A Phenomenological Approach to Understanding the Experience of Parenting Adolescent Children.

by

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ABSTRACT

A phenomenological methodology was utilized to investigate the lived parental experience of raising adolescent children. Five female and five male coresearchers participated in two taped interviews during which they were invited to describe their experiences with this phenomena. The transcripts were analyzed concurrently with the process of data collection with the objective of discovering the immanent meaning of the experiences to the parents who lived them.

The study yielded seven dominant themes and nineteen subthemes which were deemed to represent the essential features of the experience of being a parent of an adolescent child. The seven dominant themes identified were: the experience of the loss of being needed or wanted; the experience of bewilderment; the search for confirmation of reality; the experience of the transition of power; the experience of disappointment and frustration; the experience of anxiety; and the experience of mutuality. Implications for counselling and further research were included in the discussion of the results.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The "experience of parenthood" appears to be generally conceptualized in the parenting literature as an experience pertaining to the care, nurturing, and socialization of children from infancy through adulthood and even on into middle age. However, the parenting literature tends to primarily focus on the period of the family life cycle that precedes adolescent children (Pasely & Gecas, 1984). Of special interest in the popular parenting literature is the experience of "first time" parents and, in particular, the challenges and adjustments that this stage of the family life cycle brings. In this literature the reader discovers the broad range of joys, fears, and frustrations experienced by neophyte parents as they struggle to adjust to the new roles they have taken on. By examining this literature the reader can begin to grasp the essence of the lived experience of becoming a parent.

As one proceeds from this early stage of the family life cycle, however, the literature increasingly assumes a "child outcome" orientation rather than a parental experience orientation. That is, the literature indicates a shift of the researchers’ attention away from the question "What is the nature of the parental experience?" and toward the question "What is the effect of a particular style of parenting on the child’s developmental outcome?" While these child outcome oriented research questions are undeniably necessary to increase our understanding of effective
approaches to parenting, other valid foci for the study of parenthood remain to be pursued. Among the alternatives are questions which seek to understand the "experience of parenthood" in and of itself beyond the earliest phase of the family life cycle. For example: "What is the essence of the daily experience of being a parent?" or of greater interest to this writer: "What is the essence of the experience of being a parent of a teenager?"

Pasley and Gecas (1984) note that there is a paucity of research on questions pertaining to the parental experience of the role of parenthood, and especially during the adolescent stage of the family life cycle. They also point out that programs intended to improve parents' quality of life often omit the parents of adolescents, while focussing on the parents of younger children. Gove and Peterson (1980) suggest that the failure to address the experience of the parents of adolescents may in part result from a lack of information on the issues these parents are facing.

What does appear in the popular literature tends to confirm the historic perception of adolescence as a difficult and tumultuous period for both teenagers and their parents. For example, see this list of recent releases on parenting adolescents: Now I Know Why Tigers Eat Their Young: How To Survive Your Teenagers With Humor by Peter Marshall (1992); How to Stop the Battle With Your Teenagers: A Practical Guide to Solving Everyday Problems by D. Fleming and L. Schmidt (1989); and The Nine Most Troublesome
Problems and How to Solve Them by L. Bauman (1986). However, one cannot necessarily conclude that the predominance of such books indicates anything more than market forces. It may simply indicate that for those parents for whom parenting adolescents has been a generally positive experience there is little felt need to buy books that help them to understand or cope with their experience.

This study attempts to contribute to the body of knowledge in this domain by exploring the parental perspective on the experience of raising adolescent children. This chapter lays the groundwork for the study by presenting a brief review of the sociohistorical conceptualization of parenting before highlighting a few trends effecting the current experience of parenting adolescents. The next chapter will present a review of the pertinent theories of parenting and a review of the literature that contributes understanding to the experience of parenting adolescent children. At the conclusion of these initial chapters it is asserted, in concurrence with Pasley and Gecas (1984), that there is a need for more information on the experience of parenthood during the adolescent period of the family life cycle.

The Experience of Parenthood

Goetting (1986) suggests that the parenting of children is "perhaps the most emotionally charged area of human existence" (p.83). Support for such an assertion can be found in Dix's (1991) review of the literature on parenting
and emotion. He states that one of the general conclusions that can be drawn from that literature is that:

... strong emotion is a daily concomitant of parenting. Conflictual interactions between parents and children occur from 3 1/2 to 15 times an hour in families with young children and are even more frequent in families with children who are sick, disabled, or aggressive.... Parents' positive emotions are even more common than their negative emotions. Parents report 2 1/2 times as many positive as negative interactions with their children. (p. 3)

In the modern world of birth control, most North Americans become parents by choice. Further, it is commonly held that personal choice increases one's sense of ownership over the outcome of those choices. Thus, the above observation about parenting being a highly emotional experience is perhaps not surprising since it follows that one's positive or negative emotions will be closely connected to one's perceptions of the outcome of choices made (Dix, 1991; Frijda, 1986). And yet, the desired outcome of parenting (generally thought to be a responsible, hard-working, moral and functional adult (Winch, 1971)) is never assured, and maybe least of all during the adolescent period.

In addition to being an inherently challenging and emotionally laden experience, studies indicate that parenthood is negatively correlated with the psychological
well-being of adults (McLanahan & Adams, 1989). In fact, parents of adolescents are considered to be highly susceptible to emotional and psychological stress (Aldous, 1978). The nature of this inherent stress in the lives of parents of adolescents, however, remains unclear.

The literature tends to focus on the negative characteristics of this period. This tendency begets questions about the existence of opposing positive experiences that contribute to the general assessment by parents that the benefits of parenthood far outweigh the costs (Blake & del Pinal, 1981 in McLanahan & Adams, 1989; Steinberg, 1981). The present study seeks to understand the combination of parental feelings (joy and sadness, pride and humility, strength and powerlessness, etc.) that compose the experience of parenting an adolescent child in the modern context. It purports to describe the lived experience of individuals in the parental role in a society where rapid and significant changes combine to create a new experience for each generation of parents. It purports to describe the essential structure of the lived experience of those people who are currently parents of adolescents by asking them to describe their experience of being a parent of an adolescent child.

The Sociohistorical Conceptualization of Parenthood

Research pertaining to the history of parenthood: its role in socialization; its conceptualization; or its day to day lived experience is a relatively recent development.

Clearly, there is considerable disagreement amongst writers as to the historic conceptualization of the family and thus the parental role. Gairdner (1992) notes that some of this discrepancy arises out of poorly articulated distinctions between the natural family (consisting of parents and their children) and the social family (consisting of the broader network of blood relations and even friends). According to Gairdner making this distinction seriously undermines the "conventional" interpretation that the history of the family has been an evolutionary developmental process. Building on this rationale, Gairdner concludes that:
After reading a number of experts on the history of the family ... I have concluded that the natural family does not change in any important way - in fact, that the root natural family, parents and their children, has been the same for millions of years. It is true that the social family - all the extensions of the natural family, whether of blood relatives or just friends - does change. It responds to and itself generates all sorts of political, economic, and social forces that complicate the moral and legal meaning of marriage and childbirth (p.59).

Understandably, the historic conceptualization of parenthood changes with the ebb and flow of this debate over the history of the family.

An important example that demonstrates the relevance of these opposing conceptualizations may be worth examination. In Centuries of Childhood Aries (1960) studied iconographic evidence to conclude that it was only in the late Middle Ages that society began to develop a "concept of childhood" as a developmental stage between infancy and adulthood. According to Aries, the combination of high mortality rates for both children and parents, harsh economic realities, and lack of privacy (both in and outside of the household) allowed little room for the kind of parental sentiment that the modern society attaches to the role. "The family fulfilled a function; it ensured the transmission of life,
property and names; but it did not penetrate very far into human sensibility" (Aries, 1960, p.411).

Gies (1987), however, writing almost thirty years later, states that Aries basic supposition of an emotionally impoverished family prior to the sixteenth century has not stood up to subsequent research. "True, the economic function of the family that assured its survival often took precedence over other considerations" (p. 297), admits Gies, but adds, "Nevertheless, people felt toward children the same mixture of tenderness, amusement, and wonder that they feel today" (p. 298).

Historians of the family do appear to find common ground in the recognition of the continually changing societal context since the Middle Ages. These changes have influenced the dynamics of the family unit in terms of roles and powers. Among these changes was the reduction of the family's functions (Gies, 1989). Gies notes that by the seventeenth century both justice and religion were no longer perceived to be in the domain of the family. New societal institutions such as craft guilds, national governments, and schools further impinged on the family's roles. Harmon and Brim (1980) come to a similar conclusion. Citing the work of Bailyn (1960), they note that the growth of urban economies in the early seventeenth century contributed to the first limitation of parental power over their offspring. Harmon and Brim argue that this trend toward greater infringement on family and parental roles has continued to the present.
If true this may explain the common perception that contemporary parents are keenly aware of the limits of their parental power. One of the areas of interest, therefore, in the current study is how today's parents of adolescents perceive their roles and, in particular, whether their experience reflects concerns over their parental power.

Recent Trends in the Parenting Context

Many changes have occurred in the present century alone that bear on the experience of parenting (White, 1979). Paramount among these, says White, has been a dramatic loss of parental confidence in fulfilling the parental role. Confidence has dropped, in part, White argues, in response to the rise of the child care professionals whose theories have at one and the same time tended to reject traditional "common sense" child rearing practices while also contradicting the preceding professional opinion (see also Pasley & Gecas, 1984). White's analysis falls in line with that of Winch and McGinnis (1953) who forty years ago wrote: "As science succeeds folk wisdom among the 'au courant' the child expert displaces grandmother in knowing how to handle junior. And mother learns how to raise children not from her mother but from classes, books, and articles" (p. 207).

Further support for White's claim is found in Boggs' (1984) historical review of the parenting literature in which she concluded that "the most outstanding feature of the parent manuals over time is the way in which the advice has changed" (p. 272). The result, suggests White, has been
a loss of trust in traditional parenting approaches, and at
the same time a degree of confusion about which current
parenting approach to follow. These observations indicate
that the present day experience of parenting adolescents
includes a substantial measure of uncertainty and lack of
confidence on the part of the parents.

Restricting themselves to empirical evidence from the
last 30 years McLanahan and Adams (1987) identify several
trends which have had a significant influence on the
experience of parenthood. One of these trends is the rise in
the number of females in the paid work force. Citing the
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, they report that "Whereas
in 1950 only 24% of married women were in the labor force,
by 1980 over 50% were working" (p.239).

This raises a question about the relatively new
experience of working mothers with adolescent children.
What are the particular issues that the working mother
concerns herself with in regard to her role as the parent of
an adolescent child? Are these concerns substantively
different than non-employed mothers? Cain (1984) reports
that employed mothers work 5-15 hours per week (employed
work plus housework) more than other parents (cited in
McLanahan & Adams, 1987). The current research appears
devoid of information about how these changes impact the
parental experience of raising adolescent children.

Another trend identified by McLanahan and Adams (1987)
as significantly affecting the experience of parenthood is
the increase in marital instability. Among other effects this trend has generated a proliferation of new forms of family arrangements: single parent homes, non-custodial second homes for children visiting their other parent, homes with new live-in relationships, blended families, and many more. McLanahan and Adams speculate that the rise in non-traditional families has created a more psychologically stressful experience for these parents than 30 years ago when family relationships tended to be more stable and less complex. This speculation finds theoretical support in Weissman, Cohen, Boxer, and Cohler (1989) who point out the importance of the parental alliance to the health and stability of the parent, and note its particular importance during the adolescent phase of the family life cycle.

In this chapter the author has attempted to inform the reader of the manner in which parenthood has been historically conceptualized as well as the current trends which would appear to have an effect on the experience of parenting in the contemporary culture. While this discussion has been brief it has served to provide an indication of the current debate about the historical conceptualization of the family and the possible nature of the parental experience contained in it. As well, it has raised several speculations about how current cultural trends are impacting the experience of parenting adolescent children. It is apparent that the present study will not be able to fully explore the trends and related issues addressed here. While raising
several probable elements of interest in this experience, there remains the necessity to allow the data of the participants' experience "to speak for itself;" to direct attention to the elements of the experience which are real to each participant. This is the essence of the phenomenological approach which is proposed in the methodology section.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Parenting Theory

From a psychological perspective the study of parenthood began in the present century and was approached primarily from the two dominant theories of the day: behaviorism and psychoanalysis. In broad terms, it can be said that from the outset parenting researchers have pursued the answers to two basic socialization questions: "What are the modal patterns of child rearing? What are the developmental consequences of different child rearing patterns?" (Darling & Steinberg, 1993 p. 488). Thus, the study of parenting has almost exclusively been approached from a child outcome orientation rather than a parental experience orientation.

