefit parents as well as children, children caught in situations that could generate a poem as painful and poignant as the one below would be expected to be the ultimate beneficiaries of the current study. The author of the following poem was a 10-year old girl whose parents had divorced when she was three.

> *I am bait*
> *Between two hungry eagles*
> *That claim I am their supper.*
> *Who is right?*
> *Who knows?*
> *Their reasons are equal.*
> *But judgments and intentions vary.*
> *I hope that I am the right bird's supper.*
>   (Alexander, 1994)

A better understanding of the meaning of coparenting experiences in the lives of mothers could lead to new educational interventions and parenting practices which would foster positive, healthy development for children during this difficult experience in their lives instead of placing them in the impossible situation described in the poem.

Several assumptions are based on the personal belief that divorce is an individual and family *process*, rather than a singular legal event or an experience that takes place at a certain point in time or within a prescribed amount of time. The language used throughout this study reflects this belief that divorce is a process, including a focus on mothers' experiences *during* divorce rather than *after* divorce. Like any other process, the divorce process takes place over a period of time and this period of time is open-ended in duration. Both the manner and pace of its development are dependent upon the individual mother

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and circumstances involved. Individuals and families may or may not achieve successful completion or resolution of this process. Attendant assumptions based upon this belief include the following: (a) coparenting behavior at any stage of the divorce process can have significant impact on a mother's own well-being as well as on her children's well-being and that of their father, (b) coparenting itself is a process that evolves over time, (c) there are a variety of developmental processes (e.g., emotional, psychological, social) that are impacted for all individuals involved in divorce, and each of these may follow a distinctly different path and pace from each other, and (d) mothers involved in the current study may be at any point in the divorce process *and* in the related developmental processes. Where they are will either not be known or will become known as the interviews proceed.

Another personal assumption is that almost all parents share a common characteristic of genuinely wanting to be the best parent possible. For the mothers in the current study, this trait would be likely to increase their openness and motivation to participate. For parents not in the study, but who might benefit from the knowledge gained, this same trait would be likely to increase their receptivity to such knowledge.

An assumption closely related to the above is that during divorce, in spite of wanting to be the best parent possible, parents often behave in ways that cause pain and emotional or psychological damage to themselves and/or their children for reasons that may or may not be known to them. But what do we really know about why it is so difficult for divorced parents to choose behaviors that they know are healthier for themselves and their children? There is some research that suggests these destructive

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parent behaviors seen in families of divorce may reflect past familial conflicts that are being brought into the divorce, old behavior patterns that are locked in and resistant to change, and/or personal hurts and anger that envelope a mother or father and prevent constructive movement forward. However, that still leaves far more questions that have *not* been asked and answered about coparenting behavior that, if explored, might generate invaluable knowledge that will help parents behave in healthier ways. One such question is the fundamental one asked in the current study: What *is* mothers' experience of parenting with a former spouse? This phenomenological question poses no spoken or unspoken hypotheses about mothers' experience of parenting with a former spouse, but seeks merely to discover the meaning of this lived experience for mothers. What does it mean to *live* this experience in one's everyday world?

A final assumption guiding this study is that engaging in coparenting that is healthy for all family members is *difficult* and *intense* and frequently *not achieved*. The challenging nature of coparenting makes sense if viewed from the context of the overall divorce process, which is typically characterized by profound emotional, social, psychological, practical stresses and turmoil. However, I also believe that, even more significantly, there have been few voices of clarity and wisdom available from or for parents attempting to achieve healthy parenting with a former spouse. It is hoped that this study, with its potential to provide a deep understanding of the experience of coparenting, will serve to guide future efforts to help parents be more effective in this challenging role.

I watch with considerable alarm the pressures on the members of families experiencing separation and divorce. Our society is complex and subject to heavy stress. The nuclear family tries, against mounting odds, to survive in relative isolation. But it is collapsing under the strain. One out of every three marriages ends in divorce; second divorces are becoming more numerous; other marriages deteriorate into chronic unhappiness. So new approaches are needed to family, marital, even post-marital relations. "Co-Parenting" is a pioneer effort in the right direction.[2]

LITERATURE REVIEW: THE COPARENTING CONTEXT

Introduction

With few clues to indicate otherwise, the quote introducing this chapter could have been written about American families today in 2005. In fact, this description was written by psychotherapist Clorinda Margolis in the foreword to Miriam Galper's book *Co-parenting: Sharing your child equally* which was published in 1978. The concept of sharing parenting with a former spouse following divorce was indeed pioneering at the time, and Galper coined the term *coparent* to describe this radical new concept. At that time, very little was known about the effects of single-parent custody on either the children or the parents. Even research focused on the impact of traditional custody arrangements was minimal at that time and essentially nothing had been done to explore the potential for alternative parenting arrangements following divorce.

From a present day perspective, it is difficult to conceive of coparenting as a radical idea, but being reminded that this viewpoint prevailed in such recent historical

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[2] Clorinda Margolis as quoted in Galper, 1978, p. vii.

times speaks to how dramatically our culture has changed since then. During the intervening decades there have been numerous studies focused on gaining a deeper understanding of this human phenomenon and literally millions of families who have experienced this phenomenon in their own lives. Although there is still much to learn about how and why some coparent relationships succeed and others fail, we have nonetheless learned a great deal about this relatively new social institution in the decades since Miriam Galper's book was first published. Among other things, we now accept without question that the coparenting relationship can have a profound influence on the well-being of mothers, fathers, and children of divorce, but especially on the well-being of the children.

It is not the intent of this chapter, or of this study, to describe the universe of coparenting characteristics and behaviors that have been shown to have either positive or negative impacts on family members. Instead, the chapter is oriented toward providing a sufficient grounding in the conceptual tenets and practical challenges of coparenting in order to facilitate an understanding of the current study. This will be achieved by examining the origins and history of coparenting and then reviewing key developments in knowledge and understanding about coparenting that have occurred since that time. Within this structure, issues and findings of particular significance to the current study will be considered, with significance being determined by the promise of revealing, or suggesting, experiences and understandings of divorce and coparenting that are particularly relevant for mothers.

Essential information about divorce and coparenting that was presented in the first chapter and upon which the current chapter will build includes:

- Although there are a multiplicity of perspectives about everything related to divorce, and there are still no clear answers to many questions about divorce, there are three points of agreement that cross all perspectives. The three points of agreement are: divorce is associated with profound stress and turmoil for all involved; the prevalence of divorce in our society has had a profound influence on all aspects of our public lives; our research and knowledge about divorce is becoming increasingly refined even though there are answers we still don't have.

- The nature of the coparenting relationship may be the most significant factor of all in determining children's adjustment to divorce. Among the ways a child may be impacted negatively by divorce, conflict between coparents stands alone in its power to do harm to a child. It is considered to be the root cause for many adjustment difficulties in children, regardless of whether it occurs before, during, or after the divorce itself. By contrast, a cooperative and supportive relationship between former spouses can minimize the potential harm to children.

- The knowledge we have accumulated about the consequences of coparenting conflict to children's health and well-being tells us they are predictable, direct,

and far-reaching. The consequences are not only manifested during the actual marital transition and subsequent formation of two households, but throughout the remainder of children's lives.

- In response to a growing body of knowledge about desirable coparent behavior, along with a growing appreciation of the harm that can be done to children, new interventions continue to be developed, refined, and implemented. This includes a number of parent education / divorce education programs for divorced or divorcing parents.

Clearly, any new insights that be gleaned from the literature that might help mothers be more effective in their coparenting role will benefit the mothers themselves, their children, their former spouses, and ultimately our society as a whole.

Naming the Relationship

When I initiated the current study, it was my intention to use the term *parallel parenting* to describe the shared parenting roles in which mothers were engaged. Although I was quite familiar with the term *coparenting*, it held for me a strong connotation of cooperation and partnership that may or may not actually exist in the relationship. I selected the term *parallel* because, even though it wasn't ideal, it met the criteria I had established better than other terms did. I was seeking a word that acknowledged that both the mother and the father were actively involved in parenting their children during divorce, but avoided any implication of a mutually cooperative

relationship *or* an adversarial relationship. I wanted to be open to discovering the meaning

of each mother's unique experience without subtly insinuating any particular expectation

by virtue of the label I used during the interviews. Ultimately, I did not use a label for the

relationship while interviewing the mothers, but rather referred to their relationship and

involvement with their former spouses as "parenting with your former spouse." It was

only when I started my writing that I began to use the term *coparent.* In part, the decision

was an attempt at simplicity in that the term *coparent* was one that many were familiar

with that would immediately have meaning. But in part, the decision was also a reflection

of my own attitude having changed. Now, rather than objecting to the term because it

might imply a level of cooperation that did not exist, I could now view that same aspect as

an opportunity to capture a vision and a hope, regardless of whether or not that vision was

always achieved.

    I have commented on my caution about the choice of language because I believe it

is important that we develop the appropriate vocabulary for ourselves and our children to

describe the altered family structures, roles, and daily experiences brought about by

divorce, and I do not believe we have yet achieved that goal. Not only do we need

language that can be universally understood, but we need language that is minimizes

unintended negative consequences such as offending or alienating particular groups of

individuals, especially parents. For example, some individuals and groups advocate

strongly for coparenting as a viable alternative to sole custody because their world view is

oriented toward child and parent *rights*. The orienting perspective of this group is that

coparenting is the most *fair* custody and parenting solution and the only one that addresses

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a *parent's right* to continue parenting after divorce and a *child's right* to maintain a close and involved relationship with both parents following divorce. Although there is certainly diversity of representation within this group, it tends to be dominated by those who advocate for father's rights and seek to create change in what they see as a system with a historical bias against fathers. In contrast, some individuals and groups advocate for policies and practices that focus on *parental responsibilities* and *children's needs*. This latter group is more likely to view coparenting as one among several possible custody and parenting arrangements and seek solutions that best reflect the uniqueness of individual circumstances. Because the welfare of *all* children of divorce is at stake, it will serve nobody's best interest to adopt terminology that alienates entire segments of the divorced parent population because its overtones or insinuations are offensive.

Those who would find themselves sympathetic to either of the orientations described in the above example would do so for any number of reasons. But it is worth noting that the contrast between an orientation toward *rights* and an orientation toward *responsibilities* and *needs* essentially duplicates one of the distinctions described by Carol Gilligan in her ground-breaking work that examined differences in the fundamental tasks of values development for females as compared to males (Gilligan, 1982). Although no simplistic explanation such as gender would account for such choices being made, I did search for, and failed to find, literature that might have explored the possible connection between these distinctions and the preferences expressed by mothers and fathers for specific parenting arrangements following divorce.

Moving back to the terminology of coparenting found in the literature, one finds variation in both the words that people have used to describe coparenting and variation in the meaning attached to the words. Consequently, it is incumbent upon all of us to be clear about the definitions being used by various researchers, educators, court systems, and parents themselves before we try to make direct comparisons. The term co-parenting was coined by Galper (1978) and began to be used widely after publication of her pioneering book that was referenced at the beginning of this chapter. Since that time, the terms most commonly used in the literature to identify the phenomenon of sharing parenting with a former spouse include *coparenting, co-parenting, parallel parenting, parenting partnership, dual parenting, shared custody,* and *joint custody.* Although it does not appear to have become popular, the term *parenting coalition* has also been used to indicate what is hoped for in a shared parenting arrangement. Another term, *parenting plan,* has become widely used for describing the detailed specification of how the sharing of parenting will actually take place.

The variation in terminology appears to reflect the complexity of the relationship, the multiple perspectives on what the relationship *ought* to be, and the desire to find labels that appropriately reflect one's definition of coparenting and one's beliefs about coparenting. Interestingly, when Galper's book was published, few had even begun to conceive of such a parenting arrangement. But among those who were exploring the concept and among those who were living the relationship, there was already variation in what it was being called. Understanding the challenge this presents to some, and the motivation to find the *right* terminology, might become more clear by considering the

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following variation in a single dictionary's definition[3] of the root word of coparenting, i.e. *co-*:

1. Together; joint; jointly; mutually

2. Partner or associate

3. To the same extent or degree

Each of the above definitions carries with it distinctly different implications. If one were to imagine coparenting as a concept based upon each one of these in turn, the significance of the varying implications would become immediately obvious and the word coparenting would immediately take on multiple meanings. In the same fashion, same or similar words used by parents, researchers, court systems, and researchers have held different meanings for those using them. Arendell (1996) has closely examined this variation in meaning and provides a valuable summary of how others describe coparenting and the general parenting context in which coparenting occurs. For example, one author cited by Arendell describes the adult roles in a family as being those of parenting, partnering, and providing. Another describes parenting under any circumstances to be "the art of overseeing a child's growth and development." The word *coparenting* has been used to indicate: (a) the presence of a father in the life of children and mothers, regardless of the level of involvement which can range from minimal to extensive, (b) a sharing of roles and responsibilities that is intentional and equitable, (c) a collaborative effort between parents who live apart, and (d) a legal arrangement. It has also been used to describe

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[3] (*Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary*, 1996)

situations where divorced parents have a tacit agreement not to interfere in each other's lives and have established totally separate and segregated lives with their children, although Arendell contends that this latter lifestyle would more appropriately be called *parallel parenting*. Maccoby, Buchanan, Mnookin, and Dornbusch (1993) have suggested that the term *parenting partnership* be used to distinguish those parents who truly are trying to collaborate and share parenting responsibilities after divorce.

Sometimes the terms *shared custody* and *joint custody* are used interchangeably with the term coparenting. But the substitution is not always an accurate reflection of the distinctions that may exist. The terms *shared custody* and *joint custody* themselves can have different meanings before one even considers whether or not they can accurately by used as a synonym for coparenting in a given situation. Many states now distinguish between *physical custody* and *legal custody*, making a determination in each divorce as to which of these two forms of custody will be shared. Physical custody refers to the home in which the child will live and shared physical custody indicates that the child is in the physical care of each parent for regular and significant periods of time. It is within the physical custody arena that day-to-day responsibilities and decisions are allocated. Legal custody refers to legal rights and responsibilities regarding major decisions and typically includes decisions regarding education, health, and religion. When divorced parents are said to be sharing custody, their actual legal status could be any combination of sole or joint physical and legal custody.

A personal perspective regarding the significance of the language chosen to describe coparenting was repeatedly reinforced during the course of carrying out this

study, from the literature review through the analysis. Although practical considerations

exert their own influence, the language chosen to label and describe coparenting, and the

struggle that precedes that choice, ultimately reflect fundamental beliefs and desires

regarding (a) what coparenting *could* be or *ought* to be, and (b) *what*, and sometimes *who*,

will be shared. Will the parents be sharing the child? If so, how does one share another

human being? Will they be sharing the child's time? The child's love and affection? The

child's loyalties? Do the parents expect to share hopes and dreams for the child? Do they

expect to share fears and worries? Will the parents share roles? Responsibilities? Duties?

Privileges? Rights? Will they be sharing the instrumental tasks of parenthood? The

social-emotional tasks? The spiritual tasks? The underlying beliefs may be conscious or

unconscious and may lead to intended or unintended consequences for the holder of the

beliefs and for others.

Prevalence of Coparenting

The first national report of custody arrangements was not published until 1995

and was based on census data from 1989 and 1990. As reported by Hughes (1996a),

there were only nineteen states that contributed to the data, which summarized custody

arrangements as: mothers, 72%; fathers, 9.6%; joint, 17.2%; and other persons, 1.2%.

However, Hughes cautions against viewing these statistics as indicative of national

trends because of the dramatically different patterns that were found in individual states

that are not revealed in the summary data. For example, fathers had been awarded

custody in only 7.7% of the court proceedings in Wisconsin, but had been awarded

custody in 12.2% of the court proceedings in New Hampshire. Particularly dramatic at

the individual state level was the difference in joint custody awards which were as low as 8.1% in Tennessee and as high as 43.3% in Montana.

There are other reasons to be cautious about interpreting the available statistics on court-awarded custody. For example, in Maccoby and Mnookin's (1992) study that followed a large sample of California families of divorce, they found that children 15 years and older were less likely to live in a joint custody arrangement, with the range being 17% for children under the age of three and only 3% for children 15 and older. They also found that children living with their fathers were more likely to be older rather than younger and that, regardless of parenting arrangements immediately following divorce, many children's custody arrangements changed over time. This was particularly true for those whose custody arrangements were more complicated.

Another reason to be cautious about interpretation of any statistics such as court awarded custody is that the appropriate legal description and status may provide little insight into the lived reality for divorced parents and children, and may in fact create a completely misleading impression. For example, a mother might be awarded sole physical and sole legal custody for reasons specific to that divorcing family, but the child's father may be heavily involved in all aspects of parenting and the coparenting relationship may be quite cooperative.

Looking beyond the statistics and even beyond how parents would describe their coparenting arrangement, Arendell (1996) also emphasizes that sharing parenting is still not a typical experience in our country, even within the context of marriage. Not only is this significant for the division of parenting tasks, but it is particularly significant in terms

of expectations regarding central roles of a mother. Arendell points in particular to the deeply entrenched view that women have a greater capacity for nurturing than do men, which he believes has contributed to gender roles within the family being slow to change. Consequently, within the context of marriage and within the context of divorce, mothers still tend to be ones expected to nurture and maintain relationships, sometimes including active facilitation of the father-child relationship.

An often overlooked factor that must be taken into consideration when interpreting statistics regarding coparenting is that of financial resources. Coparenting is a decidedly costly endeavor and families must have adequate resources to be able to choose this option. Because of the cost alone of maintaining two homes and all that is implied, it is not surprising that coparenting arrangements are most often found in well-educated middle- or upper-middle class populations (Ahrons, 1980; Emery, 1999).

With all cautions in mind, it can be said that mothers still tend to be the primary physical caretakers, both in terms of legal status conferred upon them and in terms of everyday living, including when there is a joint custody arrangement. And while the level of sole father custody is not increasing, the level of joint custody is. Overall, parents are proving to be open to the idea of fathers remaining actively involved in their children's lives following divorce, and both the legal and day-to-day status of many divorced families reflects this openness. However, a strong bias still remains for mothers, rather than fathers, to be the primary caretaker for very young children.

Origins of Coparenting

In 1978, when Miriam Galper's book *Co-Parenting* was published, there were few who had any idea what that term might mean. And even fewer who were actually trying to implement such a parenting arrangement in their own lives. Her work was a direct response to the dramatic increase in the divorce rate and reflected some of the earliest efforts by professionals to examine the effects of single-parent custody on both children and parents. At that time, there had been only a small number of studies looking at traditional custody arrangements, and almost none that examined the option of sharing custody. Even though the number of studies about custody was small, it became clear that children needed a relationship with both parents if they were to thrive. It also became clear that the more divorced parents could interact positively with each other, the better the children did. Galper became one of the leading advocates for the concept of shared parenting following divorce and her book, intended to facilitate parents' ability to engage in coparenting, provided a comprehensive examination of the reasons this change was needed by families, a definition of what coparenting could and should be, a frank discussion of the potential benefits and the numerous challenges of instituting this change, and specific suggestions for *how* parents could actually develop such a relationship.

Galper and others believed that there were some fundamental problems with the way our nation was handling divorce and that some of these could be addressed by providing an opportunity, and a model, for both members of a divorcing couple to continue to parent together even after the marriage was dissolved. They believed that both the adversarial legal system and general societal expectations regarding divorce, such as who

should raise the children, were being maintained by tradition rather than being guided by a critical examination of the impact of the system on parents and children. These pioneers of coparenting believed that change was badly needed by families because the norms were simply not working. "The rules don't work. They make everyone miserable" (p. vi). It was time to re-evaluate and to develop new conceptions and possibilities.

The remainder of this section will be devoted to a relatively detailed presentation of Galper's conception of coparenting along with some key findings from her first coparenting study. This will include Galper's definition of coparenting, her vision for coparenting, her rationale for encouraging parents and professionals to consider coparenting as a viable alternative for raising children of divorce, and the key beliefs and assumptions shaping her expectations for coparenting. It will also include a description of what she believes are the key tasks, challenges, and rewards of coparenting, and a description of what she believes are the essential practical, moral, and attitudinal decisions and commitments that divorced parent must make if they hope to build and sustain a healthy and cooperative coparenting relationship. Such an examination of Galper's conception of coparenting will provide the reader with a solid grounding in what coparenting could be and, according to Galper, ought to be. It is on this foundation that all additional information will build, including information from the literature and information from the current study.

Vision for Co-Parenting

Galper's vision for coparenting is simple and straightforward and is described by her in the following way:

When parents share equally in caring for a child, even though they are separated or divorced, that child experiences his parents' love for him and does not feel abandonment. …does not equate separation/divorce of parents with being abandoned by one of them. (Galper, 1978, p. 17)

For Galper, the use of *co-* in the construction of her name for this relationship means *equally*, the third definition of *co-* presented earlier in the chapter. Although many have used or adapted her term coparenting, few have defined the sharing as equal. But the notion of sharing equally in parenting after a divorce was fundamental to Galper's conception of the ideal coparenting relationship. Broad criteria that were incorporated into her vision and that stated explicitly what was expected of each coparent included:

1. Mother and father will both remain active as parents.

2. Each parent will remain supportive of the other in the joint effort to work out the many facets of child rearing.

3. Neither parent will be alone with the responsibility of raising the children.

Beyond these broad expectations, Galper's conception of coparenting included very specific criteria which were again explicit statements of what was expected of each coparent. For example, both parents had to recognize and accept that neither one of them had *ownership* of children, in spite of implicit messages to the contrary that were widespread in our nation. Furthermore, they had to understand that their decision to coparent, and their subsequent living out of this relationship, could be a moral agreement as much or more than it was a legal agreement. An essential ingredient in Galper's conceptualization of coparenting, and perhaps *the* essential ingredient, was a certain

attitude maintained by both parents. Parents needed to recognize and accept that they were intimately connected to one another through their children, and commit to sustained respectfulness toward each other and toward each parent's relationship with their children. Willingly agreeing that neither parent had the right to make a unilateral decision to move the children to another state is but one example of the attitude of respect essential to Galper's conceptualization of coparenting. Divorced parents who made the choice to coparent also had to be willing to commit to the effort and persistence that would likely be required to maintain at least some degree of harmony in their coparenting relationship. And they had to be willing to commit to behaving in a way that built trust within the relationship.

Even during a first reading of Galper's defining criteria for coparenting it is immediately obvious why her approach is considered to incorporate practical, moral, and attitudinal expectations. As she revealed additional criteria and *how to's* with increasing levels of specificity regarding everyday behavior, each remained consistent with the fundamental beliefs driving her approach. Additional expectations for parents that she made explicit included the following:

1. Both parents will assume responsibility for a share of *all* the physical, emotional, and financial needs of their children.

2. Shared financial responsibility will reflect the relative income-earning abilities of each parent.

3. Children will spend approximately equal amounts of time with each parent. If the

time children spend with each parent is unequal, coparenting is still possible with the right attitude. For coparents with the right attitude, "a shared sense of responsibility may transcend time allotments" (p.16).

4. Both parents will be involved in the intimate daily routines of living with their children and will share equally in such parenting responsibilities as packing lunches, getting up at night with a sick child, making medical appointments, checking with the child's teacher, helping with homework, and shopping for underwear.

5. Ultimately, exact parenting responsibilities will be divided according to standards of equity that acknowledge the uniqueness of each coparenting couple.

6. All major decisions regarding the health and well-being of their children will be made jointly.

In addition to the kinds of expectations listed above, Galper repeatedly described and emphasized ways that parents were expected to interact with each other. Again, she was describing what she believed coparenting could be and ought to be, and was making explicit what that meant in terms of parent attitude and behavior. Some of her expectations regarding parents' interaction with each other included the following:

1. Parents will demonstrate trust and respect in their interactions with each other.

2. Parents will remain on good terms with each other and will have a sense of how best to communicate with each other.

3. Parents will avoid using their children to work out any struggle they might have

between them.

Galper was not unrealistic about the challenges of creating and sustaining a coparenting relationship that achieved these expectations. She was quite direct in discussing the everyday moments when it would be extremely difficult to follow through and offered many suggestions for overcoming those difficult moments. She also made clear that the achievement of some expectations would take time to develop and could not possibly happen quickly. For example, communicating effectively and harmoniously is especially difficult for most couples to do right after they have separated and it can take quite some time to develop. Galper's explicit expectation, or criterion, for parents during this time of building their communication skills was that the parents remain focused on "a sense of wanting it to be civil toward each other, especially where the children are concerned" (p. 19). Toward that end, Galper tried to provide information and suggestions that would help parents maintain an appropriate attitude, and to *know* what that attitude should reflect, even if they were not yet able to achieve the specific expectation of harmonious interaction with each other.

In combination, the various expectations outlined by Galper provided a fairly clear picture of what former spouses must do, or not do, in order to build and maintain a healthy and cooperative coparenting relationship. In the years since Galper's book was published, other researchers have gained additional insight about factors that facilitate or hinder the development of such a relationship. A summary of selected factors that have been found to be particularly important to a successful endeavor, and that

essentially add useful detail to Galper's expectations, was presented in Arendell's 1996 literature review (Arendell, 1996). His summary, combined with structural and editorial changes to increase clarity and to incorporate Galper's language of expectations, is contained in Table 1. Inserting this information in this part of the chapter alongside the description of Galper's conception of coparenting seems more useful to the reader than inserting it at a later point in the chapter. The combination of Galper's expectations, or criteria, and the more recently discovered expansions of these expectations will provide a more detailed picture of what is involved in creating a cooperative coparenting relationship that can be kept in mind as specific aspects of this relationship are then examined.

Table 1: Factors Contributing To Successful Coparenting

Factor	Specific Expectations	Principal Sources
Availability of essential resources	Flexible employment: coordinating caretaking responsibilities is greatly facilitated if one or both parents have flexibility in their work hours.	(Ahrons, 1980; Emery, 1988)
	Time resources: coparenting requires substantial amounts of time spent in coordinating activities and responsibilities across households.	
	Financial resources: coparenting is expensive, requiring two homes, additional transportation costs, and additional costs for maintaining basic clothing and personal items for children at both homes.	

Factor	Specific Expectations	Principal Sources
Ability to sustain motivation to respond to time and energy demands	Logistics and planning: logistical and planning efforts that are essential to coparenting are extensive and demanding.	(Ahrons & Rodgers, 1987; Arendell, 1996; Dozier, Sollie, Stack & Smith, 1993; Maccoby, Depner & Mnookin, 1990)
	Cooperative relationship: coparents need to develop and sustain a cooperative and collaborative relationship.	
	Friendly interaction: coparents need to maintain friendly interaction that allows for communication and negotiation about caretaking and logistical issues.	
	Flexible parenting plan: coparents need to develop a parenting plan that is predictable but is also flexible enough to be adjusted to respond to circumstances that arise.	
Commitment to essential planning	Regular meetings with former spouse: coparents must meet regularly to review and plan time sharing and responsibility allocations. Scheduling is key to success! Requires willingness to be flexible when needed.	(Arendell, 1996)
	Maintain direct contact: coparents must be diligent abut maintaining direct contact with each other and not using their children as intermediaries.	
	Decisions regarding children's belongings: coparents must determine what items need to be available to children in each home (bedroom furniture, clothing, toys) and what items can be shared between homes and transferred as needed (bicycles, skis)	

Factor	Specific Expectations	Principal Sources
Commitment to communication & conflict avoidance	Open and honest communication: coparents must recognize this as essential to workability of shared parenting	(Arendell, 1996; Emery, 1988; Maccoby et al., 1990; Mnookin, Maccoby, Albiston & Depner, 1990)
	Appropriate attitude: coparents must maintain an attitude that keeps the children's well-being as the priority focus. This will help reduce conflict between coparents.	
	Dialogue and communication: the amount of time and energy devoted to ongoing dialogue can be extensive and can be much more than was needed when married.	
	High level of commitment: coparents must demonstrate to each other, and be able to count on from each other, a high level of commitment to cooperative communication.	
	Maintain respectful interaction and role distinctions: coparents must maintain respectful interaction with each other and distinguish their personal feelings and needs from the parenting role the share, thereby allowing them to maintain a focus on the needs of the children.	
Parental satisfaction	Voluntary commitment: coparents voluntarily commit to maintaining shared parenting and achieve satisfaction by maintaining that commitment.	(Ahrons & Rodgers, 1987, 1989; Emery, 1988)
	Belief in benefit to children: coparents maintain an enduring shared parenting relationship because of their belief in the benefit to their children.	

Unique Demands of Co-parenting Relationship

Galper devoted a substantial amount of space in her book to the unique challenges of trying to build a coparenting relationship with your former spouse while at the same time trying to dissolve what remains of the spousal relationship. She pointed out the contradictions that were inherent in striving for a fairly close relationship with their former spouse as a coparent, while also feeling a strong emotional need to establish distance between them. However, she encouraged parents not to give up and assured them that it was in fact possible to establish a coparenting relationship with their former spouse even with this contradiction taking place. She described the uniqueness of their situation in the following way:

> I have referred to the delicacy in a relationship between two people who are no longer married to each other but who are involved with each other through their commitment to co-parenting. The delicacy exists because it is difficult to give each other support as parents *and* at the same time withdraw from each other's emotional lives. It is easy to fall back to the patterns that used to be destructive in your relationship, the ones that brought you no pleasure and much guilt, or hurt, or whatever it was that didn't feel good. You will get angry at each other in the same way you used to, and you will feel loving toward each other in the same way you used to. It takes time to break habits and for you to establish new patterns of interacting. For this is what your relationship with your ex-spouse is about now--building on what was good and decent in your past relationship while creating new forms of communicating as you co-parent. (p. 55)

Galper warns parents that they will also experience other difficulties because of trying to simultaneously end a marriage relationship and build a coparent relationship. She tells them to expect to want to pull away from their former spouse, to have an opportunity to mourn, to begin to forge a new identity. But they will also be trying to develop a cooperative, or at least civil, relationship as a coparent at the same time. There are times

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they will feel jealous, or resentful. There are times they will feel competitive. She

reassures them that they can still coparent through all of these emotions, that it is possible

to communicate with and cooperate with each other just enough to handle the basic tasks.

She also reassures them that it is not uncommon to be extremely angry with their former

spouse and still manage to coparent together. Once again, it comes back to attitude and

commitment, plus some creative thinking about what it will take to make it work for their

individual needs. The bottom line according to Galper, and one that takes us straight back

to her vision for coparenting, is to "…maintain a relationship that not only allows you,

but encourages and supports you, to be the best parents you can be to your child" (p.

61).

Although Galper is genuinely encouraging to divorcing parents who want to

develop a coparenting relationship, she also strives to help them be realistic what it will

involve, and equally realistic about their own capabilities. She cautions them to be clear

about the challenges of coparenting as well as the benefit, and to be honest with

themselves about their own limitations. She reminds them that success requires a

sincerity of effort and on ongoing openness to the tremendous time and energy it will

take to build the relationship, and acknowledges that non everyone will be able to meet

these expectations. She advises them in a non-judgmental way "If you don't think you

can manage these aspects, don't coparent" (p. 20). But simultaneously, she continues to

build their understanding of *how* to develop a coparenting relationship and to give them

numerous tips for overcoming fears and uncertainties or making adaptations that reflect

their unique needs. An example that she gives of an adaptation that one coparent couple

made demonstrates once again the central role of attitude. Because of their attitude and commitment to coparenting for the benefit of their children, the coparents described below were able to maintain their coparenting relationship in spite of being unable to achieve one of the basic expectations for regular communication

> On the other hand, I know of some parents who do not talk to each other regularly although they do co-parent. They do not share in discussions about the children's emotional well-being and they communicate with each other only when absolutely necessary. Their system works for them. They know themselves well enough to know that they need to stay away from each other as much as possible. They are committed to co-parenting and have not used their anger at each other in a destructive manner. (Galper, 1978, p. 20)

Galper certainly seemed aware of the contradictions like the above that existed when trying to build and sustain a coparenting relationship. On the one hand, it was an essential expectation that regular and harmonious communication occur. On the other hand, if minimizing communications was what made the relationship work for a given coparent couple, then that consideration took precedence. It is my belief that the contradictions reflect the complexity of the coparenting relationship and the uniqueness of each family. The inherent contradictions and complexities of this unique relationship have made all efforts to apply categorical thinking or universal strategies to the coparenting arrangement quite impossible. Nonetheless, for the many who navigate a path to successful coparenting, the rewards for everyone involved are great. An example of such rewards is expressed beautifully by one of the coparents interviewed by Galper.

> The good thing for me about coparenting is that I've learned that I'm not the only person who can care for the children and create love that sustains them. That, of course, is a big lesson, that whole letting-go process. And in the letting go, I have come to feel more free. I can feel really happy with the children now

without feeling burdened by all the responsibilities, because Bill and I share them. (p. 27)

Society's Reaction

In addition to helping them realistically assess their desires and abilities regarding coparenting, Galper also tried to prepare coparents for the additional challenges they would face from people outside their family. Because coparenting was so rare at the time, it required a determination that is not expected of coparents today. But in the late 1970s, most coparents encountered strong resistance from family, friends, the legal system, and their neighborhoods and communities. She warned them that others would be suspicious of the new kind of relationship they were trying to have with their former spouse, a cooperative rather than a hostile or disengaged relationship. "The prevailing stereotyped view of what ex-spouses did with each other was that they spoke only when absolutely necessary and were never friendly. Anything other than that was clearly a neurotic need to stay close to someone you obviously shouldn't feel close to anymore" (p. 53). Consequently, divorcing parents who were considering coparenting were advised to question how well they would handle being seen as unconventional, and receiving criticism instead of support. Her goal was not to discourage them, but to once again help them be realistic about their capabilities and to be prepared for what was ahead. Obviously, Galper believed it was well worth whatever challenges would be faced.

It is probable that many parents today who are engaged in what would be described as a coparenting relationship would not meet the criteria established by

Galper. This is not to say that they are any less committed to their children's well-being than the parents Galper was addressing. But for the most part, parents today who are coparenting have not had to demonstrate the level of critical thought, absolute commitment, and determination to overcome opposition that was necessary on the part of both coparents in Galper's time in order to make coparenting possible. Given that parents, the legal system, and our society as a whole have come to view coparenting as one of the parenting options that falls within the norm, there is generally speaking less for coparents today to prove or to overcome. It would seem very likely that some move into the arrangement with little reflection and little preparation.

Another aspect of society's reaction to divorce that should be referenced briefly here is the influence of the adversarial legal system on how well an individual adjusts to divorce. Galper was one of many who believed that the adversarial nature of our legal system exacerbated and intensified the conflict between former spouses and also the level of trauma experienced by divorcing couples. Many other authors over the decades have agreed with her assessment that the legal system tends to contribute heavily to the "disastrous moral and emotional consequences [of divorce] for everyone concerned" (Rose & Price-Bonham, 1973, p. 392).

Complexities of Coparenting

The first studies to examine the relationship between divorcing and divorced spouses were carried out well before the concept of coparenting had emerged in our nation's consciousness and included studies that focused exclusively or primarily on women (Bohannan, 1970a, 1970b; Goode, 1956; Ilgenfritz, 1961; Rose & Price-Bonham,

1973), as well as studies that focused equally on men and women (Hunt, 1966; Mead, 1970). This small handful of studies, carried out over a 14 year time period, began to inform us about the nature of the divorce process and the ways in which the relationship between the former spouses influenced individual adjustment to divorce. Each of them contributed important knowledge that remains as relevant today as it was then and that can help us understand mothers' experience of parenting with a former spouse. It is not intended that either divorce or divorce adjustment per se become points of focus for this chapter; only that knowledge from those arenas that is foundational in understanding the experience of coparenting be brought to the forefront. It is virtually impossible to disconnect one's experience of coparenting from one's prior marriage relationship with a former spouse and the process of that marriage relationship dissolving. Consequently, we will borrow from the divorce literature in order to increase our understanding of the complexities and demands of a coparenting relationship.

Early Research: Divorce as Process

In my Introduction chapter, I described some core beliefs and assumptions I brought to the current study, some of which bear repeating as we look at the process of divorce. In particular, I want to repeat my deeply held conviction that divorce ultimately has little to do with a legal event that takes place at a certain point in time, but is instead a complex *process* for both *individuals* and *families* that takes place over a period of time and that this period of time is open-ended in duration. I believe it to be a developmental process that, like other developmental processes, proceeds in its own unique manner, at its own unique pace. The way in which it unfolds is dependent upon

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the individual, the family, and upon specific circumstances in their lives together. Embedded in the overall process are specific developmental processes and tasks (especially emotional, psychological, and social) that also proceed in their own unique manner and at their own unique pace. One may or may not achieve successful completion or resolution of the various individual processes and tasks. Similarly, developing a coparenting relationship with a former spouse and developing a new family culture are developmental processes, and are also intricately entwined with the process of divorce.

Support for my belief about divorce being a complex process that took place over a period of time was unexpectedly found in numerous places in the literature. Perhaps the clearest description of the view held by many whose professional interests include examining the impact of divorce has been stated by McDaniel and Coleman in the conclusion of their 2003 study on women's experience of midlife divorce: "Divorce should not be conceptualized as a unified event. Instead, it is a diverse, complicated, multifaceted process that is dependent on social, psychological and contextual factors" (McDaniel & Coleman, 2003, p. 126).

Goode came to the conclusion that divorce was a multi-faceted process after his 1956 study that examined the relationship between divorcing or divorced women and their former spouses and its impact on the degree of trauma experienced by the women. His was the earliest study found that explored this relationship and even though the social context of divorce in the United States in 1956 was substantially different than it

is today, Goode's work continues to inform present-day practice and continues to be cited in the divorce literature.

While conducting his study on the degree of trauma experienced by women as a result of divorce, Goode discovered that the decision to divorce was usually a difficult and reluctant one that took an average of two years to make. Consequently, he speculated that much of the adjustment to divorce probably took place before there was an official decree. In fact, he found that the greatest amount of trauma occurred at the time of the final separation rather than during the time immediately following the final decree, with high trauma indicating poorer adjustment and low trauma indicating better adjustment. Goode also found that the degree of trauma experienced by the women in his study was positively related to the following:[4]

1. ***Having their husband be the first to suggest divorce***

2. Being given a short time for consideration of divorce

3. Having the idea of divorce come unexpectedly

4. ***Continuing to have attachment or emotional involvement with the ex-spouse after the divorce***

5. Possessing a desire to punish their former husband

6. Being ambivalent about obtaining a divorce

7. Being personally disapproving of divorce

8. ***Having divorce disapproved of by their reference groups (family and friends)***

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[4] Factors in bold will be discussed further in the text.

9. Experiencing discrimination as a divorcee

10. Coming from a rural background

11. Their former husbands having a middle or upper class occupation

Conversely, he found a high degree of adjustment and low trauma among woman who:

12. Had been the first to suggest divorce in their marriage

13. Held an attitude of indifference toward their former spouse

14. Could depend on regular child support payments

15. Had a full time job (thereby affording opportunities for meeting people)

16. Had greater opportunities to date and develop new social relations

The contrast between women's trauma and adjustment ratings when their former spouses initiated the divorce (finding #1) compared to when they initiated the divorce themselves (finding #12) was striking and would prove to be an enduring pattern that was confirmed in future studies (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989; Zimmerman, Brown & Portes, 2004). Consequently, the association between divorce initiation and psychological adjustment has been accepted as a significant factor in adjustment for almost five decades. As with any generalization about human beings and the lives they lead, there are exceptions. But in general, women who initiate their divorce adjust to it better than those whose former spouses initiate the divorce.

Goode also found a notable difference in adjustment for women who had disapproving, rather than supportive, friends and families. He discovered that the

negative impact on adjustment did not appear to come from something particular this disapproving social network might have actually said or done. Rather, it came from loss of opportunity--loss of opportunity to gain support for the new identity they were forming as a divorced woman, and loss of opportunity to meet new people, to begin dating, and to generally build a new social life. By contrast, friends and family who were accepting and who in essence reflected a woman's new self-identity back to her facilitated her adjustment substantially. They also provided her with comfortable ways to expand her social network. Later, Hunt's work reinforced the importance of this factor to women's adjustment when he discovered that both dating and taking a new job contributed heavily to positive adjustment by reinforcing women's efforts to redefine themselves as individuals rather than as someone's spouse or someone's *ex* (Hunt, 1966). Given that the opportunity to meet new people was such a key factor in women's positive adjustment, the attitude of the women's reference groups came to be understood as much more significant than originally expected. It would be interesting to know if the relative impact of this factor has changed over time along with the substantial increase in the number of women in the workforce and the potential opportunities that offers for interacting with others and meeting new people.

Goode (Goode, 1956; Hunt, 1966), and Bohannan (1970a, 1970b, 1970c) all discovered that newly divorced people, particularly women, experienced uncertainty about social expectations regarding how they should conduct their lives, and that this lack of clarity appeared to make divorce adjustment more difficult. An exception to this lack of clarity was the perception that, in spite of strong feelings ranging from bitterness to love,

divorced men and women felt "obliged by convention to behave as though they were indifferent to it all" (Goode, 1956).   Again, it would be interesting to know if uncertainty about social expectations has changed in recent decades as the number of divorced men and women in our country has increased dramatically and new social norms have come into being.

Early Research: Multiple Attachments

Each of the early researchers addressed in some way the significance of the challenge faced by divorced men and women as they try to disengage from their relationship with their former spouse, paving the way for future studies about the process of disengagement that built upon this foundation. In addition to disengaging from their former spouse, parents who want to engage in a healthy coparenting relationship must also redefine and recreate a different kind of relationship with that person. At the heart of the challenge lie the multiple forms of attachment that have developed during the marriage, involving all aspects of the person's life and being. The difficulty inherent in breaking these bonds of attachment, and the centrality of that task to one's adjustment to divorce, was described by Hunt in the following way:

> It is frequently the case that the crisis experienced by one member of the divorcing couple is prolonged by his attachment to the ex-spouse. Although the general concession that some form of ties remain between the divorced spouses, it is at the same time true that disengagement from emotional involvement with the ex-spouse is imperative if adjustment progress is to be made. (Hunt, 1966, p. 25)

Referring to the necessity of breaking bonds of attachment that are at least in part unbreakable, Hunt described marriage as "terminable and interminable." Similarly,

when Goode addressed the difficult, but necessary, task of breaking bonds of attachment, and the centrality of that task to the divorce process, he stated that "Just as the divorce process begins long before a decree is granted, so may it continue long afterward" (Goode, 1956). And Mead addressed the unbreakable aspect of the bonds that exist between former spouses by virtue of their children, stating that this creates "an irreversible, indissoluble relationship to each other" (Mead, 1970). Clearly, the bonds of attachment to a former spouse, and the ability of an individual to reduce, break, or alter them has profound implications on their adjustment to divorce. Coparents must wrestle with this considerable and daunting task while simultaneously creating some kind of alternative relationship so that they can manage to share parenting of their children.

Bohannon focused his research on developing a greater understanding of the nature of the bonds of attachment that can continue to exist between former spouses even after they are legally divorced. His research produced a model that continues to be of great value today in understanding how the resolution of social and psychological bonds with a former spouse can contribute to one's adjustment to divorce. As a reminder, coparenting did not exist yet as an alternative way to raise children after divorce, so Bohannon's research clearly could not examine this particular relationship. However, the model he developed was based on divorcing couples with young children, especially mothers, and is as applicable to those engaged in coparenting as to those who had different custody arrangements. His model has proved to be of enduring value and was the basis for a 2003

study (McDaniel & Coleman, 2003) on women's experience of divorce during the midlife years.

Bohannon identified six different types of attachment between spouses, each requiring their own "divorce." He referred to these individual processes of divorce as *stations* of divorce, with each station having its own unique task to be accomplished (Bohannan, 1970b). The stations included *emotional, legal, economic, coparental, community, and psychic* divorces. (Bohannon's use of the term coparental did not indicate a situation of shared custody, but simply the fact that each person was a living parent to the same children.) His process-focused model can help us understand the complexity of divorce as a multifaceted process that unfolds over time and helps us appreciate the powerful influence it must necessarily exert on those who are trying to build a coparenting relationship. The degree of change and loss that is part of this process prompted Hagestad and Smyer (1982) to describe it as a process of "multiple social and psychological ceasings" (McDaniel & Coleman, 2003).