Active research on parenting began in the late 1930s and consisted of attempts to empirically validate behavioristic and psychodynamic understandings of the parent-child relationship. Maccoby (1992) reports that much of the unsuccessful early research efforts involved the reformulation of psychoanalytic theory into "testable propositions stated in behavior theory terms" (p. 1008).

Concurrent with these efforts there arose a small but growing body of knowledge in the domain of developmental psychology. One of the important insights arising out of this field was that the parenting role must undergo systematic changes in conjunction with the increasing cognitive capacities of the children (Maccoby, 1992). As the
cognitive revolution in psychology superceded classic reinforcement theory researchers began addressing the complexity of the socialization process inherent in parenting. In an historical review of the research on the socialization of children Maccoby identifies three major changes that have occurred in this domain since the 1950s. The first of these, she says, was a reduction in the scope of theorizing pertaining to the socialization of children. The broad theories of behaviorism and psychoanalysis gave way "to more modest theories that were limited to specific behavioral domains or specific age periods" (p. 1007).

The second major change according to Maccoby (1992) was a re-conceptualization of the direction of effects in the parent-child relationship. Whereas researchers initially presumed a unidirectional top down socialization influence, they now envision a bidirectional and interactive process that develops over time within the context of intimate relationships. The third major change, reports Maccoby, has been the increasing complexity in the process of socialization.

Whereas early work consisted largely of a search for direct connections between given parental practices (or clusters of practices) and a given child outcome, current work adds a focus on processes that may mediate the way in which a parent practice effects a child (Maccoby, 1992, pp. 1007).
Maccoby’s observations indicate that rather than moving toward an all encompassing theory of parenting the field has been subdividing into more narrowly focussed researchable domains. Each of these narrower domains can contribute to the understanding of the experience of parenthood.

Related Research

In the remainder of this chapter four related domains of research will be discussed in terms of their contributions to an understanding of the parental experience during the adolescent phase of the family life-cycle. These domains of research are: studies of the dimensions of parenting; studies of marital quality; studies of parental satisfaction and psychological well-being; and studies focussing on specific domains of the parent-adolescent relationship. Each of these areas is reviewed below.

Studies of the Dimensions of Parenting

The initial studies on the parental role focussed on identifying the various dimensions and/or styles of parenting and their effects on children. In the 1950s research attempts to identify parenting dimensions usually involved factor analyzing data from surveys, questionnaires, and attitude scales (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). (See for example Becker, Peterson, Luria, Shoemaker, & Hellmer, 1957; Cline, Richards, & Needham, 1963; Lorr & Jenkins, 1953; Nicols, 1962; Sears, Maccoby, & Levin, 1957; and Slater, 1962). Baldwin (1955) went further by incorporating
observational data from home visits along with statistical techniques (Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Early results by Schaefer (1959) and Becker (1964) produced similar parenting dimensions of warmth versus hostility, and control versus autonomy. Continued efforts have since identified other dimensions of parenting. For example, studies by Burger and Armentrout (1971) and Schaefer (1965) concluded that the "control versus autonomy" dimension could more accurately be conceptualized as two dimensions: "(1) Psychological autonomy-giving versus psychological control (i.e., control through arousing guilt or instilling anxiety); and (2) firm versus lax control" (p.39).

Baumrind’s (1967) well known typology of parenting styles emphasized an alternative to the "authoritarian" and "permissive" styles that dominated early thinking. She argued that an "authoritative" style which combined affection and attention to children’s needs along with parental imposition of clear expectations for appropriate pro-social behavior produced the best results in terms of child outcome. Maccoby (1992) notes that Steinberg, Elmen and Mounts (1989) accepted Baumrind’s major dimensions of high acceptance-warmth and firm control; and then added a dimension they called "psychological autonomy" or "democracy." Maccoby concludes that the element of democracy would appear to have specific application to that stage of the family life cycle when pre-adolescent and adolescent
children are becoming increasingly more skillful at negotiating with their parents. (For others see Gross, 1989; Martin, 1981; Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979 Pulkkinen, 1982).

Following their review of the research in this domain Maccoby and Martin (1983) present their own two-dimensional classification of parenting patterns in which they propose four clusters of parental characteristics (figure one). These include: (1) The authoritarian-autocratic pattern; (2) The indulgent-permissive pattern; (3) The authoritative-reciprocal pattern; and (4) The indifferent-uninvolved pattern.

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- Demanding, controlling
  - Authoritative-reciprocal pattern
  - Authoritarian Power assertive pattern

- Undemanding, low in control attempts
  - Indulgent-permissive pattern
  - Neglecting, ignoring, indifferent, uninvolved pattern

(figure 1)

(Maccoby and Martin, 1983)

Results from this area of research confirm that parenting is a complex process and that parents emphasize differing dimensions in the fulfillment of their role. In addition, indications are that parenting style changes along
with the development of the child (Maccoby, 1992). Research also indicates that there are moderating factors (e.g., the level of parental commitment to the parental role) which may be even more important influence on child outcome than the parenting style itself (Greenberger & Goldberg, 1989; Pulkkinen, 1982).

Notwithstanding these moderating influences Maccoby (1992) draws the following conclusion about the optimal parental style as revealed in the contemporary literature:

However authoritative parenting is defined and whatever the age of the child, there appears to be a common core of meaning that defines the optimal cluster, and it has to do with inducting the child into a system of reciprocity. An authoritative parent assumes a deep and lasting obligation to behave so as to promote the best interests of the child, even when this means setting aside certain self-interests. At the same time, the parent insists that the child shall progressively assume more responsibility for responding to the needs of other family members and promoting their interests as well as his or her own within the limits of a child's capabilities (pp. 1013).

This research points to but fails to enlighten a number of questions about the parental experience of raising adolescents. For example, "What is the nature of the parental experience in utilizing differing styles of parenting when raising adolescent children?" It would appear
likely that one would find significantly divergent experiences related to variances in parenting styles. Another question of interest that arises out of this literature is: "Are parents cognizant of the parenting dimensions they emphasize in the fulfillment of their parental role and do they consciously adjust these emphases in accordance with developmental stage? If so, "What do they use as their information source to guide these conscious shifts in emphasis?" These questions point toward educational and therapeutic issues relevant to helping parents of adolescents who are having difficulty. As was noted earlier, these questions remain largely unaddressed in the current literature because they focus on the parental experience during later stages in the family life cycle where child outcome questions tend to dominate.

Studies of marital quality

A second area of research that contributes to understanding the experience of parenthood is in the domain of marital quality. Studies that seek to measure the happiness, satisfaction and overall marital quality over the life cycle consistently suggest that there is a negative relationship between the presence of children and marital satisfaction (Glenn & McLanahan, 1982; Rollins & Galligan, 1978). McLanahan and Adams (1989) report that a number of studies using different indicators of well-being and comparing different sub-groups of parents and non-parents have supported this conclusion. Although the differences in
well-being between parents and non-parents are small the size of the differences increased between the 1950s and the 1970s (McLanahan and Adams, 1987).

Within the marital quality literature there has been considerable debate over the generality of an often cited curvilinear "U" shaped relationship between stages in the family life cycle and marital quality. In this debate proponents (Aldous, 1978; Rollins & Cannon, 1974; Rollins & Feldman, 1970) argue that marital satisfaction "drops" with the arrival of the first child and continues to decline up to the first child's adolescence when it begins to "increase" as the children leave the family home. These studies indicate that families are most susceptible to stress in the early stages when children require the greatest care (e.g., infancy, preschool, and school age) (Pasley & Gecas, 1984).

Opponents, however, have criticized the hypothesized curvilinear relationship on several grounds. Spanier, Lewis, and Cole (1975) argue that this relationship fails to hold true for data from middle class respondents. Menaghan's (1982) challenge of the curvilinear pattern is based on the rationale that the proposed relationship is derived from studies using cross-sectional rather than longitudinal research designs. It is inappropriate, argues Menaghan, to describe cross-sectional results in language that suggests changes over time (e.g., marital satisfaction "drops" with the arrival of the first child). Other investigators argue
that the life-cycle approach to the study of marital quality (upon which the curvilinear relationship is built) does not appear to have any empirical advantages over the use of separate variables such as the presence and age of children independent of the duration of marriage (Menaghan, 1982).

Given the debate over the methodological issues in the marital quality literature, it is perhaps not surprising that results have been inconsistent. For example, Pasley and Gecas (1984) report a very slight increase in marital quality and satisfaction during the adolescent stage. On the other hand disputes between spouses over child-rearing issues are reported to be more frequent for parents of adolescents (Fisher & Fisher, 1976; Lowenthal & Chiriboga, 1972). One explanation for the apparently discrepant conclusions on the relationship between marital quality and adolescent children may rest in the small number of studies that have examined the marital relationship relative to this specific developmental period. Another reason for discrepant conclusions has been the possibility of confounded results. For example, Koski and Steinberg’s (1990) study of mothers during mid-life suggests that the relationship between marriage and the adolescent phase of the family life cycle may be complicated by the parent’s level of personal mid-life crisis.

These studies highlight the multiplicity of factors that come to bear on the parental experience with an adolescent child. To date the studies fail to present a
clear sense of the relationship between the quality of the marriage and the experience of parenthood during the adolescent stage of the family life cycle. Closely related to marital quality research is research on parental psychological well-being. It is to this research that we now turn for insights into the experience of parenting adolescent children.

**Studies of parental psychological well-being**

Chillman (1980) reports that there is a popular perception that parents of adolescents are more stressed and less satisfied than non-parents. There is evidence in support of this conclusion. McLanahan and Adams (1989) analyzed results from two national "Americans view Their Mental Health Surveys" conducted in 1957 and 1976. They concluded that parenthood in general has negative consequences for some dimensions of subjective well-being, and that these effects were strongest for adults with children at home. On the basis of these data the authors concluded that "Parents with children at home worry more, feel less efficacious and are less happy with their marriages than non-parents" (p.141).

Unfortunately, due to the categorization of respondents in the two "Americans View Their Mental Health Surveys" it is not possible to discriminate between parents of adolescent children and parents of younger school age children. Nevertheless, a few studies have indicated that parents of adolescent children also experience this negative
correlation. For example, Aldous (1978) concluded that parents of adolescents are highly susceptible to emotional and psychological stress. Others have concluded that mothers of adolescents suffer the greatest reduction in their overall mental health (Ballenski & Cook, 1982; Powers, Hauser & Kilner, 1989). Ballenski and Cook (1978) found that mothers felt least competent in their parental role when dealing with adolescent children.

The Pasley and Gecas (1984) study is one of the few studies focussed specifically on the parental experience and to have categorized the adolescent period into an identifiable sub-group. They analyzed data gathered in a 1981 follow-up survey of 208 families. Responses were received from 136 (65%) of the fathers and 149 (72%) of the mothers. Parents were asked to indicate which of seven family life stages was experienced as: (a) the most difficult; and as (b) the best for the individual respondent. The stages were: infant, toddler, pre-school, 6-9 years, 10-13 years, 14-18 years, and 19+ years. For both mothers (61.7%) and fathers (64%) the 14-18 year period was selected as the most difficult stage. The pre-adolescent (10-13 years) and post adolescent (19+ years) were also viewed as difficult stages. These two stages together received another 19.4% of mother’s and 23.5% of fathers choices as the most difficult. Thus, the overwhelming weight of responses in this survey placed the most difficult parenting period in one of the pre-adolescent, adolescent,
and post adolescent stages for a combined total of 81.2% of mothers and 87.5% of fathers.

The survey respondents indicated that the most frequent reason for selecting the 14-18 years stage for both mothers and fathers had to do with issues of independence (26% of the mothers and 42.4% of the fathers indicated that this was the primary reason for difficulty). For mothers "maturational limitations inherent in the child's developmental stage" and "parental loss of control" were given as the second and third most frequent reasons (19.0% & 18.1%). For fathers "personal social reasons" were given as the second and only other consistent reason for selecting the 14-18 years stage as the most difficult. For both mothers (34%) and fathers (25.7%) the three youngest stages (infant, toddler, and pre-school) received the strongest preferences as the best stage.

Other studies of parental well-being have targeted the transition years into adolescence and have concluded that the normal changes (biological, cognitive, and social) in the young person "may contribute to at least temporary detrimental consequences for parents' sense of well-being" (Silverberg & Steinberg, 1990, pp.658) (see Hill, 1980, for a review). Parental well-being appears to be moderated, however, by the parent’s investment in paid work. Those parents with a strong investment in paid work appear to be more favorably disposed to signs of transition into adolescence. For those parents with a weak orientation to
work there is a negative association between transitional signs and parental well-being (Silverberg & Steinberg).