Emotional Divorce

Emotional divorce refers to the deterioration of the marital relationship, a relationship unlike any other in one's life and characterized by multiple types of intimacy. This aspect of the divorce process has been studied the extensively in the years since Bohannon first presented his model and each study confirms the difficulty of the task. For some, it is a process that continues for years after a divorce. The

severing of theses ties can be extremely painful, as evidenced in this description taken

from one of Bohannon's research participants:

> [It was]…a sense of fabric, ripped, torn…The sense of continuity that can go back for generations and go forward for generations, it's like scissors cut across them…When something like this happens, your real feeling is numbness, just black reality….it's a death. I mean it's horrible, horrible bloody death of hopes and expectations and so many things that die off following this process. (p. 112)

By contrast with the example above, some divorced spouses will experience a

gradual emotional deterioration over a long period of time prior to actually getting a

divorce. These individuals may never experience a sharp or sudden loss because the

process is so gradual, accumulating slowly over time until no emotional connection

remains. Clearly, it would be easier to develop a workable coparenting relationship if

one had achieved this degree of disengagement prior to divorce.

Psychic Divorce

Bohannon's psychic divorce refers to the "separation of self from the personality

and influence of the ex-spouse" (p.60). Bohannon believes that one must redefine their

identity in order to succeed with the psychic divorce, and in the process must develop

an orientation to the future instead of the past. Most of the mothers in his study had

difficulty resolving the central task of the psychic divorce and developing autonomous

identities that were separate from their former spousal roles, regardless of how they felt

about being out of their marriages. For example, one mother placed a very high value

on marriage and found it nearly impossible to identify herself as a divorced, single

woman, saying:

> I just can't see myself as a divorced person. I never thought I'd be divorced. I don't see myself as a single person. There's no image or identity for that at all. I see myself as a married, church-going mother and caregiver of my elderly parents and it's just so disorienting not to be. (p. 120)

Another realized that her entire identity had been wrapped up in her roles as wife and mother and she was experiencing a great deal of difficulty adjusting to a more autonomous lifestyle. Hers was a very similar experience to that described by one of the mothers in Ilgenfritz's 1961 study:

> It hurts when I go out with our old friends, being with the same people, doing the same things, without my husband. The pain and loneliness of it make it almost not worth the effort I have to make to go at all. Maybe the only answer is to make new friends without the hurtful memories. (Ilgenfritz, 1961, p. 38)

Or yet another mother in Ilgenfritz's study who said "Sometimes you feel amputated. . . and you have to figure out how to see yourself as whole again"(Ilgenfritz, 1961, p. 38).

Coparental Divorce

This aspect of the divorce process requires individuals to redefine their role as parents and to find new ways to define and understand the involvement of the other parent. It requires redefining themselves as individuals engaged in raising children instead of being part of an intimate couple raising children together. According to Bohannon, the issue of child custody is the central and most difficult task of the coparental divorce.

Bohannon found a wide variation of experiences with regard to the coparental divorce, depending on a variety of factors such as who initiated the divorce, the ages of

the children, and the extent of the financial resources. Some characterized this aspect of their divorce as relatively easy while others described it as quite traumatic. In one instance, the mother's former spouse accused her of taking the children and abandoning him and threatened to take the children away if she persisted in seeking a divorce. He later tried to destroy her relationship with their children and tried numerous tactics to encourage the children to leave their mother and live with him. The coparental divorce for that mother was a long and wrenching aspect of her divorce.

Legal Divorce

The legal divorce involves the necessary activities required by our legal system and culminates with an official divorce decree. It was mentioned earlier that many believe the adversarial nature of our legal system contributes substantially to the conflict that occurs between former spouses. Bohannon found repeated evidence of this and other difficulties with the legal system that were experienced by mothers who participated in his research. One felt very wronged by her former spouse and expected a swift and smooth process of getting a divorce. She was distressed by the fact that it took what seemed like an inordinate amount of time to complete, and greatly distressed by some of the requirements of the process itself. In the end, she felt as if she had been wronged by the court system just as much by her former spouse. Another mother in Bohannon's study had a difficult time with the fact that the legal system has no room for feelings and was not interested, much less responsive, to her sense of betrayal and her desire for justice. And another mother was shocked by the change in her own

attitude and the relationship with her former spouse that came about as a direct result of their involvement with the legal system. Prior to that, they had both expected to work out the details of their divorce calmly and rationally. By the time they had spent months working with their respective lawyers and the court system in general, they were both bitter and angry and no longer willing or able to deal with each other in a calm or rational manner.

Economic Divorce

All of the mothers in Bohannon's study experienced decreased financial status as a result of divorce, a finding that has been repeatedly confirmed over the years. By itself, the decreased financial status, frequently accompanied by substantial changes in lifestyle for one or both former spouses, added significant strain to the divorce process in general, which in turn had a negative impact on the former spouse relationship. In addition, the common practice of legally awarding mothers financial support from their former spouses caused specific tension and conflict in many relationships, sometimes for extended periods of time and sometimes permanently.

Community Divorce

Community divorce refers to the impact of a person's divorce on their social world, including family, friends, coworkers, neighborhood, churches, and more. This aspect of divorce is basically defined by the way a divorced person interacts with the greater world and, even more significantly, the way the greater world interacts with the

divorced person. The ease or difficult of this aspect of divorce depends heavily upon

whether or not a person has an established and supportive post-divorce social network.

Again, Bohannon found a wide range of experiences with this aspect of divorce.

Some mothers had a supportive social network and experienced little disruption to their

various roles in the world outside of their family. Others had enormous difficulty felt as

though they had to redefine and recreate their social networks. The latter described

specific experiences such as feeling unwelcome in their church, "losing" friends that

had been mutual friends of the former couple, being treated differently at work, being

isolated in their neighborhood, and no longer being invited to a great number of events

that seemed now, from the mothers' new perspective, to focus only on couples.

Later Research: Deepening the Understandings

A great deal of research concerning the relationship between former spouses,

particularly in the context of coparenting, has been undertaken since these early studies.

The majority focus on the consequences to children when there is a positive,

cooperative coparent relationship as compared to when that relationship is negative and

characterized by conflict. But some have continued to explore the relationship itself,

separate from its impact on children. All have agreed conceptually with the early

findings presented above and have been designed to deepen those understandings. Key

contributions to the effort to deepen our understanding of this unique relationship will

now be reviewed briefly.

Expanding on Bohannon's model, Emery and Dillon (1994) discovered

additional aspects of the challenging task of disengaging from multiple attachments to

one's former spouse and developing a new coparenting relationship. They framed their exploration in the context of changing boundaries of intimacy and changing boundaries of power, both of which must be successfully renegotiated in order to achieve a harmonious coparenting relationship. Like many had done by the time Emery and Dillon did their research, they likened the divorce process to the grief process experienced in any loss, but added some dimensions that could help us understand the uniqueness of the loss associated with divorce. They developed a cyclical theory of psychological adjustment to divorce that assumes there are three dominant emotions involved in the process--love, anger, and sadness. Their findings indicate that, in the early stages of divorce, the typical pattern in which these three emotions are experienced is a predictable sequence moving from anger to sadness to love, with each emotion being felt strongly and *by itself*. First there is anger about what has happened. Then there is sadness about the loss of their marriage, their dreams, and perhaps their spouse in particular. This is followed by loving feelings stemming from happy memories, which are frequently accompanied by feelings of regret for what might have been. The cycle repeats itself until the person can simultaneously recognize and experience all three of these core emotions at one time.

Emery and Dillon's study also provided additional insight regarding the differences in experience for those who initiate the divorce compared to those who do not. However, their language to describe this role difference is that of *the leaver* and *the left*. As a point of interest, *initiator* has become the most commonly used term to describe which member of a couple first suggests or requests a divorce. But Emery and

Dillon's use of the language of *the leaver* and *the left* to indicate the same distinction conveys to me distinct overtones of emotion and loss compared to the more neutral *initiator*. Given the various findings about the significance of having been *left* instead of being the *leaver*, it may be that this language has not been adopted on a widespread basis precisely because it does convey an aspect of reality that is uncomfortably close to home for the researcher and researcher participants. While that would not present difficulty for phenomenological research, it is easy to understand how it might for empirical research that strives for neutrality in its perspective.

Emery and Dillon found that those who were left experienced the three core emotions with substantially greater intensity that those who were leavers. Furthermore, additional emotions were included in their response and the combination of core emotions and additional emotions were experienced in a pattern that proved to be unique to those who were left. They first experienced intense anger that was immediately followed by a powerful feeling of rejection. The feelings of rejection then changed to deep sadness, which were followed by feelings of hope. The feelings of hope in turn stimulated strong feelings of love that were almost immediately accompanied by feelings of deep hurt. The feelings of hurt brought back the anger and the cycle continued.

By contrast, those who were leavers experienced the three core emotions much less intensely and also experienced additional emotions that were somewhat different than the additional emotions of those who were left. Those who were leavers thus experienced a different pattern of emotions than did those who were left. The leavers

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first felt anger, which was followed immediately by feelings of guilt. The guilt

stimulated feelings of sadness which in turn stimulated feelings of responsibility. The

feelings of responsibility reminded the leavers of the love they have previously shared

with their former spouse, but this was quickly overshadowed by feelings of

righteousness, and then anger, and the beginning of the next cycle.

Overall, the dominant feeling for those who were left is rejection, while the

dominant feeling of those who were leavers is guilt. It is not uncommon for each of the

former spouses to trigger episodes of this pattern of emotion in each other. As

described by Emery and Dillon "These cycles are often triggered back and forth by the

two people with the righteousness and anger of the leaver leading to hurt feelings and

anger in the left party followed by rejection and sadness which triggers guilt in the

leaver and sadness and so forth through the cycle" (1994, p. 143). It is easy for the

former spouses to unwittingly become enmeshed in a never-ending cycle of triggering

each other's cycle of emotional reaction.

An additional aspect of the coparenting relationship examined by Emery and

Dillon is that of boundaries, particularly in terms of how they impact the cycle of

emotion just described. The renegotiation becomes much more complicated when it

also involves a transition from parenting together in one household as one family to

parenting separately in two households and as two families irrevocably connected

together by the children.   Both the intimacy boundaries and power boundaries must be

renegotiated in the transition from spouse to former spouse and if this is not done, there

is great risk of the former spouses becoming enmeshed in the emotional cycle of

reaction for an indefinite period of time. However, a successful renegotiation of intimacy and power boundaries can greatly facilitate the individual's efforts to resolve the grief process underlying this cycle of emotion. Consequently, a renegotiation of intimacy and power boundaries should be viewed as an important strategic priority in order to help reduce the frequency and intensity of the emotional cycle described above.

To aid in the negotiation of new boundaries, Emery and Dillon suggest that coparents formalize their relationship to the extent possible, creating an environment with substantially less intimacy or opportunities for intimacy. Essentially, they urge them to develop a distant and formal pattern of interaction, much like the disengaged pattern of coparenting described by Maccoby and Mnookin (1992), which many would view as less than ideal. They also urge them to develop coparenting rules that are simple, clear, and require minimal coordination. Particularly for former spouses who have a relationship characterized by conflict, they recommend that they abandon efforts to create a more friendly relationship and instead communicate less frequently and from substantial emotional distance. Like others, Emery and Dillon would hope that a positive and cooperative relationship between former spouses would be possible in a coparenting situation, but their research demonstrates vividly how coparents can inadvertently become caught up in a never-ending cycle that is unhealthy for each of them and for their children. Particularly at risk of having this happen are coparents who have a conflicted relationship. There is a remarkable consistency of reasoning reflected in Emery and Dillon's recommendations that coparents who are in conflict with each other try to reduce their communication and in Galper's earlier assessment

that a coparenting couple who needed to minimize their contact in order to maintain a coparenting relationship at all were in fact appropriately acknowledging the higher priority of finding what worked for them rather than sabotaging their own efforts by sticking to a strategy that was *supposed* to work for everyone.

Emery and Dillon's study contributes significantly to a deeper understanding of the challenges of developing a healthy coparenting relationship. In particular, their findings help us understand the different experiences of the left and the leaver and the implications that has on the subsequent relationship. Although it was not their intention, their work also provides the *how* and the *why* behind Rose and Price-Bonham's comparison of loss of spouse through death as compare to loss of a spouse through divorce. Rose and Price-Bonham contend that, in addition to the emotional and psychic trauma that accompany the loss of a spouse through death, the loss of a spouse through divorce "involves a purposeful and active rejection by another person, who, merely by living, is a daily symbol of the rejection" (Rose & Price-Bonham, 1973, p. 293).

Hagestad and Smyer (1982) developed a model of the divorce process that is conceptually consistent with other researchers' views that there are multiple processes that must first occur before one can develop a new coparenting relationship with a former spouse. Their categorical organization of these distinct processes differs from other researchers,' but otherwise their thinking is very much in agreement. Although their work preceded Emery and Dillon's, they are being presented later because I intend

to "borrow" from Emery and Dillon to help describe my understanding of Hagestad and Smyer's model.

Hagestad and Smyer's model classifies the divorce process for individuals as either being *orderly* or *disorderly*. If a divorcing individual succeeds in minimizing or breaking the social and psychological bonds of marriage before the legal separation occurs, they will likely experience an orderly divorce. On the other hand, if an individual progresses through the legal separation and divorce with the social and psychological bonds of marriage still intact and dominating the relationship, they will likely experience a disorderly divorce. Hagestad and Smyer also emphasize that, in their model, the longer the marital relationship has been in place, the greater the number of bonds that will have to be broken.

The social and psychological bonds to which Hagestad and Smyer refer are broken down in their model into three major categories. The first category, *emotional cathexis*, encompasses the emotional energy invested in the marital relationship. The second category, *attachment to the spousal role*, encompasses the emotional and psychological energy invested in the role of wife or husband. The final category, *shared routines*, encompasses the minions of tasks and activities that made up their life as a married couple. To succeed in breaking the bonds of attachment associated with emotional cathexis, one must address the multiple forms of intimacy that had previously been shared in the marriage relationship. To succeed in breaking the bonds of attachment associated with attachment to the spousal role, one must address all the elements of their self-identity that are connected to having been a husband or wife. And

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to succeed in breaking the bonds of attachment associated with shared routines, one must develop completely new life routines that range from miniscule to enormous in terms of both the actual change required and the emotional and psychological energy required to make the change.

Once again, the choice of language in this study has caught my attention. The choice of *orderly* and *disorderly* is notable to me in the images the words immediately convey in this particular context, which I will attempt to put into words. If a divorcing or divorced woman succeeds in breaking the multiple and powerful bonds of attachment to her former spouse, to her life and identity as a wife, and to the embedded daily routines of that represent her life with her former spouse, then her divorce experience will be emotionally and psychologically calm and orderly and relatively peaceful. She will have achieved the level of disengagement and emotional and psychological distance described by Emery and Dillon and will not be subject to continual and intense emotional and psychological reactions to her former spouse. But prior to achieving the dissolution of these bonds, her divorce experience will be characterized by emotional and psychological intensity and chaos as she involuntarily and repeatedly reacts to her former spouse with emotional and psychological intensity as in the cycle described by Emery and Dillon. Until she breaks the bonds of attachment to her former spouse, to her former role as a wife, and to her daily routines of life with her former spouse, her emotional and psychological life will continue to be dominated by the same cycle, allowing her few or no moments of peace and calm.

For the phenomenologist, there are no layers, there is just one layer of life as such. There, in that life is the depth of life. There is the explanation of life, insofar as life can be explained at all. For there is much that cannot be explained in life and that never has been explained. Life is definitely not a nebula, but it is certainly a mystery.[5]

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The methodological framework that guided my study of mothers' experience of parenting with a former spouse is that of descriptive phenomenology and, more specifically within that framework, the phenomenological psychological methodology developed by Amedeo Giorgi. The descriptive phenomenology approach to the study of human experience aims to describe as precisely as possible pre-reflective lived experiences in the world of everyday life, as they present themselves to consciousness. Giorgi's phenomenological psychological approach, in turn, situates that effort within the discipline of psychology.

In this chapter I will provide the reader with a sufficient explication of the essential features and concepts of Giorgi's methodology to: (a) facilitate understanding of subsequent chapters, especially my methodological implementation of Giorgi's approach which discusses element of his approach in detail, and (b) provide the scholarly community with an understanding of the theoretical basis for my method,

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[5] J.H. van den Berg as quoted in Becker (1992, p. 5)

against which they can make judgments regarding the appropriateness of this methodology for my research question and the trustworthiness of my findings. The philosophical and empirical concepts that are presented here will serve as points of reference for both the reader seeking to understand my research process, and for me as a researcher seeking to accurately explain my research process.

Husserl and the Birth of Phenomenology

It is not possible to develop an understanding of Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological research without first becoming familiarized with its origins. Broadly speaking, phenomenology simultaneously refers to a historical movement, a philosophy in the existential tradition, and a research method that exemplifies a philosophy of science (Lanigan, 1988). Although phenomenology can and does include within its realm more than one philosophical view of the world, the phenomenological philosophy upon which Giorgi's methodology is based emerged when German philosopher Edmund Husserl published *Logical Investigations* in 1900 (Husserl, 1970). In this seminal work, Husserl explained his conception of phenomenology and advocated for a rigorous phenomenological science that would allow researchers to explore and understand the meaning of "*conscious experience*--that is, the relationship between a person and the lived world (*Lebenswelt*) that he or she inhabits (*Zeitgeist*)" (Lanigan, 1988, p. 8). Specifically, Husserl advocated for a systematic research method that would begin with descriptions of human experience in the everyday lifeworld and illuminate its meaning (Dahlberg, Drew & Nystrom, 2001; Giorgi, A., 1970, 1985b).

By *lifeworld* Husserl meant the world of the natural attitude or the pre-reflective, pre-theoretical attitude that is frequently referred to as the naïve attitude. He believed that a phenomenological science would "bring to reflective awareness the nature of the events experienced in our natural attitude" (van Manen, 1997, p. 7), and would thereby reveal the meaning of these experienced events for the experiencer. It is the experiencer who is considered the expert and who informs the researcher. Even among those who differ in what they believe phenomenology is or ought to be, there is universal acceptance that the meaning of human experience, from the viewpoint of the experiencer, is the core concern. Ultimately, this serious interest in the human experiences of ordinary life that motivates phenomenology offers researchers and readers the opportunity to increase awareness of themselves and others and become "more efficient and effective participants in life" (Becker, 1992, p. 8).

Its focus on discovering the meaning of lifeworld experiences by examining pre-reflective descriptions of human experience immediately distinguished phenomenology from other research approaches.   Typically, researchers who explore human experience search for cause and effect relationships and focus on developing theories and hypothetical constructs that can then be used broadly to impose or project meaning on human experiences. Phenomenology, on the other hand, seeks only to discover and describe the essential subjective meaning of a human experience as it is lived, purely for the purpose of achieving a greater understanding. Greater understanding of specific human experiences can, in turn, lead to a greater understanding of human experience as a whole. It is a desire for this deep understanding of the experience of parenting with a

former spouse that made a phenomenological approach the appropriate choice for the current study.

Another way that phenomenology immediately distinguished itself was through its discovery orientation. Because it is discovery oriented, phenomenology is necessarily a methodology that has been described as *presuppositionless* (van Manen, 1997, p. 29), or one that is entered into without preconceived hypotheses or fixed procedures. Focusing on being faithful to the givens that are *revealed* in a participant's pre-reflective descriptions of lived experience rather than focusing on the identification of *pre-determined* criteria of givenness is in sharp contrast to prevailing research methodologies.   Carrying out phenomenological research requires an openness and sensitivity to the phenomena under investigation and a constant willingness to be surprised in order to allow the true meaning of an experience to be revealed.

Striving to achieve his goal of advancing the development of a rigorous phenomenological science that would reveal essential meanings of experience, Husserl recommended a methodology that included core components that are listed in Table 2 along with my own brief summaries of the primary implementation task for each.

Table 2: Core Components of Husserl's Recommended Methodology

Phenomenological reduction	Adoption of a particular attitudinal stance that allows the researcher to step away from personal biases and preconceptions and to see a particular phenomenon freshly and with wonder.
Description	Use as data only concrete verbal expressions of a particular conscious experience in the everyday lived world – a phenomenon. These expressions – or descriptions - are not merely subjective expressions of "inner reality," but are "a situation coming to explicitness in words" and are simultaneously subjective and objective, and reflect one's existence as an interactive being-in-the-world (Palmer, 1969, p. 139).
Seeking of essences	Explication of the meaning of a particular phenomenon that remains unchanged in all variations of the experience.

The implementation of each of the components above revolves at all times around the explication of meaning and remains motivated by being "as faithful as possible to phenomena as they occur in everyday life" (Giorgi, A., 1989a, p. 66). Although Husserl saw great potential value in applying his phenomenological method to psychological research and hoped it would be used in that way, researchers interested in the psychology of human experience found it difficult to adapt his method to a scientific, empirical process that demanded more concrete steps.   The development of Giorgi's descriptive psychological approach to phenomenology was meant to fill this

gap and to essentially build a bridge between phenomenology as a philosophical science and phenomenology used to explore psychological reality.

Giorgi's Descriptive Psychological Phenomenology

Giorgi believed that psychological research had historically "overlooked or severely distorted" many aspects of human experience as it is lived (Giorgi, A., 1985c, p. 1) and that the precision of traditional psychological research approaches had been gained "at the expense of the 'impoverishment' of descriptions of human experience 'as lived'"(Salmon, 2003, p. 3). He was convinced that a phenomenological psychological approach would finally offer researchers a way to explore "those 'messy,' subjective aspects of human experience which are usually factored out when experimental psychologists attempt to 'operationalize' research questions" (Salmon, 2003, p. 3).

Giorgi's descriptive psychological phenomenology preserves all of Husserl's definitions and theoretical conceptualizations and, to a large extent, his methodological components. However, he believed that Husserl's methodology, as valuable as it was for philosophical research, fell short of being appropriate for psychological research in general and for the empirical criteria demanded by that field in particular. Consequently, he made some critical adaptations to Husserl's recommended methodology to make it more suitable for psychological research, while still remaining faithful to all philosophical elements and goals. Table 3 summarizes the methodological components for both Husserl's philosophical research and Giorgi's descriptive psychological research, revealing both similarities and distinctions between the two.

Table 3: Key Similarities and Distinctions between Husserl and Giorgi

Husserl	Giorgi
Reduction • *Must* be the first component implemented, which is appropriate and necessary given the source of the experience • Bracketing • Phenomenological attitude	**Description** • *Must* be the first component implemented, which is appropriate and necessary given the source of the experience • Description of *another's* experience in the everyday world; their particular objects of experience • Description provided from the naïve attitude
Description • Description of one's *own* experience in the everyday world; one's own intentional objects of experience • Phenomenological attitude	**Reduction** • Bracketing • Phenomenological attitude • Within disciplinary perspective (psychological)
Search for Essences • Imaginative variation of own description • Essences sought are universal • Essences sought/discovered are transcendental; independent of context	**Search for Essences** • Imaginative variation of researcher's transformed descriptions • Essences sought are not universal • Essences sought are not transcendental; can be influenced by context that exists

The essential components of Husserl's recommended methodology and Giorgi's actual methodology are identical and include using verbal description of experience as data, engaging in the phenomenological reduction, and searching for the essential meaning of an experience. However, there are important distinctions in the implementation details and sequencing of the two methodologies, including:

1. Husserl's methodology bases its analysis on descriptions of the researcher's own personal experience in the everyday world. In other words, the experiencer is *self*. Consequently, the researcher must engage in the phenomenological reduction as the first step in the process, prior to providing his own descriptions. By contrast, Giorgi's methodology bases its analysis on descriptions of experience provided by an experiencer who is *other* and gathering the descriptions must come first.

2. Because it is impossible to describe one's own experiences without reflection, the descriptions that are analyzed in Husserl's methodology cannot be from a pre-reflective naïve attitude. Giorgi's methodology, on the other hand, depends upon gathering descriptions of experience that are indeed from the pre-reflective naïve attitude.

3. The researcher using Husserl's methodology engages in imaginative variation of his own original descriptions of experience, with no intervening stages in the process. The researcher using Giorgi's methodology must first transform the participant's naïve descriptions into psychological language and only then engage in imaginative variation – in this case imaginative variation of the researcher's own transformed descriptions.

4. Both research methodologies focus on revealing the lived meaning of a particular human experience and seek to describe the essential meaning

structure for that experience. However, Husserl's methodology seeks

universal essences that are independent of context, or transcendental. By

contrast, the essences sought by Giorgi's methodology are influenced by

context and, as such, are not universal and are not considered

transcendent.

Methodological Rigor

When he was developing his methodology, Giorgi was well aware of the criteria

identified by Misiak and Sexton (1973) that must be met for a research methodology to

be defined as phenomenological psychological research. The first of these is that the

methodology must base its philosophical justification on Husserl's conceptualization of

phenomenology and it has just been demonstrated Giorgi meets this criterion. The

second criterion is that the methodology must study experience as immediately given,

which Giorgi achieves by gathering naïve descriptions from participants. These

descriptions are concrete expressions of moments of immediacy within an experience

rather than cognitive reflections or abstractions of that experience. Misiak and Sexton's

third criterion is that the methodology be one that frees the researcher from

preconceptions. The phenomenological reduction that is a central component of

Giorgi's methodology allows that very freedom to the researcher. The final criterion set

forth by Misiak and Sexton is that the research result in an unbiased description of the

psychological phenomenon under investigation, a criteria that Giorgi meets by

maintaining the attitude of wonder afforded by the phenomenological reduction and by

basing his description of the essential structure exclusively on the naïve descriptions of

the participants--first "re-described" in psychological language that remains faithful to the participant's expression of experience .

In addition to meeting the criteria put forth by Misiak and Sexton, Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological psychological research methodology reflects careful attention to, and integration of, two additional kinds of criteria--scientific and psychological. By establishing and paying careful attention to these criteria, his methodology offers researchers a way to explore the previously described "messy, subjective aspects of human experience" which are the core interests of phenomenology, while simultaneously meeting the demands of the larger scientific and psychological communities.

A final criterion guiding the development of Giorgi's methodology, and critical to all phenomenology, is that both the process and the outcomes of the research project consistently reflect *ecological validity,* which he believes should be weighed just as heavily as other criteria by the scientific and psychological communities (Giorgi, A., 1989a, p. 66). Ecological validity is achieved when the research maintains faithfulness to the phenomenon as given to the consciousness of the experiencer. Although Giorgi does not explicitly include this in his own summary of development criteria, even while emphasizing its significance, I have nonetheless added it as an additional and explicit category in the following table which summarizes the criteria for Giorgi's methodology.

Table 4: Criteria for Giorgi's Phenomenological Psychological Research Methodology[6]

Phenomenological Criteria	- Is descriptive - Utilizes the phenomenological attitude, including bracketing and phenomenological reduction - Seeks essential structure of the phenomenon; uses free imaginative variation to discover it - Recognizes intentional relation between the conscious subject and the object of experience
Scientific Criteria	- Is methodical: researcher has access to phenomenon (through participant descriptions) and can organize access to it - Is systematic: knowledge obtained in research is interrelated - Is rigorous: each step satisfies coherent theoretical demands; follows rational process subject to rules of appropriate evidence
Psychological Criteria	- Takes place within a psychological perspective - Seeks to discover psychological essential structures
Ecological Criterion	Maintains faithfulness to the phenomenon as given to the consciousness of the experiencer

Because of Giorgi's faithful adherence to all of these criteria, the phenomenological research community has been given a methodology that can be judged by its own internal criteria rather than by the criteria from other research paradigms that are ill-suited to the explication of the meaning of everyday human experience. It is a methodology that has been thoughtfully and rigorously developed over decades to aid in the quest for transcendent knowledge about the psychological

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[6] **(Giorgi, A., 1985a, 1990)**

truth of concrete human experiences in the everyday world. It is not the only approach to phenomenological research, but its contribution to the field cannot be challenged.

Implementation of Giorgi's methodology

Like all phenomenological research, Giorgi's descriptive psychological phenomenology does not follow a predetermined set of fixed procedures and, in fact, doing so would preclude the achievement of its purpose. "The method of phenomenology is that there is no method!" is a statement made initially by Hans-Georg Gadamer, another noted German philosopher, and repeated frequently by phenomenologists in the literature. A phenomenological researcher must maintain an attitude of wonder and openness so completely that he is able to respond to the experiencer's descriptions by following the unfolding revelations of meaning faithfully. A rule-bound method would not allow for such a responsive attitude. Nonetheless, phenomenological researchers have developed what Heidegger (1962) refers to as a *path* and van Manen (van Manen, 1997, p. 512) refers to as *methodos---a way*. They are both referring to the fact that some direction toward the destination is needed, but this direction cannot be constructed with precise, pre-established signposts and steps. Much of it must be discovered along the way in response to what is discovered while progressing forward. The *methodos* is, however, grounded solidly in strong philosophical and intellectual traditions, a substantial body of knowledge and a long history of serious scholarship. One of the meanings of this Greek word is *pursuit* and it is perhaps more useful to think of phenomenology's *methodos*, including variations of it, as a principle-centered strategic guide to a successfully implemented pursuit rather

than as an objective series of specific procedures--the definition most commonly associated with method.

With these cautions in mind, Giorgi does suggest five procedural steps for analyzing the descriptions that can be incorporated into his broader *methodos* to help researchers succeed in their pursuit. Although these analysis activities are meant to be carried out in a particular sequence and although Giorgi provides explicit goals and criteria for each one, he is, nonetheless, hesitant to use the word "steps" and does so only with great caution. His preference is to refer to them as *principles* and he is careful to remind researchers that they are only guidelines and should not be followed blindly. Like all aspects of phenomenological *methodos*, the guidelines are meant to provide some light along an otherwise dark path for the researcher. In effect, they provide key strategies for keeping the researcher oriented in the right direction and progressing toward the right destination but without providing step-by-step instructions. The rest of the path will become illuminated by virtue of the researcher's responsiveness to the experiencer's descriptions, from within the context of the guiding principles given to him. Without the experiencer's descriptions of lived experience and the researcher's corresponding *lived responsiveness* to them from within the appropriate attitude, the destination will not be reached.

The procedural steps suggested by Giorgi as part of his *methodos* will be discussed in detail in the next chapter and are listed below. The language Giorgi uses to identify these steps has gone through its own evolution over time, and I have chosen to

list more than one of his identifying statements when I thought it would be useful for more fully orienting the reader.

1. Collect verbal data
2. Read the data holistically / Read for sense of whole
3. Divide the data into parts / Identify meaning units
4. Organize and express the raw data into disciplinary language / Transform meaning units
5. Express the structure of the phenomenon / Describe essential structure

Just as the researcher's lived response to the experiencer's descriptions is necessary to uncover the essential meaning of an experience, so too is the researcher's lived response to Giorgi's *methodos* necessary to developing a true understanding of what it is. Therefore, it is most appropriate that these steps be discussed in the next chapter, which describes how I implemented Giorgi's methodology.

Preparing oneself to coming to know means to purposefully relinquish preconceptions and biases and be willing to be a risk taker [and] … be willing to be open to unknowns (Paterson & Zderad, 1988).

IMPLEMENTATION OF GIORGI'S METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I will provide the reader with an overview of my research method and its integrated elements, followed by a detailed discussion of my implementation of each phase of data analysis. For each implementation step I will comment on its procedural aspects, its goals, the criteria that it had to meet, the nature of the demands it placed on the researcher, and analysis tools that facilitated its implementation.

Method Overview

Although his methodological guidelines provide direction and clarity to one's research purpose and activities, Giorgi's methodology can only be learned experientially--by actively engaging in it and exploring it through trial and error. His preference for referring to methodological guidelines and principles rather than steps or procedures serves to reinforce the fact that one must be flexible in their implementation of his methodology and always responsive to the phenomenon at hand.[7] Any attempt to

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[7] For additional discussion about the need for phenomenological methodologies in general to be flexible enough to be adapted to suite the phenomena under investigation, see Giorgi (1994; Giorgi, A., 1997), Pollio, Henley and Thompson (1997), and van Manen (1997).

implement Giorgi's methodology in a mechanistic how-to manner, or with rigid adherence to guidelines, or simply with logic alone, will certainly fail. Giorgi repeatedly reminds us that his methodology is designed solely to clarify the meaning of a phenomenon as experienced by a participant and if a researcher's implementation of his methodology is not achieving this illumination of meaning, Giorgi urges the researcher to modify it or use a different approach that will achieve that goal more effectively for a given researcher.

By the time I began my research project, it was clear that I would have to fully appropriate Giorgi's methodology and make it my own through whatever adaptations were necessary in order to produce authentic stable knowledge about mothers' experience of parenting with a former spouse. It was also clear that any adaptations I might make would have to simultaneously honor the scientific principles of inquiry that were part of his methodology and the Husserlian phenomenological principles upon which his methodology is based. Since it is this latter foundation that gives Giorgi's methodology its philosophical and conceptual integrity, choosing to implement Giorgi's methodology carried with it a commitment to maintain faithfulness to the full range of phenomenological concepts supporting his method and not just to the methodological "steps" that he had developed. Consequently, an early part of my method was to begin a disciplined study of the basic concepts of phenomenology, a practice which continued throughout the research project. It has been said that without a solid grounding in Husserl's phenomenology, a researcher "can expect only to dabble in phenomenological psychological research instead of doing psychological research that has merit (truth)"

(Carson, 1990, p. 33). I had higher hopes than this for understanding the meaning of parenting with a former spouse and was confident that a thoughtful and rigorous implementation of Giorgi's methodology, in combination with ongoing study of the phenomenological literature, would the produce stable knowledge I was seeking.

My implementation of Giorgi's methodology reflects an integration of three main components into what became a singular and, necessarily, personal research process aimed at providing stable knowledge about mothers' experiences of parenting with a former spouse. The first of these consisted of Giorgi's principles for engaging in phenomenological research--namely description, reduction, and seeking of essences. These principles, adapted from Husserl's philosophical phenomenology, motivated and sustained the entire research process. The second component consisted of Giorgi's five procedural guidelines for data analysis, alternately referred to as phases or steps, which included (a) gather verbal data, (b) read for a sense of the whole, (c) identify meaning units, (d) transform meaning units, and (e) describe essential structure. The third component of my implementation of Giorgi's methodology was something that I came to call my *incorporated research process*, for reasons that will be explained shortly. This last component did not exist prior to conducting this study, but it quickly began to take form as I engaged in activities specific to phenomenological inquiry.

As was appropriate, I made adaptations to Giorgi's methodology when it seemed important to do so, but only after carefully evaluating them to be sure they did not violate any central precepts and principles or put at risk the project's capability of meeting the phenomenological, scientific, and psychological criteria. I will mention a

couple of these adaptations now because they are important to providing an overview of my research method and an overview to this chapter. Others will be mentioned later in the chapter in connection with the analysis phase in which they took place.

I made no fundamental changes to Giorgi's data analysis phases, but found that I needed to break them down a bit further to make them work for me. Table 5 below compares Giorgi's five phases of analysis with the seven phases of analysis that took place in the current study.

Table 5: Data Analysis Phases: Giorgi vs. Current Study

Phases of analysis: Giorgi		Phases of analysis: Current Study
		1. *Prepare to gather data*
1. Gather verbal data		2. Gather verbal data
2. Read for sense of whole		3. Read for sense of whole
3. Identify meaning units		4. Identify meaning units
4. Transform meaning units		5. Transform meaning units
		6. *Identify invariants*
5. Describe essential structure		7. Describe essential structure

As mentioned, the nature of the changes made in Giorgi's process involved a further breakdown of tasks rather than anything substantive. The first phase of my analysis--"Prepare to gather data"--was a preparation phase that proved critical to being able to implement the subsequent steps appropriately. Undoubtedly, Giorgi's analysis process presumes this kind of preparation, but for me it needed to be articulated as a clear and distinct phase of my analysis.

Similarly, I added an additional step in my process after implementing Giorgi's "transform meaning units" phase. For Giorgi, this phase incorporates the dual tasks of transforming the participant's naïve descriptions of experience into psychological language and identifying those aspects of meaning that are unchanging in all instances of the experience. Because both of these tasks are incorporated into his phase four, he is then able to move to the final phase of describing the essential structure. For me, these tasks placed distinctly different demands on me as a researcher and were, therefore, conceptualized and implemented as distinct and separate phases of analysis.

The principles of description, phenomenological reduction, and seeking of essences are the core building blocks of Giorgi's methodology. Embedded within these principles are multiple conceptual and practical demands and criteria that qualify his methodology as descriptive phenomenology, and, consequently, I think of and refer to these as Giorgi's phenomenological process. His phenomenological process and his phases of analysis combine to form his full methodology. By themselves, his phases of analysis would not serve as phenomenological method. It is only in their integration with his phenomenological process that they can serve in this capacity.

As with Giorgi's phases of analysis, it was necessary for me to break down his phenomenological process further to make it work for me. In some cases, I was aware at the time that what I was doing amounted to creating an additional step and in other cases that only became obvious retrospectively. The way I ultimately conceptualized, defined, and articulated this additional break down of Giorgi's process is summarized in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Phenomenological Processes Embedded in Method: Giorgi vs. Current Study

Phenomenological Process: Giorgi		Incorporated Phenomenological Process: Current Study
Description		SET INTENTIONS
Phenomenological reduction		• Turn to phenomenon
Seek essences		• Fidelity to phenomenon
		• Discipline
		• Efficiency
		ENGAGE
		• Enter relationship
		» Phenomenological reduction
		» Bracket
		» Psychological perspective
		» Open
		» Sensitive
		» Whole / Parts
		» *Follow*
		• Interrogate the data
		• Respond to the data
		• Reflect / Dialectic
		• Dwell
		• Express / Re-express

I did not set out with the intention to create an articulated phenomenological process that would integrate with Giorgi's process and guide my research. Rather, it evolved as I responded to the demands of each phase of the research project. As this process is considered, it should be noted that it is not constituted from original ideas or concepts. It simply articulates a number of the extensive and complex phenomenological demands embedded in Giorgi's process and organizes them into a systematic, but flexible, guide for implementation. The only original element in this

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process is the addition of the distinct step mandating me to *follow* the data. The necessity of being a *follower* of the meaning of experience as described, rather than directing it according to preconceived ideas on the part of the researcher, was such a vivid and conscious aspect of the research process that it was important to identify it explicitly rather than leave it as an implied aspect of my approach.

The various elements of my incorporated process came about when I found myself consciously and deliberately trying to engage with the data in a specific way, long before I had labels for these activities. Ultimately, the process outlined in the table became so integrated and internalized into my response to the data--including an embodied, physical response--which I came to think of it as my *incorporated* phenomenological process. It was as central to my method as Giorgi's phenomenological process upon which it was based and Giorgi's phases of analysis. It was this incorporated process that allowed me to appropriate Giorgi's methodology and make it my own. At the risk of sounding arrogant, one might think of this as my own *methodos*, or that which allowed me to implement and appropriate Giorgi's *methodos*. Essentially, it served as an intermediary process and contained the additional signposts that I needed to light the way or get reoriented if I found myself lost. The combination of this personal *methodos*, Giorgi's three-part phenomenological process, and Giorgi's five-part phases of analysis constituted the method for this study and all were equally essential.

Prepare To Gather Verbal Data

The step in my analysis process that I am about to describe focuses specifically on my preparations to gather verbal descriptions and is the first of two additional steps that I added to Giorgi's phases of analysis. As mentioned previously, these additional steps do not change the procedural activities of Giorgi's method, but instead make explicit what was otherwise only implied in his method. Making these additional elements of his method explicit even prior to gathering data helped ensure that every aspect of my research activities would reflect a disciplined focus on the specific demands I must address in order to conduct rigorous phenomenological research

Participant Selection and Criteria for Inclusion/exclusion

In keeping with the principles of phenomenological research, my primary goal in regard to participant selection was to gather descriptions of sufficient richness and diversity to allow the essential structure of the phenomenon's meaning to reveal itself through text analysis. Because mothers' experience of parenting with a former spouse was the exclusive focus of the study, and not the participants themselves as either individuals or representatives of a group, the typical demands of carefully selecting a representative sample were not applicable. However, it was still important to thoughtfully determine the criteria that would be established for inclusion or exclusion, the reasons for each criterion, and the number of participants that would be recruited. These decisions served to provide direction in narrowing down an enormously large pool of potential participants, reinforcing the phenomenological purpose of the study, and clarifying my own intentions as a researcher. They also helped me uncover and

discard hidden assumptions about participant selection that were unconsciously influencing me and were reflective of positivistic, rather than phenomenological, goals and orientations.

The purpose of establishing my criteria for inclusion was to identify and make explicit the requirements for being a participant in the study. As was appropriate for phenomenological research, the only criterion that was essential was that participants be mothers who were currently parenting with a former spouse. Additional criteria that I chose to include were that mothers be:

1. *Divorced or separated*. This criterion reflected my previously mentioned belief that divorce is a multi-faceted process that unfolds according to many timelines, only one of which is related to actual legal events that take place. Consequently, the existence or lack of existence of a final divorce decree was irrelevant to my interest in mothers' experience of parenting with a former spouse.

2. *Parenting one or more children under the age of 18*. This particular criterion served to clarify and reinforce one particular aspect of my essential criterion, which was the requirement that mothers be *currently* involved in parenting with a former spouse. From a phenomenological perspective, it would have been equally appropriate to simultaneously include mothers of adult children whose experience of parenting with a former spouse was in the past, as well as those whose experience was in the present. My rationale for limiting participation to

those mothers whose experience of this phenomenon was in the present was to facilitate my goal of generating descriptions of immediate, pre-reflective lived experience; in other words descriptions of their "mode of being [as] governed by unreflective consciousness" (van Manen, 1997, p. 25). [8]

3. *Sharing parenting roles and responsibilities to at least some degree with their former spouse.* This criterion also served to clarify and reinforce my primary criterion and my phenomenological purpose. Provided that mothers were parenting with a former spouse to at least some degree, further delimiters were irrelevant.

4. *Willing to engage in potentially deep personal exploration of their experience of parenting with a former spouse.* This criterion made explicit a goal related to participant attitude and served to remind me of the responsibility that came with asking a participant to describe experiences that might be deeply personal. This goal was left implicit in the recruitment flier (Appendix B) but was discussed during preliminary conversations with participants.

5. *Willing and able to commit to what might be considered significant amounts of time and energy.* This final criterion was also an explicit reminder of my responsibilities as a researcher and of the significance of what I was asking from participants who were leading busy and complicated lives. Precise information regarding the amount of time being asked of the participants was included in the recruitment flier and in preliminary conversations.

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[8] van Manen's language is taken from Sartre's analysis of "The Look" (Sartre, 1956), a famous example of a description of lived experience.

A gender criterion embedded in my research question was that participants be mothers, which thereby excluded fathers. It would have been equally appropriate to have selected as my research question "What is the experience of parenting with a former spouse?" instead of "What is *mothers'* experience of parenting with a former spouse?" Such a question would not only have opened the study to both mothers and fathers and possibly expanded the diversity of descriptions obtained, but it would have rendered gender an irrelevant consideration. The reason my research question focused exclusively on mothers was to avoid the temptation – for myself and for others who might be interested in the study's results – to compare the experiences of mothers with the experiences of fathers. Such comparisons, whether conscious or unconscious, could conceivably obscure or hinder the understandings being sought with regard to the target phenomenon. Although not a motivating factor, a potential benefit of focusing exclusively on mothers also existed and stemmed from the fact that I brought to the study personal understandings of what it means to be in the world as a woman, a mother, and a mother who has experienced parenting with a former spouse. This shared experience would undoubtedly place extra demands on me as a researcher when I bracketed or set aside my pre-understandings of the phenomenon at hand, but it also offered the potential for increased sensitivity to the mothers' lived experience.

Understanding that diversity of participants is central to discovering truly invariant structures of human experience, there was minimal reason to include criteria for exclusion from my study. However, after careful consideration, I established three

categories of exclusion that addressed concerns related primarily to protection of human subjects and secondarily to methodological issues. These criteria included (a) mothers whose relationship with their former spouse included physical or sexual abuse of any member(s) of the family; (b) mothers who were currently experiencing active, untreated chemical addiction in themselves or their former spouses; and (c) mothers who were currently experiencing severe, ongoing, and untreated mental illness in themselves or their former spouses. With regard to the protection of human subjects, it was conceivable that exploring a phenomenon of such a deeply personal nature with mothers who were currently experiencing any of these complicating factors might create a situation that was well beyond my expertise. From the ethical and practical perspectives, it was important to avoid such a situation if possible. From the methodological perspective, it was also possible that the existence of any of these circumstances in the mothers' lives might create dynamics that were so complex and powerful in their own right that their manifestations in the mothers' descriptions would make it difficult to tease out authentic meanings of the experience of parenting with a former spouse. The mothers would not be directly asked about these criteria but would instead self-select into the study only after being made aware of these criteria in the recruitment flier, a strategy meant to provide potential participants with a non-threatening and private way to determine their own eligibility.

Sample Size

It is well established in the literature that a relatively small number of well-conducted phenomenological interviews with appropriately selected participants can

generate enough descriptions of meaning to reveal the essential structure of a particular

human experience. As discussed in the previous chapter, the issue of quantity that is so

important in other methodologies is not a primary concern in phenomenological

research. Rather, participants are selected based on qualities and experiences that

permit an understanding of the phenomenon in question (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The focus is on the potential of each "case" to provide rich insight into the

phenomenon, rather than on the number of "cases" examined (Patton, 2001) and value

is determined by the richness and depth of the interviews and their ability to

successfully generate concrete descriptions of participants' lived experiences. Because

phenomenology posits that universal knowledge can be generated through the shared

essences of meaning found across a *diversity* of individual experiences, rather than

across a *quantity* of individual experiences, small but appropriately selected sample

sizes are the norm.

A common participant number in phenomenological literature appears to be six.

Karin Dahlberg (2000) even suggests that three participants can be sufficient to yield all

the description that is needed if the interviews are well-conducted and meaning-rich.

She particularly urges researchers who intend to implement Giorgi's methodology to be

attentive to this issue because his method was originally developed for analyzing

relatively short texts.

With these concepts in mind, my intention was to interview a minimum of four

mothers and a maximum of six mothers. However, my participant number

inadvertently grew to nine. Speaking retrospectively and through the lens of

experience, conducting nine interviews that were rich in description did not yield

insights that were any greater than if I had conducted half as many interviews that were

equally rich in description. Although the nine interviews provided me with an

admittedly fascinating and satisfying opportunity to learn about the individual

experiences of more mothers, they did not translate into an increased understanding of

the phenomenon itself – that of parenting with a former spouse itself – which was the

purpose of the study. This fact is significant primarily because I implemented Giorgi's

detailed methodological analysis of the interview transcripts and the enormous amount

of additional work resulting from the "extra" interviews was ultimately not justified by

the outcomes. This retrospective understanding has solidified for me in a significant

way the distinction between focusing on a particular *phenomenon* and focusing on the

individuals who share their lived experience of this phenomenon. A small number

participants who can provide rich descriptions of diverse experiences of the target

phenomenon is the appropriate goal for determining the size of the participant group.

Participant recruitment

The primary strategy for recruiting participants was to seek assistance from

individuals in an established network of personal and professional contacts who shared

my interest in the well-being of parents and children. Depending on their own

circumstances and access to potential participants, these individuals agreed to distribute

information about the study via bulletin boards, newsletters, parent education classes,

childcare networks, support groups, and selective individual counseling sessions. In

addition to a recruitment flier targeted to potential participants (Appendix B), three

additional information documents were developed for distribution to the individuals

assisting me in my recruiting efforts. These additional documents included background

information for the benefit of the person assisting me, and also examples of paragraphs

that could be inserted in organizational newsletters and similar communication

documents. I was prompted to develop these additional documents when a desire for

easily accessible summary information about the study and about my background was

requested.

The recruitment plan and the flier itself were designed to create awareness of the

study, assure potential participants of confidentiality, provide immediate and explicit

information regarding criteria and expectations, and give potential participants the

opportunity to self-select into the study. Of particular importance was the explicit

statement of the sensitive exclusionary criteria which allowed potential participants to

maintain full privacy if any of these criteria applied to them. Another aspect of the

interviews that was emphasized in the flier was that it would be a conversational

interview. In combination with the research question and other information on the flier,

this was meant to reinforce the expectation that the questions would be individual,

personal to their situations, and subjective in nature as opposed to uniform, objective

survey questions. It was also made clear that participation would require a two- to four-

hour time commitment. The final aspect that was emphasized in the flier was that

participants were welcome to call me on an anonymous basis if they wanted to get

additional information but were not yet ready to be identified.

For the potential participants, the initial phone contact from them was an opportunity to learn more about the study, alleviate any concerns they might have, clarify and confirm expectations, and allow them to make a final decision regarding participation that was thoughtful and informed. It also gave them an opportunity to consider and select a time and location of their choice for the interview, and to select a merchant from which they preferred a gift certificate. For me as the researcher, the initial phone contact was an opportunity to reassure interested mothers about confidentiality issues, review the criteria for inclusion and exclusion, and, if necessary, exclude an otherwise qualified potential participant if there were indicators from unanticipated and unsought information or behavior that serious issues might exist which would be likely to create an interview situation beyond my expertise. As it happened, two potential participants did not meet the inclusion criteria.

At the time that the interviews took place, the mothers who ultimately formed my participant group had been separated from their former spouses for less than 1 year up to more than 5 years; had been married for 4 to 16 years; and had been legally divorced for less than 1 year to 4 years, with the exception of 2 mothers whose legal proceedings had not yet ended. They ranged in age from approximately early 30s to middle 40s; were of lower- to upper-middle class socioeconomic status; were educated, including two who had advanced degrees and one who was working on her degree; and the majority of them appeared overall to be well-versed in issues related to child development.

Seven of the nine mothers were of Caucasian descent, one of African American descent, and one of Hispanic descent. Prior to separation and divorce, their nuclear families had from 1 to 4 children ranging in age from 7 weeks to 13 years and at the time of the interviews the children's ages ranged from 10 months to 17 years. Three of the mothers had been staying at home full-time to raise their children prior to separation and two continued to do so at the time of the interview, although that opportunity was only short-term.

In four of the families it had been the mother who initiated the divorce, while in five of the families it had been the former spouse who had initiated the divorce. However, one should be cautious about attaching any particular meaning to these statistics without additional contextual knowledge because in some instances the marriage partner wanting the marriage to end was not actually the one who initiated the separation and divorce, and in other instances, the marriage partner initiating the separation and divorce was acting out of resignation and loss of hope rather than a desire for the marriage to end. The mothers' preparedness for separation and divorce ranged from those who were well prepared due to a long period of difficulty in their marriage to those who were caught totally by surprise and experienced significant emotional trauma. All of the mothers voluntarily chose to enter into a coparenting relationship with their former spouse.

These and other characteristics of the mothers in my participant group are summarized in the table below for the purpose of easy reference.

Table 7: Characteristics of Mothers

Characteristic	#	Characteristic	#
Mothers who chose to end marriage	4	Time from separation until interview	
Ex-spouses who chose to end marriage	5	< 1 year	2
Number of children in nuclear family		1-2 years	4
1 child	2	3-4 years	2
2 children	4	5+ years	1
3 children	2	Time from legal divorce until interview	
4 children	1	< 1 year	6
Mothers with the following custody status:		1-2 years	1
Sole physical and legal	1	3-4 years	2
Sole physical; shared legal	1	Years of marriage prior to separation	
Shared physical and legal	7	4 – 5 years	2
Mothers parenting stepchildren	1	10 – 15 years	4
Mothers remarried whose new husbands are sharing parenting	1	15+ years	1
Ex-spouses remarried whose new wives are sharing parenting	2	Average length of time from separation until divorce (ranged from 1 month to 2 years)	1 yr
Mothers who stayed home full-time with their children prior to divorce	3	Racial/ethnic background:	
Mothers who stayed home full-time with their children after divorce	2	Caucasian	5
		Hispanic	1
		African American	1

Prepare for interview

   Knowing that my ability to discover the meaning of parenting with a former

spouse depended first upon my ability to elicit the appropriate kind of descriptions and a

sufficient number of them, it was important to prepare well for my interviews.

Consequently, I approached the task of preparing for my interviews with the same

degree of attentiveness and discipline that I approached all subsequent steps of the inquiry process.

I first *turned to* the phenomenon of mothers' lived experience of parenting with a former spouse and committed to (a) seeking an understanding of this particular experience of living in the world with an attitude of openness and wonder, (b) being faithful to the experience of this phenomenon exactly as it presented itself to the mothers' consciousness, and (c) being faithful to the philosophical and methodological principles guiding my implementation of Giorgi's methodology. These commitments would be repeated in a more intense manner throughout the study, but it was important that they begin here.

Beginning with the interviews, I would need to repeatedly adopt and then maintain a phenomenological attitude by employing the methodological device known as the phenomenological reduction. One aspect of the phenomenological reduction that was particularly relevant as I prepared for the interviews was that of bracketing. Before I could successfully bracket my taken-for-granted ways of seeing the phenomenon of parenting with a former spouse, I first had to identify and make explicit my existing understandings, beliefs, and assumptions about this phenomenon. Only when I had clearly identified them could I then disengage from them and be "free to deviate from their prescriptions" (Giorgi, A., 1994, p. 214) and see the world through the mothers' eyes. Consequently, in order to be able to set them aside during the interview, I spent time identifying and reflecting rigorously on my pre-understandings about parenting, divorce, parenting after divorce, and parenting with a former spouse. These pre-

understandings stemmed from (a) cultural beliefs and expectations, (b) educational and psychological theories, (c) professional training and experience with divorced parents, (d) personal encounters and observations, and (e) subjective feelings and biases. In a parallel vein, I also identified and made explicit my pre-understandings about research interviews and the types of questions that were appropriate, the degree of engagement desired, and the role of the interviewer.

The descriptions obtained during the interviews would be the sole "data" upon which the study depended. Consequently, I spent time at this stage increasing my familiarity with what concrete descriptions of lived experiences were and how they differed from other kinds of descriptions. I also increased my familiarity with the ways in which a phenomenological interview is characterized, especially being fully engaged and present in the immediate moment, open to seeing the phenomenon in a fresh way, and consistently focused on the phenomenon at hand while at the same time being responsive to the information shared by the mothers. I was then able to develop my strategy for eliciting detailed and concrete descriptions of mothers' lived experiences of parenting with a former spouse. This included the specific leading questions I would ask, the kinds of questions I would ask for probing more deeply, the comments or questions I would use to refocus the interview as needed, and the specific question I would use to close the interview. My strategy was summarized in an interview protocol (see Appendix C) which served as a guide during each interview.

Gather Verbal Data

Engage in interview

I interviewed each mother for approximately two hours; seven of them in their own homes and one of them in a quiet place in her neighborhood. Immediately prior to each interview, I once again followed Husserl's principle of "turning to the things themselves" (Husserl, 1931). I turned to the phenomenon of mothers' lived experience of parenting with a former spouse and repeated the commitments that were central to that intentional act. I then adopted the phenomenological attitude fully, rather than the partial adoption required when I was preparing for the interview. I entered into an attitude of wonder and openness that would allow me to see the phenomenon in new and surprising ways and committed myself to using that as the force behind my questioning during the interview. In order to bracket the pre-understandings that I had made explicit earlier, I reviewed all of my prior knowledge and expectations about parenting with a former spouse, reviewed all of my prior knowledge and expectations about the way a research interview should be carried out, and visualized myself physically placing these outside of an imaginary boundary surrounding the phenomenon. I brought to my awareness that, as a co-creator of meaning, I was a part of the whole and I committed to being open to my having my perceptions revised as I saw the experience through the mothers' eyes. And finally, I situated myself within the psychological perspective regarding what aspects of mothers' experience I would be seeking to uncover and then re-describe.

Another focusing act that I did immediately prior to the interviews was to review the theoretical and practical requirements for the descriptions I was trying to elicit. As stressed by Giorgi (1985a; , 1997), only those descriptions that meet the phenomenological, scientific, and psychological criteria would be sufficient for teasing out the essential psychological structure of the experience. I had to elicit descriptions of concrete experiences from the pre-reflective natural attitude rather than any intellectualizations, summaries, or personal opinions. The descriptions needed to be specific, detailed, and focused on immediate moments when the phenomenon presented itself to the mothers' consciousness. They needed to provide access to the very *givenness* of the phenomenon, which is the specific manner that any intentional object of consciousness presents itself to awareness (1985a; , 1997; , 2003). Only through such descriptions could the meaning of the phenomenon of parenting with a former spouse be made known to others, and I had to keep these criteria clearly in focus as I asked the mothers about their experiences.

A final intentional act of focusing involved distinguishing between the individual mothers' experiences of parenting with a former spouse and the nature and meaning of the phenomenon itself on a more universal basis. For phenomenologists, each person is unique and irreplaceable, and their lived world experiences are equally unique. Each person is inherently tied to a context and to other people, and these factors help define the person and influence his or her experience of the world. However, it is the common components of these unique experiences that illuminate the essential meaning structure of a phenomenon and increase our understanding of human

experience. Therefore, I reminded myself that I must first focus on understanding the experience of each individual mother, but that ultimately these understandings were valuable in my study only to the extent that they contributed to the goal of understanding the universal psychological structure of parenting with a former spouse.

When the interviews began, I tried to establish rapport with the mothers while reviewing the expectations of the interview and the consent process. I then tried to establish a greater sense of trust and a shared orientation to the phenomenon during some preliminary questions about background facts and contextual information. When I moved to the heart of the interview – to the lived meaning questions – I reminded myself of Giorgi's criteria for the descriptions I was trying to elicit and began with the open-ended question "Can you describe what it is like to parent with a former spouse?" If the mother seemed uncertain about how to begin to answer the question, I then asked "Is there a specific experience or moment that comes immediately to mind that we can focus on for the moment to help you describe your experience?" As the interview progressed, I used a variety of strategies to probe for more concrete descriptions associated with a moment in time that was brought into immediate focus. For example, I might pursue a comment with the following series of questions, interspersed with the mother's responses: "You have commented on things that happen when your former spouse drops off your children. Let's go back to that for a moment. Let's say you are at the door right now and your former spouse has just arrived with your children. What is happening? What is your former spouse doing? Saying? What are your children doing? Saying? What are you doing? Saying? What are you feeling inside? What are

you aware of about the situation?" Or "Can you walk me through what was going on as

if it were happening now?" I also used a variety of strategies to probe for deeper

meaning, such as "What was it about that experience that made you sad? Happy?

Relieved?" "What was that feeling like?" "How did you express those thoughts?"

"What did that mean to you?"

I used my interview protocol as a general guide, but the actual direction of

movement and the specific questions asked during each interview grew out of my being

fully engaged and present to the individual mother and to the ways in which she

expressed her experiences of parenting with a former spouse.   I was striving for an

interview characterized by the conversational "art of testing" described by (Gadamer,

1982) and by the openness and immediacy that Dahlberg, Drew, and Nystrom (2001)

described so eloquently:

> …openness as a close and immediate relation to the informant….Researchers
> who are able to infuse their interviews with a sense of immediacy are more
> likely to engender the openness that is necessary for gathering in-depth data. An
> interview has this immediacy when both persons are present to each other in the
> deepest sense, each concentrating on the phenomenon, as well as what is going
> on between them….There is an intensity about the exchange, which arises from
> the authenticity of the dialogue. (pp. 160-161)

Although my questioning of each mother reflected a spontaneity of the moment, it also

remained firmly grounded in the phenomenological attitude. I was both reassured and

pleased when I discovered this experientially as I found myself being surprised by the

information given to me by the mothers.

In addition to listening to the verbal content of mothers' responses, I also

attended closely to the nonverbal and contextual aspects of their responses. For

example, I noticed voice tone, speech patterns, hesitations, emotional overtones, changes in intensity of responses, contradictions between verbal and nonverbal communications or between different verbal communications, sudden shifts of topic, repetitive appearance of certain descriptions, ease or difficulty of remaining focused on the phenomenon at hand, and mothers' overall view of living in the everyday world as a mother who was parenting with a former spouse.

As a way to comfortably close the interview and also to provide one more opportunity for the mothers to reveal significant aspects of their experience, each interview ended with the same closing question, "If you were asked to mentor a mother just beginning to experience parenting with a former spouse, what would you tell her?" This final question proved to be very valuable in providing additional insights into mothers' experiences.

Immediately after each interview, I reflected on what I had learned about that mother's experience and also reflected on what I had learned about phenomenological interviewing. These reflections on my experiential learning about both the phenomenon and the interview process provided me with ever-increasing understanding of both and influenced each subsequent interview in positive ways. After this reflection, I set aside each interview until such time as I would begin transcribing all of them at once.

Prepare data for analysis

Giorgi addresses the issue of efficiency clearly when he says, "It is because of this demanding character [of phenomenological research] that *efficiency* rapidly asserts itself as an issue. My own response is to *bracket* the efficiency issues and to stick to

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what is theoretically sound and justifiable" (Giorgi, A., 1994, p. 208). This setting aside of efficiency concerns became a significant aspect of my study beginning with this step. Again through experiential learning, I came to appreciate how essential it is that the researcher approaches this step with the same degree of thoughtfulness and deliberation as all other steps, especially with regard to the issue of efficiency.

Although the task of transcribing the interview audio tapes appears at first glance to be a simple task and a purely practical task, it is in fact much more than that. At this point in a study, the methodological concerns and the practical concerns are as interrelated as they will ever be, and in fact become one and the same. Let's look first at the methodological concerns, all of which focus on the discovery of *meaning*. The way in which the audio tapes are transcribed can have an enormous effect on the researcher's ability to discover this meaning. Therefore, rather than thinking of this step as a purely practical task, I came to see it as no less of a meaning task than any other step. I thought of it as a critical transfer of human communication to written form, with all its communicative content and nuances. Viewed this way it became obvious how much care must be taken to ensure that the written form remain true to the original communication in all its fullness and richness. Just as the interview process was critical to *eliciting* the appropriate descriptions of lived experience, so too was this step critical to *transferring* those descriptions to written form. Were the transcripts to be used for a purpose other than phenomenological exploration, decisions regarding transcribing might be substantially different. But I saw that careless attention to the transcribing

process could interfere with being able to explore the meaning of parenting with a former spouse.

Just as the meaning analysis depends on how well the transcriptions capture the participants' communications, so too will the subsequent practical tasks depend on the details of the transcriptions. Consequently, it is important that the researcher take the time to make thoughtful and deliberate decisions regarding multiple aspects of the transcribing task. It is also important that these decisions be stated explicitly and tested via trial and error experimentation in the early stages of transcribing because some decisions can only be changed later with a great deal of difficulty. This is particularly true with large quantities of data and with each of my nine interviews yielding over 50 pages of text, it became particularly important for me to "get it right" early in the transcribing process. The decisions that I made regarding how I would do the transcribing, which incorporated both meaning and practical concerns, included the following:

Attitudinal decisions

The most significant decision I made about transcribing was to consciously and deliberately set my intentions to focus only on the accuracy of the transfer and not on any emerging meanings themselves. Although I could not help but notice some meaning aspects, I did not want to get ahead and begin analyzing or responding to the data. So each time a meaning aspect caught my attention, I detached from it and

refocused my intentions on the technical task of transferring the communication with precision word by word and sentence by sentence.

Participant identification decisions

Another decision of particular significance to me was the decision regarding how I would identify each participant. I chose to use pseudonyms rather than an impersonal labeling system such as "P1," "P2." This was significant to me because it reflected my view of the phenomenological inquiry process and its dependence on developing an engaged relationship with the phenomenon via an engaged relationship with the mothers' descriptions. My being able to describe the essential structure of parenting with a former spouse would depend first on my discovering the lived meaning of this experience for each mother in her particular lifeworld. My related goal of developing an intimate familiarity with each mother's experience was facilitated by thinking, speaking, and writing of each of them as real people with individual names and identities, albeit altered for the sake of confidentiality. Eventually, each of these pseudonyms immediately and directly brought to my attention the remembered details of the real mother, her particular circumstances and experiences, and, indeed, the entire interview situation. From the time the first transcripts were printed, all document titles, computer files, paper files, analysis worksheets, participant binders, and in-text references included only these new names and "identities" – and the new relationship began.

For a different kind of study, such as a positivistic thematic analysis, there may have been no compelling reason other than expediency to choose one labeling option over another. But because I was operating within a phenomenological perspective and was driven by the commitments inherent in the *turning to* the phenomenon that I repeatedly made, this labeling system seemed the only theoretically consistent option for me.

Content decisions

The primary transcription decisions regarding content included the following:

1. I did not transcribe the repetitive review process at the beginning of each interview in its entirety. But I did listen to that portion of the interview carefully and transcribe anything that was particular to that interview, even if I could not yet determine its significance.

2. I transcribed my own interview questions and comments in addition to the mothers' responses.

3. I eliminated or altered all contextual information that could identify the mother while I transcribed. Examples include references to parents' home city, specific occupational information, and specific church affiliation. The elimination or alteration of this contextual information did not create substantive changes to the mothers' descriptions of experience.

4. I transcribed the mothers' language precisely as it was expressed, including sentence structure (or lack thereof), grammatical construction, incomplete thoughts, and interjections such as "oh," "ugh," "um."

5. I developed my own symbolic system for capturing the nonverbal aspects of mothers' communications such as hesitations, pauses, emphasized words, volume, and tone.

6. I inserted notes to myself in red font to add explanatory comments about contextual or nonverbal information that could not be conveyed symbolically, such as facial expression, emotions, and body language.

Format decisions

Most of the formatting decisions for transcribing were relatively minor and included such things as labeling each new entry with the speaker's initial and creating double-spaced documents. But one that proved particularly valuable was my decision to (a) create a two-column template in a word processing software that allowed me to copy my transcripts into the left column and leave the right-hand column blank for note-taking, and (b) placed each transcript in its own three-ring binder from which it would never be removed. These participant binders and the particular transcript copies within them became my core documents from which all other documents and analyses would build.

Read for a Sense of the Whole

The first phase of analyzing the mothers' descriptions of their lived experience –
reading the transcripts for a sense of the whole - appears deceptively simple. However,
it is critical that it be approached with the same high degree of discipline and rigor as
subsequent phases of analysis if a trustworthy foundation for discovering meaning is to
be developed. All of the four phases of analysis are intricately bound to one another,
creating an integrated unfolding of ever-deeper meaning and interrelated knowledge,
and each phase fulfills an equally significant role in this process. Consequently, my
implementation of this first phase of analysis had to reflect the same careful attention to
the phenomenological, scientific, and psychological criteria of Giorgi's methodology as
all later phases if the essential structure of mothers' experience was to be authentically
revealed. Not only was this critical to laying a foundation for the ultimate expression of
meaning, but it was critical to laying a foundation for my research process as outlined
above. My ability to learn from, be guided by, and respond appropriately to the
multiple and simultaneous methodological demands that began to intensify with this
phase would determine my readiness to proceed to the next phase.

Giorgi repeatedly emphasizes that his methodology is built upon a belief that
phenomenological research is a "purely *descriptive* enterprise" (Giorgi, A., 1994, p.
211). He defines description as "the use of language to articulate the objects of
experience" (Giorgi, A., 1989a, p. 60) and intentional objects of experience as the ways
in which a phenomenon gives itself to a person's consciousness, thus making up the
meaning of the phenomenon for that person. Prior to beginning analysis of the

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transcripts, my focus on descriptions was directed exclusively toward *eliciting* concrete

descriptions of the ways in which parenting with a former spouse gave itself to each

mother's consciousness. I had endeavored to draw out pre-reflective *linguistic*

articulations of mothers' experiences in the everyday world with regard to this

phenomenon. Reading the transcripts for a sense of the whole was my first opportunity

to interrogate, respond to, and reflect upon these same descriptions. It was my first

opportunity to engage fully in the heart of Giorgi's methodology and in what eventually

became my incorporated research process as described above. Most of the elements of

both came into play for the first time with this phase of analysis. Because so many of

these elements came into play for the first time with this phase of analysis, and because

of their centrality to laying a foundation for the rest of the analysis, I will describe them

at greater length in this step than in future ones. In subsequent steps they will only be

implied or referred to briefly unless there is something distinct about their application

within that step. But the reader should remain mindful that all of the elements of

Giorgi's process and my incorporated process occurred continually throughout the

study, manifesting themselves in ways specific to each step and its unique demands and

tasks.

     Before reading the transcripts, I turned to the phenomenon and recommitted to

being faithful to the givenness of the phenomenon exactly as it presented itself to the

mothers and recommitted to being faithful to the revelatory process outlined by Giorgi.

These deliberate and simultaneous commitments were manifestations of my

understanding that the two elements were inextricably linked. In other words, I

understood on a deep level that the ability to express the essential structure of mothers'
experience of parenting with a former spouse depended equally on my being faithful to
the phenomenon itself as expressed by the mothers and on my being faithful to the
methodological principles and practices that allowed for the systematic revelation of
meaning.

Also before reading the interview transcripts, I entered the phenomenological
attitude and bracketed my originally identified pre-understandings as well as any
revisions to these pre-understandings that occurred during the interviews and
transcribing so that I could approach the data with the ability to see it freshly. I also
situated my interrogation of the transcripts within a psychological perspective and set
aside competing perspectives such as a sociological perspective. Finally, I established a
felt personal relationship with the phenomenon that was characterized by an attitude of
openness and sensitivity. Because this phase of the analysis required that my sensitivity
be directed toward the totality of the lived meaning of parenting with a former spouse
for each mother, I clearly set my intentions on absorbing only a sense of the whole and
nothing more.

I read the transcripts in the individual participant binders one at a time. I read
each transcript several times in order to develop an overall sense of the lived experience
of parenting with a former spouse for that particular mother. As predicted by Dahlberg
et al. (2001), this repeated reading served a critical role in my analysis in that the more I
became involved with the mothers' actual descriptions of experience, the more I was
able to keep my pre-understandings from getting in the way. Through this process I

developed an internalized intimacy with each mother's story. As I read and re-read

each transcript, I could "hear" and "see" that mother as if the interview were taking

place right then. Everything about the interview was brought back to life and into an

immediate focus. Once that level of familiarity and intimacy was established and

readily accessible to me, I knew I was ready to move on to the next transcript. An

important caveat here is that I was fully conscious of the danger of inadvertently

establishing a fixed internalized sense of the whole against which to later understand the

parts. However, systematic and deliberate efforts to go back to the whole with each

new understanding of a part would ensure that the whole was allowed to unfold and be

revealed ever more clearly and accurately just as the constituent parts would be.

Additionally, I remained open to having my sense of the whole for any individual

mother be revised or expanded if my reading of subsequent transcripts enlightened me

retrospectively regarding that mother's experience of parenting with a former spouse.

As I read and re-read the transcripts, and then later listened to each of them

again, I monitored myself against Giorgi's methodological guidelines and against all of

the elements of my own emerging research process. This ongoing monitoring of my

thought processes and behaviors allowed me to successfully maintain an appropriate

focus as I participated in the relationship I had begun with the data and, indeed, with the

phenomenon itself. Some of the phenomenological demands required repeated self-

correction on my part in order to meet them.

One that required repeated monitoring and correction was that of giving

precedence to the lived meaning of parenting with a former spouse above all else.

Although I understood this demand on a conceptual level, it was difficult to do at first. In order to continually return to and/or maintain this focus, I developed the habit of stopping my reading and purposefully re-engaging in the phenomenological reduction as needed, which helped me in four distinct ways. First, it enabled me to keep setting aside any premature anticipated meanings and to restrain my impulses to hurry the process of discovery. Instead, I was able to be a patient listener, waiting to be surprised, who allowed the meaning of this complex experience to gradually reveal itself. I tried to remember at all times Becker's admonition that "we must listen to people rather than assume that we know what they are telling us" (Becker, 1992, p. 23). Second, my re-engagement in the phenomenological reduction allowed me to remain focused only on *understanding* the experiences described to me by the mothers without being tempted to interpret or explain these experiences.

Third, re-engaging in the phenomenological reduction helped me with the substantially more difficult task of maintaining a focus *exclusively* on the phenomenon itself. Whenever I found myself attending to or responding to any aspect of the mothers' experience *other than* the pre-reflective lived experience of parenting with a former spouse, I stopped reading immediately and refocused my intentions. Just as I had visualized myself physically placing my pre-understandings outside of an imaginary boundary surrounding this phenomenon during the interview, I now repeated that same visualization with the unavoidable observations regarding other related aspects of the mothers' lives such as their overall state of well-being, their parenting dreams and hopes, their parenting styles, their relationships with their children other

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than as it specifically pertained to parenting with a former spouse, their circumstances and experiences of divorce, their characterizations of their marriages prior to divorce, their extended family interactions since the time of divorce, their opinions about the wisdom of shared custody arrangements, and the strategies they had developed to successfully navigate their lives as single or remarried mothers.

Finally, re-engaging in the phenomenological reduction, in combination with a sensitivity to the meanings expressed, allowed me to maintain an awareness of the proper relationship between the individual mothers' experiences of the phenomenon in their lives and the universal psychological structure of the phenomenon itself that I was seeking. I was able to respond fully to the totality of the lived experience for each individual mother while simultaneously seeking insight from their unique experiences that would provide stable knowledge about the central phenomenon. In other words, I was able to respond to the individual experiences without letting them take precedence over the phenomenon. Maintaining this orientation was perhaps the most difficult phenomenological demand for me to respond to during this phase. Because I had developed a connection with each mother during the interview and then again while repeatedly reading their transcripts, my desire to be faithful to each mother's story – including lived experiences other than that of parenting with a former spouse – competed with my desire to remain faithful to the phenomenon itself beyond any individual experience of it. Once again, the technique of visualization served as an important aid to resolving this competition and maintaining my orientation and is represented by Figure 1 below.
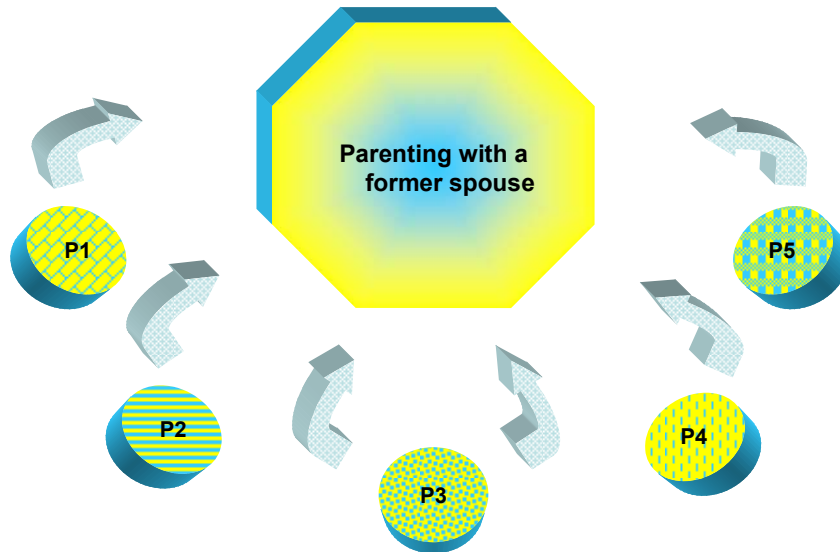
Figure 1: Totality of Individual Experiences vs. Experiences of Phenomenon

I visualized each mother's story as a unique body of information about their
lived experiences, including, but not limited to, their experiences of parenting with a
former spouse. I allowed myself to respond to their experiences in all their uniqueness
and all their fullness. I made no attempt to compare or contrast their experiences, only
to know them. And then I let go of the completeness of their individual stories and
allowed them to fade into the background, while simultaneously allowing their specific
experiences of parenting with a former spouse to come into sharp focus and begin to
contribute to a more universal understanding of parenting with a former spouse.

Eventually, the intention expressed by this visualization became a natural way to interact with the data as I continued my analysis.

Another phenomenological demand that required repeated monitoring and correction to achieve was remaining oriented only to the whole of the experience of parenting with a former spouse. In relation to the schematic above, I sought to first become attuned to the whole of the experience for each mother, and then to let those understandings lead me toward a more universal sense of the whole. The difficulty with this task lay in avoiding being drawn in by specific descriptions of experience, thereby attending to the parts instead of the whole. Although it was impossible not to have specific descriptions of experience call themselves to my attention, I discovered immediately that allowing myself to respond to them as potential constituents of meaning at this stage inevitably altered my relationship to the data. Rather than being a patient follower of the data whose purpose was to gain a holistic feel for each mother's lived experience, I began to hurry my reading and direct it toward finding additional descriptions that would either confirm or contradict those that caught my attention. I also began to search for the most appropriate descriptive language of my own, which is not an appropriate task until the third phase of analysis. Once again, regularly re-engaging in the phenomenological reduction helped me overcome these difficulties but by far the most critical help came from paying close attention to the issues of discipline and efficiency.

Adopting Giorgi's strategy of bracketing all efficiency concerns and inclinations, I committed firmly to focusing *only* on one step at a time, with discipline,

and allowing his methodology to slow down my analysis process as it was intended to.

One immediate result of this commitment was a significant change in the practical

procedures I elected to follow. Whereas I had deliberately chosen to read from the two-

column transcripts in the binders so that I could take notes in the right-hand column, I

quickly changed to a strategy of reading with minimal to no use of pen. From that point

forward, I wrote no notes at all on the transcript pages, which served two important

purposes. First, it helped me remain immersed in the present, focused only on

absorbing a familiarity with the whole of each mother's experience, rather than

continually interrupting the familiarizing process by pursuing in writing each meaning

possibility that occurred to me. Second, it helped maximize my ability to truly see the

data freshly when I used these same transcripts to identify meaning units in the next

phase.

I did allow myself to occasionally and cautiously write a word or a brief phrase

on a single two-column piece of paper that I inserted at the front of each binder. (To

put in perspective the caution I employed, I finished this phase of analysis with only one

and a half pages of words and phrases from all nine transcripts combined.) One column

was labeled with the mother's name and one was labeled "all mothers." It was here that

I began to list key words or phrases that might point me toward the potential meaning of

parenting with a former spouse when I got to subsequent steps. These words or phrases

were sometimes stimulated by similar descriptions that appeared a number of times and

were sometimes stimulated by an individual description that was unique or striking in

some way. They represented what I thought of as potential *categories* of descriptions

that might be suggestive of the meaning of the phenomenon. I was very deliberate in my choice of the word category which I conceptualized as a very loose and flexible classification. I deliberately avoided thinking in alternative language that might lead me to a narrower classification that once again prescribed in advance what to look for as I read. For example, when one mother spoke movingly about her motivations for parenting with her former spouse, I wrote only the word *motivation* in her column rather than anything more detailed. Or when another mother described a series of difficult interactions with her former spouse that week, I wrote *frequent struggles.*

I also deliberately avoided thinking or using the word *theme* as I wrote these key words and phrases. This language is too closely associated with the interpretive task of hermeneutic phenomenology which does not fit Giorgi's definition of phenomenology and his methodology. And it is also too closely associated with positivistic content analysis which is antithetical to phenomenological analysis. That approach to analysis seeks only unifying and recurrent ideas which are frequently called themes, and frequently derives these strictly from explicit statements. By contrast, phenomenology seeks the essential constituents of meaning which can be revealed by one description just as much as by many descriptions, and it derives these primarily from what is only implicit in the participant's descriptions.

When I reached the desired level of intimacy with a transcript and was ready to move on, I carried with me a sense of the whole for that mother's experience of parenting with her former spouse, but I literally and figuratively set aside the binder and the key words and phrases it contained. I did not re-read them, I did not use them to

guide my reading of the next transcript, and I was no longer hurrying the meaning or the analysis process. As my analysis progressed, some of these words and phrases were simply forgotten, having never again risen to a level of potential significance. Others were explored and eventually discarded. Many were discovered to hold seeds of meaning that were later revealed. And some remained essentially intact as core descriptors of an essential constituent. An example of the latter was the phrase *inner conflict,* which the reader will see again in the Findings chapter.

Two final elements of my method that first came into play with this phase of analysis were the mutually supportive and intentional activities of *dwelling* (Giorgi, A., 1994, p. 213) and creating opportunities for *incubation*[9] – both of which required time, and neither of which would have been possible had I not first learned experientially how to slow down and be lead by the data. As mentioned earlier in the discussion of my incorporated process, I intuitively understood the need for both of these activities and consciously engaged in them long before I discovered the names given to the same or similar processes by Giorgi and Moustakas. I engaged in both of these activities between successive readings of each individual transcript, between finishing one mother's transcript and moving on to the next, and than once again after all of the transcripts had been read. When I dwelt with the data, I remained in an interactive relationship with it that was characterized by unhurried reflection and dialogue over a period of time until I felt as if I had received all that I could from it. It was during the dwelling that my intuitions were allowed to develop, and potential meanings were

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[9] A concept take from Moustakas (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28) and referenced in Giorgi (Giorgi, A., 1994, p. 213).

allowed to unfold and begin to show themselves. By contrast, the central feature of

incubation was once again a literal and figurative setting aside. To create the

opportunity for incubation, I deliberately stopped interacting with the data and the

phenomenon and set aside all thoughts of the mothers' descriptions of experience, in

effect turning away from the data and the phenomenon instead of turning to it. This

gave my unconscious mind the opportunity to do its own dwelling with the data and to

bring its frequent and sometimes sudden insights to consciousness.

Identify Meaning Units

Before discussing the identification of meaning units, I would like to comment

on a shift that will be taking place in the information given to the reader. Up until now,

I have given the reader a fairly detailed description of how I went about implementing

Giorgi's methodology in this study. It seemed important to describe this detail in order

to give the reader an accurate picture of my research process. However, I will be

providing substantially less of this detail when I discuss the present step, and

increasingly less in future steps. Now that the reader has a sense of the various

elements of my process, their constituent parts, their interrelationships, and when and

how they influenced each research activity, I will rely on simple reference to these

elements going forward or, in some cases, will presume that the reader understands

these were taking place on a continual basis whether they are mentioned or not. What

will be discussed instead will be some of the unique demands and challenges associated

with a given step.

The meaning goal of this phase of analysis is to identify individual psychological meaning units in the mothers' descriptions. This phase is the least complex of Giorgi's analysis steps and the quickest to implement, but it plays no less of a central role in uncovering the meaning of parenting with a former spouse than other phases, and carries no less of a burden in terms of fulfilling specific criteria than other phases. In fact, as mentioned previously, the demands placed on the researcher in terms of fulfilling the criteria of Giorgi's methodology increase in both number and intensity with each successive step in the analysis process, including this second step. Though simple and quick, it requires the same disciplined approach from within the appropriate attitude and the same multiplicity of considerations in regard to how it is carried out.

According to Husserl, the mothers' naïve descriptions of parenting with a former spouse would be likely to reveal only a "vague foreshadowing" of the phenomenon's essential constituents and would "give but a wavering indication of their presence" (Husserl, 1931, p. 177). In this phase, my task was to begin to identify these wavering indications by breaking the whole of the mothers' transcript into parts called meaning units which would later become my units of analysis. Breaking the transcript into meaning units provides a starting point for more in-depth analysis of meaning by allowing the researcher to break the data into manageable parts. A meaning unit is best understood by describing what takes place for the researcher rather than by providing a cognitive, verbal definition. Each time the researcher *experiences* a transition in meaning while reading the transcript, he or she indicates where that transition occurs.

The point at which the transition occurs marks the end of one meaning unit and the beginning of the next meaning unit.

When developing his methodology, Giorgi discovered that the identification of meaning units was a perceptual or experiential process rather than an intellectual one (Giorgi, A., 1970, 1985b, 1990, 1985c). Consequently, he stresses repeatedly the importance of the researcher responding to the data with *spontaneity*, which is defined as without effort or premeditation. When done appropriately, this phase allows the researcher to *experience* aspects of the meaning, even though he or she will not understand it yet. This is part of the open-endedness of Georgi's methodology and one that facilitates being able to see the phenomenon freshly. As described by Giorgi, the spontaneous identification of meaning units "provides the fresh possibility each time of transcending one's 'knowledge about'" a phenomenon (Giorgi, A., 1990, p. 73). This spontaneous approach helps keep the researcher within the phenomenological attitude and is meant to take place fairly rapidly without stopping until a transcript has been entirely marked. Once a meaning unit has been marked, the researcher should immediately move forward "without interrogating it further at that time" (Giorgi, A., 1989b, p. 73). The more familiar one has become during the process of reading the transcript for a sense of the whole, the easier this experiential identification of meaning units will be. If this familiarity has not been established, it will be more likely that the researcher will respond from an intellectual analytical perspective and be unable to simply respond to a felt shift in meaning.

It is worth noting that not all phenomenological researchers take the same perspective about the importance of spontaneity when identifying meaning units. For example, Dahlberg's view is that this phase is dialectical in nature and involves a repetitive cycle of interrogation, reflection, and response that is done several times for each transcript. However, I had no reason to experiment with an approach differing from Giorgi's, so I went through each transcript quickly and responded spontaneously-- something that was not always easy to do. Ultimately I found that my relationship with the data, and, therefore, with the experience being described by mothers, deepened substantially precisely *because* I had to depend exclusively on openness and sensitivity to the mothers' naïve descriptions in order to respond to shifts in meaning on a strictly experiential basis. Doing so also deepened my trust for Giorgi's process and for my ability to monitor my own orientations and thought processes.

Meaning units can be of any length – from a single word to a full paragraph – and are determined by coherency of the unit and the researcher's experience of it. There is no right or wrong in the identification of meaning units, and it is likely that no two people would choose the exact same meaning units in a transcript. However, the fact that someone else might mark the meaning units differently is not a concern because the primary purpose of this task is to provide the researcher with partial meanings that are manageable enough in size for the researcher to concentrate on them and explore them in greater depth during the transformation phase coming next. At that point, the researcher will be able to dwell thoughtfully with each meaning unit for as

much time as necessary in order to transform it into disciplinary language and begin the cycle of moving between parts and whole in terms of participant meaning.

When reading the transcripts for a sense of the whole, my task had been to get a sense of the mother's experiences without being drawn to any parts or details. My role had basically been one of being sensitive to the mothers' experiences, "listening" to them, absorbing them, and dwelling with them until I had an internalized felt sense of the overall experience for these mothers. The identification of meaning units in this second phase of the analysis marked the beginning of becoming selective and discriminating with the data. Granted, the discrimination required at this stage was rather simple, but it was an aspect of the analysis that would intensify and deepen in future steps. Because there cannot be set rules and regulations for what constitutes a meaning unit, this step also became an opportunity for me to begin testing and trusting my responses to the data, my judgments regarding the wavering indications of meaning that I was being given glimpses of, the revelatory process in which I was engaged, and the ability to recognize when and why my orientation or thought processes had shifted away from the appropriate orientation.

Prior to identifying the meaning units, I once again consciously repeated the orienting process that was becoming central to my own *methodos*. I turned to the phenomenon of parenting with a former spouse and recommitted to being faithful to the givenness of this particular phenomenon exactly as it presented itself to the mothers, recommitted to being faithful to the phenomenological revelatory process outlined by Giorgi, and recommitted to engaging in disciplined practice that did not allow issues of

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efficiency to interfere with the discovery process. I also assumed the phenomenological attitude which once again allowed me to be free of preconceptions, sensitive and attuned to the phenomenon of parenting with a former spouse, and open to being surprised by the meaning units I would find.

As I picked up each transcript and adopted the appropriate attitude, I brought to mind and kept in my awareness the sense of the totality of the experience for that particular mother and began reading the transcript again. This time I went through it quickly, using a blue highlighter to mark the meaning units whenever I experienced a shift in meaning. I went through the entire transcript this way without leaving anything out since it was important that everything be accounted for. It was immediately obvious to me when I moved out of the experiential mode and started to respond from a purely cognitive perspective. In those moments, I would find myself trying to analyze a meaning unit, wondering if I had identified it "accurately," making preliminary judgments about its value or significance, or simply comparing it to other meaning units. When I found myself thinking and responding to the data in these ways, I stopped, put down the binder, and re-established my orientation before beginning again. If I found that a particular section of the transcript was troublesome, I marked a vertical line next to that section--which in some cases was an entire page--and moved on. It was not important that the meaning units be identified in a particular sequence; only that they be identified based on a spontaneous experience of meaning. Some of these I went back to and marked at another time with a different color marker, and some I did not mark until I got well into the next phase.