As stated at the beginning of this section on studies of parental well-being the research tends to support the popular perception that parents of adolescents are more stressed and less satisfied than non-parents. There is, however, evidence that contradicts this general perception. Chillman’s (1980) study of 454 predominantly white, middle class, suburban residents (261 mothers and 193 fathers) revealed that the majority of parents defined themselves as "mostly happy" in their roles as parents. Further, 62% of the mothers and 62% of the fathers reported that their parental roles were the most important aspect of their lives. A further 35% of both mothers and fathers reported that their parental roles were as important as other aspects of their lives. Although it was reported that 50% of the parents in the Chillman study had children in the older age ranges (e.g., 6-11 and 11-18 years), it is unclear whether the positive satisfaction results were distributed equally across all age groupings.

What do these studies reveal that assists in the current effort to explore the lived experience of raising adolescent children? Several indications appear to be of significance. There appears to be strong but not definitive evidence that these parents are experiencing more anxiety and less efficacy in relation to their parental tasks (McLanahan & Adams, 1989). It appears that economic strain
and personal demands will correlate with negative psychological well-being (McLanahan & Adams). It appears that parents will identify the 10-18 year period as being more difficult than preceding periods (Pasley & Gecas, 1987). It appears that "issues of independence" will be the most frequently cited by both mothers and fathers as reasons for difficulty, and that adolescent immaturity and parental loss of control will be frequently reported by mothers (Pasley & Gecas, 1987). It also seems likely that those parents with a strong commitment to their work will tend to view adolescent development more positively than those parents who don't have a strong commitment to their work (Silverberg & Steinberg, 1990).

Studies of the parent-adolescent relationship

A fourth area of research that relates to the experience of parenthood during the adolescent phase of the family life cycle is research focussed on the parent-adolescent relationship. In a review of the literature Grotevant and Cooper (1986) suggest that there are three conceptualizations of the parent-adolescent relationship that have guided the research in this domain. The oldest of these holds that it is the task of the adolescent to become independent (usually measured in terms of autonomy) of parental influence, and that the pursuit of that objective precipitates a parental response of excessive control (Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991). Support for this conceptualization is found in sociological studies (e.g.,
Cromwell & Olson, 1975; Jacob, 1975; Rollins & Thomas, 1979), as well as in clinical writings (e.g., Blos, 1979; Haley, 1980).

However, Grotevant and Cooper (1986) argue that both sociological and clinical approaches have methodological difficulties which "slight the important continuities in the parent-adolescent relationship that extend into adulthood" (p. 83). For support of their critique of the "autonomy through independence" conceptualization Grotevant and Cooper cite the studies of Kandel and Lesser (1969) and Cromwell, Olson, and Klein (1975), both of which indicate that the development of autonomy does not necessitate independence from parental influence.

The second conceptualization of the parent-adolescent relationship according to Grotevant and Cooper's (1986) review holds that this relationship remains largely harmonious and continuous in quality from childhood through adolescence (e.g., Offer, Ostrov, & Howard, 1981). Grotevant and Cooper suggest that studies that support this perspective tend to be large survey or interview type studies, and that they tend to de-emphasize real changes that occur in the parent-adolescent relationship.

The third conceptualization of the parent-adolescent relationship is one that incorporates both continuity and change (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986). It posits that the normative parent-adolescent relationship involves an enduring lifelong bond that undergoes significant
transformations at adolescence and beyond (Hill & Steinberg, 1976 cited in Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991). From this perspective the parent-adolescent relationship is renegotiated from unilateral authority to mutuality (Hartup, 1979; White, Speisman, & Costas, 1983; Youniss, 1983; Youniss & Smollar, 1985), and involves a realignment of family ties rather than a severance of them (Steinberg, 1990).

Notwithstanding research focussed on competing conceptualizations of the parent-adolescent relationship other researchers have approached the examination of this relationship with different questions in mind. The domain of focus in these studies has varied. Few studies, however, examining components of the parent-adolescent relationship have looked at the parental perspective (Goetting, 1986). In fact, the literature exhibits a paucity of information on this significant relationship from the adult's perspective (parental satisfaction and well-being studies being exceptions).

Of those domains that have been studied, the effects of puberty on the parent-child relationship has received considerable attention (see Adams, Montemayor, & Gullotta, 1989; Brooks-Gunn, & Petersen, 1983; Brooks-Gunn, Peterson, & Eichorn, 1985; Gunnar & Collins, 1988; Isberg, Hauser, Powers, Noam, Weiss-Perry, & Follansbee, 1989; Lerner & Foch, 1987; Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Steinberg, 1987, 1981). Some of the findings in this literature that are
relevant to the present research on the parental experience of raising adolescent children can be drawn from the review done by Paikoff and Brooks-Gunn (1991). They note that during the pubertal stage adolescents spend less time with their parents (Csikzentmihalyi & Smollar, 1985), are more emotionally distant from their parents (Steinberg, 1987), and are less yielding to parents in decision making (J. P. Hill, 1988; Montemayor & Hanson, 1985; & Steinberg, 1981).

However, Paikoff and Brooks-Gunn (1991) report that "Very few studies have been conducted on children's responses to pubertal change, and none on parents' responses to these changes in their children" (pp. 55). Based on anecdotal evidence Paikoff and Brooks-Gunn conclude that puberty creates discomfort and embarrassment for many parents, and therefore, that parents may be uneasy discussing pubertal change with their offspring.

Among the relevant findings in studies of parent-adolescent conflict are indications of the frequency of conflict. Montmayor (1982) reports increased parent-adolescent conflict in early adolescence and decreased conflict by about age 18. The decrease, however, may be a function of parent-adolescent separation in later adolescence rather than increased parent-adolescent relational harmony (Montmayor, 1983). Although the frequency of conflict appears relatively high — approximately twice per week in a sample of 64 tenth grade adolescents (Montemayor, 1982) — several studies report that this increase in conflict does not indicate a reduction in a strong parent-adolescent affective bond (Montemayor, 1982, 1983; Smetana, 1988a, 1988b). In fact, more recent evidence suggests that as little as 5-10% of all families experience a marked deterioration in the parent-adolescent relationship (Steinberg, 1990). Steinberg and others (Cooper, 1988; J. P. Hill, 1988) conclude that increased conflict may, in fact, serve a functional role in the individuation process when it occurs in the context of a positive parent-adolescent relationship.

Studies on parent-adolescent conflict are of particular interest in the present research effort because they come close to revealing a commonly perceived aspect of the parental experience of raising adolescents. What is the nature of this parent-adolescent conflict? Smetana (1988b) reports that most parent-adolescent conflict revolves around
the mundane issues of day to day life (e.g., "mild bickering, disagreements and conflicts over everyday issues and emotional stress during early adolescence" (p. 79). Paikoff and Brooks-Gunn (1991) describe the most frequent issues to be rules and regulations regarding personal management issues like dating, grades and dress codes. Putting this in the perspective of recent history Montemayor (1983) reports that these are essentially the same issues as have been at the center of parent-adolescent conflict in the North American culture since the 1920s. Interestingly, adolescents perceive conflicts to occur more frequently than their parents do (Smetana, 1988b).

Taken together insights garnered from the parent-adolescent conflict literature suggest that parents in the present study are likely to report increased levels of conflict as compared to previous stages in the family life-cycle and that this conflict will be higher between mothers and their daughters in the early part of the adolescent period (Montemayor, 1982). Further, that for most parents the conflict described will be of a fairly minor nature and not indicative of a significant deterioration of the parent-adolescent relationship. One might speculate from these study results that the parent of an adolescent experiences a higher level of frustration in realizing his/her preferences, particularly in the early adolescent years, in regard to his/her adolescent's personal management. Further, one might expect that as parents become accustomed to the
gradual individuation of their adolescent the nature of the conflict will change and its frequency diminish.

Still other studies have looked at specific aspects of the experience of parenthood (e.g., emotion; see Dix (1991) for an extensive review), but none of these have looked specifically at the adolescent phase of parenthood. In general little seems to be known about the parent's cognitive and emotional experience of being a parent of an adolescent (Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991).

In the absence of such research, people working in the helping professions appear to be left to draw on common assumptions or personal experience to lend insight or support to parents of teenagers. Neophyte helpers are, therefore, at a disadvantage when engaging families involved in parenting adolescents. The present study seeks to assist helpers in this situation by creating a window into the experiential world of the parents of adolescent children.

The present study utilized a phenomenological approach to gain an understanding of the experience of being a parent of a teenager.Specifically, parents were asked to "describe the experience of being a parent during the years in which their children were adolescents". For the purposes of the present study adolescence was defined as the period between puberty and 19 years of age.
CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

Rationale

Several authors (Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi, 1985; & Osborne, 1990) have argued that a phenomenological research design is an appropriate methodology for studying experiential phenomena. Whereas traditional experimental research designs strive for "objectivity" and the discovery of explanatory laws, the phenomenological approach strives for an understanding of the participant's subjective experiences of the world (Giorgi, 1970). From the phenomenological perspective the meaning of certain data (e.g. the nature of an human experiences) can only be fully understood when examined from the subjective perspective of the person experiencing them (Osborne, 1990).

As the objective of the current study was to achieve an understanding of the lived experience of the parents of adolescent children, a phenomenological approach was implemented.

Design

In phenomenological research the researcher and the participant work together to explore the phenomena of interest. In a context of mutual trust and respect the researcher gathers information that seeks to capture the participants' lived "experiences of the phenomena as distinct from their theoretical knowledge of it" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 58). Information about the participants' lived
experience is provided directly from the participant (co-researcher) in as detailed manner as possible. This mutual exploration of the experience is recorded by the researcher and later transcribed. These transcriptions (protocols) are then studied in detail in order to identify the "immanent significations" (Wertz, 1983) of the co-researchers experience. The search for the immanent significations requires that the researcher make explicit meaning that may only have been implicit in the original data. Once the immanent significations of the co-researchers' experiences have been identified they are clustered into general themes that are common with all other protocols.

Co-researchers

From a phenomenological perspective there are only two criteria necessary for the selection of participants for this type of research design: 1) to have experienced the phenomena of interest; and 2) to have sufficient verbal skills to be able to communicate that experience to the researcher (Osborne, 1990). In addition to these criteria co-researchers were selected on the basis of several other criteria specific to the phenomena of interest in the present study. A discussion of the rationale for each of these criteria follows.

Having experienced the phenomena of interest in this study was specifically defined as being the parent of at least two children, one of which was at least 19 years old and one of which was between 14 and 17 years old. The
requirement that one child be at least 19 years old was to ensure that the participants have had the experience of being parents throughout the full age range of interest. However, because the phenomena of interest in this study encompasses a broad time span it was thought that having another child who was still in the mid-range of the adolescent period would help counter any possibility of unintentionally biasing the description of the parental experience through selective recall.

The participation criterion for this study was further defined as inclusive of both genders with a goal of having equal numbers of male and female participants. Current marital status, per se, was not considered as a criterion for participation. However, research (Weissman, Cohen, Boxer, & Cohler, 1989) indicates that the absence of a parental alliance (as indicated by the stable presence of a second parental figure who is actively involved in the parenting process), particularly during the adolescent years, renders a unique experience. For this reason the presence of a parental alliance as defined above was used as a selective criterion.

Procedure

Research participants were recruited through public advertisements placed on public bulletin boards where the researcher expected potential participants to frequent. However, "word of mouth" recommendations through the researcher's network of friends and colleagues provided 9
out of 10 of the candidates for this study. Prospective candidates were given a copy of the public announcement of the study (Appendix A) which explained the purpose and nature of the study, and invited the prospect to call the researcher if they were interested in participating.

At the time of the call, the researcher assessed the candidates' verbal fluency and emphasized that the purpose of the study was not for therapy. Participants were selected on a first come first accepted basis. No prospects were rejected for fluency, but two prospects who called for more information declined to participate.

The study involved an initial tape recorded interview lasting 1.5 - 2 hours, and a follow-up interview lasting 1 - 2 hours to confirm the researcher's perceptions of the first interview, and to validate the themes and note discrepancies. The interviews were from four to ten months apart. Interviews were held at mutually acceptable times and places with the primary criteria being relaxed settings that ensured the participant's confidentiality. Most interviews occurred in the co-researchers' residences.