Once again, I was cautious about taking any notes. Although I could not help but have possible meaning insights emerge, I did not want to focus on them yet. But nor did I want to "lose" them. So at times I used the blank right-hand column to write a quick word or phrase or question, while simultaneously using discipline to bring me right back to the task at hand. In a sense, I used the right hand column as a place to list and then bracket a thought--or set it aside--for the time being. As with the earlier note-taking while reading for a sense of the whole, I thought of these words and phrases as potential categories of meaning that were very loose and flexible. Examples of some of the notes from my right-hand column during this phase include: "Turmoil? What kind?" "repeated inner conflict / being torn" "Boundaries" "Cooperation vs. competition" "Fears?" And again like the earlier note-taking, some of these did in fact point to an aspect of mothers' experience that would be explored further at a later time but this was not the time to determine that. For example, the term *inner conflict* appeared when reading to get a sense of the whole, reappeared repeatedly during the identification of meaning units, and ultimately became part of the essential structure. *Cooperation* on the other hand, or meanings related to it, was not found to be a constituent of the essential structure. And *competition* was found to be a significant aspect of mothers' experiences but only as a sub-structure to, or manifestation of, other essential meanings.

When I had reviewed all the transcripts and marked everything into meaning units, I knew I was ready to move on to the next phase. Before proceeding, I spent time dwelling with my reflections that were given full range at that point because they could

no longer affect the outcome of this phase. They could, however, give me the opportunity to begin the next phase from a more informed and reflective position.

Transform Meaning Units

This is a point in the research process where I once again made an adaptation to Giorgi's methodology. Referring to Table 5, Giorgi's fourth phase is also called "Transform Meaning Units." However, in that phase, he simultaneously and in an integrated, seamless fashion carries out the task of transforming the participants' naïve descriptions into psychological language as well as the task of identifying invariant meanings of the experience being studied. I found that there was sufficient variation in the demands placed on the researcher for each of these tasks that it was necessary for me to temporarily conceive of them and structure them as separate and sequential phases. Consequently, only the task of transforming meaning units into psychological language will be addressed at this point and all discussion of identifying invariants will occur with the next phase. I am aware that this creates a somewhat artificial separation of an intricately linked process, but it nonetheless accurately portrays an adaptation I made that facilitated my overall understanding and implementation of Giorgi's methodology. It should be noted that the boundaries of these two phases remained extremely permeable and flexible as the analysis took place.

The meaning goal of this phase is relatively straightforward – to re-express the naïve descriptions in the meaning units in psychological language. Giorgi explains the rationale for this phase of analysis in the following way:

Phenomenologically, there is no doubt that it is the meaning for the participant that must be captured, but it is equally certain that the meaning must be taken up and be re-expressed in the language of the researcher's discipline (sociology, psychology, etc.). In other words, it is the meaning-for-the-participant insofar as it is relevant to and revelatory of the research question that matters. (Giorgi, A., 1994, pp. 208-209)

In other words, it is the mothers' descriptions of experience that can contribute to an understanding of the phenomenon of parenting with a former spouse in all contexts that is being sought rather than an understanding of the individual mothers' experiences themselves. To get at this knowledge, my charge was to discover, or uncover, the implicit psychological meaning of reality for the mothers.

It must be stressed that this transformation into psychological language *does not change or alter the presence contained in the meaning unit*. Nor does it attempt to explain the description, abstract it, or impose any kind of psychological diagnosis or theory on the description. Rather, the researcher carefully avoids the use of theoretical language and strives to stay as close to the participants' naive descriptions as possible. In fact, everything in the transformed meaning unit must first be in the participant's description either explicitly or implicitly. The researcher takes the presence described by a participant precisely as it is described, with no concern for "objective reality," and begins to make explicit the psychological meanings that are usually only implicit in the participant's naïve descriptions. In effect, the researcher reveals the psychological organization of the participant's lived experience which, in turn, opens up the opportunity for deeper analysis and understanding. These transformations "help organize what would otherwise by a seemingly hopeless array of aspects" of a lived

experience (Carson, 1990, p. 147). In addition, using the terminology of Husserl (1982), the transformed meaning units articulate the participants' experiences at a "higher level" and "raise them up" so they come closer to the invariants that constitute the essential structure.

Like all phases of the analysis, the transformation of the meaning units into psychological language plays a critical role in the discovery of meaning and makes its own unique contribution to the ultimate results. Rather than simply having to take on faith that the data analysis will build upon itself, one begins to experience that directly in this phase. It is common for researchers to make the mistake of rushing through this phase, only to find later that their research process stalls because of inadequate psychological descriptions. Taking this caution to heart, I concentrated on engaging fully in this phase and once again allowing Giorgi's process to slow me down as it was intended, giving me a methodical way to patiently begin revealing the meaning of mothers' experiences of parenting with a former spouse.

It has been emphasized repeatedly that phenomenology depends upon description, or "the use of language to articulate the objects of experience" (Giorgi, A., 1989a, p. 6). Until now, my role as a researcher has been to gather descriptions of experience as articulated by mothers from within the naïve attitude, to respond to their meaning, and to begin to break them down into meaning parts. The current phase was my first encounter with a new demand for *expressing* meaning by using my own language to re-articulate the mothers' verbal descriptions, a demand that would remain central from here forward. Unlike the mothers' naïve descriptions, my transformed

descriptions were not from the natural pre-reflective attitude, but required ongoing reflection to generate them. The reflection that began in earnest during this stage was a critical element in an ongoing dialectical cycle of interrogating the data, reflecting, and then expressing the meaning that would continue throughout the analysis process. Each implementation of this cycle in successive steps would allow me to go deeper in my analysis and in my understanding of mothers' experiences. While engaging in this cycle, I was ever mindful of remaining oriented as a *responder* to the meaning in the descriptions and, as a *follower* of the meaning, and I strove to resist any impulses to superimpose my own biases, expectations, and projections onto mothers' descriptions. I was also mindful of allowing plenty of time for both dwelling and incubation.

In carrying out this phase, I developed a worksheet that would serve to capture and organize the work for this step and future steps. Once again, I found that it was critical that I take significant care in how I managed the large volumes of data that I would be working with extensively over a long period of time. And once again, it was necessary to experiment until I found the right system. My worksheet was based on a suggested format from Giorgi that I adapted to accommodate my own working style and preferences. An example of this worksheet can be found in Appendix D. This would be the last time I found it necessary to develop any worksheets for managing data because this one, as hoped, needed only minor adjustments to suit each subsequent step.

In order to use the worksheet to create a master transcript document for each participant, I first used the auto-fill feature to add line numbers in the first column and a similar feature to fill in the participant's name on every row in the next column. I then

transferred the entire transcript, item by item, into sequential cells in the third column. An item was either an interviewer question or an individual meaning unit that I had marked in the transcript in blue highlighter. When there was a sequence or series of meaning units that I might want to consider together, I added the phrases "Begin sequence" and "End sequence" in the appropriate places. Although this was indeed a tedious and laborious process, it served me well for the duration of the research process and was readily and quickly adapted as needed for future steps. It is a choice I would make again because of the time it saved me in the long run and the ability it gave me to keep the large amounts of data organized and useful.

After transferring all of the transcripts to the new format, I then began the process of transforming each meaning unit into psychological language. I did all of my work directly on the computer and wrote my descriptions in the second of the three columns. I used the third column to keep track of notes and questions that came to mind as I worked. This allowed me to keep all of my ideas, questions, and reactions physically associated with the mothers' descriptions that had elicited them, which aided tremendously during the many subsequent reviews of the meaning units. I tried to re-express each meaning unit in the best way possible, but I was aware that in many cases it would require several efforts in order to adequately capture what had been expressed. In some cases, I rewrote the transformed meaning unit several times in one sitting. In other cases, I wrote what I could at that moment, knowing it was far from complete but also knowing that I would come back to it for further refinement. It was more important to keep moving through the transcripts than to get stuck because of a

particularly troublesome transformation. It was not uncommon that a transformation I wrote for a meaning unit further down in the transcript would inform me in a new way about mothers' experiences, and that in turn, would allow me to go back and complete some of the unfinished meaning unit transformations.

As I moved through each transcript, interacting with the data and engaging in a dialectic cycle, both my understanding of that mothers' experience and of the phenomenon of parenting with a former spouse increased.   Once again, I repeatedly reoriented myself to focus only on the phenomenon itself rather than on the individual mother's experience per se. I discovered experientially what Giorgi had meant when he said that the transformed meaning units could, and should, be informed by presences in the entire transcript and not limited to the presence in just a singular meaning unit. The more familiar I became with the meaning units contained in each transcript, the more I was able to write transformed meaning units that integrated meaning from throughout the transcript. Similarly, by constantly moving from part to whole and back again, I was able to write transformations that integrated meaning from my reading of the transcripts as a whole. The more I was able to integrate presences from throughout the transcript and the more I was able to integrate presences from the whole, the more confident I could be about eliminating some meaning units completely or setting aside meaning units that would yield only highly repetitive transformations. While identifying mothers' meaning units in the previous phase, it was not possible to determine which of them would yield the most valuable insights regarding the essential structure of the experience of parenting with a former spouse. It would also have been

ill-advised to attempt to do so because of the risk of beginning to project one's own expectations onto the data. However, distinguishing which meaning units were most promising in terms of yielding insight did become possible to at least some degree during this phase of analysis. As the process of transforming meaning units continued to unfold, it became strikingly obvious why the ability to describe the essential psychological structure depended so heavily on the care, and time, taken with this step.

Identify Invariants

Invariants are also referred to in phenomenological literature as *essences* or *constituents,* and together they form the essential psychological structure. As I discuss the identification of invariants, I remind the reader that separating this phase into one separate from the preceding transformation of meaning units in to psychological language was not a rigid distinction and there was a tremendous amount of overlap. However, conceiving of this as a subsequent step rather than a simultaneous step allowed me to focus on (a) moving through the transcripts and generating reasonably good psychological descriptions that I could go back to and refine as extensively as necessary, and (b) increasing my abilities to articulate psychological descriptions as I gained more practice. I do not mean to imply that the previous phase was done carelessly or too quickly. Rather I was not focused on remaining with each meaning unit for indeterminate amounts of time until I was completely satisfied with the transformed description. I allowed myself to do the best I could, engaging in a dialectical cycle of interrogation, reflection, and writing, and then I moved on.

One way that I interpreted Giorgi's methodology that is perhaps unique but will serve to clarify my distinction between these phases of analysis further revolves around the phenomenological process of using imaginative variation to intuit the invariants. Giorgi states that the researcher's task it is "to intuit and describe, essentially, the psychological meanings contained in the everyday description with the help of free imaginative variation" (Giorgi, A., 1985a, p. 73). Employing imaginative variation once again allows the researcher to systematize and slow down what is normally lived through more quickly, and to draw upon the imaginative and intuitive capabilities Giorgi believes we all carry within us. As there is no way of knowing ahead of time what intuitions will emerge, Giorgi says that these are, therefore, genuine discoveries (Giorgi, A., 1989b).

> Merleau-Ponty defines imaginative variation in the following manner:
>
> *Wesenschau* [phenomenological intuition] is based on the imaginary "free variation" of certain facts. In order to grasp an essence, we consider a concrete experience, and then we make it change in our thought, trying to imagine it as effectively modified in all respects. *That which remains invariable* through these changes is the essence of the phenomenon in question. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964b)

A person describing experience from within the naïve attitude usually communicates a great deal of implicit as well as explicit information, and the phenomenological researcher is able to use imaginative variation to "go through" (Carson, 1990, p. 149) the concrete expressions in the meaning unit and identify the essential, or invariant, psychological meanings implicit in the description.

In implementing Giorgi's methodology, I experienced what I will refer to as two distinct "levels" of invariants that I responded to and then described with the help of free imaginative variation. The first of these consisted of an invariant psychological meaning being expressed within a given and singular meaning unit. Identification of this level of invariants was incorporated into my previous phase of transforming meaning units into psychological language. The meanings thus identified are those that could answer the question "What psychological meaning remains constant through all possible variations of the experience expressed within this meaning unit that one can imagine?" When I stated in the previous phase that I sought to generate reasonably good psychological descriptions that I could go back to and revise as needed, I was referring to this first level of identification of invariants. However, my desire (and indeed, need) to go back for further revision and refinement was a simple acknowledgement of the fact that it might take many iterations before a given psychological description felt like an well-articulated invariant that stood up to the test of remaining invariable through all possible modification of the facts. Consequently, the finalization of this first level of invariants occurred during the current phase instead of the previous one, and it is, therefore, being discussed here.

The second level of identified invariants consisted of those first-level invariants which, when modified and changed imaginatively, remained as invariants across all experiences of parenting with a former spouse and not just as an invariant contained within a given meaning unit. These invariants answered the question "What psychological meaning remains constant through all possible variations of experience of

this particular phenomenon?" It is this level of invariants that directly constitute the essential psychological structure, and there are far fewer invariants that can answer this question than can answer the previous question. In my study, the finalization of my first-level invariants and the identification of the second-level invariants occurred simultaneously as part of the current phase, with each new discovery at either level helping to give shape and form to the other.

The identification of invariants is without doubt the heart of Giorgi's method of analysis and is by far the most difficult to implement. It is also the point at which the wavering indication of the essential structure of meaning becomes less distant and begins to appear within reach. Like the other steps, it is crucial to the unfolding process of explicating meaning and is one that becomes eminently more satisfying as one's proficiency builds through practice. As intended, I discovered first hand while engaging in this step what Giorgi and others meant when they described this step as demanding, intense, wondrous, and requiring both spontaneity and discipline, as well as sensitivity, to implement. Eloquent descriptions of this phase of analysis include the following:

> [It is] as painstaking as the works of Balzac, Proust, Valery or Cezanne - by reason of the same kind of attentiveness and wonder, the same demand for awareness, the same will to seize the meaning of the world or of history as that meaning comes into being. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. xxi)

> Recall that Husserl (1982) explained how the imaginative variation supplies us with analogies that press upon us, that provide us with conjectures that draws us toward real intuition. In other words, the researcher makes rich use of imaginative variation to fructify the data to the point that it *knocks at the door of the researcher's intuition.* With his/her intuition the researcher can reach

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through the concrete description and clarify the psychological invariant(s) implicit in the protocol meaning unit. Intuition here is defined as direct perception of the truth independent of any reasoning process. (Carson, 1990, p. 150)

As with all previous steps, I used phenomenological reduction to maintain the appropriate attitude and to facilitate my being able to implement this step with the requisite discipline and with a lack of concern for efficiency. While imaginative variation is genuinely meant to free one's thinking from boundaries that can be quite limiting, it nonetheless must be employed within a context that does have some limits. Giorgi includes within these limits whatever connotations, analogous experiences, psychological values, and language choices that effectively represent "intuitable givens or necessities that obviously belong to the situation." He excludes "gratuitous assumptions that will enable one to keep moving on a problem or to circumvent certain types of difficulties merely for the sake of keeping moving or circumventing" (Giorgi, A., 1990, p. 72). My desire to avoid the latter hazard reinforced my decision to separate Giorgi's "transform meaning units" step into two separate steps for myself – "transform meaning units" and "identify invariants." This helped me more easily maintain the mindset that my transformations would remain incomplete until I had gone back to revise them as often as needed until they were satisfactory descriptions of invariants – initially of what I am calling level one invariants and then ultimately of what I am calling level two invariants.

Giorgi considers this task of identifying invariants to require spontaneity in terms of the researcher's lived response to the descriptions and the implicit meaning

contained within them--the "direct perception of the truth independent of any reasoning process" referred to by Carson in the preceding quotation. Although deep reflection and frequent variations of written descriptions of meaning are also required, it is the spontaneous recognition of having arrived at a psychological meaning which resonates the truth of the participants' totality of experience that will be the most critical guide for the researcher regarding the discovery of invariants. Clearly, the researcher must never lose sight of the fact that it is the totality of experience that is the reference point against which to measure the invariants. When seeking the invariants of mothers' experience of parenting with a former spouse, I engaged in imaginative variation until I intuited the non-linguistic presences Giorgi (1990) assures researchers they will discover and drew upon these to guide me to linguistic expression of the same. This process of developing linguistic expressions of non-linguistic experience is so central to Giorgi's phenomenology that it seems worth while at this point to include a lengthy description from him of what he experiences when implementing this step himself.

> In those moments when language is *transcended* it is because a meaning or event evokes an expression that accurately characterizes the state of affairs being observed. Language is both an open-ended system and a dynamic one. It evolves and changes, but I can only do so through *speaker*, who must be *responding to something non-linguistic* in order to be able to contribute to the evolution of a language….In the case at hand, for example, that is, the description of constituents of the psychological essence of a concrete description, in each case I find myself confronted with a gap that is filled with *tension*. I often must express myself in a way that I initially find to be puzzling. I concentrate on the problem. I read the appropriate section of the concrete description again, I then think of the task before me, and then I begin to wonder how I can express the intuited meaning….More often than not, certain forms of expression come to my awareness and I compare them, sometimes, with the "tense gap" and I find them lacking, until at last words form and I find them fitting….Sometimes this is done with genuine excitement as I discover

expressions I never believed could be realized, and other times I begrudgingly accept modes of expression that I hope I will be able to improve upon later….The point of the description is to show that I am *being guided by a non-linguistic presence that language is being called upon to express through me*….If true, not all linguistic expressions are completely determinative. The process is more dialectical than that. (Giorgi, A., 1990, pp. 79-80)

And finally, while implementing this phase of Giorgi's methodology, I remained mindful of the absolute necessity of retaining an attitude of wonder. I recalled van Manen's description of wonder as "the central methodological feature of phenomenological inquiry (van Manen, 2002, p. 5) and also his quotation from Verhoeven (1967) that summarized the role of wonder as "both the condition *and* the primary principle of phenomenological method." With this in mind, I worked to maintain a continuous attitude of wonder as I responded to the mothers' descriptions given within the naïve attitude and tried to create transformed descriptions of mother's experiences that were intimately and authentically representative of mothers' experiences. I also tried to create transformed descriptions that achieved the related goal described by van Manen: "Phenomenology not only finds its starting point in wonder, it must also induce wonder. For a phenomenological text to lead the way to human understanding it must lead the reader to wonder. The text must induce a questioning wonder" (van Manen, 1997, p. 44-45). As I developed written expressions that would authentically reflect the invariant meanings associated with mothers' experience of parenting with a former spouse, it became clear that the level of proficiency I desired would require an extent of practice not possible within a single research study. While implementing this phase of analysis, I read additional

phenomenological texts to assist me in learning this new form of expression and committed to future projects that would lead me to the proficiency desired. I also continuously implemented my incorporated phenomenological process in order to maintain the appropriate orientation and intentions and be able to fulfill the criteria set forth by Giorgi.

Describe Essential Structure

The final phase of phenomenological analysis is the explication of the essential psychological structure of meaning for a particular human phenomenon which is then presented to the scholarly community to judge. This ultimate finding is firmly grounded in the analysis of the participants' meaning units and also in the analysis of the researchers' transformed meaning units which organize the data. It is important to note that the participants' descriptions are given from within a naïve attitude, and the researcher's descriptions are given from within the phenomenological attitude. The two are not the same. The first is a description of experience *by* the participant and takes place *pre-reflectively*. The second is a description of meaning *for* the participant as grasped by the researcher and requires *reflection* to develop. The two are not reducible to each other and, in fact, do not even have to be identical because, while the experience described in a participant's meaning unit belongs to that participant who is the experiencer, the ultimate meaning discovered by the researcher transcends individual participant experience and points to a more universal meaning.

The universal meaning of Giorgi's descriptive phenomenology is not equivalent to the truly universal essence sought by phenomenological philosophers, but rather it is

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the revealed meaning that is invariant in all possible variations of an experience. This meaning is expressed in the form of an essential psychological structure and tells us "that which makes a some-'thing' what it *is* – and without which it could not be what it is" (Husserl, 1982; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). It describes the "in-itselfness" of a particular human phenomenon and can only be grasped by studying specific lived experiences of that phenomenon. However, we are reminded by Merleau-Ponty that we should not consider the explication of the essential psychological structure of experience as an end in itself. Rather, we should view it as an opportunity to "return to the world as lived in an enriched and deepened fashion" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a), more able to understand others and more able to understand ourselves.

The implementation of this final phase of analysis once again requires the researcher to engage in free imaginative variation. Although this strategy has been employed during other analysis phases, there is an important distinction in this phase of analysis that directs the imaginative variation process toward a slightly different kind of goal. Whereas it was used in previous phases to generate descriptions of invariants, or of the constituents of the essential psychological structure, it is now used to generate descriptions of the *interrelationships* among these invariants. As the psychological invariants described in earlier phases of analysis "cohere and coalesce into an essential structure of meaning" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a), it is the interrelationships among these invariants that are revealed through imaginative variation. In other words, the researcher uses imaginative variation to intuit how the invariants relate to each other and to the totality of the experience and then makes this structure explicit. This "calls

our attention to an internal organization that makes the value and the meaning of a particular psychological phenomenon come to life" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964b).

As I began this final phase of analysis, I reestablished my intentions (as per my incorporated process) and engaged again in an active relationship with the data. I engaged in a dialogue with the psychological invariants I had identified in previous steps and wrote down words and phrases that might be suggestive of the essential structure. While doing this, I maintained an awareness of the important distinctions between the imaginative variation occurring with this phase of analysis and the imaginative variation that had occurred in previous phases. Initially, I had employed imaginative variation with presences in the meaning units constituted by the *participants*. Now, while ensuring that the essential structure remained grounded in the participants' lived experience, I was dialoguing with and employing imaginative variation with the psychological invariants constituted by *me* as the researcher. I continued this process until I had intuited what I believed were descriptors of the interrelatedness of the invariants identified previously and until I had developed a description that contained a sense of structural unity to the experience being described. This phase of analysis was complex and multi-dimensional, but I found that if I remained disciplined and sensitive in my approach, allowing the process to unfold as intended, it did indeed create a dynamic whereby the data did cohere and coalesce into a structural unity. The essential structure thus revealed, along with the constituting invariants, is presented in the next chapter.

As I walked new ground, searching for a foothold in an altered life, the aftermath of my divorce took on many personalities, which appeared out of nowhere, like uninvited guests. Some barges in all at once; some held more power on different days; others popped their heads in for attention at any given moment. Some were welcomed visitors: liberation; stimulation; wonder; resolution. Peace. Some were obstructive intruders: sadness; guilt; confusion; uncertainty. Panic. I yelled at them, begged them to leave. Get out of here. Let me get on with my life. Move forward. (Roth, 2002)

REVELATION OF MEANING

Throughout these chapters, it has been emphasized that phenomenological research is focused on meaning. Accordingly, the findings presented in this chapter are descriptions of the meaning of parenting with a former spouse as revealed by the participant mothers' naïve descriptions of their lived experience. More specifically, the findings presented here include descriptions of the invariant constituents of the meaning of this experience followed by an integrated description of the essential psychological structure of the meaning of this experience for mothers. These descriptions of meaning reflect "that which makes a some-*thing* what it *is* – and without which it could not be what it is" (Husserl, 1982), a definition that the reader may recall was used to introduce this study. The descriptions of meaning then, tell us the *it-ness* of mothers' experience of parenting with a former spouse, and provide stable knowledge about this human experience that transcends the concrete, individual experiences of the participant mothers.

Prior to presenting these findings, it seems useful to remind the reader of the definitions of some critical terms. As with other phenomenon, mothers who are parenting with a former spouse respond to a *unity of intentional relations* that constitute their *conscious experience* of that phenomenon and form the basis of their naïve descriptions of this lived experience. My first task as the researcher was to discover within these naïve descriptions the individual *constituents* of that unity of experience described by mothers, or the particular aspects of meaning that would be *invariant* in all possible variations of that experience. My next task was to *describe* these invariant aspects of meaning in language as precise as possible without resorting to labels, abstractions, theoretical constructs, interpretations or explanations (Giorgi, A., 1989b). Once these were described adequately, my next task was to reflect on how these multiple and interrelated constituents of meaning "coalesced and cohered" into a single psychological *structure* of meaning for mothers and, applying the same language guidelines and limitations as before, describe the structure for the scholarly community, for parents, and for all who want to gain a deeper understanding of this particular phenomenon. The structure thus revealed is typically called the *essential psychological structure* and is considered the *essence* of the experienced phenomenon.

According to Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty, 1964b), the description of the essential psychological structure should make the meaning of a particular psychological phenomenon come to life. And indeed, the phenomenological descriptions of both the invariants and the essential psychological structure should produce "a feeling of understanding in those who encounter them." They should provoke a sense of

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recognition in the reader that the meaning as described is something that they, as a

fellow human being-in-the-world, have experienced or could conceivably experience at

some point. Ricoeur has suggested that, rather than judging the truth of the descriptions

according to an arbitrary external standard that is unrelated to the participants' personal

experiences, one should judge the truth of the descriptions according to their

congruency with the participants' lived world that they unfold and reveal. This

requisite connection to the specific kind of rigorous discovery process that is

fundamental to phenomenology and should be the basis for its credibility is

conceptualized by Heidegger[10] to be "truth as unconcealment." Reinforcing these

viewpoints, Giorgi states:

> It is not so much whether another position with respect to the data could be
> adopted (this point is granted beforehand) but whether a reader, adopting the
> same viewpoint as articulated by the researcher, can also see what the researcher
> saw, whether or not he agrees with it. That is the key criterion for qualitative
> research. (Giorgi, A., 1975, p. 96)

Like others before me, the phenomenological analysis of mothers' experience of

parenting with a former spouse engendered in me a profound respect for the complexity

of that particular lived experience and for the complexity of other lived experience as

well. It also reinforced my profound respect for the challenge of describing the

mothers' experience accurately. As with the learning of any language, the requisite

degree of proficiency with phenomenological languaging develops only with time,

repeated exposure, and repeated practice. And again in keeping with learning any

language, written expression of a language is the last form to be learned and the most

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[10] As quoted in (Ray, 1994p. 12)

difficult to master. Phenomenological description cannot be written carelessly if it is to connect human beings to others by revealing the truth of experience. Consider Steven Pinker's comment about the limitless variation of meaning possible with our English language:

> With a few thousand nouns that can fill the subject slot and a few thousand verbs that can fill the predicate slot, one already has several million ways to open a sentence. And if the number of sentences is infinite, the number of possible thoughts and intentions in infinite too, because virtually every sentence expresses a different thought or intention. (Pinker, 2003, Chapter 3)

Pinker's comments provide a rather dramatic framing of the challenge of finding the precise words to express each unique thought or intention under any circumstance, much less when the criteria are as demanding as they are with phenomenology. And in spite of the richness and limitless possibilities of our English language, phenomenologists must frequently develop their own unique vocabulary to convey meaning as lived.

Once again it was through experiential learning that I came to understand clearly that it would be a lengthy process to find the "right" language to express the non-linguistic, pre-reflective aspects of meaning for the mothers in my study. Writing and rewriting the descriptions of constituent meanings and the essential psychological structure made very visible the present day limits of my expressive language capabilities related to phenomenological description. But these same capabilities are yet expanding today as I write this page and they will continue to grow in expansiveness and precision each time I put pen to paper. Writing phenomenological descriptions about a particular human experience then, is an evolving process that has

no clear moment of completion. Because the meaning of human experiences is multi-dimensional and multi-layered, it is always possible to explore more deeply or to explore from a different perspective. Similarly, it is always possible to explore and experiment further with new language choices that will more precisely describe the meaning of the phenomenon being studied.

Another limitation related to the multi-dimensionality of meaning is the practical necessity of being selective in the aspects of meaning one chooses to describe and ultimately, in the specific language one chooses to describe these meanings. Consequently, no individual research report could ever hope to describe the meaning of any given human experience in its totality. It would indeed be arrogant and dismissive of the incredible richness of human experience to believe such a goal could be accomplished. The most any study can hope to do is provide a greater understanding and depth of insight about a given human experience than existed beforehand. Van Manen may have said it best when he commented that "no conceptual formulation or single statement can possibly capture the full mystery of [the] experience" but carefully written descriptions can "point at, allude to, or hint at, an aspect of the phenomenon" (van Manen, 1997, p. 92).

The descriptions of meaning that you will find in this chapter simultaneously reflect the kinds of limitations that have been discussed and a disciplined effort to achieve the stated goals. Some will be at a "higher level" than others. Some will be much longer than others – either because they are inherently more complex and therefore require more description, or because I failed to find language that would allow

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me to convey the same information more concisely. Like van Manen, my uncovering of the meaning of parenting with a former spouse for mothers, and my written descriptions of these discoveries, is temporarily *interrupted* rather than complete. With each new interaction with the data I gain new understandings and new capabilities to express those understandings. What I write today reflects my understandings and capabilities today, but both would certainly be changed by tomorrow.

Regardless of the potential strengths and limitations of the descriptions of meaning presented in this chapter, a comment about my experience of arriving at them might be useful to include here. As has been stated previously, Giorgi's descriptive phenomenology makes no attempt to anticipate meaning. In fact, to achieve its purpose of discovering and faithfully describing the givens of the experience as revealed in the participant's naïve descriptions, it is essential that the researcher remain open at all times to being surprised. I can personally attest to the efficacy of Giorgi's methodology in maintaining this orientation of openness and discovery as I was regularly "surprised" by the meanings that were being revealed. This awareness of my own moments of surprise simultaneously validated the methodology and also served as a reassurance that the meanings that were emerging were indeed a reflection of the participants' lived experience rather than a reflection of my own beliefs, preconceptions or interpretations.

Table 8: Range of Variation for Selected Characteristics of Mothers

Characteristic	Range of Variation
Length of marriage prior to separation	4 – 16 years
Length of time from separation until research interview	3 months – 5 years
Number and age of children at time of separation	1 – 4 children ranging in age from 7 weeks – 14 years
Age of children at time of interview	9 months – 18 years
Overall context and circumstances at time of separation	From (a) happily married for many years & totally shocked by former spouse's request for divorce, to (b) unhappy and having spent a year planning and organizing for a quick & smooth divorce process, to (c) deeply wounded by discovery of infidelity, which prompted mother to initiate divorce, but sadly.
Degree of choice regarding divorce	From (a) no choice & not wanting it, to (b) complete choice and wanting it, to (c) reluctant resignation that it was the only/best alternative.
Dominant reaction to divorce	From emotional and psychological trauma to relief and relative calm.
Degree of change in lifestyle as a result of divorce and attitude toward change.	From (a) minor change and comfortable acceptance, to (b) significant change and pragmatic coping, to (c) dramatic change and daily struggle with resentment and anger
Overall nature of relationship with former spouse coparent	From (a) friendly and supportive, to (b) somewhat unpleasant but usually civil, to (c) too hostile to allow any direct communication and characterized by former spouse's willfully destructive behavior

Characteristic	Range of Variation
Type and intensity of feelings toward former spouse	From (a) somewhat sad with moderate feelings of dislike or disapproval, to (b) enraged with intense feelings of dislike, to (c) heartbroken with strong positive feelings still dominant.
Degree of civility in coparenting relationship	From (a) extremely civil and even thoughtful at all times, to (b) mostly civil but requiring great effort to maintain, to (c) not civil at all.
Attitude toward coparenting and degree of choice	From (a) absolute conviction that it is in the best interest of the child and unequivocally had full choice, to (b) believes it is in the best interests of the child but also felt there was no choice, to (c) willing to listen to those who say it is in the best interests of the child, but not necessarily convinced yet and felt forced into at least trying to make it work.
New marriages for mother or former spouse and resulting involvement of step-spouses or step-children in parenting life	From (a) no new marriages for mother or former spouse, to (b) two short-lived marriages of former spouse with no major impact on parenting, to (c) new marriage for former spouse resulting in excellent partnership between step-mother and mother in lieu of a hostile coparenting relationship. Partnership included step-mother's children and mother's new husband as well.

Embodied Experience

A concept that is fundamental to phenomenology, to a metaphor that will serve

as one of the organizing frameworks for the next chapter, and to understanding many of

the invariant meanings presented in this chapter, is that of *embodied experience*.

Because of its centrality to understanding the constituent meanings, a brief exposition of

this concept is included here. Positioning this exposition here, in immediate association

with participant meanings, is certainly a digression, but one that is meant to facilitate

the reader's understanding of all that is to follow.

Meaning is created, or more precisely co-created, in the exchange between a

person and his lived world, including both objects and people. It is created in the

dialectic movement between a person and object or person and other, and encompasses

what van Manen refers to as the four "lifeworld existentials" that together form the

"grounding level" of human existence that we called *embodied experience* (van Manen,

1997). The lifeworld existentials to which he is referring are:

Lived body (corporeality)

Lived body refers to the fact that we are always bodily in the world and a

person's body is *the means by which a person experiences the world*. Merleau Ponty

emphasizes the fact that this is the way we experience the world by asserting that we as

human beings not only *have* a body, but that we *are* a body. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) It is

through our corporeality that we experience the other existentials.

Lived other or *lived human relation* (relationality)

Lived other refers to the lived relations we maintain with others in the

interpersonal space that we share with them. Our lived relations are first corporeal,

even if the other is not physically present to us and depends upon a mental image that we have formed of that person. As we interact with the other, we develop a conversational relation which allows us to transcend *self*. Van Manen states that "In a larger existential sense human beings have searched in this experience of the other, the communal, the social for a sense of purpose in life, meaningfulness, grounds for living, as in the religious experience of the absolute Other, God" (van Manen, 1997, p. 105).

Lived space (spatiality)

Lived space refers to the felt space we experience in a largely pre-verbal, unreflective manner in our embodied life.   It is not about space that we can measure, but about the felt space in which we find ourselves that affects the way we feel. As we engage in the world from within a given space, we may feel stimulated, vulnerable, calm, or awkward. For example, it is the variation in our experience of lived space that accounts for the differences in tolerance levels regarding personal space--a commonly use term to define how close to your body another can comfortably place his body.

Lived time (temporality)

Similar to *lived space*, *lived time* is the felt time we experience primarily in a pre-verbal, unreflective manner in our embodied life. Like lived space, it affects the way we feel and is the reason that time seems to go faster when we are enjoying ourselves and seems to go more slowly when we are not. Lived time also refers to a more encompassing temporal way of being-in-the-world such as being a child with

limitless time horizons, or a middle-aged person who is suddenly acutely aware of how much time has passed in his life, or an elderly person understanding in a pre-verbal way that most of their time for living is past.

The co-creation of meaning that is taking place all of the time as we engage in life in and through our bodies is ordinarily not given any notice or attention, even though it is part of all perceptions, thoughts, and emotions. It is pre-reflective and not part of our conscious thought until something goes "wrong" and calls us to attention. We become aware of it "when something disrupts the smooth flow of our everyday world and forces or invites us to attend to ourselves and our surroundings in a new way" (Becker, 1992, p. 20). For example, we ordinarily go through the day paying no conscious attention to the physical distance between ourselves and others or to what is happening on a pre-reflective level within ourselves and others that allows us to share physical space comfortably. But when another steps too close, perhaps even causing us to feel alarm, we become very conscious of physical distance and pay close attention to it. Conversely, if we are attracted to someone and that particular other steps closer than usual and causes us to feel happy, we will once again pay close attention to the physical distance. It is not about the actual feeling produced, but the fact that the "norm" has been disrupted and brought aspects of what is usually pre-conscious embodied experience to our full attention.

As we develop experience and expertise in our lives, much of our interaction with the world becomes embodied experience that is no longer at a conscious level. A now famous example of embodied experience described by Husserl is that of a soccer

player. When engrossed in play, the soccer player becomes one with the field, the goal, the grass, the boundaries, the other players, the movement on the field, his own actions and thoughts. He does not distance himself and view these as "objects of experience" or "objects of thought." Rather, he understands what is happening in way that is *lived* rather than known cognitively. He engages as a "knowing body," acting from embodied knowledge rather than conscious thought. It is when the norm becomes disrupted that it he focuses consciously on one or more of these aspects of his experience. Similarly, an expert teacher will automatically adjust the pace of her lessons to reflect the mood her embodied knowledge allows her to instantly recognize and a mother will know exactly when and how to use touch to bring comfort to her child. At a more basic skill level, it is our knowing body that allows us to tie a shoe without thought or reflection.

When one achieves a bodily knowing of something, it can be said that they have *incorporated* that knowledge. The knowledge has become a part of our physical body, our physical knowing. Lang defines incorporation in the following way:

> Incorporation is the initiative of the active body, embracing and assimilating a certain sphere of foreign reality to its own body. Thus incorporation is essentially the movement from the strange to the familiar. This commerce of strange and familiar…forms a central dialectic of human existence. (Lang, 1984, p. 138)

With these fundamental phenomenological concepts fresh in mind, the rest of the chapter will be devoted to an explication of the essential constituents of meaning for mothers who are coparenting with a former spouse. The interrelationships among these invariant aspects of meaning, and the manner in which they naturally coalesce and

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cohere into an essential psychological structure, will become increasingly obvious as each constituent is presented. It will also become increasingly obvious why it is so difficult to isolate individual aspects of meaning from the integrated whole and why any sequence of presentation is merely a best-judgment assessment regarding the flow of information rather than a necessity or an indication of the *right* sequence. Because there is necessarily a great deal of overlap among the different aspects of meaning represented by each constituent, the level of detail provided for any given constituent is in part a reflection of this best-judgment assessment regarding the sequencing of the constituents. In cases where the overlap is particularly strong, much of the detail will be implied rather than re-stated explicitly.

Invariant Aspects of Meaning for Mothers

In order to describe the invariant aspects of mothers' experience of parenting with a former spouse that together constitute the essential meaning structure, it is necessary to first separate these aspects of experience into artificially distinct entities that at first glance appear to be independent entities that exist in a summative and/or hierarchical relationship to one another. But the reader is reminded that there exists an essential interrelationship among these invariants and that they are experienced by the mothers as part of a coherent unity of experience. That being said, the remainder of this chapter will be given to providing a narrative description of each key constituent of mothers' experience of parenting with a former spouse, followed by a description of the essential psychological structure. This particular sequencing of the presentation is important since the essential psychological structure becomes visible only as the

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individual constituents "coalesce and converge" into an integrated structure. Then in the final chapter, selected organizing frameworks will be used to guide further discussion and explication of the constituents of meaning, focusing not only on the specific ways these manifested themselves in the lives of the participant mothers, but also on the mothers' pre-reflective verbatim descriptions of experience that pointed toward the meaning, that provided the initial wavering indication of its presence.

During the final preparation of this chapter, I added "titles" to each of the invariants to assist readers in finding their way through the many pages of text that suddenly seemed dense and cumbersome without such an organizing feature. However, this was a decision made only with great hesitation since it is essential that it remain clear that invariants are to be described and not labeled. They are aspects of meaning that cannot be reduced to a summary label and one should be cautioned against thinking of them that way. However, issues of practicality ultimately prevailed and the titles were added to ease navigation for readers.

Each of the invariant meanings presented here is revelatory of the experience of *all* of the mothers in the participant group. Given the diversity of the mothers' lifeworlds and contexts, this speaks strongly to the phenomenological conception of developing stable universal knowledge about the essence of a given human experience through deep analysis of unique individual experiences. It also speaks strongly to the likely truth of the meanings uncovered. Although a number of characteristics of the participant group were presented in an earlier chapter, examples of other kinds of variation in the mothers' lifeworlds and contexts that might have been expected to

preclude "universal" meanings are presented in Table 8. The first few examples repeat

prior factual information from the earlier chapter for the convenience of the reader, but

the rest provide additional contextual information that might be helpful in

understanding the mothers' experiences and in understanding the power of

phenomenology to reveal universal meanings across multiple contextual variations of an

experience.

Awareness and Felt Presence

Unrelenting and sometimes oppressive awareness of, and felt presence of, their former spouse coparent in their everyday world.

An entire chapter of Irene Alexander's 1994 book written for single and

divorced parents addresses the issue of "the Other" parent. In particular, she addresses

the constant presence of "the Other" parent in the following way:

> There is always an Other. Whether they are part of our daily lives or not, they are present in our children....the Other is present in the nucleus of each cell of their bodies, present in the depths of their psyches. For our children, the Other is not other but part of them. And in whatever way and to whatever degree we can, we must honor their right to that part of themselves. For [parents] that may well mean learning how to relate to and about that Other in a way that supports our children. (Alexander, 1994)

The mothers in the current study would certainly agree with Alexander in terms

of the significance and presence of their ex-spouse in their child's life and in their

child's very being. But the presence that they experienced was even more

encompassing than that described by Alexander, which is why it sometimes became

oppressive to them. To use the language of embodied experience, mothers experienced

continual disturbances to their pre-reflective embodied living. They experienced

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continual calls to attention that demanded at least an acknowledgment and perhaps a more active response. The various calls to attention they experienced reflected each of the four lifeworld existentials--*lived body, lived other, lived space,* and *lived time*—and were experienced as a forced awareness of the presence of their former spouse in their world, whether that awareness was wanted or not. Sometimes the felt presence that intruded upon their consciousness had little or nothing to do with the actual person who was their former spouse and coparent, but was instead a reminder to them that their being-in-the-world *was* as a mother coparenting with a former spouse; a state of being-in-the-world that carried with it tremendous significance and meaning for all areas of their lives. It was always there, it was unwelcome, and it was very resistant to efforts to diminish or eliminate it.

The precise ways in which their former spouse's felt presence impacted the mothers was in part determined by the nature of their marriage and subsequent separation and divorce, but all of the mothers described the almost constant nature of this awareness. At times when the awareness is not conscious and immediate, mothers learned to expect it to be easily called forth. Depending upon their overall individual context and the specific circumstances at the moment they experience a particular call to attention, the conscious awareness might be brief, fairly neutral in nature, and then quickly disappear or it might linger, intense and distressing, and refusing to be dismissed For example, a mother has a momentary awareness that a particular decision about her child's upcoming birthday party will ultimately depend upon her former spouse's cooperation but is able to quickly acknowledge that, plan to address it, and

then move on to the next decision about the party. The felt presence in that case is once again an automatic, embodied experience, but one that in and of itself causes no distress and passes quickly. As the same mother continues planning the party, the felt presence of her former spouse takes on new qualities and brings forth unwanted memories and comparisons with past birthday parties, sorrow about the kind of complications and difficulties that have become part of planning an event for their child that should be unencumbered by anything other than excitement, concern about the multiple interactions that will be necessary with her former spouse until the party is over, worry about her own ability to keep the inevitable tensions invisible to their child, frustration about limitations and requirements that she has accepted from her former spouse in order to maintain harmony, and mental images and rehearsal about what it will be like to have her former spouse in her home during the party--participating in preparations in the kitchen, taking things out of her cupboards, walking through or past spaces that feel private, seeing the physical manifestations of her current life that is no longer shared with him, and perhaps judging her throughout his experience of her home. No matter what this mother does, she cannot banish this felt presence and it makes itself known throughout the hours, days, and weeks leading up to the party, then during the party itself, and then during later reflections about the party. The details of the awareness may change, but its persistent presence does not and she longs for the simplicity of past birthday parties and longs for the presence of her former spouse to disappear.

In looking at other examples of the manifestations of mothers' awareness of the presence of their former spouse, a useful place to begin is what was revealed when the

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mothers talked about situations where they happened to be in the same physical location as their former spouses. Again, it is useful to conceive of this awareness as existing on a continuum of frequency and intensity, but in general they mothers described being extremely sensitive to his physical presence and having an almost hyper-awareness of his movement through space, his relative near-ness or far-ness, his body language, his behavior, his judgment, his apparent awareness--or lack of awareness--of the mother, his interactions with others, his interactions with his children. When it was experienced intensely, this hyper-awareness felt unnatural and the self-consciousness that accompanied it felt uncomfortable and foolish, and yet the mothers could not will it to stop. In those moments they often felt as if they were unable to engage in their usual relaxed, automatic interaction with their world and instead felt as if they were behaving and speaking awkwardly and unnaturally.

The mothers' awareness of the presence of their former spouse was just as easily brought to immediacy even when they were not in the same physical location. For example, a decision about their child's school might immediately result in the mother feeling the presence of their former spouse almost as if he were indeed present-- wondering what his opinions would be, wondering what would be required to engage in a discussion with him and come to a decision acceptable to both of them, wondering if he cared. Or a particularly happy experience of their child's might bring his felt presence to the foreground immediately as the mother's instincts and habits urge her to tell her former spouse--still the child's father after all--about the experience.   She might well imagine how he would enjoy the tale even while she tries to banish his presence

from the moment. His presence might remain only until this particular conflict was resolved or it might remain and induce a much longer lasting anger and resentment about being-in-the-world as a mother coparenting with a former spouse and having to spend time and energy on something as simple as a phone call.

Sometimes the constant felt presence and the inability to move it out of awareness made the mothers feel distinctly *unfree*. As if they had the *other* with them all of the time, hovering in their lived world, always having to be taken into account, and always having the potential to influence or interfere in the mothers' and children's lives at will, or perhaps to elicit sadness because of the absence and loss the presence reminded them of. The awareness alternately impacted mothers' experience of their corporeal world, their relational world, their emotional world, and their financial world. Considerations might include: Should I check with him first? Will this be easy or difficult? What strategy can I employ? What does he really want? What is he telling my child? What does he think of me? How do I look today? How does my house look today? Mothers sometimes accepted this continually appearing presence rather philosophically and sometimes fought against it, wishing they could rid themselves of the awareness and be free from its hovering presence, which sometimes felt as if it had physical form to it. The sense of being unfree that this presence had the potential to induce in the mothers' lives can perhaps be best appreciated by an example of an experience one mother described that was particularly striking to her. Normally, her existence was permeated with an automatic, embodied awareness of her former spouse's presence that persistently influenced her mothering life in some way. One

time, when her former spouse had gone on a trip out of the country for several weeks, the mother discovered that her awareness of his presence suddenly diminished drastically and sometimes even disappeared. She described feeling "totally free" and "liberated" and "lighter" for the first time since her separation and divorce. The striking contrast revealed to her just how *unfree* she normally felt and for the first time she became truly aware of the power of this felt presence to influence her everyday life.

The persistent felt presence of their former spouse that had little to do with his actual physical presence, and mothers' wish for it to be gone, brings to mind the words of an old English nursery rhyme:

> *As I was walking up the stair,*
> *I met a man who was not there.*
> *He was not there again today.*
> *Oh, how I wish he'd go away.*
> *Hughes Mearns*

Ceasings and Losses

A painful awareness of ceasings, of what is no longer, of what has been lost, that can be suddenly and unexpectedly triggered by a particular awareness of, or interaction with, their former spouse.

This particular invariant aspect of meaning could easily have been presented as one of the manifestations of mothers' awareness of the presence of their former spouse. However, it is presented here by itself to avoid the possibility of its significance being unintentionally minimized. Once again, a continuum of frequency and intensity for this aspect of meaning was described, but all mothers experienced moments when the actual or felt presence of their former spouse, now their coparent, engendered a painful

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awareness of loss, of what *was no longer*, of what had *ceased to exist* in their lives. At those moments, as their consciousness was called to attention, the attention being demanded was focused on what had changed about their being-in-the-world as mothers, on what was different about it today compared to *before*, and especially, on what had been lost. (The *before* could refer to any point in their history.) Each loss was brought to the forefront and starkly revealed, sometimes evoking a sad reflection about the unexpected turns their lives had taken, sometimes evoking a powerful visceral response reminiscent of acute physical pain capable of taking their breath away.

The recognition of what had ceased in their lives was frequently associated with emotional memories that transported them across time and space to the moment a remembered experience had been lived—sometimes to the point where there was a brief instant of feeling as if they actually *were* once again in that time and experience, not simply remembering it. This might be triggered by the former spouse's physical nearness and a mother's discovery that her embodied, non-reflective response to that nearness was unfolding in familiar ways that were no longer appropriate. Such as the time a mother found herself instinctively reaching to touch her former husband's leg during a school performance. Or it might be triggered by a moment of emotional nearness such as the time another mother, during a conversation with her former spouse about their children that was extremely relaxed and familiar, discovered that she slipped naturally into her past manner and relationship with him, to the point where she suddenly had to stop and remind herself that they were no longer married. In both these instances, as the mothers realized what they were doing, they understood at some level

the depth of the familiarity of their embodied response and the corresponding depth of the hopes and dreams they had always had for their marriages. The contrast between those hopes and dreams and the reality of their current life reawakened their sense of loss and grief.

The moment of awareness of loss could be triggered by any number of things in the course of a mother's everyday life. Some of these moments were predictable and anticipated by the mothers, such as those triggered by trying to redefine holiday traditions. Others came unexpectedly and took the mothers by surprise. Like the mother who took her daughter to a swim meet and as she approached the seating area was suddenly struck by the realization of the absence of her former spouse, with awareness of absence simply being a different side to awareness of presence. She had been struck by this realization at many other times, and it was always a painful and lonely realization. But that day the realization was also followed by a sensation that every family represented in the stands was a declaration of the existence of "whole, healthy, nuclear families" while she and her daughter, alone among the entire universe of people at the swim meet, stood out as representatives of "broken, damaged families," and her was the only child in that building who was not blessed with the opportunity to be raised in a "whole, healthy, nuclear family." The experience of attending her daughter's events by herself was not new, and she was aware that her sensation had nothing to do with reality, but for that moment in time, nothing could alleviate the sharpness of the pain and the profound sense of grief at their brokenness, all triggered by the experienced absence of her former spouse.

Although the frequency and intensity of the awareness varied, all mothers experienced these reminders of shattered dreams, of what was no longer, of the ceasings in their lives. Moments of having to stare into the face of their losses, whether anticipated or thrust upon them unexpectedly, was as true for the mothers who wanted to be divorced as for those who did not, as true for those who had been divorced a long time as for those who were still reeling from the shock, and as true for those whose sense of loss related primarily to an abstract loss of the ideal of a loving husband and father as it was for those whose sense of loss related to the direct and personal loss of the individual person who was their former spouse.

Unrelenting Demands

Unrelenting and exhausting demands for attention to, care of, response to, adaptation to, concern about, and/or entanglement with, the coparenting relationship.

One might have expected that the constituent meanings described by mothers would focus heavily on the actual encounters between mothers and their former spouses. The encounters with their former spouses were indeed very significant for mothers, but the meanings that emerged reflected aspects of their experience that were far too encompassing to be contained within the time-bound moments of encounter. To begin with, while many of the mothers' experiences were related to their encounters with their former spouse, this included anticipated encounters and past, relived encounters just as frequently as it included actual moments of encounter. In addition, there were many aspects of their experience that were focused more on their place in the

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world as a mother coparenting with a former spouse, a place in the world with multiple and complex implications. Together, mothers' experiences associated specifically with encounters with their former spouse and their experiences associated more with their place in the world as a mother coparenting with a former spouse, created a powerful and dominating sense of unrelenting demands for attention to which they must respond in some way. Being a coparent meant that little of their parenting lives, and in some cases other parts of their lives as well, could be relegated to an unreflected, automatic, embodied engagement. Rather, their parenting lives were filled with constant "calls to attention" that demanded something extra from them. To use the language from above, the embodied lives as mothers that they had previously known were now constantly "provoked" or "disturbed," preventing a "smooth flow" of their everyday parenting world. Aspects of parenting that had taken little thought in the past now claimed their energies in significant ways.

Some of the disturbances to mothers' embodied world resulted in experiences that will be described or implied only with this invariant. Others, however, were either too prevalent or too powerful to merely be embedded here with the possibility that their significance and visibility would be inappropriately diminished. In those cases, they will be discussed as a separate invariant. As it is meant to be with phenomenological findings, the interconnectedness of all the uncovered meanings is unmistakable. The visibility of the multiple interrelationships among and between the constituents reinforces once again the elements of artificiality and arbitrariness that must inevitably be a part of determining the individual constituents of meaning of a lived experience.

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The kinds of extra demands experienced by the mothers were wide ranging in type and like many of the meanings expressed by mothers, could best be thought of as existing on continuums of frequency and intensity. At one end of the continuum were demands that were quite easily met, caused no particular distress, and might even be viewed with humor. What made the demands at this end of the continuum significant was the fact that they were so continuous in nature. At the other end of the continuum were demands that caused major disturbances to the mothers' lives in some way – whether physically, emotionally, or psychologically. Among these were demands that seemed overwhelming and impossible to meet, demands that generated intense and frequently painful emotions, demands that caused tremendous irritation, and demands that caused mothers to feel extreme discouragement or worry. The demands also varied in their duration, with some being short-lived and momentary and others that must be struggled with over a long period of time.

The following narrative serves to illustrate both the frequency and type of demands experienced by one of the mothers in the study and clearly reveals this particular constituent of meaning in her life – i.e. the persistent calls to attention and the persistent disturbances to her embodied life as a mother who was coparenting with her former spouse. It should be emphasized that the narrative is not a fictitious scenario created by summarizing and paraphrasing this mother's experiences, which would be inappropriate in a phenomenological study. Rather, it is a compilation of actual descriptions of her lived experiences, with editing being limited to that which was needed to create complete sentences or transitions. Her descriptions are presented here

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in a condensed timeframe and in the third person only for the sake of readability and a

manageable length.

Nancy is helping her elementary age children, Peter and Maria, organize and pack what they will need to have with them for the next several days of their lives when they will be living at their dad's house. As she helps Peter, she remembers to include a pair of freshly laundered pajamas that had been purchased for Peter by his dad. Dad had been a little upset that Peter had brought them to mom's house and wanted them returned to his house so they would be available during Peter's times with him. Dad hated to shop and didn't want to do any more of it than he had to. Nancy kind of chuckles at the whole thing, knowing that Peter has plenty of pajamas in each home. But it is an easy enough request to honor and she wants to make sure she at least returns them clean.

Going through the children's school backpacks to see what might be needed for school over the coming days, Nancy finds a reminder that Maria's Girl Scout troop will be taking shifts selling cookies for fundraising on Saturday. She had forgotten to sign Maria up and realizes right away that this will cause tension with her former husband. Maria's dad has made it clear that he is not willing to invest time in Girl Scout activities and since Nancy knew that before signing Maria up, he expects Nancy to be fully responsible. Nancy is more than willing to rearrange her day and pick Maria up on Saturday and get her to the sale, but it is more complicated than that because Maria's dad also gets very angry if he "loses" any of "his" time with the children because they are doing things with their mother that exclude him (even if the choice for exclusion is his, as with the Girl Scouts). He wants all of those kinds of activities to take place while the children are actually living in their mother's home and resents it if they happen when the children are living in his home—seeing it as a deliberate infringement on his time with the children rather than just a reflection of the activities they are involved in at the time. This issue has caused many difficult times for all of them since it is just not that simple to make coparenting schedules totally clean and clear cut.

Unfortunately, Maria realizes the same things as Nancy and immediately becomes upset and tearful. She knows how angry her dad will be and wants to skip participating in the cookie sale. Nancy is empathetic about Maria's distress at the thought of her dad's anger, but doesn't feel like she can let Maria skip the cookie sale. She has talked with both of her children extensively about the importance of following through on their commitments and believes this is an important one. Not only does she want

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Maria to understand the importance of contributing to the group effort of the scout troop, but she also believes it is important for Maria to contribute in her own way to the significant time, energy, and financial resources that Nancy and other parents have been committing to make all of this happen for their daughters.

Nancy thinks her former husband's stance on matters like this is unreasonable and juvenile, and suspects that it is more about exerting control over her than it is about the children's activities. It makes her furious that he takes it out on the children this way, intimidating them and bringing them into the center of something they should not have to be worrying about, i.e. a foolish power struggle over how their shared parenting time and responsibilities are handled. However, she must choose her words carefully while talking to Maria – with Peter eagerly listening for her response - because it will only make things worse if she voices her negative views of their dad out loud. The children will end up defending their dad and getting angry with her for being critical. They can't stand to hear Nancy criticize him, and are as quick to pick up on her body language and tone of voice as they are on her actual words. Nancy understands this on a deep level and always tries to avoid having any of her negative views about their dad be visible to the children. Instead, she tells Maria calmly that they will find a solution and starts figuring out how she can rearrange her day on Saturday, which is filled with other commitments. What can she move to a different day? Who can she get to cover her for one of them? How can she pull it off? Simultaneously, she decides that she will try to protect Maria from her dad's anger as much as she can by deflecting it fully onto herself.

Although the idea of deflecting her former spouse's anger exclusively to her instead of having it include Maria, Nancy has no illusion that it will be easy, if it is possible at all. Besides trying to get his cooperation for the cookie sale itself, she wonders how she should present her concern about his anger being directed at Maria without him interpreting it as telling him how to parent? If he feels like she is telling him how to parent, it always causes a major outburst and then digging his heels in. And from a purely practical standpoint, when and how will she tell him? He will be here shortly to pick up the children and she does not want to have the confrontation in front of them. Should she try to call him first and see if she can tell him by phone? No…that never works. Should she ask him to step outside with her when he gets here so they can talk out of earshot of the children? That's possible, although she suspects he won't do it. And if he does, how embarrassing will it be with the neighbors out in their yards if he blows up? Or should she say *when* he blows up? And in all honesty, is

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she up to this confrontation today? Her former husband is not a bad man, but has a quick temper and can be brutal in his anger, which was a contributing factor to the divorce. Nancy hates having to have contact with her former spouse under any circumstances and wishes there was a magical solution that would allow him to be there as a dad for Peter and Maria but without her having to ever see him or talk to him. But she particularly hates the conflicts they have and feels like she is no match for him when he starts yelling and saying hateful things. It still amazes her to discover the kinds of things he can say and the ways that it can deeply wound her. She can and does walk away when it's bad, but that always leaves something up in the air that they have to come back to anyway. And of course, once he is angry, there is no hope of cooperation about whatever child issue is on the table. Nancy can already feel her stomach churning in knots at the thought of what it will be like. She knows she has to try for a solution but she absolutely dreads it.

As Nancy is gearing up mentally for the confrontation that will take place soon, Peter asks her about working some more on his science project this weekend, which is in progress in the family room. For several years now, this has been something Nancy and Peter have worked on together because they both enjoy it. It has become an annual tradition and in the past, her former husband was always content to let it happen without him. She knows that this year will be different. Although there are times when he refuses to be involved, like with the Girl Scouts, there are other times when he is almost overly involved. Sometimes he seems to genuinely be trying to prove that he can be a good father, but other times he seems almost territorial about it, as if it is a "right" that he doesn't want to miss out on. She already knows that this year's science project has become a sore spot waiting to explode since she was recently asked by her former spouse "Why do you always get to be the one who does this with Peter? I should be able to enjoy that with him just as much as you do." Even though she knows it shouldn't matter who works with Peter on the science project, she admits to herself that when her former spouse said that, she instinctively felt territorial about it herself. After all, this was a tradition that had been going on a number of years and she didn't want to give it up or share it. Nancy even found herself hoping that Peter would only want to do it with her and would "choose" her over his dad if he knew there was suddenly a choice. Why did it have to feel like a competition? Just the thought of him "choosing" his dad instead of her was painful, even though it hadn't even come up. She knew it would feel like Peter loved her less if he made that choice and it would become one more of the many small losses that she had learned came with the territory.

All these thoughts and emotions race through Nancy as she wonders how to respond to Peter's request. She is also aware that trying to bring Peter to her house over the weekend to work on the science project will only compound the problem she is already facing trying to get Maria to the cookie sale. Her former spouse will undoubtedly interpret it as her "taking away" some of his time with both of his children. Both Nancy and her former spouse know that it would present no problem to him if the children spent much of their weekend at friends' homes instead of their dad's, but to spend it with Nancy transforms it into something being taken away from him. And taken away *by Nancy*, deliberately. He is quick to voice this view to the children and more than once they have asked Nancy if they are doing anything "mean" or "bad" to their dad when they do things with her during their time at his house.

Getting back to Peter, what should she tell him? Asking his dad about the science project will definitely add fuel to the fire and might result in her former husband refusing to let either of these activities take place. And then what? Will she go to his house and physically carry them away against his will? Obviously impossible and she doesn't want to trigger that angry refusal. But would it be right to only ask about Maria and the cookie sale and suggest to Peter that they work on the science project another time? Wouldn't that be playing favorites? Is that fair? And if she tells Peter that it's ok with her and she will ask his dad, will she have the energy and the courage to take on both battles instead of one? And to deal with the aftermath that may go on for an extended period of time? Is there anything she can offer as a "trade" that will make it more of a negotiation instead of asking for a favor?

Nancy suddenly realizes that she is now getting mad at herself. Why doesn't she have more courage when it comes to these confrontations? Why can't she just say "this is what's going to happen" and then make it happen no matter now angry the objections? What is she afraid of? Of her former husband? Of creating such enmity and open hostility that coparenting would become impossible? Of the kids getting caught in the line of fire? Why can she be like a mother tiger protecting her young with all of the rest of the world and then shrink from the same thing with her former husband? And now the anger shifts back to him for being who he is and for making even these little things so tense and difficult. She hates feeling so trapped and as if there is no good answer. She realizes with dejection that all three of them hate facing her former husband's anger and they all try to avoid it. But Maria and Peter are just children. She is the mother and should just stand up for them. The fact that they all share the same fear, and avoidance, and tension is known by all of them,

but there is a silent conspiracy to not see it…because mothers should be braver than that. The shared dread becomes the proverbial elephant in the room.

While still wondering how to answer Peter, the phone rings. It is a couple that she and her former spouse had gotten to know years ago who had since moved to a new city. They are coming to town the following week and have plans to join Nancy and the children one night for dinner. Peter and Maria had always had a lot of fun with this couple and they are very excited about the visit. After a happy greeting, Nancy is stunned by what the couple then tells her. Apparently, their planned dinner with her and the children has caused a huge falling out between the man and Nancy's former husband. They had all originally met because the two men worked together and Nancy's former husband believed that initial friendship between the two men demanded a loyalty to him, to the exclusion of Nancy. The couple tells Nancy that they are so distressed by what has happened that they have decided not to go through with the dinner. They feel like they are being forced to take sides even though there is no reason for them to do so. And even though they know it is not Nancy's doing, there are other major stressors going on in their lives right now and they just don't think they can take on one more for the time being. Maybe the next year when they came back again? And don't take it personally?

Hanging up, Nancy is crushed by the obvious weakness of a friendship that she presumed was stronger than that. And she is furious with her former husband for stooping so low. How can she ever get her emotions under control enough to keep her children from seeing her outrage and her hurt? She could never explain this to them in any way that makes sense so she isn't going to even try right now. Instead, she has to find a way to hide her feelings and get back to solving the more immediate issues of the cookie sale and the science project. The thought of having to negotiate sticky issues with her former husband is really sickening to her right now. Can she even be civil, much less successful? Her knee-jerk reaction is to want to hurt him and then never see him again; and to want her children to know that he is capable of this kind of behavior and to join her in not wanting to ever see him again. Beyond the knee-jerk reaction, does she really want a father who behaves like this to be parenting their children? What will become of them if they begin to model some of his thinking? She has only seconds to pull herself together before talking to the children, but knows down deep that it would be a terrible and unfair burden to bring them into this. And she has only moments to be prepared for the interaction with her former spouse. But in that same down deep place in her, she knows that she will somehow find a way to manage it and to keep the very

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> tentative lines of communication open *enough* and civil *enough* to allow her
> children to have both parents involved in their lives.

Although the above narrative conveys a sense of drama even for me as I read through it, such was not the intention or purpose. Rather, it was designed to demonstrate the reality of the demands experienced by participant mothers in the course of their everyday lives as mothers coparenting with a former spouse and the draining nature of these demands that lie behind this particular consituent of meaning. For Nancy, it required her to spend significant amounts of energy strategizing her upcoming interactions with her former spouse; strategizing her responses to her children; and trying to subdue, resolve or hide the worries, fears, hurts, anger, and frustrations that surfaced in response to these unrelenting disturbances to her embodied life as a mother. With all of the participant mothers, it was perhaps this aspect of meaning more than any of the others that motivated their decision to (a) minimize contact with their former spouse whenever possible, and (b) limit their interactions to the strictly instrumental tasks that must be addressed.

No parents in the United Sates today are strangers to the mounting burden of "logistical" tasks that must be managed as parents and children alike take on more and more commitments. And in the best of marriages those tasks can create friction. Without doubt, the logistics become more complicated in and of themselves for mothers who are coparenting, and the participants all spoke about this extensively. But as the analysis unfolded, it became increasingly clear that it was the extra calls to attention, which were inevitably associated with the necessary interactions with their former

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spouses, that caused the handling of logistical tasks to be experienced as so

burdensome. And to stray into topics or issues beyond the strictly instrumental matters

of logistics only invited the calls to attention to appear more frequently and/or more

intensely. Thus, logistical arrangements became the only relatively safe ground for

interaction and mothers tried to keep their interactions within these boundaries.

It should also be noted that the scenario above is not intended to convey the

impression that the former spouses of the participant mothers were always portrayed as

"the bad guys," or that in general it is the fathers in coparenting relationship who are

usually responsible for the challenges. Another scenario could be written with the

former spouse being cooperative, easy going in nature, and interested above all in the

welfare of his children, and it would still create a sense of drama by the time one

finished reading it. This is because it is not the specific demands in and of themselves

that this constituent meaning reflects. Rather, it reflects the fact that mothers

experienced these extra demands as relentlessness, wide-ranging, and ultimately

exhausting, something that will become increasingly clear as the remaining constituents

of meaning are presented. They were always present as "add-ons" to normal parenting

challenges and to normal life challenges beyond the parenting role. They became an

accumulation of straws threatening to break the camel's back.

Although this chapter is meant only to describe mothers' experiences of

parenting with a former spouse and discussion of potentially related theoretical concepts

should be left for the Discussion chapter, there is one related concept that is important

to mention now to further reinforce the fact that difficult behavior in the context of

coparenting is not the exclusive realm of fathers – not in the participant group of mothers and not in the universe of mothers and fathers coparenting together. It is common for people who are experiencing significant stress to behave in ways that are not characteristic of their usual behavior. And the more intense the emotions that accompany the stress, the more likely that this will happen, and the more substantial the change in behavior might be. Those who study the development of values systems call this "values regression" because the stress can lead people to behave as if their values system were less developed than it actually is (O'Connor, 1988).[11] In other words, they are incapable at that moment of being their best selves. Only individuals with the most advanced of values systems are usually able to resist this regression. Managing a coparenting relationship with the person with whom you could not maintain a marriage relationship is usually fraught with stress and strong emotions. And both parents are susceptible to regressing from their usual behavior and standards when interacting with each other. It is very possible, if not probable, that both the stress and the emotions will diminish over time, but it's important to recognize the ways it might influence the coparenting relationship in the meantime.

Feeling "Torn"

> **Repeated sense of being <u>torn</u> as they are confronted with internal conflicts triggered by their own competing and mutually exclusive goals, desires, needs, emotions, impulses and beliefs. The confrontations are sometimes unexpected and startling and sometimes repetitive and predictable, but they always demand to be noticed.**

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[11] A concept studied in a graduate course on "The Development of Values Systems" with Dr. Michael O'Connor, using proprietary materials developed by Dr. O'Connor.

One of the most pervasive constituents of mothers' experience was the repeated confrontation with their own contradictory but simultaneously held goals, desires, needs, emotions, beliefs, impulses, and instincts that were triggered by their circumstance of being-in-the-world as a mother coparenting with a former spouse. This was but one type of "call to attention" or extra demand experienced by mothers and described in the previous constituent. This particular call to attention manifested itself repeatedly in mothers' descriptions and was striking in terms of the breadth and frequency of its occurrence. It was if diametrically opposed forces from deep within them competed to dominate the mothers' thoughts, behaviors, and reactions at the same point in time. And each of these provoked a sympathetic and familiar response from some part of the mothers' being at the same point in time. These contradictory internal forces and the contradictory but equally authentic responses that they provoked in the mothers, created both practical and moral dilemmas for mothers every way they turned. They were impossible to avoid, impossible to ignore, and they did not want to be reconciled. They sometimes exerted mild or fleeting pressure on mothers and other times were so intense that the word *torn* was no longer adequate without further qualifiers such as *torn in two*, or *torn asunder*, or *torn completely apart* or *torn to shreds*. Over time, mothers used tremendous energy resources engaging in struggles to silence one or both of the opposing forces of the moment, or find ways to reconcile them so that they could stop feeling torn. These confrontations with competing forces within them were a major factor in the mothers' overall experience of coparenting as a

difficult, tiring, straining, unpleasant endeavor. This was as true for the mothers who

had good relationships with their former spouse as it was for the mothers who did not.

No matter what kind of relationship existed with their former spouses, and no matter

how appreciative they might be of their former spouse, or of the benefits of coparenting,

the inner conflicts and feelings of being torn that were so prevalent could not help but

result in the mothers' overall experience of coparenting as difficult. (Their motivation

for choosing to continue to coparent in spite of this is discussed below.)

When Giorgi (1986, p. 157) explains to us that "the principle of contradiction

states that the same thing cannot be and *not* be at the same time," he also gives us

examples of situations in the lives of human beings where this principle is defied. In

particular, he references the fact that a mother can be both the "good mother" and the

"bad mother" at the same time. He also references the well-known existence of "love-

hate" relationships. In both of these circumstances, the something simultaneously *is*

and is *not*, causing great tension in the person experience both simultaneously. She *is* a

good mother at the same time that she is *not* a good mother. They *love* each other at the

same time that they *don't* love each other. In the latter case, the "*not* love" could be

relatively neutral emotionally or it could be very intense and to the point of hate,

causing an impossibly sharp contradictory state in those experiencing it. It is this same

dichotomy between simultaneous experienced internal forces that the mothers contend

with on a far too frequent basis.

Although many variations in the nature of these internal conflicts were revealed,

there were also certain kinds that appeared more frequently than others. For example,

the heart of the matter for the most frequently occurring experience of being torn was a fundamental conflict between mothers' concern for the best interests of their child and their own very natural self-interest, especially self-interest for that immediate pre-reflective moment in time. For example, did she want to be cooperative and agree to yet another request to change parenting schedules, which was in the child's best interest so he didn't feel like he had no place he was welcome right then? Or did or did she want to "circle the wagons" and solidify her personal boundaries because that was better for her? Some kinds of conflicts were complicated and multi-layered; some involved a concern for the well-being of the former spouse as a father; some involved a conflict between what a mother *wanted* to do and what she felt constrained from doing by legal expectations or merely by social conventions of civility.

Some kinds of internal conflicts were those that are commonly referred to as "head vs. heart" – or what the mothers *felt* like doing compared to what they *thought* they should do. This latter type had a broad range of complexity within it, but at the most simple level it revealed conflicts that Deirdre Combs (2004) would classify as conflicts between our *cerebral instincts* and our *reptilian instincts*. Our cerebral instincts reflect our highest level of reasoned response while our reptilian instincts are concerned only with survival and are most closely associated with the familiar fight or flight response. I found Combs' terminology to be particularly appealing to me as I reflected upon the mothers' experiences because they seemed to both *call up* and *speak from* the physical aspect of our responses to life, making them seem as one with embodied experience. In the same way, Leder's (1990) discussion of our emotionality

being rooted in our *visceral* body over which our will has no control, both called up and spoke from the physical aspect of emotions. The actual words--cerebral instincts, reptilian instincts, and visceral reaction—added strength to my understanding of these kinds of conflicts that were experienced by the mothers. Over and over again, the mothers experienced a powerful visceral reaction to something in their embodied lives as coparents that was also accompanied by equally powerful but conflicting instincts such as simultaneous desires to throw caution to the wind and rebel vociferously, to wound their former spouse deliberately and deeply and then retreat to a place of comfort to nurse their own wounds, to turn and run and get as far away from him as possible (literal--for the moment and hopefully for a lifetime, and to take a deep breath, subdue these instincts and their emotions, and come to a reasoned decision about what how they would actually behave.

The confrontations with competing internal forces were experienced in virtually all arenas of mothers' lived experience of coparenting with a former spouse, in ways so small as to make minimal impact and in ways powerful enough to reverberate for weeks, months or even years. Some of the conflicts presented themselves only momentarily and then were over while others stayed just beneath the surface for extended periods of time and were easily reactivated on a regular basis. These kinds of variations are easily visible in the following examples, each of which is a summary of a particular mother's descriptions that were too long to include in their original form.

- While being strongly motivated to create and sustain a cooperative relationship with their ex-spouse coparent that will help create a healthy environment for their child, a mother simultaneously experiences an equally

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strong desire to raise their child by herself, free from the direct and worrisome influence of his father, free from the complications of coparenting, and free from any need to interact with her former spouse for any reason whatsoever. She simultaneously wants her relationship with her former spouse to be *near* and to be *distant* or absent.

- While believing in all sincerity that it is in the best interest of their children to have a healthy and loving relationship with both parents, a mother also harbors a desire for their children to dislike or reject their father, to take sides with the mother against their father, or to reserve their parent love only for the mother. This might be manifested in any number of ways, including a desire to tell their children "the truth" about their father's overall character or momentary behavior competing with a desire to protect their children from coparental conflict. Or similarly, the mother experiences satisfaction when their children are angry at their father while simultaneously wanting to encourage and support a positive relationship between father and children. The mother simultaneously wants their children to love their father and to dislike or even hate their father.

- Related closely to the preceding inner conflict, a mother observes demonstrations of a loving relationship between their child and his father and experiences multiple competing and equally strong reactions. One reaction is relief and gratitude that their child has such a loving father, while another is jealousy about the relationship and resentment that it exists because she believes her former spouse didn't do enough to earn it and therefore "doesn't deserve it." Yet another reaction is fear the she is loved less by their child than their father is. The latter may or may not influence her to actively compete for their child's love. These mixed and conflicting reactions make the mother aware that she simultaneously wants and doesn't want a good relationship between their child and his father.

- Immediately after instinctively reaching for the phone to call her ex-spouse and tell him about something special that just happened for their child, the mother also immediately stops herself and shrinks from such an interaction. She wants to avoid an unexpected conflict, wants to break her habit of sharing these kinds of parenting joys, and for a brief moment also wants to be spiteful and exclude him from the joy. Regardless, she is simultaneously motivated to call him and to not call him; to include him and to exclude him.

- A mother unexpectedly encounters her former spouse as she comes around a corner at their child's school and experiences the impulse to smile warmly and extend herself, while simultaneously experiencing the impulse to glare at him and say something sarcastic or to simply ignore him and walk away

without speaking. She is equally driven to convey friendliness, mean-spiritedness, and indifference and ends up behaving quite unnaturally and feeling quite awkward and self-conscious.

- A mother engages in a conversation with her former husband about a child concern and finds it to be an easy, respectful, and familiar exchange. As one part of her relishes the genuine sharing of parenting concerns, another part of her is filled with anger, resentment and heartbreak that they are having the conversation as coparents instead of as married parents. The mother wants to continue this conversation and have others like it in the future, while simultaneously being angry with herself for enjoying it and wanting it to end immediately and never happen again. The mother is simultaneously experiencing both loving and hateful feelings about her former spouse, and both loving and hateful feelings about their interaction.

- A mother learns of a vacation her former spouse is taking with their children to a place they used to go as a nuclear family. Her children love it there and she experiences great happiness for them, wanting it to be a wonderful time for them. But she simultaneously experiences many additional and conflicting desires, including jealousy that her former husband can do this for them and she can't; resentment, grief and loss that they will be vacationing there without her for the first time; fear that the children will love their father more than her and find their life with him more exciting than their life with her because he can do these kinds of things for them; and an embarrassing desire for something to go wrong so that the vacation either can't happen or the children find it unhappy and lonely without her.

- A mother greets her daughter and former husband at the door when they return from dad's house. She sees and feels her daughter's discomfort and awkwardness standing there between the two parents and knows that she feels too awkward and self-conscious to give mom the big smile and exuberant hug that is her usual way of greeting her in other circumstances. The mother's heart goes out to her child and she instinctively wants to put her at ease and let her know without words that there are no expectations she has to meet. But she simultaneously wants the familiar smile and hug to reassure her that her daughter is as happy to see her mother as she normally is, which the mother realizes in that instant is something she has come to count on. She also wants to make clear to her former husband that their child is happy to be with her again. For that quick instant, the mother simultaneously wants to place no demands on her daughter and wants to sweep her into her arms literally force a hug to happen.

One can see that responding to these diametrically opposed internal forces with which the mothers were continually confronted place a wide range of demands on them that, like the previous constituent meaning, seeped into every arena of their lives. Some of the inner conflicts were such that they could be quickly dismissed, accepted without distress, easily resolved, or even laughed at. Others were highly charged with emotion or conviction and were difficult, if not impossible, to resolve. Some were over with almost as soon as they happened, like the encounter in the school hallway. Others were more deep seated and extended over significant periods of time, continuing to cause distress and difficulties for the mothers, such as the conflict between wanting her children to be happy in their life with their father and yet feeling great loss and frequent jealously, fear and resentment when they were. The more intense the internal conflict was, and the more sensitive it was in nature, the more mothers described feelings of literally being torn apart by the opposing forces and the more they experienced high levels of distress, worry, distraction, inability to act or make a satisfying decision, inability to see either alternative as acceptable, self-doubt and confusion, anger or even hatred toward their ex-spouse

Each of the contradictory beliefs, desires, goals, and emotions experienced by the mothers was authentic and exerted its own pressure on the mothers. Over time, the repeated confrontations and subsequent struggles to reconcile or silence the contradictory forces was recognized by the mothers as a predictable, though unwelcome and intensely disliked, *given* in their lives as coparents. Although this recognition was valuable in helping mothers develop strategies for coping with the resulting dilemmas,

the very relentlessness of the confrontations, the relentlessness of feeling torn, and the

relentlessness of engaging in struggles to reconcile or silence the opposing forces, was

ultimately very draining on the mothers' emotional, psychological and physical

energies.

Becoming an Outsider

Unexpected, painful, and disorienting discoveries of ways in which they have become outsiders--especially to their children.

Families can be defined by structure, function, and individual characteristics that

make them unique. Within any given family there are spoken and unspoken rules that

determine such things as personal boundaries, mutual expectations and standards,

guiding values, insider privileges and obligations, defined loyalties, and degree of

openness and permeability of the family's boundaries to the outside world. There is

also a shared history that accumulates over time, including such things as explicit and

implicit traditions, individual and family secrets and vulnerabilities, family stories,

family jokes, shared memories, hardships, successes, pride, dreams and the kinds of

connections that can only be built by virtue of sharing life's spaces and experiences

over a period of time. Ideally, a family provides a safe haven for its members, a place

where feelings can be expressed, where affection can be openly exchanged, where love

is given freely, and where its members can be seen in their totality, as whole and

unmasked individuals with unique strengths, weaknesses, and characteristics.

Typically, living out life together as a family creates a network of insider relationships

who share multiple types of intimacy such as those outlined by Nunnally, Miller, and

Wackman (2004): emotional, intellectual, spiritual, recreational, social, economic, parent/child, household, and sometimes vocational if there is a family business. Married couples typically add a new dimension of sexual intimacy and tend to achieve the deepest levels of intimacy in the other arenas with each other.

Almost from the moment that their two coparenting households were formed, mothers in this study began to discover ways in which they had stopped being an insider and had instead become an outsider. Being an outsider meant losing access to someone or something that they had previously had access to. As with all of the constituent meanings, the frequency, intensity, and details of these experiences varied, but they were present for every mother. For most, but definitely not all of the mothers, the transition to outsider in the life of their former spouse tended to be much less problematic than their transition to outsider in the life of their children. The mothers who found this to be the case preferred being an outsider in the life of their former spouse, having lost their desire for sharing any kind of intimacy of any kind, with the possible exception of parenting intimacy. I say "possible exception" because some mothers knew that would never be possible, and had stopped seeing it as a reasonable goal. Other than an understandable human curiosity, or a desire to be aware enough to protect their own and their children's interests, these mothers had lost interest in having access to their former spouse's life, whether external or internal. Nevertheless, they still experienced a disturbance to their embodied life that called them to attention when they encountered new manifestations of changing personal boundaries that reflected yet another situation in which they had become outsiders. Until the new boundaries and the

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new outsider roles became incorporated into their embodied existence, the awkwardness stemming from the unfamiliarity would persist.

There were also mothers who found their new outsider roles with their former spouse to be as difficult an adjustment as their new outsider roles with their children. For these mothers, the desire for shared intimacies with their former spouse was still strong and losing access to his life was experienced as a painful loss. The calls to attention that these mothers experienced when confronted with manifestations of new outsider roles with their former spouse were much more intense and painful than with the mothers who were content with their new roles and needing only to develop more familiarity with them.

In regard to establishing their own personal boundaries, all of the mothers, regardless of their feelings for their former spouse and regardless of the nature of the coparenting relationship, were committed to establishing firm boundaries that eliminated their former spouse's access to all but the most basic aspects of their lives that had to be known in order to manage the shared tasks of parenting. Information about themselves that had previously been part of the multiple shared intimacies with their former spouses now became private or even secretive. Their public parenting life was the only part of themselves to which they willingly allowed access and they would have preferred it if they could close that off too. But in spite of the dramatic decrease in access mothers were willing to give their former spouses; they nonetheless invested a great deal of energy in maintaining *enough* parenting intimacy to allow at least a civil working relationship between themselves and their former spouses.

New outsider roles with their children were a completely different matter for mothers. None of the changed boundaries and decreased access to their children's lives would ever have chosen by any of the mothers and it was a universally negative aspect of their experience of coparenting with a former spouse. Some of the changed roles were predictable if the mothers had been guided only by logic, but logic is not the basis for a mother-child relationship. Consequently, most discoveries of a new situation in which they had become outsiders in their children's lives were disconcerting and disruptive to mothers' embodied life and to their peace of mind. Some were completely unexpected, painful, and very disorienting in their complete contradiction of mothers' historical embodied knowledge of their relationship with their children. The specific ways in which mothers were becoming outsiders to their children seemed to gradually increase over a period of time until it reached a point of stabilization and predictability; until what were essentially new personal boundaries and new rules of engagement were established.

The core issue that was repeatedly revealed about situations in which Mothers became outsiders to their children was the issue of loyalty. To whom did a child owe his loyalty? Under what circumstances? What constituted honoring a particular loyalty expectation and what constituted betraying it? What loyalty expectations were embedded in the new family rules in each of the two families he was now a part of? When loyalty expectations for his father conflicted with loyalty expectations for his mother? What *should* he do? What *could* he do? If he had to choose, how would he decide which loyalty to honor and which to betray?

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A frequent manifestation of mothers' outsider status with their children was in the restriction of information seeking and information flow. Most mothers discovered quickly that asking their children all but the most fundamental questions about their father--such as "Will he be picking you up from school?--was something they could no longer do without risk of their children getting upset and either stating or implying that it would be disloyal to their dad to answer the question. Any other kind of information was apparently viewed by the children as information for insiders only, and they understood keenly that their mother and father were no longer insiders to each other. The insider information they had access to as members of their new family with their father was not meant to be shared with outsiders, and especially not with their mother, newly relegated to outsider status and having the potential to be a competitor of their father in the parenting arena. Regardless of the answer, a question such as "Did you and your dad go to church this weekend?" might have been perfectly acceptable for a mother to ask when they first established two households, but as new boundaries are set, and loyalties are figured out, that same question might become one of many that the child believes he cannot answer if he is to maintain loyalty to his father. It is insider information and could conceivably be interpreted in a way that created a negative impression of his father. Depending on the circumstances, insider information that mothers no longer had access to might include the kinds of activities they engaged in at their dad's house, the kind of rules they had to follow at their dad's house, the reason they sounded or looked upset when they came back from dad's house, the ups and downs of their children's relationship with their dad, their relative happiness at dad's

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house, their dad's happiness with his job, their dad's social life, their dad's handling of money, their dad's mood or ability to handle certain situation, the expectations for doing their homework at dad's, and many other kinds of information. An equivalent restriction existed for what kinds of comments mothers could make about the children's father or about the children's life at their father's house. In the most extreme cases, it was almost as if mothers were refused access to or opinions about any part of their child's life that occurred while they were living under their dad's roof.

Another frequent manifestation of mother's new outsider status with their children and of children's conflicted or uncertain loyalties occurred when mothers, fathers, and children shared the same physical space but without the children being clear to whom there loyalty should be directed. For example, if both mother and father attended a child's school event, the children might be comfortable with the presence of both of them and interact as freely with one as the other. But it was more common for loyalty confusion to show itself, such as when children showed discomfort interacting with either parent while they were all sharing the *in between* space that was neither within the boundaries of the father's home and family and loyalties nor within the boundaries of the mother's home and family and loyalties. An even more tense situation occurred at times when a child interacted comfortably with her dad, whose home she was living in right then and who had brought her to the event, but closed off access to her mother or interacted with her only minimally and under duress. During moments like this, when children were engaging in the world from the *in between,* the mothers frequently became outsiders with no access to their children at all. In one such

instance, a mother was unable to even induce eye contact with her child, much less a more direct interaction. And yet the mother knew well that the child was quite comfortable with her presence at school events when the she was living with the mother and was brought to the event by the mother. When a child's pain and discomfort in this situation was as visible as in the last example, mothers described feeling an almost physical pain of compassion and empathy for their child. But even their empathy and their intellectual understanding of what was happening could not completely shield mothers from the sudden hurt of being pushed out of the insider circle of their children's lives.

As mentioned before, mothers' experience of loss of access to parts of their children's lives varies according to many contextual factors, but the pattern of progression was consistently one of a gradual, steady, and largely unpredictable increase in these experiences until a point in time when new boundaries, new family rules, and new rules of engagement had been stabilized. Along the way, most mothers found a disturbing dilemma facing them that was quite surprising and difficult to resolve. Not only did mothers want as much access as possible to their children's lives, but they wanted their children to have as much access to their own lives as was realistic and healthy. However, they simultaneously wanted to severely restrict their former spouse's access to their lives. If they freely shared access to their lives with their children, might the children then share that access and information with their father? Should they limit access for their children in order to avoid that risk? Should they ask their children to deliberately maintain secrets with them, excluding their father from

those secrets? Or should they maintain exactly the degree of openness with their children they truly desire and accept the fact that the price for having the relationship they want with their children might be a greater public exposure to their former spouse than they would choose, and that this greater exposure might also create greater vulnerability. Manifestations of this particular dilemma varied from not wanting a particular purchase to be mentioned, to not wanting a particular relationship to be mentioned, to not wanting a major life decision to be mentioned.

A frequently seen impact of mothers' becoming outsiders and losing access to some aspects of their children's lives was an acute awareness of the separateness of their children's two households and the worlds that these households encompassed. This acute awareness easily triggered a concern about, or at least a wondering about, what kind of comparisons and judgments the children made about their world with their dad and their world with their mom. When these concerns were triggered, it was sometimes difficult for mothers to resist an urge to think of the two households as being in competition with each other for their children's favor. And to begin wondering such things as "If their dad has bought them new furniture and I can't afford to do that, will they stop liking it at my house and want to stay at their dad's more? I can't compete that way, but what other way can I compete so they will like it at my house just as much as they like it at their dad's?" Or "My children and their dad are having so much *fun* playing soccer together. I'm not very good at playing any kind of games per se with my children but we have always done other kinds of things together. Am I less fun than their dad? Am I boring to my children compared to their dad? Will they keep loving

me and wanting to continue to live with me if I can't be more fun like their dad? What

can I do differently to show them that I can be fun too?"

Watchfulness

Constant state of watchfulness in multiple directions within and between the two coparent family systems.

Similar to mothers' awareness of the ceasings in their life, this particular

constituent of meaning could have been embedded in others, but only with the risk that

its presence and significance would be lost. This invariant aspect of meaning, while

sharing similarities with the awareness constituent, had its own unique focus. It was a

special type of awareness that demanded to be articulated clearly and explicitly. The

state of watchfulness being referenced was characterized by vigilance and monitoring

that was neither random nor casual, but instead was purposeful. And the purpose was

always specifically connected to the fact that the mother and father were divorced and

were now coparenting their child. The constant state of alert watchfulness that also

characterized this monitoring distinguished it sharply from any other kinds of conscious

or unconscious monitoring that may be a natural part of being-in-the-world as a parent

who cares deeply about their children's well-being. A final distinguishing characteristic

was that the motive and felt need for this monitoring stemmed from *concern* rather than

curiosity, implying a predisposition to seek out problems more than to seek out anything

else. The degree of watchfulness, its specific purpose, and its outcomes varied among

the mothers, but the state of watchfulness itself was an aspect of mothers' being-in-the-

world that manifested itself in the lives of all of the mothers. The more widespread and intense the watchfulness, the greater the risk that it will engender or reinforce parenting comparisons and feelings of competition in the mother.