Bracketing of Presuppositions

Giorgi (1975) notes that it is "the task of the researcher is to let the world of the describer, or more concretely, the situation as it exists for the subject, reveal itself through the description in an unbiased way." One of the means of reducing the level of bias introduced through the researchers own subjective involvement in the
research process is for the researcher to articulate his/her own assumptions about the data in advance of the gathering and analysis process. The following statement of the present researcher's presuppositions were only partially articulated in advance of the data gathering process, but nonetheless accurately reflect the expectations held when the research question was initiated:

Parenting adolescent children is expected to be a multifaceted experience that changes primarily in response to the psychological development of the adolescent, the experience of the parent, and the interaction of these two dynamics over time. It is presumed that the parenting experience reflects a high level of anxiety over various aspects of the adolescent child's behavior and attitudes. Further, that high parental anxiety is common during the adolescent period of the family life cycle in relation to normative adolescent risk taking activities, as well as in relation to the future challenges the adolescent will have to face. It is also presumed that parent-adolescent conflict will be an inherent but not necessarily dominant aspect of the parenting experience. At the same time, it is presumed that parenting adolescents involves the gradual transformation of the parent-adolescent relationship from one grounded in authority to one grounded in mutuality. Finally, the present researcher expects that
parents of adolescents frequently experience a sense of satisfaction in regard to the observed progression toward the parental long term goal of a mature, well functioning adult.

Demographic Information

Ten co-researchers were involved in this study; five males and five females. The five females ranged in age from 41 to 49 years and the five males ranged in age from 43 to 51 years. In all there were 26 children (25 of whom had entered adolescence) in the families represented by the co-researchers (14 sons and 12 daughters). Seven families had a male child as the oldest and three had a female child as the oldest. Six of the co-researchers had three children and four had two children.

The First Interview

At the first interview the researcher took a few minutes to establish a friendly and casual atmosphere to alleviate any participant anxiety (Osborne, 1990). During this time the purpose of the study was reviewed and any questions answered. The participants were assured of the confidentiality of the study, and asked to read and sign the consent forms (Appendix B), one copy of which the participant kept. The researcher then began the interview with the following orienting statement:

As a way of beginning I would like to suggest that you think of this interview as an opportunity for you to
tell me a story about your life as the parent of an adolescent. Maybe the beginning of that story should be at the point when you first realized that you were the parent of an adolescent.

The researcher thereafter allowed the co-researchers to explain their experience as it came to them with only minimal interruptions intended to clarify the story. The interview, thus, remained "open-ended" and "minimally structured" so as to allow the co-researchers to describe those aspects of the experience that were most potent to them. When it appeared that the co-researcher had "run out of steam", the researcher drew on his prepared questions (Appendix C) to help the co-researchers focus on other potential aspects of the experience that were as yet unexplored.

Osborne (1990) points out that phenomenological researchers need to exercise caution so as not to inadvertently lead participants with the use of questions. This caution was kept in mind throughout the interviews. In some cases the co-researchers painfully re-lived certain aspects of their experience during the interview. The researcher attempted to empathically respond to these situations without loosing focus on the depth of meaning that the co-researcher was revealing.

The Second Interview

The second interview lasted from 1 - 2 hours and was also tape recorded and later replayed (but not transcribed)
to assist the researcher in the incorporation of the co-researchers’ feedback. This interview was divided into two sections with the first portion being used by the researcher to clarify issues arising out of the first interview. This involved reading a portion of the initial transcript back to the co-researcher and asking for clarification as to the intended meaning. In some cases the co-researchers simply clarified the specific point as requested. In other cases the co-researchers went on to tell more details about the incident that gave more of a context or flavour for the specific experience. On occasion the request for clarification resulted in an answer that was quite different than expected and several subsequent questions were required to fully explore this new understanding of the experience.

The latter portion of this second interview focussed on a presentation of the identified themes and a joint discussion of their accuracy to the individual’s lived experience. This final aspect of the interview functioned as a validity check of the study results. In phenomenological research validity is measured in terms of how accurately the "essential structure" describes the co-researcher’s lived experience. As further studies of the phenomena of parenting adolescent children are undertaken, the results of this study may be further validated through the discovery of the same essential structure. However, on the basis of an individual phenomenological study the best measure of validity remains the confirmation of the results by those
co-researchers who participated in the initial data collection process.

The development of themes in the present study was a gradual process with some themes not yet fully articulated in advance of the earliest second interviews. However, all themes were presented in their most completely developed form at each successive second interview. In all cases the co-researchers concurred with the essential content of the themes presented in the results section of this study. Some themes were more obvious "good fits" with some co-researcher's experience than others were and during this validation process I noticed that the participants tended to focus their comments on those aspects with which they related most strongly rather than on those aspects which least represented their experience. Examples of this include Sherri's comment which was: "Yeah, I think you've got it. That makes sense, especially the loss of being needed theme."; and Jim's "I think those [themes] are right. I really find the confusion, or bewilderment theme to be true." These validations were important indicators that the identified themes were accurate. Although it is possible that the co-researchers may have been subtly desiring to please the researcher by affirming what they could in the results, this is not considered to have been a significant factor in the strong co-researcher validation achieved. The reason for this is that the methodology employed is intrinsically dependent on a mutual desire (between
researcher and co-researcher) to explore and understand the phenomena of interest. Thus, it is necessary to assume that this interest carries forward to the validation process and that there would be little or no incentive for co-researchers to falsely confirm themes suggested by the researcher as representing the co-researcher's experience.

Data Analysis

As the initial interviews were completed they were transcribed verbatim in preparation for analysis. Pseudonyms were inserted in place of the participants’ real names during the transcription process to ensure confidentiality was maintained. The analytical procedure utilized in this study was a modification of that proposed by Colaizzi (1978) for phenomenological research. The modification of the Colaizzi (1978) procedure was to incorporate the use of computer technology in the analytic process. The researcher utilized a software program (The Ethnograph) designed to speed up the traditional cut and paste process of the analysis procedure. The modified procedure used in this study is delineated below:

1) All transcripts (or protocols) were read once through in their entirety in order to create a sense or feeling for them as a whole.

2) Each protocol was then read again with the objective of identifying each significant phrase or sentence that pertained directly to the phenomena under study. Each identified phrase (or meaning unit) was given a code (or
codes) by which it could be grouped with other similar meaning units. For example in a sentence which read "

3) These codes were then entered into The Ethnograph software program along side the appropriate section of the transcript. As a summary list of all code words generated from this process totaled over 400 codes, an extensive reexamination of this list was undertaken to eliminate redundancy and duplication. The results of this process were then used in step four. For a more detailed explanation of this process see the section titled "Detailed discussion of coding and revision process" that follows this overview of the data analysis process.

4) All similarly coded sections of each transcript were printed and studied together in order to discover the "formulated meanings" of similarly classified meaning units. This was done by going beyond the content of the original data, while at the same time remaining true to it. This process is one in which the researcher sought to include "contextual and horizontal meanings" (Colaizzi, 1978, p.59).

5) By working with the formulated meaning statements generated from similarly coded meaning units from each protocol the researcher reflected on the similarities and differences of these formulated meanings in order to identify commonly shared "clusters of themes." The clustered themes were validated by going back over the original protocols to ensure that each theme was "generated from" rather than "imposed upon" the original data.
6) The second interview occurred at this point to validate the generated themes. Each participant was presented with the findings and given an opportunity to comment on any inconsistencies with their personal experience. This feedback was then incorporated into the final results.

7) The validated themes were then worked together into an "exhaustive description" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 61) of the experience of being a parent of an adolescent.

Detailed Explanation of the Coding and Revision Process

As was outlined in steps two and three of the data analysis procedure, a significant step in the process of identifying the "formulated meanings" and the identification of the "clusters of theme" was the coding of "meaning units" within each co-researcher's protocol. A "meaning unit" is an excerpt from the co-researcher's description of his/her lived experience and is the basis of the analytic procedure. A "meaning unit" could be as small as a few words of a sentence or as large as a few paragraphs. Initially I tended to identify partial sentences as meaning units, but over time I shifted toward full sentences and even groups of sentences as meaning units because of the need to include more contextual information when printing off similarly coded sections for further analysis.

It was frequently the case that a specific section would be given multiple codes. The following excerpt from
the first interview with co-researcher number six has been included below to serve as an illustration of this process.

... but the other thing is the strong expectations from Greg on me through those years of maintaining this perfect family life that we'd had up until this time. But it wasn't happening quite as easily anymore. I mean to get everybody together for dinner every night was a struggle. I was more inclined to just give up and say "Well, they're happy having a craft dinner. What's the big deal? I could make a big dinner and nobody will show up, so why bother?" Um, but for him I think

Code key: # = "family environment", "marriage relationship: expectations", and "expectations".

$ = "family is very complex"

%= "I quit" and "family cohesion lost"

*= "parental effort" and "frustration"

In this example the lines beginning before 2929 and continuing down to 2941 are coded as "family environment", "marriage relationship: expectations", and "expectations". The lines beginning before 2929 and extending beyond 2941 are coded "family is very complex". The lines beginning at line 2929 and going down to 2941 have been coded "I quit"
and "family cohesion lost". Finally, the lines beginning at 2931 and extending beyond line 2941 have been coded "parental effort" and "frustration".

As was noted this coding process generated over 400 codes which necessitated a reexamination to narrow this list to a more manageable size. There were a number of factors that allowed this huge list of codes to be significantly reduced.

In part, the lengthy list was an artifact of the Ethnograph software program. It allows each code to contain a maximum of ten characters and spaces. This limitation meant that the researcher had to create a code (or code word) to represent each of the meaning units identified in the co-researcher’s protocol. Some meaning units could be easily represented with a simple word like "anger" whereas other units were somewhat more complicated to label (e.g., the experience has not equaled parental expectations). As the number of codes increased inaccurate recall of the precise spelling used for the coding of a particular meaning unit sometimes resulted in a new code for an already identified concept. For example, the concept of the loss of family cohesion was initially coded as "FAMCOH LST" and later by error coded as "FM COH LST". Thus, two codes became representative of the same idea.

An additional factor in the generation of such a large number of codes was that occasionally the researcher chose a new code for the same concept without realizing a code had
already been identified for it. An example of this was the use of the code word "LOSS" to refer to the general concept of "the loss experienced as the parent observes the child achieving independence"; and at the same time the code word "LOSSOCHILD" (loss of child) to refer to the same concept. Another example of this double coding of a concept was the codes "FELLOWSHIP" and "MUTUALITY" to identify the transformation of the parent-adolescent relationship towards an adult to adult equality status.

A third factor contributing to the large list had to do with the specificity of the coding employed. In the initial identification and coding of meaning units, I was uncertain of what would eventually constitute a significant meaning unit. Therefore, my tendency was to be overly specific and to label similar but related concepts as distinct codes. Upon reflection these were sometimes more profitably thought of as one concept, or occasionally, as part of yet another overarching concept. As an example, the following codes were all eventually considered to represent one closely related aspect of the experience of parenting adolescents: ANXIETY, ANX:FUTURE (anxiety related to the future), ANX:SAFETY (anxiety related to physical safety), PAR:REVER (parents remain parents forever), SAFETY, DETRIMTLTY (the existence of a detrimental potential in society at large).

After the reexamination process described above was complete there still remained many codes that had not been regrouped. They were left to stand on their own as
legitimate codes for the meaning units they identified. Some of these codes only represented a few excerpts in total from all the protocols. As such they tended to be interpreted as idiosyncratic to an individual experience rather than a component of the phenomena’s essential structure. Greater emphasis was placed on similarly coded meaning units that were found in several or all protocols. In all the process of reexamining the coding of the meaning units reduced the number of distinctly coded meaning units to about 225.
CHAPTER FOUR — RESULTS

This chapter presents the distilled experience garnered from the interviews with the ten co-researchers in the present study. As the phenomenological approach to the study of experience involves a conscious attempt to resist detachment and objectification of the experience from its source, this chapter will begin with a brief introduction to the co-researchers to help the reader connect the observations to the real people and situations that gave rise to them. All co-researchers’ names and any other identifying information have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

Introduction to the Co-researchers

Co-researcher #1

Theresa was 41 years old, and had been married 25 years at the time of the first interview. Theresa has one daughter (20 years) and one son (17 years). Theresa remained a homemaker during her children’s upbringing, including throughout most of their adolescence. Theresa had supplemented the family income for many years by teaching piano out of the home. Theresa espoused a strongly held religious belief system. Theresa’s husband had been stably employed throughout their marriage as a chemical engineer for a large petroleum company. Theresa described her overall experience with raising adolescent children as being one of disappointment that it hadn’t been better than it was. Theresa described her daughter (1st child) as being
significantly more challenging than her son, and as having motivated the family’s involvement in counselling. At the time of the first interview Theresa was struggling with the issue of her daughter’s lesbian lifestyle, with her son’s failure to graduate from grade 12, and with her own direction in life over the coming years.