The first direction of vigilant watchfulness, which appeared to be the most universal and the most central to the mothers, was *from mother to mother*--in other words, self-monitoring on the part of the mother. Every mother described ways that she was constantly monitoring her own behavior in front of her children. Carefully selected words, hidden emotions and reactions, unspoken thoughts, unfinished conversations because her children had come in the room--all this to avoid doing or saying something that would be hurtful to her children. Mothers were quite open about stating that (a) they understood and agreed with those who advised them never to speak ill of their children's father, (b) it required vigilant self-monitoring at all times to achieve such a goal, and (c) some moments and days the struggle to restrain and contain themselves was lost. Mothers also described learning through experience how important it was to continually strive to achieve this goal.   They all had remembered incidents of speaking quite negatively about their children's father and the palpable distress this caused in their children, motivating the mothers to be even more vigilant than before about their own behavior. Many times mothers experienced strong internal conflicts as they wrestled with this issue, sometimes to the point where the conflicts were almost felt to be raging within them as mothers. For example, they might simultaneously want to "tell their children just what kind of a person their dad is" while also wanting to keep those thoughts and emotions to themselves because they know how hurtful they will be

to their children. Or they might simultaneously want to tell their children "their side" of an argument in the hopes that their children will form an alliance with them against their dad while also wanting to protect their children from the adult arguments and disagreements that should not be their concern.

Another direction of vigilant watchfulness was *from mother to child* and this was also part of every mother's experience. There were multiple situational purposes that were revealed in the mothers' descriptions, but the principle one was that of concern for the child's well-being and a desire to watch for cues from the child as to his present state of being. This constituent meaning does not refer to the watchfulness focused on children's well-being that is an almost universal part of parenting, but an even more targeted watchfulness aimed at picking up cues about the child's well-being *with respect to his being-in-the-world as a child with two coparents, two homes, and two family cultures*. Sometimes the purpose became even more specific, such as monitoring for cues regarding the child's comfort or lack of when mother, father, and child were all physically present. Or monitoring the child's behavior whenever he returned from his dad's house to watch for cues regarding his overall peace of mind. Or monitoring the child's behavior when she departed for dad's house. Or listening carefully to verbal cues about the child's state of well-being, potential worries, fears, confusion, or conflicted loyalties. Or monitoring the child's reaction to an encounter with his dad. Or watching the child's face when his dad was telling him something that was difficult for the child to hear. Or watching the child's reaction when he was reprimanded by his dad. Or monitoring a child's overall relationship with his dad. It

might also be something very concrete and immediate like watching closely to see if the child was picking up on a mother's negativity toward his father through the mother's words, voice tone, or body language. Had he overheard the telephone conversation? Had he heard the whispered comment? Did he read something in our facial expression that belied your words? Again, it must be emphasized that this was a vigilance that was specifically connected to potential impacts of having a divorced mother and father who were coparenting the child together.

A particularly revealing direction of vigilant watchfulness that was described by the mothers was *from child to mother* and from *child to mother-father interactions*. (A parallel watchfulness from child to father may well have been experienced by fathers and children, but that aspect was not part of the study's focus and was not addressed in the interviews.) Given that the children's watching behavior was observed and then described by mothers rather than the children themselves, this category really is about *mothers watching children watching mothers and fathers*. All of the mothers described their children's alertness to, and sensitivity to, their mother's behavior with regard to their father. Just as any insider group, including a family, will protect its own from outsiders, so too did the children described in the interviews remain on the alert for possible threats to their father in the form of criticism or negative comments from mothers. In those situations, mothers may have been perceived by the children to be the ultimate outsider. When the mothers, fathers, and children were together, the children were equally watchful but focused on both parents and the exchange taking place rather than on just one of the parents.

Yet another direction of vigilant watchfulness was *from mother to former spouse*. Mothers monitored their spouse's behavior for multiple purposes, again all specifically related to the fact that they were all trying to make a two-household, coparenting family structure work for them. Mothers' monitoring of their former spouse's behavior might focus exclusively on their children's well-being, as in Is he being good to them? Is he helping them with their homework? Is he being too harsh with them? Is he keeping them safe? Is he teaching them things I don't believe in and don't want them exposed to? Is he spending enough time with them? In all these cases, there may well be an element of passing judgment on their former spouse as well as the element of remaining informed. Sometimes, as mothers' outsider roles get more widespread and more entrenched, and children's loyalties get more divided, it becomes more difficult for mothers to get the kind of information they need to in order to alleviate what might be legitimate parenting concerns.

A completely different purpose for vigilance *from mother to former spouse* that was also found in mothers' descriptions of experience was a purpose focused on potential impact on the mothers themselves. Questions motivating this particular kind of vigilance might include: Is he telling the children things about me that will hurt my relationship with them? Does he ever speak supportively of me to the children? Is he trying to be their favorite parent? Is he trying to win them over with material gifts that I can never compete with? Is he trying to sabotage my parenting efforts with the children? Is he trying to make me look bad? Is he encouraging my children to behave respectfully toward me or disrespectfully toward me? Does he encourage those

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attitudes with his words? With his behavior? Is he making sure my children remember me on my birthday in the same way they should be taught to remember other significant people in their lives or is he deliberately hoping they will forget about it? As with the previous *from mother to former spouse* vigilance, this one may well carry with it explicit or implicit judgments-in-the-making as well as its basic information gathering function.

A final direction of vigilant watchfulness described by mothers was *from former spouse to mother*. There was much greater variation in this aspect of meaning for mothers and by itself, it would not have risen to a level of significance that would qualify it as a constituent of meaning. However, because it contributed to the overall state of watchfulness within and between the two coparent family systems, it is important to include it here. Some mothers felt as if there was no particular watchfulness of any sort occurring from former spouse to mother. These mothers had no sense of being monitored at all by their former spouses. Others experienced the monitoring and watchfulness, but experienced it as non-threatening and oriented toward the former spouse learning from the mother in positive ways. One mother whose former spouse watched and modeled much of how she handled parenting was conflicted in her reaction to this circumstance. On the one hand, she appreciated the respect for her own parenting that it represented and her former spouse's honest effort to be a better parent. On the other hand, she found it irritating at times, especially when it inevitably reached a level where it began to feel competitive. And finally, there were mothers who not only experienced watchfulness from their former spouses, but experienced it as

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always oriented toward finding something wrong, "catching" her making a mistake,

Essential Structure of Mothers' Experience

As intended, the essential psychological structure of mothers' experience of

parenting with a former spouse emerged as the invariant aspects of meaning came

together to reveal the unified structure of the experience. Although the structure is

constituted by the invariant aspects of meaning, a description of the structure does not

merely repeat them or add them together. Rather, it integrates them, or perhaps weaves

them, into a brief expression of the whole that reflects the interrelationships of

meanings. Just as the revelation and elaboration of the individual constituents of

meaning illuminated the essential structure, so too does the essential structure illuminate

the whole of the experience. The final description, which is considered the essential

meaning of the experience, may incorporate the individual constituents of meaning

either explicitly or implicitly. The description of the essential structure of mothers'

experience of parenting with a former spouse is as follows:

> Mothers who are parenting with a former spouse find themselves in an
> everyday world characterized by inescapable and inevitable threats to their
> equilibrium. The most fundamental and central role of their existence--that of
> being a mother--is now intricately and delicately linked to a relationship that is
> inherently fraught with contradictions and risk. The relationship contains
> within it an uneasy, disorienting mix of past, present and future that can make
> even the simplest aspects of shared parenting become huge with significance
> and challenge. The relationship includes a history of sharing life's most
> profound intimacies and dreams as well as a history of an irrevocable, painful
> tearing apart of the shared intimacies and dreams, leaving the mothers with deep
> and sometimes enduring grief. The opposing and irreconcilable differences in
> experience with their former spouse cannot help but create turmoil and intense
> emotions. At any given moment, which part of this history will trigger an
> instantaneous bodily response from the mothers? And yet it is from this
> conflicted position in the world that a new coparenting relationship must be

formed and maintained. It is from this conflicted position in the world that they must share their greatest treasure, their children. It is from this conflicted position in the world that they must share the intimacies of parenthood. And it is from this conflicted place in the world that they must rebuild their own identities and that of their newly formed family.

Their former spouse is simultaneously their partner and not their partner. He is simultaneously loved and hated. He is simultaneously family and not family. He is simultaneously important in the world and not important in the world. He is simultaneously welcomed and rejected. He simultaneously helps and hinders. He is simultaneously trusted and not trusted. He is simultaneously a friend and an enemy. He is simultaneously wanted in the child's life and not wanted. Grief, gratitude, anger, resentment, sorrow, love, envy, disgust, fear, worry, heartbreak, relief…they threaten mothers' equilibrium daily and are always on the horizon waiting to spring forth. They must be continually fought against in order to allow the relationship to survive. It is a constant dance of the head and heart that is ultimately exhausting. The mothers' motivation for the best parenting option for their children ultimately outweighs the sometimes overwhelming demands and they would not choose to give up that goal. But they long for it to be easier, long for the constant presence and demands to disappear, long to feel unconstrained, long to feel free, long for a sense of equilibrium that is lasting, long for the easily-triggered sense of *dis*equilibrium to end.

As we research the possible meaning structures of our lived experiences, we come to a fuller grasp of what it means to be in the world as a man, a woman, a child, taking into account the sociocultural and the historical traditions that have given meaning to our ways of being in the world (van Manen, 1997, p. 12).

DISCUSSION OF MEANING

The purpose of the current chapter is to provide additional discussion about mothers' experience of parenting with a former spouse that, in combination with the findings presented in the previous chapter, will deepen the reader's understanding of this particular human phenomenon and in so doing, will deepen the reader's understanding of what it means to be-in-the-world as a human being. The previous chapter focused on identifying and defining the constituents of meaning and the essential psychological structure of this phenomenon and was organized according to a sequential explication of each individual constituent. By contrast, the discussion presented in the current chapter is oriented toward the *unity* of experience described by mothers and is intended to reinforce an understanding of the essential *interconnectedness* and *interdependence* of the various constituents. Consequently, the discussion that follows will focus on reflections about mothers' experience that are relevant to multiple constituents of meaning and to the unity of experience rather than to

just singular constituents of meaning. The reflections will draw upon the constituent meanings described in the previous chapter, selected concepts from current literature that can further advance our insight, visual cues and concepts from a series of original schemas, and--as is imperative--participant descriptions that serve to anchor the discussion and keep us close to the specific moments of mothers' lived experience of this phenomenon. Finally, the chapter will conclude with an example of phenomenological writing that resonates with significance for mothers' embodied experience of parenting with a former spouse and serves as a closing metaphor for the discussion. The contributions from each of these elements are intended to complement and inform each other in ways that increase our ability to *communicate about* mothers' experience of parenting with a former spouse, and therefore to increase our *understanding of* the meaning of this experience.

The constituents of meaning and participant descriptions that are integrated into the discussion throughout the chapter have been selected as explicit and representative *examples* of experience that are relevant to a given discussion. However, each time an example is chosen it is but one among many that could have been chosen – a fact that is particularly important to note for the constituents of meaning. In some cases, virtually all of the constituents of meaning could have provided an equally effective example. Similarly, using a particular constituent of meaning or participant description to reinforce one part of the discussion does not mean that the same constituent of meaning or participant description could not have been equally valuable in reinforcing another part of the discussion. It is expected that the reader will instantly recognize that the

examples have relevancy for multiple parts of the discussion, but this fact is so foundational to understanding the chapter and its focus on the *unity* and *interrelationships* of the constituents of meaning that it bears stating once more.

Complex. If it were possible to select a single word to describe the task of constructing this chapter, it might be the word *complex*. Mothers' experience of parenting with a former spouse is a profoundly complex experience. A coparenting relationship is, by nature, a multifaceted and complex relationship that has been studied from multiple different perspectives and continues to perplex. It perplexes and challenges those who live it and those who study it. The mechanisms by which a coparenting relationship can impact the well-being of mothers, fathers, and children of divorce are complicated, understood only a little, and resistant to simplistic explanation. Phenomenological analysis itself is a multi-layered, complex, and sometimes mysterious process that has the potential to reveal endless depths of meaning about human experience. In addition to the multiple layers of complexity inherent in each of these contributing content areas, there is an abundance of rich and fascinating information associated with each of them that could contribute strongly to the discussion.

The complexity of each content area, the sheer volume of relevant information about each one, and the additional layer of intricacy involved in integrating the content into a unified, coherent, but manageable whole, made the task of constructing this chapter both exciting and a bit daunting. Ultimately, a high degree of selectivity was required regarding what information to include and how to organize it. Thus, the

chapter reflects informed but nonetheless personal judgments of value, with no attempt

to suggest that these are the only judgments possible or the ideal judgments of value.

Review of Embodied Experience

As stated in the previous chapter, an understanding of the concept of embodied

experience is critical to understanding the phenomenological meaning of human

experiences. It is also critical to understanding the schemas and the phenomenological

metaphor used in this chapter. In order to ensure that this concept is fresh in the

readers' mind while reading this chapter, a brief review will now be provided.

Embodied experience refers to the meaning that is created in the exchange

between a person and his lived world, including both objects and people. This pre-

reflective making of meaning is taking place all of the time without us taking notice

until we are called to attention by something disrupting the norm. This call to attention

awakens our conscious thought and leads us to "attend to ourselves and our

surroundings in a new way" (Becker, 1992, p. 20). The four lifeworld existentials that

constitute our embodied experience include:

- *Lived body* (corporeality) refers to the fact that we are always bodily in the
  world and our body is the means by which we experience the world.

- *Lived other* (relationality) refers to the lived relations we maintain with
  others in the interpersonal space we share with them.

- *Lived space* (spatiality) refers to the felt space we experience in a largely
  pre-verbal, unreflective manner in our embodied life.

- *Lived time* (temporality) refers to the felt time we experience primarily in a
  pre-verbal, unreflective manner in our embodied life.

A non-verbal recognition and understanding of our embodied experience has always influenced the verbal expressions we use to describe human experiences. It is no accident that many of our expressions of experience contain reference to our corporeal existence, such as the ways we describe "matters of the heart"--an expression that itself is a reference to our corporeal existence. A person who has been *wounded* in love is said to have a *broken* heart. When we want to indicate an extreme degree of broken-heartedness or to simply be more dramatic in our expression, we say the person has a *shattered* heart. A person who is feeling happy and without worry is said to be *light hearted*. Someone preoccupied with sorrow is said to have a *heavy* heart and is described as being *weighed down* by it. A person who is generous spirited and loving toward others is said to be *big hearted*. Such expressions do not reflect a deliberate and cognitively calculated connection to our corporeal existence. Rather, they reflect a pre-verbal awareness of our corporeal existence and a pre-verbal recognition of the appropriateness of language borrowed from the physical world of objects.

As expected, participant mothers' pre-reflective descriptions of experience contained unintentional and repeated references to their embodied existence that can increase our understanding of the meaning of their experience. Examples of descriptions that reflect each of the lifeworld existentials that constitute embodied existence are listed below in order to ground the remainder of the discussion in the appropriate lifeworld language and orientation. Clearly, some of the expressions refer to multiple existentials even though they have been listed under a single one. Contained within these statements of embodied experience are numerous indications of various

constituents of meaning, and it is presumed that they will be immediately visible even though they are not being explicitly discussed at the moment. In combination, mothers' descriptions of experience that will appear throughout the chapter will serve as a rich resource for achieving a greater understanding of the constituents of meaning and of the unity of experience for the mothers in this study.

Expressions of Corporeality

Even though she had been the one to initiate the divorce, a mother was describing her grief about her marriage not having been one that lasted a lifetime. Her description is filled with references to physical attributes and physical motions as she struggles to describe the pain and what it feels like to have it thrust upon her.

> *But sometimes, ah, the pain is a lot more than others. Sometimes the emptiness that I feel inside is worse than others, it's hollow…and then I feel like I'm just like going down hill…a really steep hill…and I am just going to fall…I'm falling into a hole that is totally black.*

Another mother created a vivid mental picture of physically packing away her feelings whenever she had to interact with her former spouse. Her description even included where she would put them for safekeeping until she could safely bring them forth.

> *My gut reaction is that you have to be able to compartmentalize your feelings…you have to just take them and put them on a shelf to get through…..It is very difficult. It is very gut wrenching. But you do…you just have to put all your feelings on a shelf and get through until he leaves.*

The next incident was mentioned in the previous chapter in relation to one of the constituents of meaning, but is useful to also include here as a demonstration of the power of our incorporated corporeality. This mother was talking about the fact that she considered herself to have done a good job of adjusting to the divorce and to coparenting, but then a certain feeling would catch her by surprise and remind her of how difficult it had been and could still be. In the example provided, the mother's body was responding in familiar ways without benefit of the mother's conscious thought.

> *The smallest things can make it difficult. At, ah…we've been at basketball games together where it's felt just like back when we were all a family to the point where one day I almost put my arm on his leg because things felt so normal and then I said, 'Oh, my gosh!" and so…..*

Expressions of Temporality

The mother who made the following statement had been describing an internal conflict she sometimes experienced when she had a strong desire to call her former spouse and have a lengthy discussion about something with their children, but simultaneously had an equally strong desire to never call him at all or to contact him only about quick and practical matters. She had been trying to convey what it was that made her still want to have lengthy conversations about their children with him at times. In this instance, the mother's expressions of temporality had a direct and explicit link to personal history.

> *Sometimes…..I want to talk to somebody that, like I put it, knows my history, was part of that history. We made that history together so who better, who better than him to…to go to for those things.*

Expressions of Relationality

The following descriptions about relationality convey a significant difference in the mother's and former spouse's ideas about what kind of relationship they currently have with each other and/or what kind of relationship they could have. The former spouse's behavior indicates an embodied carrying out of a relationship that does not exist for the mothers. The former spouse's behavior also reflects the pre-reflective aspect of embodied experience, while the mothers' behavior reflects the fact that she has been called to attention because of something wrong. Her former spouse's relational interaction with her causes dissonance rather than finding a matching response.

> *My husband, my ex-husband has said, we can be best friends anyway, and I told him, no, we can't. We can't…..But he still thinks of it that way….So he'll tell me all his plans for going on a vacation with the kids, not having a clue that this should be a vacation…we should all be taking this vacation like we always did.*

> *It's very matter of fact. I've got to look at it like a business meeting, you know…You know, he tries to make small talk, be friendly, warm, and I just…I can't go there. I mean, the kids would say I'm friendly, warm, and I smile and joke and everything, but, ah, I just can't relax and be me….only part of me is even there…..It's not like it used to be and he doesn't get that…I can't "chit-chat" with him any more…*

> *I guess it's different because…in a way, the <u>balance</u> is kind of thrown off. For them [the children], they don't have that…the other person that is their parent that they go to talk when they're stressed out. And at least…even though he really wasn't there emotionally [for them], he was there physically. So even if he wasn't necessarily listening to them, they felt better being able to sit next to him, talk to him, um…that aspect of it. And I think it's…I thought it would…I guess if I had to think, I thought it would be <u>easier</u> than it is.*

Expressions of Spatiality

The following expressions of spatiality are perhaps the most dramatic in their instant revelation of the mothers' bodily response to something wrong in their physical space.

> *I had a hard time having him coming here into my kitchen. You know, that's intimate. We're not intimate anymore. It was uncomfortable for me. It was…this isn't…this isn't what our family is anymore. But it is because when it comes to the kids, you just have to do it…and that's where it was…it was for the kids.*
>
> *So he knocks and he comes in, but he always comes when he says he's coming. He doesn't just come in at any time. It's when I'm expecting him, and that's fine. But, ah, I've had to learn how that works and that's one of the reasons why I've got to get out of this house because there will be natural boundaries when I get my own house. But here this was his house, so that's been tough and, ah, it just doesn't feel natural to have him come in here any more.*
>
> *It hurt me so much in the beginning when they were at their dad's house. When they weren't home, I didn't want to be home and I would just get busy doing all the things…. I would finally have to go home…and then I would be <u>sick</u>…and I still have those moments of missing them terribly and the house feeling so big and empty and I don't want to do anything in the house…*

Coparent Relationship History: The Power of the Past

There are no previous studies that examine mothers' lived experience of parenting with a former spouse, or even studies that examine the universe of coparenting from the perspective of the current study. However, the literature is replete with accumulating knowledge about multiple aspects of coparenting. How can we use

knowledge from the literature to help us understand the meaning of experience as described by the mothers in the current study? And conversely, how can we use the discovered meaning of experience in the current study to help us understand the knowledge in the literature? It seems imperative that we integrate these two sources of knowledge, allowing them to inform each other, in order to achieve a greater understanding of mothers' experience of parenting with a former spouse. Regardless of whether the specific knowledge contributions reinforce each other or oppose each other, integrating them will nonetheless increase our understanding.

This part of the discussion will center around a selection of related concepts from the literature that have been shown to be important to understanding the coparenting relationship *as a whole*, and will reflect on the possible connections between these concepts and the meaning of the coparenting experience as revealed by mothers in the current study. Chief among the selected concepts are coparent relationship history, attachment bonds, and disengagement. In particular, the discussion will center around how (a) these concepts that have been described in the literature may have manifested themselves in the embodied experience of mothers, and (b) the ongoing disturbances to embodied experience that were revealed in this study may support or challenge these same concepts. Mothers' embodied experience will be the point of connection for the concepts from literature, mothers' descriptions of lived experience, and the discussion itself.

It is quite clear by now that coparenting is a complex relationship that can have profound impact on the well-being of the mothers, fathers, and children in coparent

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families. It is also quite clear that it is universally challenging to do well, even when entered into voluntarily and with great motivation to succeed. And finally, of particular importance to the immediate discussion, it is also quite clear that one cannot shed the history of the coparent relationship. This statement warrants both emphasis and repetition: *One cannot shed the history of the coparent relationship.*

At first glance, such a statement appears eminently logical and unsurprising. But it fails to warn of its true significance. Professional literature explores the influence of coparents' relationship history on their ability to develop a constructive coparenting relationship and identifies multiple bonds of attachment that must first be broken. It also makes clear that successfully disengaging from these bonds can be very difficult, but is absolutely essential. However, even the substantial and explicit knowledge about this necessary task fails to prepare one for the power of this history as it was revealed in the mothers' descriptions of experience. The influence of the historical relationship with their former spouse permeated all aspects of each mother's being-in-the-world as a mother coparenting with a former spouse.

At no time in the current study was there a deliberate attempt to explore the connections between the history of mothers' relationships with their former spouses and their current experience of parenting with their former spouse. Identifying the relationship history as a significant factor in mothers' daily lifeworld was neither a goal nor an expectation. Not only was the study carried on in a discovery mode, with no apriori expectations, but the significance of mothers' relationship history with their former spouse was not even something that was identified as a research preconception

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that would be set aside via bracketing during the phenomenological reduction. This "eminently logical and unsurprising" fact was so completely in the background as an expected and taken-for-granted part of reality that it was not seen. Much like the expectation that mothers would express love for their children. Both were seen, felt, made note of, and then relegated again to the invisible background. Consequently, even though its influence was experienced repeatedly--by the mothers and then by me during the interviews and analysis--it did not assert itself as an entity demanding its own attention and status until well into the analysis. By that time, it was not only visible, but striking in its power.

Ultimately, the presence and influence of the coparent relationship history was made visible in virtually all of the constituent meanings. This created a new depth of understanding for descriptions in the literature that had been all but forgotten: marriage as "terminable and interminable" (Hunt, 1966); coparents as having an "irreversible, indissoluble relationship with one another" (Mead, 1970); and divorce as a "process of multiple social and psychological ceasings" (McDaniel & Coleman, 2003). It is obvious that deepening our understanding of this particular aspect of parenting with a former spouse is crucial if we are to provide realistic assistance to families as they struggle with this difficult relationship.

From the time Miriam Galper (1978) first warned parents of the challenge of trying to simultaneously end a marriage relationship and develop a new kind of coparenting relationship, researchers have recognized the difficulty of disengaging from the multiple bonds formed during a marriage relationship. Much of the available

knowledge has focused on the various kinds of *attachments* formed and the implications

for the kinds of *disengagement* or "types of divorce" (Bohannan, 1970b) that are

subsequently needed.   All agree that the bonds of attachment are not only deep and

ingrained, but that they cross all aspects of self--emotional, psychological, intellectual,

spiritual, financial, and familial--as well as all aspects of public and private life--from

familiar daily routines to acceptance within a given social group. Some would argue

that the bonds created with a coparent's former spouse can never truly be severed and

will always exist to some degree. But all would agree that it is at least possible to

dramatically reduce their power and influence in one's life and that this is what

breaking the bonds or *disengaging* usually means.

The complexity of the task of breaking the bonds of attachment with a former

spouse should not be minimized. Mothers and fathers who are coparenting together

have previously shared multiple types of intimacy and, just as important, have shared a

commitment to pursue a shared life dream together. They must now disengage from, or

disentangle from, every aspect of their shared lives other than parenting. In most cases,

their couple-ness and later their family-ness constituted a significant part of what

defined their being-in-the-world. Regardless of the factors that contributed to the

dissolution of their marriage, and regardless of anticipated benefits, there is a great deal

of trauma associated with the process of divorce. An enormous part of the very

foundation of their being-in-the-world is no longer. That foundation must be redefined

and rebuilt even while reeling from its destruction.

Divorced parents *must* succeed in breaking the multiple bonds of attachments to their former spouse if they are to develop a workable coparenting relationship. But even beyond that, it is essential to their efforts to redefine themselves following divorce. As we know from the literature, a fundamental and unavoidable task of personal development and growth that divorced individuals encounter is that of redefining themselves. The task of redefining self becomes both a requirement for, and an unavoidable outcome of, the process of breaking established and powerful connections between individuals and their former spouses.

Reflecting on researchers' discussions of the process of disengaging from a former spouse, it seems that they, like me, are trying to find ways to more thoroughly understand and describe experience. Differences in philosophical approaches notwithstanding, are they perhaps trying to describe aspects of the coparenting experience similar to what I have tried to describe regarding mothers' experience? Trying to connect descriptions of mothers' embodied experience to researchers' descriptions of attachment and disengagement seems like a promising way to increase our understanding of both.

Describing the impact of disturbances to mothers' embodied experience in the world was a primary goal of the previous chapter. At the risk of being too repetitive, a brief scenario about disengaging from attachments will be presented here and then used as a reference point throughout the discussion regarding disengagement. Imagine, if you will, a mother's world prior to divorce. Her embodied knowing of the world incorporates all aspects of the lifeworld existentials. It is a pre-reflective knowing that

contains her entire reality, her being-in-the-world. Looking for a moment just at the primary roles through which she engages in the world, she is in the world as a woman, a daughter, a mother, a wife, a colleague, a sister, a painter, a gardener, a runner, a friend. Her embodied existence, her embodied knowing of the world in which she lives, encloses her in comfort, familiarity, and un-reflected recognition. She has incorporated her knowledge of her world into her physical body, which continually responds to the familiarity or to any disturbance. Only when there is a disturbance is this mother's conscious attention called forth; only then does she look at her everyday world in a searching or reflective manner. Among other things, her corporeal, embodied knowing contains her knowledge of her spouse, the multiple forms of intimacy they share, the significance of being a wife and mother, the awareness of what it means to be-in-the-world as a wife and mother, the family rhythms they all share, they physical space they move within together, the feel of the air between them, the awareness of protection and support that is continually exchanged, the feeling of belonging, the presence of ancestors who help define them, the generations that will continue in the future as part of the same family. All these are part of her embodied knowing of her world and are as natural, and as essential, as the oxygen required to breath. And they course through her as invisibly and as unreflected on as the oxygen she breaths.

Now consider the same mother immediately after a sudden, unexpected, and unwanted divorce. What aspect of her embodied knowing of the world has remained intact? What aspect is as comfortable, as natural, and as predictable as it was before? None of it. Her being-in-the-world has changed in such a fundamental way that nothing

is left untouched. As described elsewhere, the very foundation of her being-in-the-world has been destroyed or dramatically altered. Her senses respond to the world differently and she experiences sounds differently, tastes differently, smells differently. Time is also experienced differently as it unfolds in her everyday world. Every relationship she has is different because she is a different being-in-the-world now. She is a different being who must rebuild a foundation of embodied existence that will allow her to once again be enveloped in the comfort and familiarity of before, rather than the sharp, disorienting, disturbing, confusing, lonely, embodied life that she is living today. In the meantime, her embodied memory guides her corporeal self to continually search for the familiar, connecting to it immediately when found and bringing an awareness of absence and an increased sense of disorientation sharply into focus when not found. Particularly disorienting are her corporeal encounters with the *leave-behinds* from the destruction--the pieces of the wreckage that link her to what was, the visible and felt and sensed reminders of what had been. Ultimately, she must either dispose of or transform each leave-behind in order to successfully build anew. A new being-in-the-world foundation cannot adhere to particles of wreckage. But for now they remain, familiar and unfamiliar at the same time, and demanding a connection, commanding her loyalty, drawing on her lifetime of learned response, standing as the only way of getting her bearings at all.

If one thinks of the process of divorce as the source of destruction in this mother's embodied world, it becomes easy to understand why the word *trauma* has been so frequently associated with it. If one thinks of the embodied responses that

continue to search for and respond to the familiar, it becomes easy to understand why the multiple forms of attachment to the former spouse are difficult to break. If one thinks of some of the leave-behinds as painful encounters with what has been but is no longer, it becomes easy to understand the complexity of the disengagement process. And if one thinks of the necessity of a comfortable, natural, familiar embodied world to one's self identity, it becomes easy to understand the loss of identity that is associated with the disorienting world one must inhabit for a time. Taken together, these also make it easy to appreciate the enormity of redefining and rebuilding a significant portion of one's being-in-the-world and to appreciate the enormity of the challenge for former spouses to develop the new relationship that is needed in order to be successful coparents.

Remaining within the embodied experience perspective, selected research results from the literature that appear to resonate most strongly with mother's descriptions of experience will be explored. We will begin with the concept of human trauma and, in particular, trauma in the context of divorce and coparenting. Clearly, it would be impossible to measure the degree of trauma to one's embodied existence as it was just described. But Goode's early study (Goode, 1956) on the degree of trauma experienced by women following divorce, which continues to be cited and continues to be reaffirmed, may have been trying to assess aspects of their experience very similar to the aspects of experience sought in the current study. There certainly appears to be a connection between his findings, mothers' descriptions of experience, and the embodied experience scenario just described. Although it was neither important nor appropriate

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in the current study to assess the degree of trauma experienced by mothers as a result of divorce, or to assess the degree of attachment to the former spouse, differences in both of these aspects of experience were quite visible among the mothers and appeared to (a) have a significant influence on the meaning of the experience for mothers, and (b) be interrelated. Besides apparent differences in intensity or degree, mothers' attachment to former spouses also included differences in terms of a positive orientation and attachment or a negative orientation and attachment.

There are a number of different meanings of the word trauma when it is meant to refer to an injury to one's psychological being, and each of these has its own implications for ultimate well-being. For example, Webster's Online Dictionary (2004) provides the following definitions:

1. An emotional wound or shock that creates substantial, lasting damage to the psychological development of a person, often leading to neurosis.
2. An event or situation that causes great distress and disruption.

Each of these definitions suggests a decidedly different degree of gravity to the condition, but that by itself makes a useful contribution to how we might think about trauma. Although relatively few of us can make a formal diagnosis of trauma, we all have some kind of internalized definition and we all have a pre-verbal, non-reflective way of recognizing or sensing it when we encounter it. Yet another definition that can help us think about and talk about trauma comes from the work of psychologist Carol

Gilligan, who has spent decades studying various aspects of women's psychological

health and development. Her definition of trauma is as follows:

> Trauma is the shock to the psyche that leads to dissociation: our ability
> to separate ourselves, to create a split within ourselves so that we can
> know and also not know what we know, feel and yet not feel our
> feelings. (Gilligan, 2003)

It is this definition that I find the most useful for exploring and talking about mothers'

experience of parenting with a former spouse. This definition goes beyond telling us

what a person *has* in the way of a diagnosis, and provides a description of how a person

might *respond* to the world when they have experienced trauma and what a person

might *do* as part of their coping strategy. In addition, the coping strategy described in

this definition closely parallels some of the descriptions of experience provided by

mothers, including the description used earlier as an example of corporeality. That

mother described "compartmentalizing" her feelings and "putting them on a shelf" in

order to get through. Another talked about "burying" her feelings and trying to

"pretend they are not there." And yet another talked about refusing to acknowledge her

feelings during the day and "making them wait" until she could process them during the

middle of the night. Consequently, without trying to make any formal assessment of the

presence of absence of diagnosable trauma in their lives, Gilligan's definition helped

expand my ability to understand and talk about certain aspects of mothers' experience.

In order to look a little more closely at the possible connection between

mothers' experiences and Goode's findings regarding degree of trauma, his list of

specific factors that was provided in the Literature Review chapter is duplicated below

for the convenience of the reader. Of the 11 factors identified by Goode as relating

positively to degree of trauma, three of them may reflect the time period of his research

(the 1950s) rather than anything inherent in the experience itself, including:

experiencing discrimination as a divorcee, coming from a rural background, former

spouse having a middle or upper class occupation. The remaining eight will serve as the

focus in this discussion and included:

1. divorce first suggested by former spouse

2. being given only a short time to consider divorce

3. having the idea come unexpectedly

4. continuing to have attachment or emotional involvement with former
    spouse after the divorce

5. possessing a desire to punish former spouse

6. being ambivalent about the divorce

7. being personally disapproving of divorce

8. having divorce disapproved of by reference group

The five factors identified by Goode as being negatively related to the degree of

trauma included:

1. being the first to suggest divorce

2. having an attitude of indifference toward former spouse

3. could depend on regular child support payments

4. had a full time job (thereby affording opportunities to meet people)

5. had greater opportunities to date and develop new social relations

Experiences of mothers in the current study would appear to reinforce Goode's findings regarding the factors that were positively and negatively related to the degree of trauma experienced by women following divorce, and the impact of that trauma on the disengagement process. All eight of the factors positively related to degree of trauma were visible in the experiences of the mothers and it did indeed seem that the mothers who were having the most difficulty detaching from their former spouse were those who had experienced, or were currently experiencing, a high degree of trauma from the divorce. In addition, a relationship appeared to exist between the degree of difficulty they were having detaching from their former spouse and the actual number of factors identified by Goode that were applicable to them. For one mother, six of the eight factors applied to her, and she did indeed describe a high degree of trauma and attachments to her former spouse that were still strong and pervasive in her life.

Some of the mothers who appeared to have, or have had in the past, higher degrees of trauma, described their experiences in the following ways: [12]

Yeah. It makes me angry. Makes me sad and then a whole bunch of feelings that start coming out. It's like a roller coaster of feelings. Ahm, you know, angry and then sad and then angry. I get angry at the situation and then sad and I may cry and then angry again but at ME. It's like "Why do you get upset? Why do you react? You can't change it. And…then I start, ah, to be back to me again…and just tell myself "you're doing good and you're going to come out…..things are going to be better. It's like a vicious circle that needs to stop somewhere, but it's not stopping.

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[12] Each new paragraph will always indicate a different mother's voice unless otherwise stated.

Ah, not really. I mean, I guess I was in such a, you know, sort of…like severe depression. I cried all the time. I couldn't even <u>imagine</u> my life, and it was more just waking up and putting one foot in front of the other every single day until all of a sudden it was like, okay, I'm doing this and we're doing this and it's working. But I don't think there was any kind of…I couldn't think that far ahead. I had to live in the day.

….There are just so many things from the divorce…and I just can't be my normal self no matter what I do. And it hurts all the time…and then I have to put all that aside to be a parent….I have to forget about it. I mean, it's almost…it feels almost as if I'm <u>bleeding</u> but I need to just put on like a Band-aid, a very little tiny Band-aid….so,,,

The conception of divorce as a developmental process that takes place over a period of time and is unique for each individual has been emphasized in several places in this study. I am particularly reminded of that fact during this discussion about varying degrees of trauma experienced by the mothers as a result of their divorce. The process so clearly unfolds in each of their lives in a way unique to them and their circumstances. One mother whose divorce had been particularly traumatic was still engaged in the recovery aspects of the process many years after her divorce. A poem that I read while doing my analysis brought this particular mother to mind immediately. And even though it is a poem about somebody else's experience of divorce, it can still convey to you something very real about the experience of one more mother in the study.

Unresolved

For a long time
after I'd learned
to live alone
again,
I drove past
lighted windows

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of other people's
houses,
remembering
what it was like
to belong –
remembering the feeling
of home, shared
like a crocheted afghan.
I don't know
when one gets past the shaking,
the feeling of having dropped
into a well;
I don't know when terror ends,
or the longing
for a caress.

Flights of wild geese
across the twilight sky
unnerve me.
They are so purposeful.
I have been trying to heal
for seven years,
and I am *still*
driving past
lighted windows
of other
people's
houses.
               Anne Wilson (Roth, 2002, p.90)

There were also mothers in the study who described relatively lower degrees of

trauma and relatively lower degrees of attachment to their former spouse. However, I

feel compelled at this point to remind the reader that a relatively lower degree of trauma

at the time of the interviews does not automatically indicate a lack of trauma associated

with the experience of divorce, and therefore equally associated with a mother's

coparent relationship history. In one situation, it appeared to be indicative of her

diligence in preparing for the divorce before it happened and her diligence in seeking

both internal and external solutions to coparenting and personal development challenges

throughout the divorce process. The potential significance of her diligence prior to the divorce is supported by the work of Hagestad and Smyer (1982) on orderly and disorderly divorces, which is explained in more detail below.

Of particular significance to the current study was Goode's distinction between who suggested the divorce first. When the former spouse was the first to suggest it, it became a positive factor for trauma, but when the woman herself was the first to suggest it, it became a negative factor for trauma. This distinction has been examined in many studies since then, as was discussed in the Literature Review chapter, and it is consistently found to exert a high degree of influence on the coparent relationship and on the ability to disengage from bonds of attachment to the former spouse. Although there are always exceptions, and exceptions existed within the group of mothers in this study, this factor appeared to influence their coparent relationship and their ability to disengage, in ways that are in keeping with prior research.

Previously I noted that the most common language for describing the person who first suggests a divorce has come to be *the initiator*. I also commented that I preferred Emery and Dillon's (1994) language, which describes *the leaver* and *the left*. In light of the present conversation, I reiterate that preference. The preceding scenario about mothers' embodied experience of divorce and about the very foundation of their embodied world being destroyed demands a language choice more descriptive than the rather neutral "initiator" [of action]. The terms *leaver* and *left* carry with them an indication of preparedness, or lack of, for the destruction of a mother's embodied world. In both cases the destruction will take place, but when one is the *leaver*, there is time to

brace for the destruction and possibly even time to start building a replacement. By contrast, when one is the *left*, the marriage may end with no warning or preparation and the sense of devastation is then intensified because of the very suddenness and total surprise.

Interestingly, the notion of preparedness is also central to Hagestad and Smyer's (1982) distinction between an *orderly* divorce and a *disorderly* divorce. An orderly divorce occurs when one is able to break or significantly diminish the social and psychological bonds of marriage before the actual legal separation. The parallel between the preparedness of the *leaver* and the one who achieves an *orderly* divorce is obvious, but what is genuinely striking is the mental image of mothers' embodied experience of being *left*, and mothers' embodied experience of a *disorderly* divorce. To me, the images are identical. Taken alone, these concepts are quite different from each other. One describes a role, the other describes a process. But when absorbed into the context of mothers' embodied experience as described in this study, they become one and the same. Certainly there must be truth in this aspect of an experience that we have all studied and tried to describe in different ways.

Much has been said in the literature about the increased degree of trauma when one is *the left* in a divorce, and much has been said about how much more difficult it becomes for *the left* to break their bonds of attachment to their former spouse, to *the leaver*. Both positive and negative bonds of attachment become more difficult to break, but the negative bonds are the most difficult. The experience of one of the mothers in the study gave life to the notion that strong negative attachments are the most enduring

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of all, regardless of which party(s) may be seen as "owning" the negative connections. She had been the leaver in her divorce and her former spouse continued to be excessively hostile years after the divorce, accusing her of having "deliberately destroyed all of them." At the time of the interview, his anger at her for ending their marriage had not diminished even though they were both remarried by then. For all practical purposes, communication between them was impossible because the hostility was so great, and was regularly acted out by her former spouse in blatant and hurtful ways. This mother was able to maintain a coparenting arrangement for her children only by working hard to develop a good relationship with her former spouse's second wife. For all practical purposes, the coparenting arrangement was strictly between the mother and her spouse's second wife, while the former spouse was rarely involved. The arrangement also included the second wife's children. This mother's unusual and creative coparenting arrangement proved very successful, which brings us back full circle to the views expressed by Miriam Galper when she introduced the concept of coparenting to our nation in 1978. Two guiding principles that Galper stressed repeatedly were attitude and creativity. Certainly, this mother has demonstrated both of those to a remarkable and significant degree.

Descriptions of experience from this same mother regarding the time period prior to the second wife's arrival in their lives provide a vivid impression of what it meant to be the object of someone's strong negative attachments. They also provide a vivid impression of the "relentless demands" that were revealed as a constituent of meaning for the mothers and help us understand how significant these demands can be.

I will share some of her descriptions in order to animate the constituent of meaning that

describes the impact of these constant demands on one's embodied engagement in the

world. Her circumstances, and the nature of the demands she faced on an ongoing

basis, make it easy to understand how she personally would become worn down by

these demands. But it's important to reiterate that the existence of, and the constant

presence of, these demands to one's embodied living in the world, was an experience

shared by all of the mothers, regardless of the nature of them.

> *You know…there were several…it took a long time to write the emails to him because I wanted to make sure…and it always took a lot of thinking. Am I doing the right thing? Am I making this decision because of my own selfish interests or am I making the decision because I truly want to make a decision that's right for the kids, and then based on that, I would go through, okay, what are my arguments and the reasons I went…I came to this conclusion. So I would go through this very logical thought process to come up with whatever that email was going to be. And it was the only way I could even possibly communicate with him. And then I would literally just get really nervous and tense sending that email off because the reaction…you never knew what the reaction was going to be. It used to be terrifying to come to my desk and see my little red light on because it could be just somebody returning a phone call or it could be Tom and, ah, wanting to yell at me or leaving me one of his really yucky messages. And so it would physically make me…I mean, I could feel myself just tensing up and getting very worried about what was going to be at the other end of that little red message light.*

> *My heart rate would change. My chest would tighten, you know, and…and that was just in anticipation of the kind of message I might get from him…..There were, ah, especially early on in the divorce, there were a couple of times where he would just, ah, tear me to pieces on the phone to the point where I couldn't even work. I…I'd go home. I'd call my counselor, you know, ahm, because, or you know, I'd just have to go through it with somebody;*

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> *It was like every little thing had to be hard and full of tension. Nothing was ever simple.*

When I lived in a townhouse, I had to go out to the driveway to meet them when he brought the kids home. He would never walk them to the door and knock. I would have to come out and get them. Ah…in the early months he would call me names under his breath or, you know, just do something, just mean and spiteful.

But the transition times that were the hardest were picking up the kids from his house because…he was just scary. He would say really just ugly things and so I would…I would just be really nervous to pick up the kids. They didn't want to go over there. Ah…and then I just don't want…especially when he was dropping off, if there were ugly things he was going to say, that's not stuff kids should be hearing. So it was always the fear that the kids were going to hear something that they just didn't need to hear.

It feels like your life is kind of being run that way. You know, so you're…kind of have to…getting really emotionally hooked. Now it probably happens once or twice a month, ah, and I'm really working hard not to let him hook me at all. But when I was getting hooked on a regular basis when he was doing it, it…it was a real relief to get through a day and not have to talk to him. It was a very big relief! Or to know that he was going out of town and he would be unavailable for a couple of days was like I was on vacation! And frankly it still is that way. When he goes out of town, it just feels like, aaaahhhhhh (relief). You know, even if I haven't talked him for a couple of weeks. He's out of town. I know there's not going to be any issues because ___ (laughter).

Emery and Dillon (1994) further emphasize the difference in experience for the

leaver and the *left* when they describes the cycles of emotion that repeat themselves for

an indefinite period of time until a particular psychological resolution has been

achieved. Not only did Emery and Dillon find that the *left* experienced a very different

cyclical pattern of emotions than the *leaver*, but that the intensity of the emotions for the

left was usually substantially greater than it was for the *leaver*. Once again referring to

the embodied experience scenario, their findings are consistent with the idea of having

some preparedness prior to the destruction taking place, some time to say good-bye to

parts of one's embodied life, some time to accept that ceasings will occur, some time to begin building a new foundation. They are also consistent with the differences that were revealed in the mothers' own descriptions above. This further confirms the idea that a deep understanding of the enormity of the disturbance to mothers' embodied everyday knowing of the world can in fact serve as the point of connection between mothers' experiences and findings from the literature, allowing each to contribute to and reinforce an understanding of the other.

Emery and Dillon's explorations of the attachments between former spouses, the requisite disengagement process and challenges, and the significance of being *the left* or the *leaver*, has contributed substantially to a greater understanding of the coparenting relationship. Their work has also provided a powerful explanation for the results of Rose and Price-Bonham's (1973) comparison of losing a spouse through death and losing a spouse through divorce. Rose and Price-Bonham conclude that both kinds of losses involve emotional and psychic trauma that can be devastating, but that losing a spouse through divorce, particularly if it is the spouse who has chosen to divorce "involves a purposeful and active rejection of another person, who, merely by living, is a daily symbol of the rejection" (Rose & Price-Bonham, 1973, p. 293). In light of what we know about embodied existence, and in light of the constituents of meaning that were revealed in the current study, each portraying specific and ongoing disturbances to mothers' embodied existence, we can begin to understand the significance of an additional, and painful, disturbance that takes place on a continual basis simply because the coparent is alive. With this new level of understanding, we can instantly recognize

the full meaning of the following words taken from a women's poem about her divorce: "…your handwriting on an envelope can impale me in an instant" (Roth, 2002, p. 155). This level of understanding allows parents and professionals alike to gain a realistic appreciation of the challenges that can be associated with developing and sustaining a coparenting relationship, and the energies that will be required in order to succeed. It also allows a degree of *preparedness* that cannot help but facilitate success.

Family Transitions

At the beginning of the chapter, reference was made to a series of original schemas that would be used to organize and guide some of the discussion. Before presenting the first group of schemas that focus on transitions in family culture and identity, it would be useful for the reader to understand how and why they came into being and ultimately became a key component of this chapter.

The Schematic Framework

Webster's Online Dictionary (2004) defines the term schema as it applies to psychological experience as follows: "a diagrammatic representation or pattern imposed on complex reality or experience to assist in explaining it, to mediate perception, or to guide response." The schemas that will be used to organize and guide the next three sections of this chapter are rather rudimentary graphical representations of certain aspects of meaning for the mothers in this study that have been included because of their contributions of visual and corporeal cues that have the potential to increase our

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understanding of the "complex reality" of participant mothers' experience of parenting with a former spouse. This schematic framework is one that evolved as a direct response to a specific kind of relationship dilemma that appeared repeatedly in mothers' descriptions of experience. It includes a series of interrelated schemas that depict both contextual and detail aspects of this particular dilemma that might help us understand the challenges and demands that are typically associated with it. The schemas began to emerge early in the phenomenological analysis in response to the meanings that were beginning to reveal themselves. In the same way that I was getting wavering indications of meaning about mothers' experience from their descriptions, I was also getting wavering images of visual representations that could serve as vehicles for understanding and communicating about the aspects of meaning that were beginning to reveal themselves. Neither was clear at the time, but both continued to develop and be refined.

Several cautions and comments are in order regarding the schemas about to be presented. First, the visual representations of certain aspects of experience described by mothers are not meant to abstract the experiences they represent, theorize about them, or distance us from them. They are also not meant to summarize and "package" mothers' experiences, but rather to serve as an additional vehicle for reflecting on the findings from this study and for talking about mothers' experience while still keeping us close to that experience. They also provide an additional way of organizing what I have learned so it can be shared with others. The fact that the schemas came into being at all reflects my own natural tendency to think in images and my corresponding appreciation

of the value of visual images in facilitating understanding and communication. It is possible that the use of schemas, in combination with one's capacities for imagination and visual imagery, will provide just enough difference in perspective to stimulate new insights or understandings about coparenting that have not been possible using verbal description alone. To the extent that the schemas can serve this purpose they can be useful tools in deepening our understanding of mothers' experience. Should they encourage or create distance between the reader and the mothers' experience, they should be abandoned.

The labeling of the schemas and the descriptive language used to elaborate and discuss the schemas will always reflect a conscious, deliberate choice rather than an arbitrary or casual choice. The words chosen may come from the mothers' verbatim descriptions, the literature reviewed for this study, popular books, movies, or what is known as "common knowledge." For example, the word chosen to indicate a family's change from the traditional nuclear family structure to a dual-household coparent structure is the word "split." Of the various words that could have been used, this one was chosen because (a) it is associated with everyday language that people instantly recognize, (b) it conveys a corporeal sensation of being pulled apart that reveals more about the experience than other words, and (c) it is a word used several times by mothers in this study. Since it is the mothers' descriptions of experience that that gave birth to the schema, every effort has been made to use their language whenever possible. When their exact language has not been used, the alternative words chosen are meant to remain as close to their expressed meaning as possible. At all times, the

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tone and context of the scenarios discussed with each schema closely match those described by the mothers and remain true to the goal of *describing* their experience rather than developing a theoretical model based on hypothetical scenarios.

As stated earlier, this chapter's orientation is toward the *unity* of mothers' experience and the *interconnectedness* of the constituents of meaning. In the preceding discussion regarding the impact of the coparent relationship history on mothers' experience, each topic discussed was relevant for all constituents of meaning. Similarly, the central relationship dilemma that lies at the core of the schematic framework is relevant to all constituents of meaning. The interconnectedness of the constituents of meaning will become increasingly apparent, as will the challenge of selecting an organization for the discussion that facilitated understanding. As each schema is introduced, it will be used as a vehicle for discussing a variety of experiences described by mothers. The experiences that are the focal point for any given schema will in turn contain within them multiple constituents of meaning. Some of these connections to individual constituents of meaning will be made explicit, but others will be left implicit with the assumption that they will nonetheless be visible to the reader.

The early schemas and associated discussion will lay the foundation for subsequent schemas. Consequently, there will be a substantially greater focus on conceptual elements of the discussion at the beginning of this framework than there will be later on, including at times some detailed explanations. In effect, less and less will be stated explicitly because of assumptions that (a) the groundwork has been laid and there is no need for repetition, and (b) the schemas will begin to speak to the reader for

themselves, without the need for additional explanations. Mothers' verbal descriptions, however, will continue throughout all schema sections. While the early schemas focus necessarily explore contextual factors in mothers' everyday experiences, later schemas bring us closer to mothers' lived moments of experience and interaction and it is appropriate that the balance shift from talking *about* mothers' lived experience to simply providing more examples *of* their lived experience.

Family Culture and Identity

The first three schemas are meant to portray fundamental family culture and identity changes that take place for members of a family when parents divorce and subsequently establish coparenting households. However, before trying to depict any change, it is necessary to first depict that which exists prior to the change. Consequently, Figure 2 is an intentionally simple schema of a nuclear family prior to divorce that will serve as the conceptual and graphic foundation for the remaining schemas and related discussions. Although it would be possible to engage in a multi-faceted discussion that was stimulated by reflection on this one simple schema, its purpose in this chapter is merely to lay the groundwork for understanding later schemas.
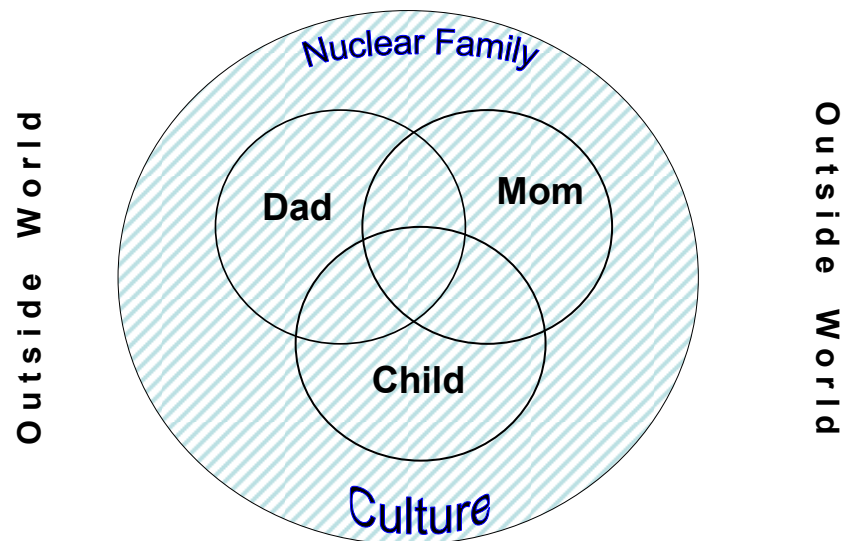
Figure 2: Nuclear Family – Culture & Identity

Figure 2 is a graphic representation of what the nuclear families of the mothers in this study might have looked like prior to divorce and is concerned primarily with family membership, family culture, family identity, and family being-in-the-world. Specific aspects of the family meant to be conveyed by this schema include the following:

1. The family exists in the world as a unified social unit.

2. The membership of the family includes mom, dad, and children

3. All family members live interconnected lives encompassing physical space, relationships, family rules, traditions, dreams, and mutual commitments to each other and to the family as a whole. Together, they

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have created a family culture and identity that each understands, and

each member is clear about their place and their identity in that culture.

4. The boundaries between the individual family members and the

boundaries between the family and the outside world are smooth, soft,

rounded, inviting. They allow family members easy access to each other

and easy passage between the family and the outside world.

It is not difficult to create a mental image of a mother's unified, stable family

unit, with its interconnected members, moving through the lived world together. At

times, mothers made poignant reference to an earlier time in their lives when this image

had applied to them, or to a past or current dream that their family would someday look

like this.

As you hold in mind the image of a mother's stable family unit moving through

life together, imagine that her single and unified family unit is suddenly transformed

into two family units as a result of divorce. Broadly speaking, how was that

experienced by the mothers? It was experienced as a *splitting* in two. Not a gentle

transformation, but a sudden splitting that felt broken. Perhaps an image very similar to

this contributes to our collective vocabulary of *broken* homes, *split* families and

marriages that *fall apart*. Or perhaps there is no mental imagery at all, but merely a pre-

reflective corporeal awareness that creating two out of one requires the one to split, to

break, to tear, or perhaps to explode. Regardless of the way in which a mother's family

became two, it was experienced by them as no longer being one, no longer being whole,

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and no longer being unified. The nuclear family depicted in Figure 2 was split in two and became two families, as depicted in the next figure.
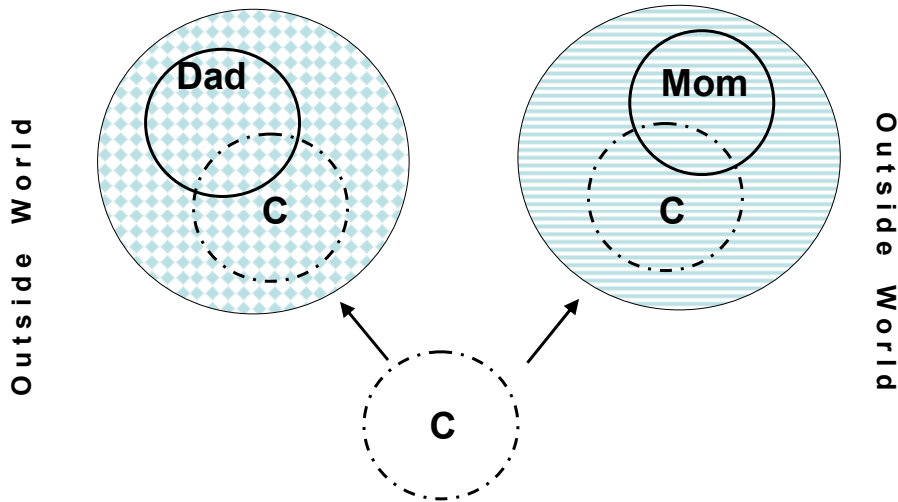
Figure 3: Coparent Families - Cultures & Identities I

Figure 3 is the only schema that is hypothetical, although it wasn't originally intended to be so, and is meant to depict what the change from a nuclear family to two coparent families might look like, using Figure 2 as the starting point. Once again, the primary focus is family membership, family culture, family identity, and family being-in-the-world. The major changes that are portrayed here include:

1. Family membership. The membership cluster of the nuclear family no longer exists. Mom and children are new members of one of the new families, which will sometimes be referred to as the mother-family. Dad and children are new members of the other new family, which will sometimes be referred to as the father-family. Children take on a unique membership status whereby they have a permanent *relational membership* in each family, but only a transitory *physical membership*, which is indicated by the dotted line circles.

2. Separateness. When a nuclear family splits into two coparent families, each coparent family suddenly exists in the world as its own social unit, independent of the prior nuclear family or the other coparent family. Each coparent family is "on its own" in the world.

3. Redefinition. Each coparent family must redefine itself and build a new family culture, identity, and being-in-the-world that is truly its own. Some aspects of the nuclear family culture may be maintained; others may be altered; and still others will cease to exist.

One can see that fundamental changes that take place for the new coparent families are far more than structural in nature. From the perspective of embodied experience, each family member would have previously achieved an embodied knowing of their world based on being members of their particular nuclear family. Their

embodied knowing would have included their family culture, their family identity, their individual place in the family culture, and their individual identity within the family and beyond. This knowing would have required no conscious thought or reflection as they moved through their days together. Now, each family member's embodied world has experienced a massive disturbance and each must "pay attention to themselves and their surroundings in new ways" while they seek to form new family cultures and identities and find their individual places within the new coparent families. Children must become part of two new family cultures, develop two new family identities, find their own unique place and identity within each one, discover how to navigate between the two, and learn how to be-in-the-world as a member of *two* families instead of one. The individual and collective challenges that will be encountered in developing new family cultures and identities can sometimes be monumental and can be experienced as overwhelming.

Although the diagrammatic changes needed to create Figure 3 were completed easily, the result struck me as an inadequate representation of a family's transition from a single nuclear family to two coparent families. My embodied response to the new schema called my attention to it in a new way and I experienced a sense that it was "off the mark" in some way, although I did not know why. As I continued to work with the mothers' descriptions, I came to realize that my dissatisfaction stemmed from the overall impression conveyed to me by Figure 3. It conveyed softness. It was too soft. It was too easy and comfortable. It was too smooth. Its smooth, soft, curved lines spoke of easy interaction with the world, easy interaction with each other, easy passage

between them for the children. Open. No sharp edges or corners to intimidate or hurt. A sense of being able to softly blend into the world at any point. Everything was gentle and approachable. Flexible. Safe. The spheres could float near to or past each other with ease. Unintentional bumping into each other was also soft and harmless. Somehow still unified. Had these basic shapes been put to paper for a different purpose, I am quite sure I would not have had this reaction to them. But the softness, the gentleness, the flexibility, the approachability, the invitation for easy interaction-- this was not the world mothers were describing to me. The transition was not soft, not easy, even for mothers who had chosen to divorce and whose former spouses were fairly cooperative. It was not smooth and graceful and characterized by an easy interaction with the world. It was not oblivious to the distance between spheres, and comfortable in each other's presence. It was none of those things. And given the nature of the phenomenological inquiry in which I was engaged, I felt compelled to abandon something that seemed too far removed from the meaning I was discovering in mothers voices. In order to honor the meanings revealing themselves in the mothers' descriptions, I made changes to Figure 2 that I hoped would more effectively suggest at least some of the reality of mothers' transitions.

Once the decision to make changes to Figure 3 had been made, certain details of both of Figure 2 and Figure 3 became more visible to me, thereby providing some insight about the kind of changes that might be needed. These newly visible aspects of the schema had previously been in the background and gone unnoticed. For example, when I drew circles to represent the family and its members, neither the shape nor the

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lines themselves captured my attention at all – only their capacity to enclose and embrace a family entity. But now, from a new vantage point, the softness of the shapes became visible and the solidness of the lines for each family member became significant in terms of pointing to a permanent membership. It was only because something felt wrong that these aspects of the shapes and lines took on meaning. This unfolding development is worth mentioning here in order to reinforce an understanding of the ways we experience disturbances to our embodied existence in the course of normal living. The more one's embodied human experience is understood – through everyday events like my response to the schema as well as to the mothers' descriptions that are contained throughout the study--the more one can appreciate the enormity of the disturbance to mothers' worlds when their being-in-the-world changes from that of a married wife and mother raising children in a nuclear family to that of a divorced mother raising children with a former spouse. It is this enormous disturbance that is the inescapable context for the experience that this study seeks to understand.

Expanding on the notion of context, I ask the reader to imagine a mother's world of embodied knowing prior to divorce. The multiple kinds of knowing. I now ask the reader to imagine the extent to which the change to two new coparent families triggers multiple kinds of disturbances to a mother's embodied knowing. Can you sense the sheer volume of disturbances? Can you sense the noise of the disturbances? Can you sense specific disturbances regarding a mother's lived space? Lived time? Lived relations? Lived history? Can you sense how these interact? How they sometimes create an intensified cumulative impact far greater than any of the individual ones

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would suggest? Can you also sense the bafflement experienced by a mother when she

has no idea how or why this suddenly happened in her life? Although I had no illusion

that such a scale of disturbance could be portrayed in a simplistic schema, I nonetheless

wanted to make changes to Figure 3 that at least hinted at some of these contextual

disturbances and that created an overall tone that did not seem to belie reality. Thus

Figure 4 was born.

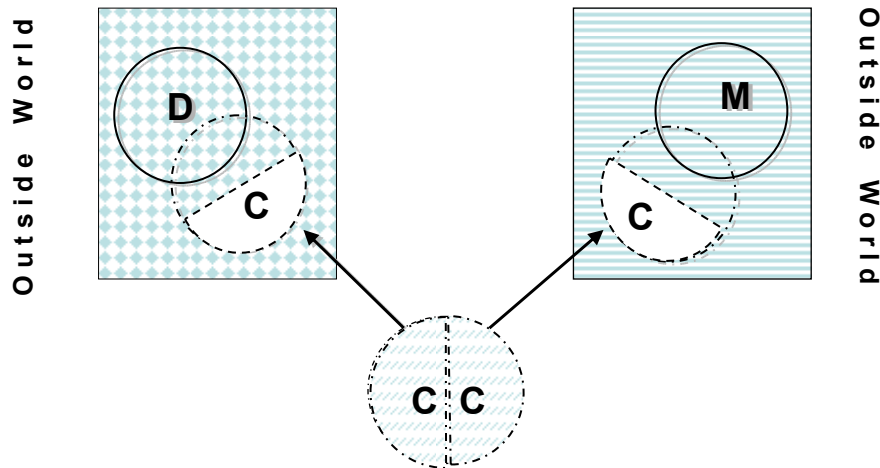**Figure 4: Coparent Families - Cultures & Identities II**

From an objective point of view, the changes between Figure 3 and Figure 4 are

not dramatic. But just as a painter's alteration of colors and brush strokes can vary the

overall impression made, so too are the schema changes meant to convey a different

overall tone. You will be the ultimate judge of the value of these distinctions for

increasing your understanding of mothers' experiences. Some attempts to convey a new tone are visible and some must be felt or imagined.

Gone is the softness, the ease of interaction. In its place are hard edges, sharp edges. Corners that can hurt if bumped into. The edges are barriers instead of invitations. They emphasize boundaries that are not flexible. The boundaries are closed. They signal: Keep out! Keep your distance! They are sometimes intimidating. Moving between the two worlds of such separateness can be difficult for children. Children know they must completely leave one world to join the next because there is no overlap. Children also intuitively understand that the privilege of moving between the separate worlds is theirs alone, and is not shared by either of their parents. The separateness feels harsh and absolute. Born from an irrevocable split. From brokenness. It is a priority to keep the new broken piece together, to avoid further brokenness. Gone is the easy interaction with self and world. Gone is the feeling of being *at*-ease with self and world. That might come back some day. For now, nothing is whole. Everything is less than it was. Nothing is smooth. Everything is jarring. Sharing space is awkward and unnatural. Yes, this more adequately reflects the mothers' lived experiences and embodied worlds as expressed in their verbal descriptions.

Like every other aspect of the divorce process, the transition from a nuclear family to coparent families cannot be located at a specific point on a calendar. Using the moment of transition as a starting point for a discussion is useful in pointing out the numerous and dramatic changes that must be made. But this only identifies the point at

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which the transition begins, and it must be understood that the transition will go on for an indefinite period of time and will likely have many points of change and variation along the way. The discussion here is meant to cover the initial time of transition and also the continuing impact of this change in mother's lifeworlds over time. Additional information about this time period for the mothers in the study, only some of which can be suggested by the graphic representation, includes the following:

1. Family membership. With regard to the new family membership, mothers experienced the change as one of loss, of diminishment, of brokenness, of disorientation. This was true even if the mothers chose to divorce and even if there were also elements of relief and optimism associated with the change. They recognize the profound separateness that has begun, while also recognizing the attachments and intertwining of lives that continues.

   > I'll never forget the look on their faces when we told them. I'm going to cry now just thinking of it....it was heartbreaking (gets teary). It was like you were watching the world fall out from underneath them....I don't even know....don't have words to describe.....I would have killed to be able to take it all back and never see such pain and terror on their faces. But I....didn't have...couldn't stop it from happening. I hated their dad right then...for being so selfish....making them....and they're just innocent....and had nothing to do with this...and for making them have to suffer like that because he didn't want to grow up....You could tell from their faces that they would never feel safe in the world again....not really....not the way they did before.

   > He [coach] asked me if I would share the new schedule with my ex. And I wanted to scream! Don't you <u>know</u> our family isn't together any more? Don't you <u>know</u> there's no sharing....of anything....of little things...of big things...Don't you <u>know</u> that asking me to share this with him can't work any more?

2. <u>Physical location.</u>   Location was not even mentioned in the first schema because, as is typical for embodied knowledge, it was something taken for granted and in the background. Now it has become something than cannot be missed or ignored. It must be attended to in all its significance.

3. <u>Separateness</u>.   Although an awareness of separateness was anticipated prior to the divorce, few were prepared for the intensity of it and for the ways it continually impacted their daily lives as they searched for the appropriate boundaries in one situation after another. During this time mothers also became much more aware of the multiple barriers that encouraged or maintained the separateness between the two coparent families--some expected and some surprising.

> *I feel very conflicted, you know. Ah…frustrated, angry, sad. I feel sad for my children that their family is so split….that their parents sometimes can't talk. I feel sad because I can tell it divides them.*

The separateness of each coparent family with regard to existing in the world as its own social unit was also much more pronounced and difficult than expected prior to divorce.

> *All kinds of people who used to invite us places have stopped calling. It's like they don't want to take sides…don't know who they should invite…so they don't invite anybody…I don't know who our friends are any more…*

> *One neighbor asked if she should keep carpooling to preschool when my daughter is at her dad's house or only when she is at my house…I just don't get it…We live two blocks apart! It's like I have to give her*

permission to pick her up at both houses...and...sort of be the go-between to arrange it all

It has been stated many times that mothers' experiences might best be viewed as existing on a continuum of frequency and intensity. A continum is also a useful way to view the degree and intensity of separateness of the mother-family and the father-family. To what extent to they interact? What is the tone of interaction? How flexible or rigid are the physical and emotional boundaries? How open or closed are they regarding information flowing between households? How comfortable are the children during their movement between the worlds? How comfortable are the children when the worlds intersect? How protected are the worlds from each other? No matter which end of the continuum a mother may be on, the separateness of the households, the separateness of the worlds, was clear. And for most of the mothers, the boundaries between those worlds were firm. The details of what the boundaries were varied among the mothers, but not their firm presence. When boundaries were crossed, even with good will, great corporeal discomfort occurred as mothers' embodied selves were called to attention. For one mother the physical boundary was the threshold of her front door. The *other* side of the threshold was an acceptable and comfortable place for her former spouse to be when he came to pick up the children, but *this* side created immediate discomfort. For another mother,

the relational boundary was conversation about anything other than the children.

4. <u>Redefinition</u>.   Mothers gained a new appreciation of the difficulty of redefining a family culture and family identity, as well as a new appreciation of the difficulty of redefining themselves. The complexity of these tasks began to seep into their awareness as they encountered repeated disturbances to their embodied world.

> *I thought we were a happy family. And now we are in pieces. And I don't have a clue who any of us even <u>is</u> any more.*

In combination with the separateness aspect listed above, the redefining of the mothers' coparent families in relation to greater world took on particular significance and was frequently the source of painful adjustment experiences.

> *When we went to "family" events…at school…at the dance studio…at our block party…I felt like we don't belong any more. I feel totally abnormal…like a freak. Everybody else was part of a "whole" family and we were just pieces of a family. We didn't fit anywhere. We were broken freaks. Even trick-or-treating felt awful…like who are we to be going to these houses where everyone is together and happy? What's <u>wrong</u> with us? Will we ever fit in anywhere again? Sometimes before…I didn't even like going to places with my ex. But I always felt normal…and now I just think…like everyone wonders…why we are there since we don't fit any more. We used to belong, but we don't any more.*

5. <u>The in-between</u>. Originally, choosing a dotted line circle for children indicated nothing more than the fact that they physically moved between

families. However, without using this word, mothers discovered the existence of what I have called the *in-between*. The in-between was a new place for the children to inhabit that did not exist prior to the divorce. The in-between frequently involves a time when children are not physically located in either home, but it is primarily a state of being characterized by uncertainty. And the uncertainty is directly, and exclusively, a result of a child's family having gone through a divorce and the child now being a part of two families. In particular, the in-between is characterized by a child's uncertainty about how to behave when both parents are present or a child's uncertainty about loyalties and allegiances that he should be honoring. The connection of the in-between to the mothers' constituent meaning of *becoming an outsider* will be discussed in more detail with the next cluster of schemas. But it is something that mothers first discover during their initial transition to a coparent family structure.

> *My ex came into my apartment to look at his [son's] new book. But then he…didn't know who to read to. He…like usually reads it to me. He kept looking back and forth…and watching me. I think….I think he thought I would be mad.*

<div align="center">-----</div>

> *I felt so left out at her recital last week. She was at her dad's that night and went there with him and her step-mom…and kept looking at them…didn't really look around to find me…And after….she stood right by her dad and hardly talked to me…until she whispered that she was sorry they were going out to celebrate without me….So they went out to celebrate and I went home…I could hardly drive because I was crying.*

6. <u>Children divided</u>. The sense of separateness and division and the

   solidification of new boundaries puts children at risk for feeling divided in

   some way, whether it be experienced as divided attentions, divided time, or

   divided loyalties. How intensely this will be experienced varies, but it is

   portrayed in the new schema by child circles that have themselves been

   divided in half. The division of the children's circle in the in-between

   indicates the potential for being caught in the proverbial middle. The

   division of the children's circle within the mother-family indicates those

   parts of a child that remain oriented toward their "other world" life in their

   father-family, even while they are physically present in their mother-family.

7. <u>Insiders and Outsiders</u>. As with the discovery of the in-between, the

   transition to a coparent family begins to reveal to mothers a variety of ways

   that they are becoming outsiders in their children's lives. And again like the

   in-between, mothers' new outsider roles are directly, and exclusively, a

   result of having gone through a divorce and now living as a mother who

   shares parenting with her former spouse.

   > *They were helping their dad move to his new apartment and I…I was
   > trying to make it not such a horrible thing. Like "Aren't you excited
   > about your new bedroom?" and stuff like that.   But I was dying inside.
   > When they drove away I knew they were starting a whole new world that
   > I could never be part of and it felt so lonely. It was like they were going
   > to be out of reach…like I didn't belong in part of their life…*

   > *All I wanted to do was call them to say hi….pretty simple, right? Wrong!
   > It's like all these stupid thoughts started going through my*

*head….and…it was suddenly a big deal. Could I…would I have to talk
to their dad first? Would he think I was…taking away…bothering his
time with them? Would they think something was wrong and that I
wasn't ok without them? And then….and then I was so….just so
frustrated and wanted to cry. Why shouldn't I be able to call my own
kids anytime I wanted to? This was all just so wrong.*

The experiences just described by mothers going through a transition from being

a married mother in a nuclear family to a divorced mother in a coparent family brought

forth aspects of meaning that first made their appearance at the time of transition, and

that frequently proved to be enduring. In order to make those appearances more

apparent, it is appropriate to review the constituents of meaning now so they are fresh in

the reader's mind. Although it is inconvenient to have a summary that includes full

descriptions rather than a simple list that can be instantly absorbed, I feel constrained by

the need to avoid reducing complex, rich, multifaceted aspects of meaning to mere

labels. Consequently, the full descriptions are provided, along with the hesitantly

provided "titles" previously used for each constituent of meaning section in the

Findings chapter.

Table 9: Constituents of Meaning Summary

Awareness and Felt Presence	Unrelenting and sometimes oppressive awareness of, and felt presence of, their former spouse coparent in their everyday world.
Ceasings and Losses	A painful awareness of ceasings, of what is no longer, of what has been lost, that can be suddenly and unexpectedly triggered by a particular awareness of, or interaction with, their former spouse.
Unrelenting Demands	Unrelenting and exhausting demands for attention to, care of, response to, adaptation to, concern about, and/or entanglement with, the coparenting relationship.

Feeling Torn	Repeated sense of being <u>torn</u> as they are confronted with internal conflicts triggered by their own competing and mutually exclusive, goals, desires, needs, emotions, impulses and beliefs. The confrontations are sometimes unexpected and startling and sometimes repetitive and predictable, but they always demand to be noticed.
Becoming an Outsider	Unexpected, painful, and disorienting discoveries of ways in which they have become outsiders--especially to their children.
Watchfulness	Constant state of watchfulness in multiple directions within and between the two coparent family systems.

One can readily see each constituent of meaning revealing itself in the previous discussion about family changes and in the participant descriptions used during the discussion. One can also see a rather dramatic, and vitally significant, distinction between the information about mothers' experiences contained in the discussion text and the information about mothers' experiences contained in their own pre-reflective descriptions. During the discussion, it was possible, and in fact necessary, to address one issue at a time. The potential artificiality of doing so was acknowledged, but then one issue at a time was presented. However, the unity and inclusiveness of the mothers' experiences that are seen in their own verbal descriptions is startling in comparison. Every one of the mothers' descriptions could have been used as an example of several other issues related to family transitions in addition to the one to which is was "assigned." In addition, virtually every one of the mothers' descriptions contains multiple constituent meanings. For example, a description from a mother who was asked to share a team schedule with her former spouse was used to demonstrate the new significance of physical location. But that same description would have served equally

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well to demonstrate her response to changes in family membership, her awareness of separateness and brokenness, and the challenges involved in redefining self and family. In addition, this same description could serve as an example of multiple constituents of meaning—i.e. *Awareness, Ceasings and Loss, Unrelenting Demands,* and *Feeling Torn.* From the perspective of embodied existence, the request to share a team schedule stimulated multiple calls to attention, multiple disturbances to her embodied knowing of the world, multiple signals of something being wrong.
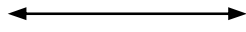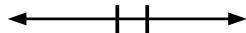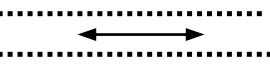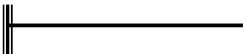
In the same discussion and same descriptions, one can also see indications of the concepts from the literature that were examined earlier in the chapter. The schemas and their related discussions offer additional insight into the trauma that may be experienced, the multiple attachments that will have to be broken, the difficulty of breaking those attachments, the added significance if one is the *left* rather than the *leaver*, and the cycles of emotion that can burst forth at any moment. If we once again use the same description given to us by the mother who was asked to share a team schedule, we can see suggestions of all of these concepts within her description. It is well beyond my expertise to make an informed judgment about the exact connection between the emotional and psychological experiences to which these concepts refer and the calls to attention experienced by mothers' embodied selves. But it would seem possible that each of these (a) may occur as a *response* to the calls to attention and the disturbances to her embodied self, and (b) may *contribute* their own particular calls to attention, their own disturbances to her embodied existence. That would be an interesting question for an expert in that arena to explore. Regardless of the source or

combination of sources for the disturbances to their embodied existence that were experienced by mothers parenting with a former spouse, certainly the prevalence alone is enough to understand mothers' overall sense of coparenting as difficult and exhausting, even if worthwhile.

Family Relationships

Building on the previous schemas, the next two try to capture some of the altered relationships mothers experienced following their divorces, focusing especially on the ways in which they became outsiders instead of insiders. It is recommended that the reader first become familiar with the symbols that will be used in the remaining schemas by reviewing the contents of Table 10. In addition to lines and arrows that may be intuitive, there are also some new graphic elements in the schemas that are adaptations of relationship markers borrowed from a genogram model whose meanings are quite specific and important to understand.

Table 10: Symbols Used to Distinguish Relationship Type

	Bi-directional arrow extending into each individual's personal space	Open INSIDER relationship that includes shared intimacies
	Bi-directional arrow with slash marks	INSIDER relationship with barriers. Increasing number of slash marks suggest increasing number of barriers
	Bi-directional arrow within dotted lines; does not extend into individuals' personal spaces	Open NEUTRAL pathway that allows basic communication and interaction to occur but does not extend to personal information
	Line with perpendicular bar at end	Closed OUTSIDER relationship that deliberately prevents access to certain kinds of information and sharing
	Line with perpendicular bar at and multiple crossed lines	Closed outsider relationship that is also TROUBLED and EMOTIONALLY INTENSE. May include openly expressed hostility.

Insiders and Outsiders

Figure 5 below depicts a nuclear family with multiple interrelationships, freely flowing communication, all members experiencing family life from the perspective--or status--of an insider. The bi-directional arrows extending into each other's personal space indicate insider relationships that include shared intimacies, secrets, traditions, etc. Two arrows were used to emphasize the strength of the interactions and insider roles described by participant mothers. In sum, they described an environment that was characterized by ongoing communication, interaction, sharing of information and privileges, and in which everyone could be themselves. In some instances, this environment had begun to change prior to their divorce, but all mothers described it as having existed at some point in their family's history.
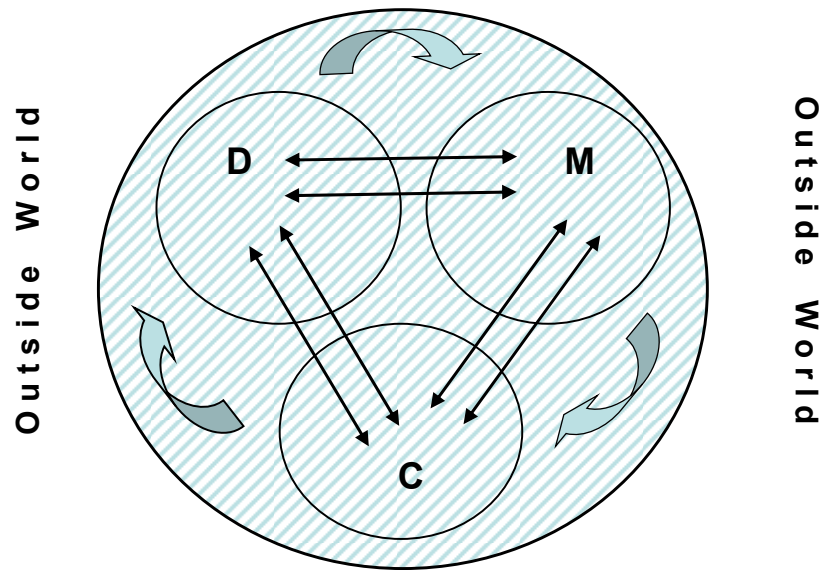
Figure 5: Nuclear Family - Mothers' Insider Relationships

By contrast, Figure 6 below depicts the multiple ways in which mothers became outsiders. Some of these may have been welcome, but the transition to outsider was nonetheless experienced as a disturbance to their embodied existence. Sometimes they were prepared for it, but often it would be experienced as a complete surprise. And it was always more pervasive that they could have predicted.
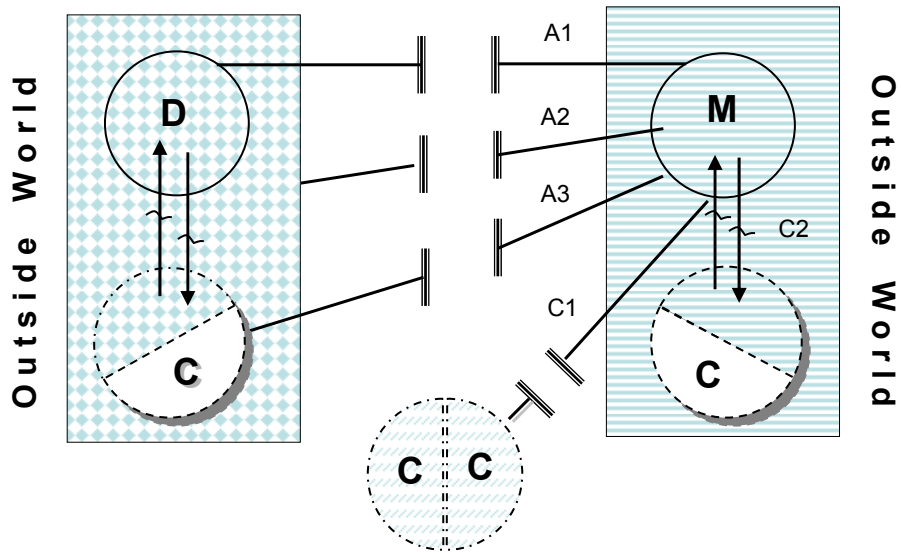
Figure 6: Mothers' Outsider Relationships

Figure 6 demonstrates the number and type of outsider roles that mothers experienced as a result of parenting from their mother-family instead of from their original nuclear family. Mothers lost insider access to their former spouse as an individual, the father-family as a whole, and to at least some parts of their children as members of their father-family and in the in-between. The degree to which the loss of insider status occurred varied from partial to complete and the emotional intensity and impact also varied, but the patterns were very clear. Although some of these changes were welcome, and they were also part of the necessary disengagement discussed above, they nonetheless caused significant disturbances to the mothers' embodied

existence as described in earlier sections of this chapter.   The most painful of these experiences were those that involved loss of some insider access to their children

The children's circle within the mother-family has been created with a dotted line instead of a solid line and is divided in half, with each half being a different color. (Although dividing the circle was clearly the intent, the "half" has no basis in reality. It was simply easier to draw.) The same is true of the children's circle in the in-between, although both halves are the same color in the in-between. The dotted line indicates a less-than-complete membership status and the division of the circle indicates a division within the children, particularly one related to divided loyalties. Within the mother-family, half of the children's circle is the same color as the mother's world and indicates that part of them that is fully present and accessible to the mother. The other half of their circle is a different color and remains oriented toward their father-family. That part of them is not present and acessible to mothers. Mothers' experience of losing access to parts of their children's lives will be recognized by the reader as one of the constituents of meaning, and it will call her to attention multiple times each day.

While considering Figure 6, the reader is encouraged to review the section of the Findings chapter that explores this particular constituent meaning. The most distressing experiences of becoming an outsider were those that involved their children and that caught them by surprise. Over time, as new family definitions and boundaries became settled, there were fewer surprises for the mothers. They were still relegated to outsider status in ways that could be painful, but they understood that it reflected their children's conflicted loyalties and to fight it would only make things more difficult for their

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children. Notice the times the mothers are relegated to outsider status while the children are in the in-between. An example that, unfortunately, was not uncommon in the mothers' descriptions would be a school event for the children when both parents were present. Frequently, children would align themselves with the parent who had brought them there and would be uncomfortable interacting with the other parent. Sometimes, the children would display discomfort interacting with either parent, as if they weren't sure who they should be paying attention to.

Note that there is also some disturbance to the insider relationship between mother and child within the mother-family, which reflects the conflicted loyalties that reveal themselves even when the children are in the mother-family. As the separateness of the mother-family and the father-family persisted, and frequently increased, children's boundaries with their mothers changed to reflect the separateness of their worlds. Information that might have been offered freely at one time was now considered disloyal. It was insider information from the children's father-family and therefore considered "off limits." Even innocent questions or references to information the child considered to be father-family-information-only could bring tension to the mother-child relationship. Consequently, mothers became keenly aware of their children's sensitivity to boundaries and tried hard not to cross them for the sake of the mother-child relationship.

As with the earlier schema depicting mothers' coparent families, the boundaries between the two family worlds were frequently experienced as firm and ungiving. Mothers who described more rigid boundaries than others also described more instances

of becoming an outsider in their children's lives. The vividness of the separateness and

the closed pathways for mothers in Figure 6 helps create an understanding of their

vulnerability to comparing households and wanting to compete for their children's

affections and loyalties. It also helps create an understanding of why the mood and

attitude between the two worlds of the child can so frequently look like that portrayed in

the following poem.

Cold War

The Maginot Line follows the contours of the driveway.
The defenses are in place around the forget-me-nots,
meticulously arranged, carefully maintained,
    burying the blame.

The tower guards are on constant alert
searching the road for the scheduled assault.
Adversaries approach with the sound of the bell.
    When the door opens

at Checkpoint Charlie, the opposing force is there
grinning, well armed. "Daddy!" troops shout as
They rush into noisy, jostling formation.
    The trade-off begins.

Permission is granted through forced smiles
for this weekend furlough, with step-
mother, an alien family, a new brother,
    an other home.

They leave behind solitude in a house
suddenly too large.   Always the whispered
retreat at the weekly prisoner exchange.
    Then come back to me.

Viva Dianne Lawson (Roth, 2002, p. 106)

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Central Relationship Dilemma

The final group of schemas moves us even closer to the mothers' everyday experiences of parenting with a former spouse. Central to this group of schemas is a fundamental relationship dilemma experienced repeatededly by all of the mothers—i.e. mothers wanting to interact with their former spouse in ways that were helpful to parenting while simultaneously wanting no interaction with them at all. Or mothers wanting their former spouses to be active coparents while simultaneously wanting them to be out of their lives forever. Perhaps more than any other experience described by mothers, the relationship dilemma behind the choices in the following schemas inserted itself into virtually all types of experiences and all aspects of their lives as coparents. Many examples of this relationship dilemma were discussed in the previous chapter in association with invariant aspects of meaning, especially that of feeling *torn*. Each time the dilemma appears, they must make a choice about their coparenting relationship and how they will interact at that moment. Mothers wrestle with each choice, aware of the potential risks and benefits that will affect not only their ability to coparent with their former spouse, but also their relationship with their children. (It should be noted that the constituent of meaning that reflected a feeling of being torn also included internal conflicts that were broader reaching than this relationship dilemma, but only this dilemma--and the resulting alternatives--will be explored in these next schemas.)

As these final schemas are presented, it is important to stress once again the need to resist viewing these schemas as theoretical abstractions of mothers' experience. They are meant only to provide visual cues that, in combination with mothers'

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descriptions and lived meanings, can facilitate communicating about their experience while keeping us close to it. It is also important to remind the reader that these final schemas are meaningful only as they expand upon the foundation laid out in earlier schemas, and only in conjunction with the consitutents of meaning revealed by the mothers and the discussions that have taken place earlier in this chapter. With this prior knowledge in mind, the final schemas should "speak to" the reader with relatively little explicit explanation.
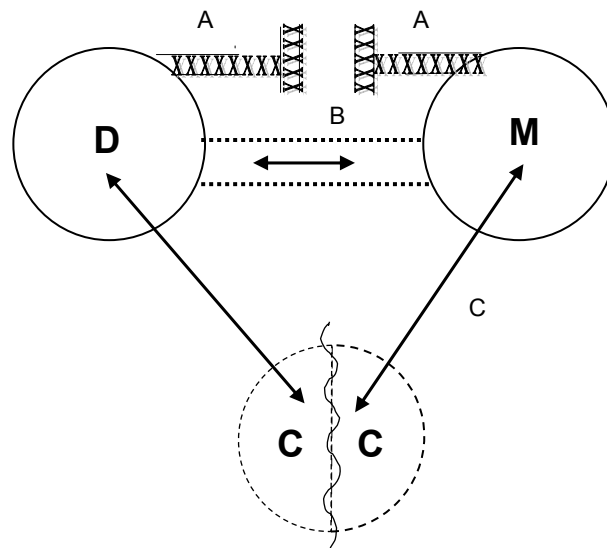
Figure 7: Mothers' Coparent Relationship Alternative 1

Figure 7 represents the type of coparent relationship that might be thought of as the "ideal." Pathway A represents the closed, but dominant, outsider relationship with their former spouse as described by mothers. For all mothers, it was a relationship that

was difficult for them and one they wished was not a part of their lives. It might be

characterized by hostility and conflict or it might be characterized by feelings of grief

and loss. But it was always difficult, always intense, and always dominant. However,

the relationship alternative depicted in Figure 7 also shows a successful alternative

(pathway B) that allows mothers to maintain the necessary communication and parental

cooperation with their former spouses. This path does not extend into the respective

personal spaces and is not an insider relationship. But it does offer them a way to

temporarily set aside, hide, and not act on, the dominant relationship that is ever

present. The path does not necessarily reflect a genuinely positive relationship or one

that would be valued under other circumstances, but it is relationship pathway that is

open *enough* and cooperative *enough* to make communication possible and civil. When

this type of relationship path is kept viable, the direct mother-child insider relationship

remains relatively intact. The child is still and inevitably divided, but to the least degree

possible, which is indicated by the very thin wavy line.