Co-researcher #2

Ron was 47 years old, and had been married 23 years at the time of the first interview. Ron has three children: a daughter (19 years), a son (17 years), and a daughter (15 years). Ron has been stably employed in the agricultural equipment sales field throughout the marriage. Ron espoused a strongly held religious belief system. Ron’s wife remained an at-home mother throughout the children’s upbringing, but in the last few years has taken on part-time work in order to finance putting the adolescent children into a private secondary school. Ron described his overall experience as a parent of adolescents in positive terms and reported that his youngest daughter was proving to be the most challenging during this phase of parenting. At the time of the first interview Ron described himself as worried about his fifteen year old daughter’s distancing behavior and the number of conflicts that he and his daughter were experiencing. Ron also described increased anxiety over his oldest daughter’s apparent choice of a prospective marriage partner.
Co-researcher #3

Jim was 51 years of age, and had been married 28 years at the time of the first interview. Jim has two sons (23 years and 17 years). The second son was adopted at birth. Jim has been stably employed as a teacher and public school administrator throughout his career. Jim espoused a strongly held religious belief system. Jim’s wife was employed as a teacher, but chose to remain an at-home mother to raise the children, and returned to university to upgrade her teaching qualifications when the second boy was in grade 12. At the time of the first interview Jim described his experience of parenting adolescents in very positive terms. While admitting to challenges during the preceding years Jim did not associate them with either child over the other.

Co-researcher #4

Anne was 41 years old, and 14 years into her second marriage at the time of the first interview. Anne has one son (25 years) who was born when she was 16 years old, and two daughters from her second marriage (14 years and 9 years). Anne had raised her oldest son for nine years as a single parent before her first marriage. Anne was employed as a teacher in her country of origin, but at the time of the first interview she had been working full time as a recreation director for three years and was upgrading her qualifications in that field. Anne espoused a humanistic belief system. Anne’s husband was stably employed. Anne described her experience of raising adolescents as markedly
different due to the time span involved and the distinctness of her relationship with her first child. She described her 14-year-old daughter as being significantly more challenging during the adolescent phase.

Co-researcher #5

Suzanne was 47 years old at the time of the first interview. Suzanne had two sons (19 years and 16 years). She was divorced eleven years prior and remained single for seven years. She entered into a tumultuous relationship with an alcoholic for a short period before entering a stable common-law relationship which she had been in for 3 years at the time of the first interview. Suzanne’s common-law spouse was stably employed and had a good relationship with both of Suzanne’s sons. Suzanne had a Master’s degree and had been employed as a teacher for all of her professional life. Suzanne espoused a humanistic belief system. Suzanne reported her experience of raising adolescents in the most positive terms of all co-researchers in this study, and described neither son as having been more challenging to raise than the other.

Co-researcher #6

Sherri was 49 years old, and had been married 27 years at the time of the first interview. Sherri had two sons (24 years and 19 years) and a daughter (17 years). Sherri is a nurse by profession and worked on a part time basis during the children’s growing years so as to allow her to be an at-home mother whenever the children would be home. Sherri
espoused a strongly held religious belief system. Sherri's husband had been stably employed in the public school system as a teacher and counsellor throughout their marriage. Sherri described the parenting of her oldest son during the adolescent years as having been a very difficult experience. This son was described as having acted out in an extreme manner including running and living away from the family home on several occasions, dropping out of school, and overt rebellion. Sherri described her experience with her second and third children as having been "normal".

Co-researcher #7

Rosanne was 45 years old, and had been married for 24 years at the time of the first interview. Rosanne has three children; a daughter (21 years), a son (19 years), and daughter (15 years). Although trained as a teacher, Rosanne had elected to be an at-home mother throughout her children's growing years and began working on a part time basis in the year prior to the first interview. Rosanne espoused a strongly held religious belief system. Rosanne's husband ran his own small business which had been marginal for a number of years. Rosanne described her experience of raising her adolescents as a symbiotic relationship in which, for the most part, she enjoyed her children's companionship and at times was "carried by them emotionally". Rosanne reported her middle child (son) to have clearly been the most challenging during this period. At the time of the first interview Rosanne was carrying what
she described as a heavy burden of responsibility for her aged mother who lived near the family residence.

Co-researcher #8

Dan was 49 years old, and had been married for 22 years at the time of the first interview. Dan had a son (20 years), and two daughters (18 years and 16 years). Dan had been employed on an inconsistent basis over the years as a skilled laborer (a heavy equipment operator in the logging industry). Dan espoused a strongly held religious belief system. Dan’s wife had been an at-home mother until two years prior to the first interview when she had taken on employment due to economic pressure on the family. Dan reported that he found his second child (daughter) to be the most challenging during the adolescent period.

Co-researcher #9

Bob was 43 years old, and had been married for 16 years at the time of the first interview. Bob had a step-son (20 years), a son (16 years), and a daughter (15 years). Bob’s wife had been previously married and had custody of a son (4 years) at the time of their marriage. Bob had been steadily employed as an engineer throughout their marriage, and at times has had to be away from home for as much as 30% of the time. Bob’s wife was an at-home mother in the early years, but had been working in the banking business for several years at the time of the first interview. Bob espoused a humanistic belief system. Bob described his experience of raising adolescents in two distinct categories. He reported
a tumultuous experience with his step son (the oldest child) which involved significant acting out behavior (including the destruction of a new family car and a separate instance of charges for criminal behavior), and ended in the son's departure from the family home. Bob described the other category of experience as being a very positive and enjoyable "normal" experience along the lines of his original expectations.

Co-researcher #10

Fred was 49 years old, and had been married for 23 years at the time of the first interview. Fred had one son (20 years) and one daughter (17 years). Fred had a Master's degree and had been steadily employed in the technical computer field and computer management field throughout their marriage. Fred espouses a strongly held religious belief system. Fred's wife had been an at-home mother throughout their children's lives, but has also struggled with Multiple Sclerosis and Rheumatoid Arthritis for a number of years. Fred described his experience of raising adolescent children as challenging. He identified his son as being the most challenging to deal with during this phase of his experience. At the time of the first interview Fred expressed concern over his wife's continuing health struggles.

Introduction to Themes

Although changes clearly occur in the adults' lives during their children's adolescent years, these changes
appear to be insignificant in comparison to the rapid and monumental changes that take place in the adolescents' own lives. This is not to claim that parental life changes have no influence on the parental experience during the adolescent phase of the family life cycle, but just to point out that in the present study it appears that it is the changes that are occurring in the adolescents' lives that define this as a distinct period of the experience of parenting.

It is also important to identify the interconnectedness of the many constituents that contribute to the experience of parenting during the adolescent period. In addition to the wide variety of factors which make a contribution to the experience within the family itself, there are undoubtedly numerous societal influences which make the experience during the last eight years (the period during which most of the co-researchers in the present study had teenagers) distinct from another period possibly as recent as only a generation ago.

This research doesn't attempt to offer insight into these larger societal influences, but they are mentioned here to draw attention to the complexity of the question of looking at the experience of parenting an adolescent child. What follows is an explication of the themes determined by the present researcher to be the most reflective of the experience of the co-researchers who participated in this study. Although the constituents of the experience of
parenting adolescent children are presented by necessity in linear and categorical form, it is important to note that they strongly resist this type of delineation. In fact the constituents interrelate and overlap with multiple and subtle nuances that can only be fully grasped by considering them as a whole which is fluid and alive.

The researcher recognizes at the outset of this presentation of results that the very process of trying to capture the essence of the experience of the ten co-researchers has to some degree done an injustice to the depth of the individual story. Each individual's experience of parenting adolescent children remains unique. By careful and persistent reflection on these experiences the researcher has attempted to pass through the details of the individual experience and to grasp the "immanent significations" (Wertz, 1983) imbedded in them; to understand the meaning of each person's lived experience. The researcher acknowledges this level of understanding is a goal which may not have been fully achieved in examining the complexity of each co-researchers experience; that apparently idiosyncratic elements of their experiences may, in fact, have unrecognized general meaning for the experience of parenting adolescents.

Although every phrase of each protocol was coded and then examined together with similarly coded segments from both the individual and grouped protocols, not all coded segments were incorporated into the formulated meanings and
themes. Those discarded were either redundantly coded (the use of two codes capturing the same or similar concept) or were considered too trivial or obscure to offer substantive meaning to the parenting experience. The present research yielded seven dominant themes in the experience of parenting adolescent children; several of these themes have been subdivided into subthemes in order to explicate the constituents that contribute to the fullness of each theme.

Summary of Themes and Subthemes
1) The experience of the loss of being needed or wanted
   * The experience of the loss of dependency
   * The anticipation of the empty nest
   * The experience of loss of the sense of cohesiveness of the family unit
2) The experience of bewilderment
   * The inability to understand the emergent adolescent
   * The experience of uncertainty over the correct response to problem situations
3) The search for confirmation of reality
4) The experience of the transition of power
   * The loss of agency over developmental outcome
   * The experience of ambivalence
5) The experience of disappointment and frustration
   * Disappointment with the self
   * Disappointment with the child
   * Frustration related to self-centeredness and immaturity of the adolescent
* Frustration related to adolescent closed mindedness
* Frustration related to loss of agency

6) The experience of anxiety

* Anxiety over the loss of being needed or wanted
* Anxiety in relation to the experience of bewilderment
* Anxiety related to the transition of power
* Anxiety related to disappointment and frustration

7) The emergence of mutuality

* The uneven progression toward mutuality
* The discovery of common ground
* The experience of fellowship

Explication of Themes and Subthemes

Theme: The Experience of the Loss of Being Needed or Wanted

The results from this study indicate that the parenting of adolescent children involves an ongoing and progressive experience of a sense of loss of one’s historic role in the life of one’s child. There is a loss of a sense of familiarity in the parent-child relationship. Initially, this loss is experienced in the relatively narrow context of life before the adolescent period. Over time, however, it takes on a broader context of life with and without dependent children.

The nature of this loss experience remains fluid, both within and across co-researchers, throughout the adolescent period. Three constituents of this loss experience were identified in the present study: the loss of the child’s
dependency on the parent; the anticipation of the "empty nest"; and the loss of a sense of family cohesion.

Sub-Theme: The Experience of the Loss of Dependency

In this study the co-researchers reported that prior to the period of adolescence the parent had been proceeding along more or less unrestricted in the project of guiding one’s child towards maturity. To the parent there was a kind of positive dependency about this process. During the adolescent period the parent becomes cognizant of a shift in the child’s preference to spend more time with his peers and away from the parent. The following excerpt from Sherri’s interview captures the profoundness of this experience and the parental feelings associated with this loss of being important in the child’s life:

... you know from elementary school and up to adolescence the kids are very keen to have you there all the time; to verbalize all their little ups and downs and whatever is going on in their lives; to share everything - I mean if you don’t share it, you feel like you’re neglecting them. They’re wanting to give all [their] time to you and then there comes this stage where all of a sudden you’re not important anymore. Their friends are important and you’re just the idiot sitting there that’s good for a meal or two and some clean laundry, ‘but don’t interfere with my life’, and I think that’s a really difficult stage to go through as a parent of an adolescent.
The loss of dependency, as previously known, marks the end of something that the parent enjoyed, the end of a positive reliance on the parent. It also introduces a kind of "stepping out" as the child starts to exercise his/her independence; it marks a beginning of the realization of his/her own distinct path in life. As such, it initiates a sense of "separateness" that has both present and future characteristics.

Sub-Theme: The Anticipation of the "Empty Nest"

While the loss of dependency is a very present loss of the familiar sense of connectedness, it is simultaneously experienced as a foreshadowing of things to come. It predicts a time when the child will be "free standing", no longer dependent on the parent. Thus, there emerges on the horizon of the parent's consciousness a new awareness of the temporality of the parental role. For the parent there is a sense of time marching on; of the inevitability of something negative. For Suzanne this new awareness came to her on the very first occasion she realized that her child was becoming more independent. In her words:

... it was like them really opening their wings and getting away from me and it sort of gave me a taste of the fact that it was going to be more like that - up to the time when they would live somewhere else and I would lose them.
Another constituent of the experience of loss is found in the parent’s sense of loss of the cohesiveness of the family unit. In the preadolescent phase the parent was able to maintain a sense of family cohesion through the sharing of fun times together. During adolescence, however, the parent finds this increasingly difficult to orchestrate. Sherri stated, "there was a loss of enjoyment of the family unit because my son was separating himself from that." As an example, Sherri spoke about her family’s annual Christmas holiday out of the city (which included alpine skiing; an activity enjoyed by her oldest son):

When it came time to go [my oldest son] was quite adamant that he wasn’t going. He had Christmas parties to go to with his friends. ... he was still only 13 or 14 and we compromised and let him stay at home for a day or two extra to cover whatever activities he had going on, and then he took the bus up and joined us. But ... he was there under duress. So that was sort of a real turning point in terms of family activities. We had pretty well always been able to, you know, enjoy things together as the five of us.

Dan spoke about the loss of family cohesion in the adolescent period by contrasting it to the preadolescent period in which his children enjoyed parental company:

... when they’re little kids, ... they always want to be with you, they want to ride with you, up town and
wherever dad went and things like that. And after they become independent they want to stay home and hang around with their friends ... I'm a family oriented person, you know, the whole family being together, ... and so, I've had to learn to let go.

Fred described in disbelief how his 17 year old son resisted a first time opportunity to go to Hawaii on a family trip:

... We found ... we had to force [our kids] to do things. Believe it or not, at the age of 17 [my son] decided he wasn’t going to come [to Hawaii]. 'I don’t want to go.' Can you imagine a kid not going to Hawaii?

Another way in which family cohesion is lost is in the disappearance of family routines. For Sherri there was a tension between her husband’s pressure to maintain shared family meal times and the amount of effort expended in its pursuit.

... [my husband wanted the maintenance of] this perfect family life that we’d had up until this time. But it wasn’t happening quite as easily anymore. I mean to get everybody together for dinner every night was a struggle! I was more inclined to just give up and say 'Well, they’re happy having a Kraft dinner. What’s the big deal?’ I could make a big dinner and nobody [would] show up, so why bother?

With the arrival at adolescence the young person begins to branch out from the family unit. Activities with friends compete with family activities, and the adolescent begins
making explicit their preference to be with others. Ron stated: "...throughout adolescence that happens, their friends take them away from you and consume more of their time ...." Some parents indicated that they deliberately maintained weekly family evenings in an attempt to maintain the cohesion of the family unit. Others invested in new recreational equipment to increase the adolescent’s incentive to "opt in" rather than "out". Taken together the constituents of the loss of dependency, the realization of the coming ‘empty nest’, and the loss of family cohesion intermingle to create the theme of the loss of being needed or wanted in the child’s life. In themselves these constituents fail, however, to complete the picture of this experience of loss. Additional aspects of this experience will come to light under other themes.

**Theme: The Experience of Bewilderment**

The parents of teenagers in this study revealed that parenting during the adolescent years also entails the experience of a sense of bewilderment. This bewilderment experience is discussed in terms of two constituents, but to emphasize the interconnectedness of them they are illustrated as two aspects of an analogy that came to the researcher’s mind as he was reflecting on the co-researchers’ protocols. The first constituent of the experience of bewilderment is an inability to understand the "emergent adolescent" and the new reality the parent and the child share (this constituent is described using the
analogous experience of buying a foreign car). The second constituent is the uncertainty over the correct response to presenting problem situations (this constituent of the experience is explicated using the analogous experience of driving in a thick fog). An explanation of these constituents follows.

Sub-Theme: The Inability to Understand the Emergent Adolescent

The co-researchers in this study experienced a reduced ability to understand their children during the adolescent period. With pronounced changes occurring in the child’s life there is a loss of familiarity with the young person’s inner world. New behaviors are hard to understand. Ron reported that:

There wasn’t the same closeness, like, at other times [my daughter] would go to her mother and kiss her and show her affection and so on, but all of a sudden in front of her peers that wouldn’t be there, and that wasn’t her natural self...

The adolescent’s tendency to psychologically distance him/herself leaves the parent less confident in their relationship with their child-come-adolescent. The parent feels out of touch with the child even though still living in close proximity. Ron’s description seems to accurately represent the psychological distancing that contributes to the experience of bewilderment:
there are times when it becomes more difficult to communicate with them. They may close up, they may be quiet, or become a bit more moody, ... or just go to their room and study and not have much interaction.

The parent struggles to make sense of the reality that he is sharing with the adolescent child. It is a struggle that derives from the parent's discomfort with bewilderment because bewilderment represents a loss of predictability in the relationship with the child. It also represents a loss of a sense of agency to guide the child's development (see "transition of power" theme). Because "understanding" is perceived as the other side of the coin of "bewilderment", the parent pursues understanding in an attempt to regain the lost sense of predictability and control.

In their search for understanding parents look at their own and their partner's personal and family histories for genetic or sociological connections to current adolescent behavior. While explaining how they struggled to understand their son's lack of interest in academics, Fred said:

... and neither of our parents ever had trouble with us studying or those kinds of things. And so, we assumed that our children would be somewhat like that and that was [what baffled us], 'Where did we get these kids?' You kind of look at your family and you find that there's brothers and sisters, and aunts and uncles that had some of these traits so the first thing you have to do is come to grips with [that] ...
As is indicated each parent processes the experience of bewilderment according to their own personality strengths and weaknesses. Nonetheless, processing bewilderment remained basic to the experience of the parents in this study.

The following analogy may be helpful to capture the nature of the parental experience of bewilderment during these years. It is an analogy that came to the writer's mind while reflecting on the parental experiences with their children getting their driver's licences. As adolescent licence getting was a component of every co-researchers' parental experience, the following car analogy struck the writer as a particularly representative illustration for this period of family life cycle. The analogy is that of someone, with no previous experience driving a car with a standard transmission, inheriting a foreign made sports car with the steering wheel on the opposite side of the car and equipped with a standard transmission. While in the midst of traffic the person is so preoccupied with the basic functioning of the car and the road immediately in front of and behind him/her that he/she is incapable of identifying where he/she is at the moment, nor even the direction of travel with any precision.

In the following excerpt, this foreign sports car analogy can be seen to apply to Theresa's experience with her adolescent daughter's dress code:
For some reason she couldn't seem to understand that a clothing allowance would allow [her] to buy some items, and she could have had some clothes that she wanted. It took us about two years to figure out that she thought that we wouldn't spend enough money on her to buy the kind of clothes that she wanted ...

For most of the parents in this study bewilderment was experienced most potently with the first adolescent. It is with the first child that the parents "cut their teeth" with every new developmental stage. It is with the oldest child that there was the greatest tendency to ask "Is this the normal experience?" Continuing with the foreign car analogy it is as if the parent studiously reads the foreign car's owner's manual in order to know how the car operates and then proceeds to start the car. At first every sound is unfamiliar. Questions like "Is it running right?" and "What's that sound?" are followed by "How do I get it moving?" which is then followed by "Why did it stall when I let the clutch out?" After many stalls the car owner and car become familiar with each other's idiosyncrasies and travelling becomes smoother.

The foreign car analogy can be further utilized to illustrate the unique aspect each adolescent child brings to the parental experience. Driving one foreign car does not equate to driving all foreign cars. Nor does the owner's repair manual for one car necessarily teach the operator very much about the next car, even if it is the same model
made by the same company in a later year. In this regard Sherri described how bewildered she was with the arrival of her third child (first daughter) into the adolescent period:

The changeover from being involved in everything in elementary school to not wanting to do anything extracurricular in junior high was hard for me to understand, because I’m a fairly outgoing person and I assumed because of her past history that she would tend to carry on being that way.

Indeed the parents in this study were uniformly clear that their experience with each foreign car was unique; each adolescent brings a new experience to the parent. In Ron’s words:

... every child is different and they are all individuals ... we have found in our experience that we can’t treat [them all the same]; each one has different experiences ..." (and a little later) " ... as I was saying earlier ... each child is different from the others ...  

And in Sherri’s words:

You can’t treat all your kids the same ... it just doesn’t happen. I mean you may love them all whatever the same means, but your responses ... their reactions and your responses are all so different.

The experience of bewilderment is, however, not a uniformly anxiety provoking experience. For parents with a good sense of humor (and for those who regain it from time
to time) there is entertainment to be found in the irrationality of one’s child’s behavior (in terms of the foreign car analogy learning to drive on the opposite side of the car can be fun - given the right personality and situation). With obvious amusement Bob described how his 15 year old daughter would come home and say: "Do you know what what’s her name said to me today? Well, I’ll never speak to what’s her name again." And only a short interval later: "Oh, what’s her name and I are going to a movie tomorrow."

Still, for most of the co-researchers their bewilderment over their adolescents’ behavior was often a little too "close to home" to be funny (for most people, learning to drive a foreign car remains a stressful experience). For example, Anne’s 14 year old daughter was being so obstreperous that Anne hesitantly said "I could almost say that [I don’t] like her very much and that’s a awful thing to say." At the same time Anne’s daughter could sit down with Anne’s peers when they came over to visit and be the epitome of a mature adolescent. Anne’s response?: "God, is this the same child? It’s just like two different personalities almost ...."

The predominantly negative experience of bewilderment is further exemplified in this excerpt in which Theresa described her experience of having both her children commence smoking during their adolescence in spite of the presence of cancer in the family, and strong parental resistance to it:
I cannot understand why people who are fairly intelligent can't figure out that when your parents tell you that this aunt ... and you know [what] the reason for this person having cancer is ... and it's in the family ... you really shouldn't risk your life.

Returning again to the foreign car analogy, driving a standard transmission sports car - with the steering wheel on the opposite side - for the first time evokes a definite sense of disorientation that can be likened to dealing with an adolescent family member. Things are not the same, and getting anywhere involves changing one's habitual way of doing things, or encountering real (and possibly serious) problems. To complicate matters, even when one makes changes in style the parent finds that the route to be traveled often remains unclear.

Sub-Theme: The Experience of Uncertainty Over the Correct Response to Problem Situations

The second constituent of the experience of bewilderment is found in parental uncertainty in the handling of problem situations. The parents in this study were keenly cognizant of the higher risks inherent in the adolescent period (see anxiety theme). This awareness appears to add to the difficulty of responding to the new situations encountered in adolescence. The parents deeply desire to handle problem situations in such a manner so as to communicate respect for the adolescent's personhood without sacrificing their parental goal of desired behavior.
These sometimes conflicting goals accentuate the parental uncertainty about how to proceed. In response to the confusion felt over the clothes situation previously described Theresa emphatically stated that the question on her mind was: "What is it that I need to do?".

This heightened sense of uncertainty contrasts against the pre-adolescent experience when questions were perceived to have self-evident answers. Referring to parenting during the adolescent period Fred said: "You truly are groping in the dark ...." Then, in comparison to his "groping in the dark" experience with adolescent children Fred described his pre-adolescent experience of parental clarity:

In preadolescence it was more [like] Frances [Fred's wife] bringing information or I would bring some information and that was it. There was basically no reason to have long discussions on what we should do next or how we should do it. It was very natural and easy, like [it was just] the parent's role.

As was previously stated the foreign car analogy for the theme of bewilderment was the creation of the researcher while reflecting on the co-researchers' protocols. The decision to use this analogy to explicate the theme of bewilderment was guided by the fact that it applied to both constituents of the experience. The experience of uncertainty over the correct response to problem situations is analogous to the new sports car owner embarking on a trip, in the first week of owning the car, in which he/she
must attempt to travel down an unfamiliar road in a heavy fog. The parent of an adolescent finds that while still feeling unfamiliar with the new car he/her is confronted with challenging situations never heretofore encountered. Along the way the parent reads whatever road signs he/she finds time to see to help guide him/her to the destination. Some travelers carefully seek advance information on the unfamiliar route. In Fred's words:

[my wife] and I did go to quite a few seminars on parenting, listening to James Dobson, all of his films right on parenting and adolescence. We listened, read books and magazines ...

However, some travelers (co-researchers) reported that they carefully prepared in advance for the trip only find themselves disappointed by incorrect information and false advertising. Needless to say these travelers were more than a little disappointed once 'en route'. This was Theresa's experience in relation to her adolescents' smoking behavior:

... [my daughter] insisted on smoking ... and I was adamant that she wasn't going to smoke. They lied in the book you know. They told us, they told parents that if you didn't smoke the chances were that your children wouldn't smoke, and that's rubbish. Both of our children have smoked ...

If the analogous car owner gets lost on the road, he/she stops at the nearest informative looking place for directions. Fred reported asking friends "How do you deal
with this?" in regard to his son's defiant behavior. Four out of ten of the participants in this study reported pursuing formal counselling help in dealing with difficulties related to the parental experience of raising adolescents. For one family "stopping for directions" came too late with the adolescent choosing to permanently park himself in another garage (see Bob's overview on page 48 - co-researcher #9).