Mothers repeatedly described their efforts to create and maintain a coparent

relationship with the essential features of the one in Figure 7. They also repeatedly

described how difficult and/or painful it was to develop or keep a pathway B

relationship and how conflicted and *torn* they always felt between how they *wanted* to

behave in relation to their former spouse and how they knew they *should* behave.

Sometimes, they succeeded in setting aside or subjugating the dominant and difficult

relationship; sometimes they did not. But they always kept trying. And they always

experienced the extensive disturbances to their embodied lives that have been described

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throughout this study. Each of the examples below from different mothers reinforces

this perpetual relationship dilemma and their continual struggle to respond to it in ways

that are good for themselves and their children.

But mostly the thoughts running through my head is "how do I do this."
You know, do I...how do I co-parent with him but be able to start
disengaging from some of those old dynamics...because they're not good
for me.

Uhm, I've made some mistakes and I have to kind of figure it out all over
again every day...and we sit together at recitals and things like that. We
do that because...it's very tough for a kid to look up and there's mom
(pointing in one direction)....and there's dad (points in other direction).
Who do I go to first when the recital is over? And I've seen kids that
have to deal with that. It would be much easier for me to...sit on the
other side. I don't want...I don't want to be anywhere near him...or
hear his voice...or have to be civil...but I do it for the kids.

Every one in my life is like, oh, how can you heal from all this betrayal
and all this and you see him every day...and, yeah, it's annoying, but
(chuckles) I get his help. I get a break. I get monetary support and my
son adores him. So it's, you know, I have to suck it up for myself...and
that's how I see parenting too. I see parenting as a pretty selfless act,
and so I sort of know there's going to be hardship for me in order to have
my son get what he needs and this is one of those examples...dealing
with my husband, my ex-husband.

And it makes it a lot worse to...to have a relationship that is so **split** *and,*
ah, so **split***...*

What's gotten in the way of that...quite frankly...'cause he's really ready
to move into that partnership...has been my anger and hurt and sadness.
I just have trouble being a partner with him right now.

I don't want to be cooperative with him even if it is for my daughter. I just can't let go of the past yet....sort of forget everything he's done...and act like everything's just great. He just creeps me out and I... just don't want to cooperate with him. I make myself do it, but I don't want to...I'm having trouble with it right now.

I put on a good show...and act like everything's fine. And we get through what we need to about the kids. But my heart is breaking....I don't dare let any of my real feelings show.

I feel like it's up to me to hold my kids above water. If I give in and act like I want to with my ex...or behave the way he does half the time...my kids will get...swallowed up in the water and drown. It's filthy water and it's up to me...

Figures 8 to 10 indicate three relationship alternatives available to mothers when they are unable or unwilling to engage in the type of relationship depicted in Figure 7. The primary distinction between these relationships and that depicted in Figure 7 is the notable absence of the alternative relationship pathway B. Since pathway A is simultaneously a stressful *and* a closed relationship, mothers engaged in these types of relationship interactions have limited options for communication with their former spouses or cooperation between households. Each of the remaining schemas demonstrates a different potential outcome when the alternative relationship pathway B is absent. Viewed together, they represent relationship alternatives with successivly increasing risk to the overall well-being of those involved--especially the children. Although all of the mothers in the study worked diligently to keep pathway B open, they all described moments when they engaged in one of the following relationship

alternatives. Fortunately, the participant mothers were always able to see the risks and find the inner strength and motivation to re-open pathway B, which they recognized as the healthiest of the alternatives. And unfortunately, we have all witnessed other coparents whose relationship with their former spouse mirrors these next schemas on a permanent basis, much to the detriment of their children.
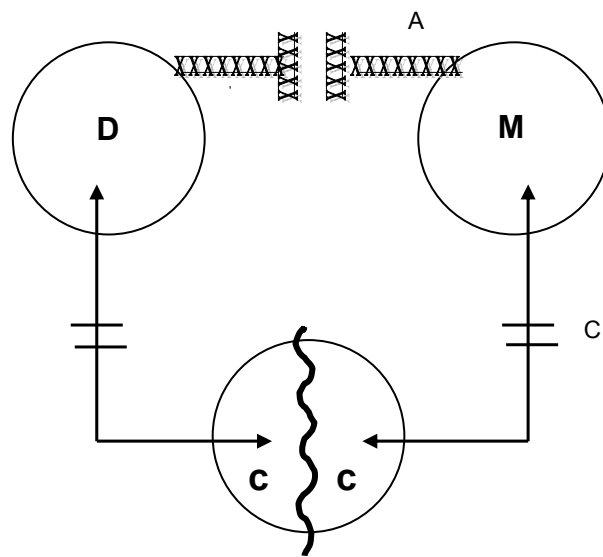
Figure 8: Mothers' Coparent Relationship Alternative 2

In addition to the absence of the alternative relationship pathway B, Figure 8 shows a different shape for the bi-directional arrows between mother and child, and shows somewhat more disturbances or barriers to this direct insider relationship. It is virtually impossible to have zero communication between former spouses and between

households and in this schema the shape of the mother-child relationship arrow is changed to reflect that at least some communication inevitably takes place through the children. However, in the relationship depicted in this schema, the mothers do not *intentionally* communicate with their former spouse through their children, and there is not a high degree of frequency. Consequently, the increase in the child's sense of being divided and of being caught in the middle, which is indicated through a slightly heavier dividing line, is minimized.

The reality of this relationship alternative is that it is essentially impossible to maintain over time. It may serve an occasional purpose, but cannot be sustained and will soon give way to one of the other alternatives. An exception in the group of participant mothers was the mother who engaged in coparenting communication and cooperation with her former spouse's second wife instead of with her former spouse. While her relationship with her former spouse was the kind indicated in Figure 8, it was sustainable over time only because she had created an alternative pathway B with her former spouse's second wife.

Mothers' coparent relationship alternatives 3 and 4 as depicted in the final schemas--Figures 9 and 10--are essentially the same except for a significant difference in the severity and harmfulness of the outcomes. In both schemas, mothers are unable or unwilling to develop and maintain an alternative relationship pathway B that allows them to overcome or subjugate the dominant relationship with their former spouse that is troubled and stressful. But they simultaneously want to avoid engaging in the
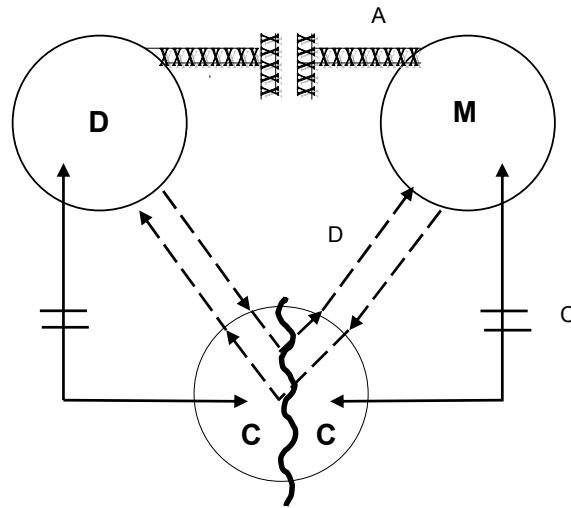
Figure 9: Mothers' Coparent Relationship Alternative 3
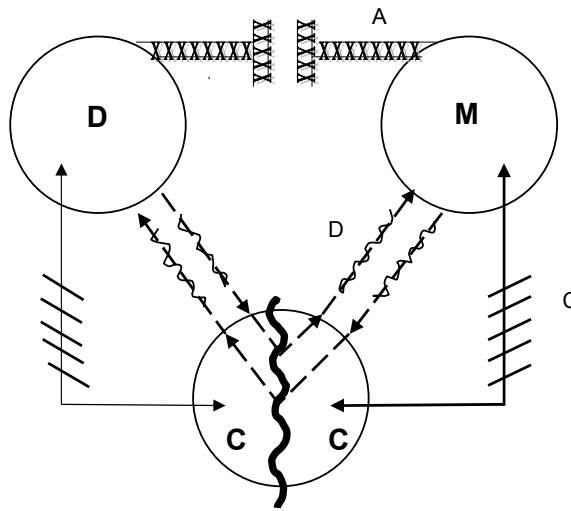
Figure 10: Mothers' Coparent Relationship Alternative 4

troubled relationship. Effectively, they have eliminated all options for direct

communication with their former spouse and therefore intentionally direct their

communications through the children. It does not occur incidentally as in Figure 8, but

is instead the conciously chosen path for communications. Children are quite literally

put in the middle when these relationship alternatives govern communications. Their

feelings of being divided intensify and the disturbances and barriers associated with

their direct relationship with their mother increase and intensify as well. When the

communications from the mother-family that are communicated through the children

are also communications containing negative emotions such as anger, judgement, or

hostility, the negative outcomes for the children become even more substantial.

None of the participant mothers chose these final relationship alternatives as

their norm for interacting with their former spouse. But it was not uncommon for them

to describe isolated occasions when they engaged in this pattern and the remorse that

was associated with having done so. It was that very remorse that helped them return to

a healthier pattern such as relationhip alternative I, described in Figure 7.

> *I was so mad! I couldn't believe he had let them do that! I just started yelling [at my children] about how dangerous it was…and told them to tell their dad that if…if he ever tried that again….it he couldn't keep them safe…then they could never stay at his house again…I yelled at them to call him right then and tell him…and really tried to make them do it….Finally, I saw that they felt trapped and I just stopped…the look on their faces…I think of that look and bite my tongue now…and never do that any more.*

Dwellings We Inhabit

In the Methods chapter, I mentioned that part of my method was to keep going back to the literature, including examples of phenomenological writing that others had done. However, it was only through serendipity that, near the end of my analysis, I came across Richard Lang's phenomenological exposition called *The Dwelling Door* (Lang, 1984). I present a significant portion of it here not because it is a beautiful exemplar of phenomenological writing--which I believe it is--but because it could have been written for the express purpose of helping us understand mothers' experience of parenting with a former spouse. I ask readers to hold in their minds the descriptions of mothers experience, the constituents of meaning, the essential structure, and the visual representations just discussed, and with that orientation to read *The Dwelling Door*. It conveys in a way that I cannot some of the very disturbances to embodied knowing that were experienced by the mothers. Certainly it can give all of us an opportunity to deepen our knowledge and understanding about our embodied lives, and in the process can deepen our knowledge and understanding of mothers' experiences that gave this study life.

THE DWELLING DOOR:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION[13]
Richard Lang (1984, pp. 137-149)

THE HOME

> *Being an initiative of the active body,* **inhabiting** *is an intention and not merely a fact of nature; it is not just to be somewhere, to*

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[13] Words and phrases of particular significance to this discussion have been highlighted for present purposes only and do not reflect any choice of emphasis on the part of the author, Richard Lang. The section titles have also been added for present purposes only.

find oneself somewhere, but to inhabit a place…
[it] is the act of transformation where space becomes place.
Inhabiting is itself an act of **incorporation***, of active and*
essential **acquisition***…embracing and assimilating a certain*
sphere of foreign reality to its own body. Thus incorporation is
essentially the movement from the strange to the familiar.

This commerce of strange and familiar, which forms a central
dialectic of human existence, is instituted and **embodied** *in our*
dwelling*, our home. The home is the intimate hollow we have*
carved out of the anonymous, the alien. Everything has been
transmuted in the home; that is, within the home things have truly
become **annexed** *to our body,* **incorporated***."*

<div align="center">❖❖❖❖</div>

The act of transformation [is] disclosed when we move into a
new residence….Somewhat like being a foreign face, the
presence of the former occupant lingers about the house. If we
are sensitive to this atmosphere, we are acutely aware of the
alien texture of this reality….It seems to face someone else,
resisting us, failing to reveal itself. The labor of our caretaking
turns this place into a home, into a place that addresses us as
familiar, as belonging to us. This act of familiarization…is
enacted at the most primitive level **without the assistance of**
conscious thought*. Thus, there comes a time when this house*
feels familiar. At certain moments as we stand and move about
in the house, we catch a sense of our active body communing
with it. The atmosphere has become a warm and intimate texture
as though the body has established a sort of uncanny alliance
with it, a bodily understanding of it. It has become **of** *the body,*
transmuted to the nature of the active body. Our existence as
embodied *finds a new access to the world in the home. The*
home becomes our second body.

…everything in the home becomes incorporated by the body; the
body is extending itself through household things… Through
incorporation we have the very distinct experience of our home
enveloping us as a kind of extended tissue of our own body…Thus
our bodily existence is pulsating through the home, transforming
a sphere of the anonymous in such a way that it becomes part of
the self.

<div align="center">❖❖❖❖</div>

THE DOOR

[I] will elaborate this bodily act of incorporation by focusing on one facet of the home, i.e. the door…the intention is to **reanimate the meaning** *of the door by demonstrating how ordinary doors embody human experience and thus reflect subjective life.*

❖❖❖❖

Though a door can be seen purely as a physical object…it also can be viewed as a new **access** *and* **disclosure** *of the world. To think of the house as embodied, as a kind of second body, means to see it in all its aspects not as thing but as access to things… it is first of all access to an* **inside** *and an* **outside***, it is* **disclosure** *and* **closure***, it yields or resists, it beckons or rejects.*

❖❖❖❖

The doorway is **between** *outside and inside,* **between** *public and private,* **between** *anonymity and familiarity,* **between** *foreign and personal…Through doors we move from one world to another. To disclose the meaning of personal doors…is to comprehend how we live and embody* **transition** *in everyday existence, the* **life-world***.*

❖❖❖❖

[The door can…]

-be an imposing barrier
-be closed to my comings and goings
-be a portal through which the outside and the inside communicate
-close to tell us of our rejections or another's isolation
-swing wide open like broad smiles to welcome our approach
-imprison us by becoming impenetrable walls
-dramatically slam during scenes of anger
-resemble whispers when tentatively unlatched
-call us to an intimate enclosure when life's struggles become too demanding or threatening
-embrace us in conviviality and familiarity
-protect us from the elements, the dangerous wilds and the anonymous

❖❖❖❖

*[A door] is a place of **judgment**, a yes and a no.*

❖❖❖❖

THE THRESHOLD

The central structure of the door is the threshold. The uniting and separating quality [of the door] is most clearly visible in the threshold. In a poetic rendering Martin Heidegger (1954/1971, p.204) highlights this cardinal structure:

> The threshold is the ground-beam that bears the doorway as a whole. It sustains the middle in which the two, the outside and the inside, ***penetrate*** each other. The threshold bears the ***between***.

*[quoting another author] The threshold **separates** the two spaces [and] also indicates the **distance** between. [It] is the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds, and at the same time the paradoxical place where these worlds **communicate**, where **passage** from [one to the other] becomes possible.*

❖❖❖❖

ACCESS AND ATTITUDE

*The door is an **access** and its accessibility is in relation to our **attitude** toward what lies beyond the threshold. When visiting the house of a friend, for instance, we confidently approach this hospitable door…it is the **bridge** to the world of others.*

*The **hospitable** door stands as a benevolent and inviting shadow between us and our friends as the moment of meeting approaches. It is only when the interior of the house and its inhabitants acquire a **hidden** or **ambivalent** meaning that the door gradually transforms into a massive object which **demands our attention.***

When we are refused admittance to the interior, the door takes on the character of a substantial barrier; the door transforms…to become a massive piece of laminated wood, with ornately carved designs, etc…The door has now become primarily a surface spectacle, and we begin to notice and count the details of its

construction. Our progress toward others is interrupted at this barrier – to be refused access to the interior, denied access to others, is to be **obsessed** *with the door.*

❖❖❖❖

SUMMARY

The door is the **access to the other**, *the site of human meeting, the place of dialogue, of judgment. The door is radically intersubjective, for it is the revelation of self and other.*

As I conclude this chapter, I borrow the original Latin meaning for conversation that I am grateful to have learned. [14] It means "a wandering together with." I have indeed wandered together with a group of courageous and committed mothers as they shared their experiences of parenting with their former spouses. And I hope I have captured their experiences sufficiently for the readers to feel as if they too have wandered together with this group of mothers. The conversation is not ended, but merely interrupted.

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[14] From Kvale (1996)

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APPENDICES

Appendix A1: Divorce & Coparenting: Public Demand for Resources

Appendix A1 Contents:

Internet search results can sometimes serve as an indicator of public demand for information and services related to a specific topic. The search results summarized in the three tables that follow can provide a useful perspective on our nation's public demand for resources about *divorce* and about *coparenting*. Taken together, the results can shed light on the overall prevalence of demand for each topic, and the extent to which the demand appears to be increasing, decreasing, or remaining stable.

Tables included:

Table 11: Google Search Results: 11-Month Comparison for DIVORCE
Table 12: Google Search Results: 11-Month Comparison for COPARENTING

Table 13: Yahoo Search Result: 6-Month Comparison for DIVORCE and COPARENTING

Table 11: Google Search Results: 11-Month Comparison for *Divorce*

Search Keywords	Google Search 3/29/04	Google Search 8/24/04	5-mo change 3/29-8/24	5-mo % change	Google Search 2/20/05	6-mo change 8/24-2/20	6-mo % change	11-mo change 3/29-2/20	11-mo % change
DIVORCE Searches									
Divorce	7,030,000	7,990,000	960,000	13.66%	20,300,000	12,310,000	154.07%	13,270,000	288.76%
Divorce, parenting	824,000	933,000	109,000	13.23%	1,680,000	747,000	80.06%	856,000	203.88%
Divorce, mothers	360,000	656,000	296,000	82.22%	1,940,000	1,284,000	195.73%	1,580,000	538.89%
Divorce, fathers	316,000	359,000	43,000	13.61%					
Divorce, custody	963,000	1,270,000	307,000	31.88%					
Divorce, children	2,590,000	2,520,000	-70,000	-2.70%	6,980,000	4,460,000	176.98%	4,390,000	269.50%
Divorce, social	1,750,000	2,270,000	520,000	29.71%	4,760,000	2,490,000	109.69%	3,010,000	272.00%
Divorce, resources	1,670,000	2,010,000	340,000	20.36%					
Divorce, process	1,550,000	1,830,000	280,000	18.06%					
Divorce, society	1,050,000	881,000	-169,000	16.10%	2,320,000	1,439,000	163.34%	1,270,000	220.95%
Divorce, stress	598,000	646,000	48,000	8.03%					
Divorce, consequences	415,000	440,000	25,000	6.02%					
Divorce, emotions	236,000	247,000	11,000	4.66%					
Divorce, outcomes	123,000	131,000	8,000	6.50%					
Divorce, impacts		66,500							

Appendix A1, Results 1

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Table 12: Google Search Results: 6-Month Comparison for *Coparenting*

COPARENT Searches									
Search Keywords	**Google Search 3/29/04**	**Google Search 8/24/04**	**5-mo change 3/29-8/24**	**5-mo % change**	**Google Search 2/20/05**	**6-mo change 8/24-2/20**	**6-mo % change**	**11-mo change 3/29-2/20**	**11-mo % change**
Divorce, coparent	708	5,590	4,882	689.55%	821	-4,769	-85.31%	113	115.96%
Divorce, coparenting		20,400			8,140	-12,260	-60.10%	8,140	
Coparent		2,840							
Coparenting		10,400							
Divorce, co-parent		4,920							
Divorce, co-parenting		18,900	30,200		30,200	11,300	59.79%	30,200	
Co-parent		17,400							
Co-parenting		30,700							
Divorce, shared custody		7,860	19,700						
Divorce, cooperative parenting		1,680							

Appendix A1, Results 2

Table 13: Yahoo Search Results: 6-Month Comparisons for *Divorce* and *Coparenting*

Yahoo Searches: 6-month Comparison				
Search Keywords	**Yahoo Search 8/24/04**	**Yahoo Search 2/20/05**	**6-mo change**	**6-mo % change**
DIVORCE Searches				
Divorce	9,880,000	19,900,000	10,020,000	101%
Divorce, parenting	878,000	1,470,000	592,000	67%
Divorce, mothers	631,000	1,070,000	439,000	70%
Divorce, fathers	597,000	1,080,000	483,000	81%
Divorce, custody	1,240,000	2,640,000	1,400,000	113%
Divorce, children	3,620,000	6,740,000	3,120,000	86%
Divorce, social	2,290,000	4,740,000	2,450,000	107%
Divorce, resources	2,360,000	5,120,000	2,760,000	117%
Divorce, process	1,900,000	3,970,000	2,070,000	109%
Divorce, society	1,660,000	3,580,000	1,920,000	116%
Divorce, stress	873,000	1,680,000	807,000	92%
Divorce, consequences	671,000	1,360,000	689,000	103%
Divorce, emotions	545,000	972,000	427,000	78%
Divorce, outcomes	145,000	280,000	135,000	93%
Divorce, impacts	90,300	156,000	65,700	73%
COPARENT Searches				
Divorce, coparent	853	1,140	287	34%
Divorce, coparenting	2,700	8,630	5,930	220%
Coparent	3,790	13,000	9,210	243%
Coparenting	8,280	15,800	7,520	91%
Divorce, co-parent	13,400	22,300	8,900	66%
Divorce, co-parenting	13,800	56,600	42,800	310%
Co-parent	7,940,000	54,600	-7,885,400	-99%
Co-parenting	3,000,000	86,300	-2,913,700	-97%
Divorce, shared custody	13,800	30,000	16,200	117%
Divorce, cooperative parenting	1,170	333,000	331,830	28362%

Appendix A1, Results 3

Appendix A2: Divorce & Coparenting: Scholarly Interest

Appendix A2 Contents:

Just as the preceding internet search results provided us information regarding public demand for divorce and coparenting resources, so too does the table in this appendix provide us with information about the degree of scholarly interest in divorce and in coparenting, as indicated by published articles in scholarly and professional journals.

Table Included:

Table 14: Professional Journals Search Results: DIVORCE and COPARENTING

Table 14: Professional Journals Search Results: *Divorce* and *Coparenting*

8/24/04 Searches: Professional Journals and Date Ranges					
Search Keywords	ERIC* '99-'04	JSTOR Soc. Science Jrnls '00-'04	JSTOR LAW Jrnls '00-'04	UMI Dissertations (all dates)	Fam & Society Studies Worldwide '00-'04
DIVORCE Searches					
Divorce	>200 *	>200 *	57	3,235	24,985
Divorce, parenting	43	38	2	234	42,238
Divorce, mothers	43	71	11	410	84,741
Divorce, fathers	36	50	10	311	41,893
Divorce, custody	26	14	10	298	28,209
Divorce, children	190	133	23	1,299	268,818
Divorce, social	114	172	34	1,112	219,760
Divorce, resources	36	96	21	157	60,779
Divorce, process	28	111	34	598	70,782
Divorce, society	16	125	35	286	49,527
Divorce, stress	25	52	9	275	54,638
Divorce, consequences	21	98	31	155	37,625
Divorce, emotions	8	31	5	48	32,292
Divorce, outcomes	19	79	22	171	57,365
Divorce, impacts	2	18	5	38	59,647
COPARENT Searches					
Divorce, coparent	0	3	0	4	25,079
Divorce, coparenting	2	4	0	18	25,086
Coparent	0	3	1	9	131
Coparenting	15	4	0	38	231
Divorce, co-parent	147	3	0	10	171,515
Divorce, co-parenting	43	4	0	33	47,857
Co-parent	>200 *	3	1	25	131
Co-parenting	>200 *	5	0	71	231
Divorce, shared custody	6	1	38	8	32,325
Divorce, cooperative parenting	1	0	0	36	46,558

Appendix A2, Results 1

Appendix B: Recruitment Flier

April 2003

Fact: In the United States, close to 3 in 5 first marriages will end in divorce, and two-thirds of these will involve children.

A Study of
Parenting and **Divorce**

Are you a divorced (or separated) mother who is currently parenting with your ex-spouse?

Would you be interested in learning more about the opportunity to participate in a University of Minnesota dissertation research study that will focus on what it is like to parent with an ex-spouse? Do you know others who might be interested?

Many aspects of divorce have been studied, written about, and discussed in the course of everyday lives – including practical parenting challenges and suggestions. However, no one has a clear understanding of what it is like to *live the experience* of parenting with an ex-spouse.

If you meet all of the criteria listed below and would like to learn more about participating in this study, please contact me at your earliest convenience. All calls will be strictly confidential, and anonymous information-gathering calls are also welcome.

I look forward to hearing from you!

(Name and contact information provided)

Criteria for participation:

- You are a divorced (or separated) mother of one or more children under the age of 18. (Includes both mothers who are single and mothers who are remarried.)
- Both you and your ex-spouse are involved (to at least some degree) in parenting your children.
- None of the following circumstances exist in your relationship with your ex-spouse:
    - History of physical or sexual abuse
    - Active, untreated chemical addiction
    - Severe, ongoing, and untreated mental illness
- You are willing to consider a commitment to a *conversational interview* of **approximately 2 hours in April/May**, and possibly a second interview of approximately 2 hours in May/June.

Note: Participants will receive a $15.00 gift certificate to a local merchant of their choice as a gesture of appreciation for their time and willingness to share.

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

<u>Introduction & Preparation for the Interview</u>

[<u>Note</u>: The introductory comments that will precede the actual interview questions have been described throughout the application. Following these explanations, questions, and checking for understanding of consent, the consent form will be signed. Then the following interview sequence will begin.]

<u>Interview Sequence</u>

Background questions

[<u>Note:</u> These background questions are meant to be a very brief part of the interview. Rather than providing substantive data that will later be analyzed, they are meant only to provide some factual information, a general context, and a comfortable beginning to the interview.]

Before we explore your experiences of parenting with an ex-spouse, it would be helpful to learn some background information so that I can have a context in which to place the discussions we will be having.

    1. Would you please tell me some factual details about your marriage, including:

- How long were you married to your ex-spouse?
- How long have you been divorced?
- How many children did you have together?
- What were the ages of your children at the time you separated? Divorced?
- What are the ages of your children now?

    2. How would you characterize your parenting relationship with your ex-spouse while you were married?

    PROBES:

- Mutually respectful partnership?
  -as viewed by each of you?

  -as viewed by your children?

- Supportive of each other's parenting beliefs and efforts?
- Balanced efforts, responsibilities, decision-making?
- One parent handling most/all of responsibilities and decision-making?

Transitional questions

[Note: These questions focus only on participant expectations prior to parenting with an ex-spouse and are meant to help build the participant's comfort level and ease with examining and verbalizing about the topic. Discussion of these questions is expected to facilitate the coming discussion of actual lived experiences.]

3.If you think back to when you and your ex-spouse separated/divorced, can you remember what you expected in terms of the two of you continuing to parent together under these new circumstances?

PROBES:

- Did you have a mental picture of what it would be like?
- Can you describe that mental picture?
- What were your hopes? Concerns? Fears?

Lived experience questions

[Note: The following examples of open-ended, conversational interview questions are designed to help participant identify and describe – as fully as possible – their lived experiences of parenting with an ex-spouse. These are not prescriptive, but are meant to guide the interviewer and to maintain an orientation to the central research question.]

- Has your experience of parenting with an ex-spouse been what you expected it would be? In what ways has it been what you expected? In what ways has it not been what you expected?
- Can you describe parenting with an ex-spouse as you lived/are living through it?
- Is there a specific example or experience we can focus on that will help you describe your experience?
- What stories can you tell me?
- Can you describe the experience from the outside? What was happening?

- Can you describe the experience from the inside? Your feelings and thoughts?
- If you were asked to "mentor" a mother just beginning to experience parenting with an ex-spouse, what would you tell her?

PROBES:

[Note: When probing for more description or deeper meaning, the researcher will let the participant's own responses and stories guide the questioning and discussion.]

- Can you tell me more?
- How did that come about?
- How did you express those thoughts?
- How was that decision made?
- What was that feeling like?
- What would have happened if….?
- Why was that important?
- What did that mean to you?
- What was it about the experience that made you sad? Happy? Relieved? Grateful? Worried?
- Etc.
-

Appendix D: Worksheet for Transforming Meaning Units

	Pax	MU	Transformation 1	Notes regarding possible invariants
1.				
2.				
3.				
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23.				

Appendix E1: Transformation of Meaning Units for Irene: Phase I

	Pax	MU	Transformation 1	Notes regarding possible invariants
1.	**Irene**	*I: Can you describe what it's like for you to live day in and day out as a mother, with an ex-spouse who is also being a parent to your children? Are there words that come to mind that would be descriptive?*		
2.	**Irene**	IRENE: *(long pause)* My gut reaction is that you have to be able to compartmentalize your feelings…	In order to interact with her ex-spouse about parenting, I. has to adopt a strategy of compartmentalizing her feelings.	*Splitting self?*
3.	**Irene**	for the kids' sake.	I.'s motivation for compartmentalizing her feelings when interacting with her ex-spouse is consideration of her children / concern for their well-being.	*Motive
4.	**Irene**	*I: What is it like to do that?*		
5.	**Irene**	IRENE: It's just torture. Just torture.	I. experiences emotional pain that she describes as "torture" when she has to compartmentalize her feelings when interacting with her ex-spouse.	*Pain is intense* *Physical reference for pain*
6.	**Irene**	**[Begin sequence]** IRENE: It's, you know, it's, ah, it's not only stressful because you have to be able to, you have to continue to communicate around those kids all the time (cont'd)	I. finds it very stressful to compartmentalize her feelings in this manner, and the stress becomes cumulative and more intense because she must do this every day in order to be able to communicate about the children	Can I bring in a later comment about "talk about this stuff 4 times a day?" Can I integrate it here or no?

TMU Irene, Phase I, Page 1

	Pax	MU	Transformation 1	Notes regarding possible invariants
7.	**Irene**	IRENE: and in our situation, I think, it's been very, very hard because I have…he's still in our church and we share half-custody so basically we see each other every day. (cont'd)	I. perceives her situation to be much harder than it might be because of the frequency with which they must interact. They "share" multiple everyday environments and there are virtually no days in her life when this compartmentalization of feelings is not required of her. And few, if any, environments where she can get away from this. She cannot even get away from it at her church, since he attends the same church.	*No way to get away from it* *Everywhere, all the time*
8.	**Irene**	IRENE: We talk to each other every day and so it would be easier…it would be easier if we hated each other's guts and we didn't want to see each other. (cont'd)	I. believes that it would be easier if she and her ex-spouse hated each other and were able to act on the desire to not see each other at all. She perceives that this would relieve her from the painful and constant process of compartmentalizing her feelings in order to communicate	
			(REVISED)I. wishes she could hate her husband and act from her hate and anger, mainly by allowing her to refuse to interact with him, and then by letting anger dominate when she has to interact. Having intense anger would protect her from the pain and would give her permission to act on it.	*Head/heart*
9.	**Irene**	IRENE: But because we don't hate each other's guts and because we do want the best for the kids, we	Because I. and her ex-spouse do not hate each other (which might give her different options) and because they	

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	Pax	MU	Transformation 1	Notes regarding possible invariants
		must…we must communicate and we must coordinate (cont'd)	both want what is best for the children (which is her fundamental motivation for interacting successfully with her ex-spouse), I. is unable to see any alternative other than continuing to use the strategy of compartmentalizing her feelings in order to get through the constant communication and coordination of efforts that is required.	
10.	**Irene**	IRENE: and so when you do that, you have put your feelings on the shelf and it's pretty hard and stressful for me. That has been the most stressful. **[End sequence]**	I. defines what it means to her to compartmentalize her feelings, describing it as "putting your feelings on a shelf." For her, this means continually setting aside the painful feelings she has surrounding the break up of the marriage and "pretending" that everything is ok when it is not. She describes this as being the most difficult and stressful aspect of continuing to parent with her ex-spouse.	*Burying feelings* *Pretending*
11.	**Irene**	IRENE: Because other, and I don't know that many other divorced couples, but those that harbor a, you know, a whole bunch of resentment and anger around the way the divorce went or the way stuff got split up. I don't know. Maybe it's easier for them because they have someplace to direct all that to. I don't know.	I. wonders if parenting with her ex-spouse would be easier if she had a lot of anger and resentment that could serve as a focal point / a place to direct the feelings she tries to "put on a shelf."	*Needs clarification. Didn't quite capture it. *Find better language for "putting her feelings on a shelf" that can be used here and in other parts of this transcript

	Pax	MU	Transformation 1	Notes regarding possible invariants
12.		**[Begin sequence]** IRENE: It just has to be kept in the background, ah, and cannot take first priority. You know, kids got to take first priority and, ah, I have to learn that…and that's part of the hardest thing is learning what kind of relationship and what our relationship's going to look like from here on out.	I. stresses that she must put her "self" on the back burner because the children's well-being is the top priority. She also acknowledges that she must still find a way to reconcile competing desires for the kind of relationship she wants with her ex-spouse, and find a way to define it and/or shape it as they move forward….in a way that is good for her as well as for the children. I. finds it extremely hard to live with the kind of relationship they have right now, but also finds it extremely hard to resolve right now…thus keeping her in the pattern of "acting" all the time for the sake of the children.	*Boundaries and definition of relationship* *Internal conflict again*
13.		But he still thinks of it that way. So he'll call me and share with me all his plans for going on a vacation with the kids, not having a clue that this should be a vacation we should all be taking.	In treating I. as his "best friend," he calls her to share his plans and excitement about an upcoming vacation he is taking with the children. I. finds the conversation very painful because she sees it as the "family vacation" that they should *all* be taking together as one family…just like they used to. She is aware that her ex-spouse is oblivious to that desire on her part, the feeling of broken-ness it triggers about her family, and the feeling of being left out. The contract/contradiction between his excitement and his assumption that she	*Conflict* *Contrast between ex-spouse's reactions and expectations and her own. Inability to convey that or let it show.* *Have I expanded too much on this? Everything mentioned has been explicitly or implicitly stated in the interview, but perhaps not all with this MU.

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	Pax	MU	Transformation 1	Notes regarding possible invariants
			will be equally excited to know about the trip…and what her true feelings are as she listens…are striking to her. Yet she once again feels like she must hide her true feelings in order to maintain a positive parenting relationship.	
14.		IRENE: It is very difficult. It is very hurtful. It is very gut wrenching. **[End sequence]**	I. describes the emotional and psychological pain of the conversation as "gut-wrenching."	*Pain and grief* *Physical*
15.		I: What do you do with those reactions?		
16.		IRENE: Sometimes I sob, you know, go home and sob. Sometimes I just go, awh (sound), that guy hasn't got a clue (laughs), and sometimes you think, you know what. This is just a good thing. It is a good thing.	I. In spite of the pain, and the tears, brought on by situations like this, and amazement about how lacking her ex-spouse is in insight about how it affects her, C. is sometimes able to reach a point where she grasps onto the only good thing about the situation…that the vacation, the special times with their dad, and the positive (on the outside) relationship between their parents…is good for her children. That is what helps her tolerate what seems like an impossibly painful situation.	*Head/heart*
17.		I: For the kids?		

	Pax	MU	Transformation 1	Notes regarding possible invariants
18.		IRENE: That is what has gotten me through ____. I don't know how I would do it otherwise….'Cause it always…every time I talk to him…there's so much grief….and it's like talking to him switches it on…..and…and….I can't go there. So I try to make it a business meeting, you know….I launch into actress mode.	1) I. has to hold on to the certainty that these are good things for her children. Only that knowledge makes it possible for her to cope. 2) Just the fact of talking to her former spouse triggers I's terrible grief, which she cannot let show and cannot give in to if she is going to be able to handle the everyday parenting tasks with her former spouse. To make it possible to interact with him, she hides her feelings and pretends she is fine.	*Motivation *Hiding feelings, pretending
19.		IRENE: Yeah. And yet you have to find the right balance with that because kids need to know how you're feeling without them being in counseling. For example, on vacation and I was really struggling with this___ the kids. I just need to tell you Wednesday I said, I'm really having a tough time being on this vacation without dad and I just want you to know this and they were upset but and it was done, and they knew I wasn't crazy during the vacation. So you have to kind of find the right balance between making sure the kids know that you're a normal person with feelings but not using them.	I. is aware that she must protect her children from many of her thoughts and feelings, but is also aware that she must be open enough to give a legitimate, though incomplete, explanation to the children since they will be picking up on her feelings anyway. She doesn't want to add confusion and uncertainty to their lives.	*Authenticity?

TMU Irene, Phase I, Page 6

Appendix E2: Transformation Of Meaning Units For Irene: Phase II

	Pax	MU	Transformation 1	Notes regarding possible invariants
1.	**Irene**	*I: Can you describe what it's like for you to live day in and day out as a mother, with an ex-spouse who is also being a parent to your children? Are there words that come to mind that would be descriptive?*		
2.	**Irene**	IRENE: *(long pause)* My gut reaction is that you have to be able to compartmentalize your feelings… for the kids' sake. [combined with another MU]		*Splitting self?*
3.	**Irene**	[moved up with line 2]		*Motive*
4.		[deleted]		
5.	**Irene**	IRENE: It's just torture. Just torture.	I. experiences emotional pain that she describes as "torture" when she has to compartmentalize her feelings when interacting with her ex-spouse.	*Pain is intense* *Physical reference for pain*
6.	**Irene**	**[Begin sequence]** IRENE: It's, you know, it's, ah, it's not only stressful because you have to be able to, you have to	I. finds it very stressful to compartmentalize her feelings in this manner, and the stress becomes cumulative and more intense because	Can I bring in a later comment about "talk about this stuff 4 times a day?" Can I integrate it here or no?

TMU Irene, Phase II, Page 1

		continue to communicate around those kids all the time (cont'd) IRENE: ...because we do want the best for the kids, we must…we	she must do this every day in order to be able to communicate about the children	

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	Pax	MU	Transformation 1	Notes regarding possible invariants
		must communicate and we must coordinate (cont'd) [Combined MUs]		
7.	**Irene**	[blended with other MUs]	I. perceives her situation to be extremely difficult / much harder than it might be because of the frequency with which they must interact as a result of "sharing" multiple everyday environments. There are virtually no days in her life when this compartmentalization of feelings is not required of her. And few, if any, environments where she can get away from this. She cannot even get away from it at her church, since he attends the same church.	*No way to get away from it* *Everywhere, all the time*
8.	**Irene**	IRENE: We talk to each other every day and so it would be easier…it would be easier if we hated each other's guts and we didn't want to see each other. (cont'd) IRENE: But because we don't hate each other's guts and because we	I. believes that it would be easier if she and her ex-spouse hated each other and were able to act on the desire to not see each other at all. She perceives that this would relieve her from the painful and constant process of compartmentalizing her feelings in order to communicate	*Head/heart. Internal conflict.*
				TMU Irene, Phase II, Page 2
		do want the best for the kids, we must…we must communicate and we must coordinate (cont'd) IRENE: Because other, and I don't	(REVISED)I. wishes she could hate her husband and act from her hate and anger, mainly by allowing herself to refuse to interact with him, but also by letting anger dominate when she has to	*Head/heart*

	Pax	MU	Transformation 1	Notes regarding possible invariants
		know that many other divorced couples, but those that harbor a, you know, a whole bunch of resentment and anger around the way the divorce went or the way stuff got split up. I don't know. Maybe it's easier for them because they have someplace to direct all that to. I don't know. [combined several MUs]	interact. Having intense anger would protect her from the pain and would give her permission to act on it instead of burying it and/or hiding it.	
9.	**Irene**	[Moved up with other MU]	Because I. and her ex-spouse do not hate each other (which might give her different options) and because they both want what is best for the children (which is her fundamental motivation for interacting successfully with her ex-spouse), I. is unable to see any alternative other than continuing to use the strategy of compartmentalizing her feelings in order to get through the constant communication and coordination of efforts that is required.	
10.	**Irene**	IRENE: and so when you do that, you have put your feelings on the shelf and it's pretty hard and	I. defines what it means to her to compartmentalize her feelings, describing it as "putting your feelings	*Burying feelings* *Pretending*

		stressful for me. That has been the most stressful. **[End sequence**	on a shelf." For her, this means continually setting aside the painful feelings she has surrounding the break up of the marriage and "pretending" that everything is ok when it is not.	

	Pax	MU	Transformation 1	Notes regarding possible invariants
			She describes this as being the most difficult and stressful aspect of continuing to parent with her ex-spouse.	
11.	**Irene**	[Moved up with other MU]	I. wonders if parenting with her ex-spouse would be easier if she had a lot of anger and resentment that could serve as a focal point / a place to direct the feelings she tries to "put on a shelf."	*Needs clarification. Didn't quite capture it. *Find better language for "putting her feelings on a shelf" that can be used here and in other parts of this transcript
12.		**[Begin sequence]** IRENE: …and that's part of the hardest thing is learning what kind of relationship and what our relationship's going to look like from here on out.	I. acknowledges that she must still find a way to reconcile competing desires for the kind of relationship she wants with her ex-spouse, and find a way to define it and/or shape it as they move forward….in a way that is good for her as well as for the children. I. finds it extremely hard to live with the kind of relationship they have right now, but also finds it extremely hard to resolve right now…thus keeping her in the	*Boundaries and definition of relationship* *Internal conflict again*

			pattern of "acting" all the time for the sake of the children.	
13.		IRENE: But he still thinks of it that way. So he'll call me and share with me all his plans for going on a vacation with the kids, not having a clue that this should be a vacation we should all be taking.	In treating I. as his "best friend," he calls her to share his plans and excitement about an upcoming vacation he is taking with the children. I. finds the conversation very painful because she sees it as the "family vacation" that they should *all* be taking together as one family…just like they	*Conflict* *Contrast between ex-spouse's reactions and expectations and her own. Inability to convey that or let it show.* *Have I expanded too much on this?*

	Pax	MU	Transformation 1	Notes regarding possible invariants
			used to. She is aware that her ex-spouse is oblivious to that desire on her part, the feeling of broken-ness it triggers about her family, and the feeling of being left out. The contract/contradiction between his excitement and his assumption that she will be equally excited to know about the trip…and what her true feelings are as she listens…are striking to her. Yet she once again feels like she must hide her true feelings in order to maintain a positive parenting relationship. [comments based on multiple MUs]	*Everything mentioned has been explicitly or implicitly stated in the interview, but perhaps not all with this MU. Multiple MUs contribute to the meaning.*
14.		IRENE: It is very difficult. It is very hurtful. It is very gut wrenching. **[End sequence]**	I. describes the emotional and psychological pain of the conversation as "gut-wrenching."	**Pain and grief* **Physical*
15.		I: What do you do with those reactions?		

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	Pax	MU	Transformation 1	Notes regarding possible invariants
16.		IRENE: Sometimes I sob, you know, go home and sob. Sometimes I just go, awh (sound), that guy hasn't got a clue (laughs), and sometimes you think, you know what. This is just a good thing. It is a good thing.	I. In spite of the pain and the tears, brought on by situations like this, I. is sometimes able to reach a point where she grasps onto the only good thing about the situation…that the vacation, the special times with their dad, and the positive (on the outside) relationship between their parents…is good for her children. That is what helps her tolerate what seems like an impossibly painful situation.	*Head/heart*
17.		I: For the kids?		
18.		IRENE: That is what has gotten me through ____. I don't know how I would do it otherwise….'Cause it always…every time I talk to him…there's so much grief….and it's like talking to him switches it on…..and…and….I can't go there. So I try to make it a business meeting, you know….I launch into actress mode.	I. has to hold on to the certainty that these are good things for her children. Only that knowledge makes it possible for her to cope. Just the fact of talking to her former spouse triggers I's terrible grief, which she cannot let show and cannot give in to if she is going to be able to handle the everyday parenting tasks with her former spouse. To make it possible to interact with him, she hides her feelings and pretends she is fine.	*Motivation* *Hiding feelings, pretending* *Authenticity?*

TMU Irene, Phase II, Page 6