There are many natural turns in the road and some highway changes to negotiate as the parent proceeds toward his/her destination. Occasionally the fog lifts and the decisions become easier, but more thick fog often awaits just around the next curve. For most parents in this study the trip was a series of trial and error ventures. In this excerpt Fred described his bewilderment in negotiating through the fog as he attempted to understand how his interventions were connected to the responses observed:

... some [of the decisions you made would] give you the wrong results, or maybe the opposite results of what you thought. Like, before when they were seven years old, you would say, "I don't want you to touch that" and that was it. Now, all of a sudden, you say, "Don't touch that" and that's exactly what they would do.... [and so] you try to learn from that, [but still] some reactions I could not figure out at all. I didn't have a clue. Sometimes both of us had no clue why that reaction.
To complete the analogy for bewilderment it can be said that at best the parent successfully negotiates the course and both driver and car make it to the end destination running smoothly. At worst there are serious accidents with fatalities. Unquestionably the most common scenario in this study were collisions with varying degrees of seriousness; some of which were minor while others may still require years of reconstructive body work to correct. The results from this study indicate that throughout the trip the parent continues to learn about the new car and how to get the best performance from it, as well as about some of the hazards on the route they are traveling together.

Theme: The Search For Confirmation of Reality

According to the results of this study the parental experience during the adolescent period involves greater uncertainty (see the bewilderment theme), less control (see the transition of power theme), and more stress (see anxiety theme) than in previous periods of the family life cycle. The interactive effect of these themes generates in the parent a heightened desire for confirmation of his perspective on, and approach to, difficult situations. Further, persistent adolescent challenging and the potential for serious consequences arising out of errors in parental judgement combine to undermine the parent’s historic sense of confidence.

The co-researchers in this study described new adolescent abilities and an emergent sense of identity as
combining to facilitate challenges to the parent's perspective of the world and how it should be organized. Anne described how her daughter persisted in arguing her perspective to the point of parental exhaustion in the following words:

... boy, she can debate and she never takes no for an answer, you know, it always just goes back and forth and, you know, [my daughter] in never wrong. It's always us. ... It's an absolute nightmare. I mean it really is difficult because she can argue with you back and forth to the point where in the end you don't know anymore what really was said at the beginning of the conversation, because she just argues and discusses - not discusses, but she argues - argues to the point where she is blue in the face!

When adolescent challenging reaches new highs and crises actually occur the parent finds him/herself carefully reviewing his/her positions and approaches taken, and in a sense "second guessing" him/herself. This process was explicitly discussed by several participants in the present study. The following example arose when Fred's son ran away from home for 3 days in response to a dispute over curfews and other basic rules of the home:

... we [went] through an analysis of [our rules]. Which rules were really essential? Which rules were sort of just our feelings? ... We really had to apply some
logic to it. Does this rule make logical sense or is this just a family ... tradition?

In both the normal and the crisis situation the parent of an adolescent functions within an environment of increased dissonance. The parent attempts to resolve this dissonance by continually scanning the horizon for signals that would confirm the parent's perspective on reality. In the above crisis between Fred and his son, Fred validated his perspective by noting that both his son's teachers and coaches were reporting difficulty in dealing with the son's defiant attitudes. In Fred's words:

You can go and talk to his teachers.... And his coaches noticed his rebellion.... The coaches would come to me and say 'Look, I had to get down on your son, so I hope you don't mind.' I would say, 'Oh no, no, were going through something the same at home as well.'

After Sherri's son had run away from home one of her friends called up and supportingly said that she had misinterpreted previous "off hand" complaints by Sherri about her son as just jokes. To Sherri this call was a confirmation of her perception that her son really was behaving terribly. In Sherri's words:

... the mom came by one day to pick up [my son's] friend and I was kind of groaning [and] I [said]: 'You know, I'd like to stick him in the (laughing) deep freeze for the next four years and then pull him out and have him all together.' So, when [my son] ran away
she phoned me up and she [said]: 'I thought you were just joking!' She had no idea how rebellious and defiant [he] really was I don't think. So when he took off she said: 'I thought you were just making a joke, but I can see you were really stressed.'

The search for confirmation of reality relates to the parental desire to employ the right solution to problem situations. This desire was referred to in the bewilderment theme as the analogous task of watching for the road signs while driving through the thick fog on the unfamiliar road. To utilize this analogy yet again the parent, while driving remains somewhat unclear about the various shapes seen in the fog. The parent is cognizant that making steering corrections when there is no need to correct can be just as dangerous as not making steering corrections when there is a cow on the road.

Most drivers in heavy fog look for the tail lights of another vehicle, preferably a large truck, who is traveling at a safe speed to follow through the fog. The tail lights of the leading vehicle mark the route ahead and also provide advance warning of the need to stop. In this way some of the parents in this study reported utilizing the experience of those that had recently gone before them. In the following excerpt Fred described his response to a period of heavy fog in relation to his son's 3 day absence:

... so one thing we did a lot of was talk to our home fellowship [group], a lot of them had experienced
exactly the same thing so they gave us some good advice and a lot of prayer.

In the day to day context of life, however, the parent is forced to carry on with or without the desired confirmation that her perspective is the correct one. The results of this study indicate, however, that parents continue observing the outcome of their decisions in an ongoing attempt to determine their correctness. For example, Jim described an incident in which he and his wife felt the need to make a decision for the benefit of the family even though it was opposed by their two adolescents. Looking back on the decision almost 5 years later Jim concluded: "I would say it was a difficult decision. Now ... in retrospect, I think it was the right one."

Theme: The Experience of the Transition of Power

At the commencement of adolescence the parent remains largely in charge of the child’s life. Through his or her legitimate position of authority the parent has functioned as the primary agent of influence in the child’s development. At the end of the adolescent period the "child" has by and large taken charge of most of the decisions pertaining to his life. The "transition of power" theme represents the parental experience of moving from the first scenario to the second. There were three constituents to this experience which were identified in the present study: the loss of agency over the developmental outcome; the
experience of anxiety (which is specifically addressed under the theme of anxiety); and the experience of ambivalence.

Sub-Theme: The Loss of Agency Over Developmental Outcome

According to the co-researchers in this study parents of adolescent children find themselves in a phase of their lives in which real power is increasingly handed over to, and/or yanked away by, their children. This process introduces the experience of a loss of agency over those factors which are perceived to contribute to the developmental outcome of the parenting project. Until this stage of the family life cycle the parents reported enjoying what they perceived as a high degree of influence over their child’s developmental outcome; a sense of control in the ability to resist undesired attitudes and activities while encouraging desired ones. Accordingly Dan described his sense of agency with his preadolescents in terms of "control":

I think when they’re twelve and under it’s easier. It’s a lot easier. ... You seem to have ... your opinions and you’re sort of in control and they’re obedient and everything....

In Suzanne’s experience the beginning of the transition of power was observed in the subtle way her sons began informing her of their plans instead of conferring with her about them. It is noteworthy that she too refers to this in terms of control:
[Before] they would go for a sleep over with their friend, but it was not the same, it was not ... 'I am going out, and I will be back when I will be back' type of thing. In other words I had much less control over their decisions, as to when they were coming back.

As this writer reflected on the nature of the "loss of agency" constituency, it struck me as being similar to that of an artist observing someone else modifying his/her creation. The parent has not only given the child life, but also carefully nurtured him or her through years of open dependency. To the parent the child is the product of his or her continuous creative efforts. Upon further reflection the work of a playwright appeared to best capture the essence of this aspect of the transition of power experience. It is as if the parent were the playwright, and his/her child the lead character in his/her play. Through the writing of the play the playwright develops the desired character she wants by adding and removing supporting actors.

In this analogy the adolescent period of the family life cycle is the setting for the play’s production. During the production of the play the lead character is empowered with a directorship role. Initially, the neophyte actor/director is tentative and relies heavily on input from the playwright. However, soon the actor/director begins making changes to the sets and script in accordance with his or her artistic tastes.
The playwright often doesn't like the changes nor the new direction he/she sees these changes taking the whole production. The playwright experiences anxiety about the potential failure of the production (see the anxiety theme), and in the back of his/her mind lies the knowledge that his/her own name will show up wherever the production is put on; as such, the production will be seen as a reflection of the playwright's work. There is the occasional battle of artistic wills with the new director, but the playwright recognizes (even if reluctantly) that there is a new authority on the stage; an authority with whom the playwright must sooner or later come to terms.

Dan's experience as an analogous playwright watching the new director of his play is captured in the following words:

... You've always made the decisions up until they get into the teenage [years] for them in every way and then all of a sudden you're realizing that 'Wow, they've got to make choices - right or wrong - themselves, and that's a hard place to let go.

In this analogy, as with life, the playwright has been in the business much longer than the actor/director and has experience which gives him or her greater insight than the neophyte. He/she has a good sense of what will work with an audience and what won't. However, with the loss of the directorship, the playwright realizes that he/she no longer has the right to speak uninvited to issues on the new
director's stage. Anne experienced this frustration in seeing the actors in the play changed against her will in relation to her daughter's choice of friends. Anne felt they were clearly having a bad effect on her daughter. In her own words:

[But] you have to accept whoever they hang out with because if you don't, then you're a real jerk! You have to accept it and you have to just make the best of it; like with this Benjamen kid, you know. I thought he was totally impolite, he had no manners, and ... he was a little jerk, but I couldn't tell [my daughter] that because she would have just ... [been] resistant and ... just going and wanting to be with him even more.

From the parent's perspective the interpretation of the "transition of power" as a "loss of control" experience derives not from a need to control the child's every move, nor from a deep distrust in the child's decision making abilities. Rather, it is birthed by a profound desire to see the child realize the best that life has to offer which entails having the good fortune of avoiding a multitude of pitfalls that would interfere with that goal. The parent is hesitant to get out of the director's chair because of fears the production will fail and the young actor/director's career will be forever stained. The further the parent steps away from the director's chair the greater his or her anxiety.
Sub-Theme: The Experience of Ambivalence

In this study the experience of ambivalence was an important constituent of the "transition of power" theme. For the parent it was the "transition of power" that most acutely represented the releasing of the adolescent to function in the adult world. It was in the outward symbolic accomplishments of getting a first job, a driver's license, a girl/boy friend, or graduating that the parent experienced the greatest confrontation with the reality of the child's growing up.

It was in the context of granting the child the next level of responsibility that the parent most profoundly felt the struggle between holding on and letting go. From the parent's heart there is a sense in which the parent says "I should hold on because I can make better decisions, drive better, plan better, and avoid the many hazards that still lie ahead for my child." From the parent's head there is a sense in which the parent says "I should let go because I know that my child has his own lessons to learn, his own dreams to chase, and his own life to live." It is a gradual and ongoing transition of power in which ambivalence rises and subsides with each new freedom granted.

The transition of power facilitates the movement toward independence, but it also has implications for the parent's sense of being needed in the child's life. The transition of power creates the opportunity to make meaningful decisions, but carries with it the probability of real consequences for
those decisions. In the following quote, Dan’s admission reveals the ambivalence in releasing real power for decision making to the adolescent child: "They’ve got to make choices - right or wrong - themselves, and that’s a hard place to let go."

Intellectually, the parent is fully aware that this transition of power is a natural and necessary aspect of raising children, but it is still felt on an emotional level as well. Suzanne verifies this in her comment about the inevitable departure of her sons from the family home:

"It makes me sad when I realize [that they will leave]. But at the same time it is not my role to prevent them from opening their wings and so on. ... there is the reality that I have to let them spread their wings and let them go, but at the same time I think ‘Oh God, I am going to miss them.’ Yes, I am going to miss them. This is what I feel the most."

**Theme: The Experience of Disappointment and Frustration**

The descriptors "disappointment" and "frustration" represent slightly different emphases of one part of the experience of being the parent of adolescent children. While each term has its own meaning in the co-researchers’ lived experiences they share enough in common to be discussed as one theme. To refer to the experience of parenting adolescents with the term "disappointment" points to the failure to realize the parental expectations or hopes for this phase of the family life cycle. To similarly employ the
term "frustration" points to the realization that all one's efforts, however vigorously or persistently applied, have been ineffectual.

In the following discussion disappointment will be subdivided into two headings: disappointment with oneself; and, disappointment with the child. After that, there will be a delineation of the constituent of frustration which will be subdivided into three headings: frustration related to adolescent self-centeredness and immaturity; frustration related to adolescent closed mindedness; and, frustration related to the loss of agency.

Sub-Theme: Disappointment With Self

In the present study the parents of adolescents shared the experience of disappointment in regard to both the "self" and the "child". In regard to the "self" most parents implied their disappointment with their performance as a parent of adolescents in readily admitting to having made numerous errors. It seems that every parent had aspired to higher ideals than they managed to achieve on a day-to-day basis. Jim stated that there "is a lot of things you'd like to do over again." Ron stated his sense of disappointment a little more explicitly in these words:

...but I always feel that I haven't done enough, you know, that I haven't handled certain situations the way I should have, and which at times ... have created more conflict because of my nature.
Bob described a situation in which his stepson of 13 years was recklessly driving the brand new family car and had an accident that destroyed the car. Following the car accident the son decided to leave the family home and live with his natural dad with whom he had had minimal contact. In the end Bob’s experience of disappointment was deeply personal; in his mind the disappointment rested on his own performance as a father. In his own words:

And the way he walked out the door. I felt a real failure. I was a failure. There he goes out the door.... From my point of view, after 14 years or whatever it was, I failed in my job and my duties. Here he is walking out the door to his natural father. It was my failure. I didn’t consider him a failure. He was going to go on to do wonderful things in his own way.

Sub-Theme: Disappointment With the Child

Parents of adolescents also shared the experience of disappointment in their adolescent children. There were many idiosyncratic expressions of disappointment with adolescent children, their specific behaviors, and their attitudes; but only a few were expressed by all co-researchers. This section will deal with these few most commonly shared disappointments with adolescent children.

Always present in the consciousness of the parents of this study was the strong desire that regardless which career path their child takes he would be happy in it. In Theresa’s words:
I don’t care what [my son] does for a job, but I would like him to be happy; I’d like him to be able to earn enough money to feed himself and whatever family he has, and to do something that makes him happy with his life.

For the parents in this study the route to a satisfying career and happy adulthood was perceived to pass through the door of education (and usually post high school education). Because of the meaning given to success (or more importantly to failure) in this area, the parents reported that they were diligent in monitoring their adolescents’ academic performance. Failure in this area invoked disappointment for the parent because it foreshadowed the unlikelihood of attaining expectations and hopes for the adolescent’s future. In Sherri’s words:

In our society today the opportunities aren’t there unless you do the basics and so that’s, I think, my disappointment in [my oldest son]....

For Sherri her oldest son’s failure to achieve "the basics" in education was especially disappointing because she felt he had the greatest natural talent: "I think of all of our kids [the oldest] has been the brightest and he’s done the least with it academically."

Another common experience of parental disappointment in the child was found in the adolescent child’s overt violation of significant parental rules of behavior. Parental disappointment in this area is perhaps to be
expected given the adolescents normative tendency to push against boundaries. According to these co-researchers one of the tensions that the parent of an adolescent lives with is that while they are attempting to cooperate in the gradual transferral of power to the adolescent they cannot be guaranteed that the child is ready for the power being granted and will handle it responsibly. Occasionally, of course, the child abuses the trust invested in him/her resulting in the experience of disappointment for the parent.

In this regard, it is interesting to note that four parents in this study (Theresa, Suzanne, Bob, and Fred) reported that one of their adolescents (all males) caused significant damage to the parent’s car while driving recklessly. In one such incident Theresa’s fifteen year old son took the family car for a drive and accidently ran into the back of a truck. Theresa’s feelings went beyond disappointment to a sense of betrayal:

I really felt, you know, I really felt betrayed by that. I did not expect that a child that we had been, you know, fairly disciplining in one area, but allowing him to learn to drive [at the cabin] earlier that sixteen years old and encouraging ... [his] adventuresomeness and [his] wanting to learn more and everything. I think it’s - I felt they should be more glad that we had allowed them to do that and not take advantage [of it].
The tendency to experience disappointment with one’s adolescent was tangible enough that one of the co-researchers offered a rationale for it. Ron pointed out that, as a parent, he holds an "ideal" in his mind for what he would like his child to be like. Unintentionally, explained Ron, this ideal becomes a standard by which he measures his child, and by which his child, of course, always fall short. Ron concludes:

So, often it happens, instead of encouragement, you condemn your children. You say 'Oh, why didn't you do that?'; 'Why didn't you do this?'

Sub-Theme: Frustration Related to the Self-Centeredness and Immaturity of Adolescents

As suggested previously the parent of an adolescent is immersed in the parental project of nurturing the child toward the end goal of a mature functional adult. As required in our criteria for the experience of "frustration" he has vigorously and persistently applied himself to this project from the child’s birth. This study indicates that during the adolescent period the parent watches for indications that these efforts have been effectual. Failure to detect such indications increases parental anxiety that the parent has been ineffectual in the parenting task. Actual contrary indications begin to confirm one's ineffectualness and nudge the experience of anxiety toward the experience of frustration.
One of the prominent contrary indications of the achievement of the end goal, according to the co-researchers in this study, is adolescent self-centeredness and immaturity. Indeed, Sherri concluded:

... that it takes a lot to catch their attention because I've come to the conclusion that adolescents are the most self-centered people in any stage of life (laughter). It's got to be adolescents because they are so focussed on themselves ...

Theresa came to a similar conclusion in regard to her daughter's single minded focus on her own agenda. Theresa stated:

[My daughter] gets an idea in her head and she just runs for it. She doesn't think about the people around her, and that has tended to be a sore point with me because I like to consider how this is going to affect other people, especially those members of the family.

Parents of adolescents also share the experience of being frustrated with their child's failure to assume self-responsibility. Adolescent spontaneity to the parent means that the child remembers important plans or information at the last possible minute resulting in the additional parental efforts such as driving the child around to collect forgotten books and the like in order to meet school deadlines or other goals the parent otherwise supports. Although the parent has long since learned how to conserve valuable resources of time, energy and money by thinking
ahead the adolescent hasn’t yet fully integrated these concepts into his patterns of living.

Sub-Theme: Frustration Related to Adolescent Closed Mindedness

In university the student enroled in the second year is referred to as a sophomore which is a word coming from two Greek words: "sophos" (wise) + "moros" (foolish). The implication being that the second year university student has a little bit of knowledge (and so thinks he is wise) while still actually having lots to learn (and so is actually still a fool). It is said that the sophomore is both dangerous and irritating because he/she thinks he/she knows far more than he/she really does. In an analogous way the term of sophomore would seem to be a useful one for describing the parental experience of having an adolescent child.

As previously noted the parent finds the adolescent more forcefully expressive of his/her will than the preadolescent was. The parents in this study reported attempting to engage their adolescents with meaningful dialogue, but found the adolescents often unwilling to settle differences of perception on purely rational grounds. For example, Anne said this in reference to her daughter:

I mean it really is difficult because she can argue with you back and forth to the point where in the end you don’t know anymore what really was said at the
beginning of the conversation, because she just argues
... until she is blue in the face.

In this study the issues over which parent and
adolescent perspectives differed were, of course, numerous
during these years, but as already suggested academic
performance was a common one. Jim reported his frustration
with his son’s closed mindedness as it surfaced in relation
to the academic area with these words:

[My son] hates math and sciences and I think allows
[his] attitude toward those subjects to defeat himself.
And ... sometimes he’s quite stubborn about his views.
And it’s hard to be able to dialogue with him and share
with him what you see as being some of the root causes
when he won’t accept it. So [that is] some of the
frustration [you experience as parents]....

In this study the adolescent’s openness to discuss
issues could be characterized as changeable. Thus, the
parents found that they had to know when the adolescent was
open and an issue was still worth pursuing and when the
adolescent had already finished listening. In other words
the parent of an adolescent becomes aware that although the
child may still be present physically he may no longer be
engaged in the discussion. An example of the parental need
for a sensitivity to whether the adolescent was still
listening is found in this excerpt from the interview with
Fred (the issue as stake was unacceptable behavior when the
son was with his peers):
...so [we] constantly [tried] to preach to such an extent that ... [his] reaction became '[you’re] always preaching' and then [he would] shut down, like the system of listening shuts down and you’ve lost [him] as well. So then you get this fine balance ... of saying enough to get the message across about what happens if you go and let this peer pressure get to you and all this kind of stuff, and yet not enough so that they turn off because at that [point] you’ve lost also. So, you walk this fine line ...

Sub-Theme: Frustration Related to Loss of Agency
The third and related element of the experience of frustration had to do with the parental loss of a sense of agency. In order to draw out the essence of this experience and to facilitate the reader’s integration of the themes I will draw upon the analogy used in the earlier discussion of the "transition of power" theme. Specifically, under the heading "the loss of agency" I suggested that the parent could profitably be likened to a playwright whose child is the lead actor. It was suggested that during the adolescent period the lead actor is granted the joint role of actor/director.

To further this analogy in the current interest would be to suggest that upon seeing the new director making changes to the script and even to the characters, the playwright attempts numerous direct and indirect avenues to get the director to see the errors of these changes. He/she
attempts this by speaking with the new director as an advisor, as a mentor, and even as the playwright with a legitimate legal stake to contend with. He/she also contacts some of the other actors to get them to influence the new director’s decisions, and he/she even approaches the underwriters to get the performance delayed. In the end the playwright realizes that each and every effort has been ineffectual at making the new director follow the original script for the play.

For each of the parents of an adolescent in the present study there were moments or periods of exasperation; of being thwarted at every attempt to move the parenting project along toward the end goal. Anne’s experience with her daughter’s choice of friends became an experience of frustration when she realized that she couldn’t even comment on these friends without aggravating the situation. In Anne’s words:

[This friend] was totally impolite, I thought, but you know I could never tell her that because I knew she would just be resistant and ... just ... wanting to be with him even more.

Implied throughout this discussion is the fact that underlying the parental experience of disappointment and frustration is an emotional investment in the life of the child-come-adolescent. The parent nurtures expectations and hopes for both the adolescent and the parent/adolescent relationship. The very fact that these are experienced as
expectations and hopes defines their nature as something not yet realized, something yet to come. As such, they are inseparable from the experience of anxiety to which I now turn.

**Theme: The Experience of Anxiety**

Although it is hereby asserted that anxiety is an integral constituent of the experience of parenting adolescent children, the results of this study do not imply any suggestion that anxiety is exclusive to this phase of parenting. While the experience of anxiety is likely a universal prerogative of parenthood, the nature of the experience during the adolescent period is nonetheless deemed to be distinct. The following excerpt from Suzanne’s interview explicitly states this frequently implied message from the co-researchers in this study:

> You know, I think this is the thing that has to be said about parents in general, whether [their kids] are small or teenagers, [when] you get a child you get at least 20 years of non-freedom, basically, or worry .... The concerns or worries are about all kinds of things, the worries are just different, they are just different. When they are tiny you don’t want them to get sick, you know, when they are teenagers you don’t want them to be in a car accident but the worry is still there. ... that is the price you have to pay for having them I think.
It was stated earlier that the various constituents of the experience of parenting adolescent children are intertwined to such an extent that, examined separately, a full understanding of them remains illusive. It was suggested that only by integrating these constituents while reading can the reader overcome the linearity of the presenting format and get a sense of the fuller meaning of the experience of being a parent of an adolescent. The theme of anxiety is presented at this point to reiterate the interwoveness of the whole. In this section the experience of anxiety will be discussed in relation to some of the preceding constituents of the experience of parenting adolescents.

**Sub-Theme: Anxiety Over the Loss of Being Needed or Wanted**

"Anxiety" permeates the experience of the loss of being needed or wanted in the child's life. The child's historic dependency has been perceived as positive because of the parent's deep concern for the well being of the child in both the present and the developmental sense. The child's emerging independence gives rise to parental anxiety about whether the child is ready to displace the parent in running his own affairs.

Within this loss of role experience the parent becomes acutely aware of his own inability to guarantee that the child's social situations will be safe ones. Dan articulated this sense of anxiety in reference to his children being on the roads at night:
... when they’re doing things and they’re getting independent and they’re wanting to stay out late at night, out to twelve or one o’clock (and they’re with good people) ... you spend a lot of anxious moments. They’re out on the road and they’re travelling quite a bit ... and you know of accidents, and all of a sudden they’re an hour or two late. You are very anxious to see them come home. ... [you’re] sort of letting go and yet you don’t really want to let them on their own [because] you’re realizing that something could happen in their lives. They could be taken from you.

The loss of being needed or wanted by the child initiates in the parent a horizontal awareness of the temporal nature of his own parental role, and points to a future time when the parent will preside over an "empty nest". Some participants in the present study reported experiencing a more profound sense of anxiety in relation to this than others. The following quote captures Theresa’s sense of "crisis" arising out of an awareness of this coming reality:

It’s really too bad that parents are often in a mid-life crisis themselves [during adolescence], like I don’t want my children to be gone from home. I love my children. I only ever wanted to be a mother. That is what I wanted to do with my life. ... (a few seconds later) ... I’m in a crisis because my kids are leaving home and I’m trying to be allowing that to happen, but
knowing that it kills me. I’ve been wondering what I’m going to do with the rest of my life....

While reflecting on the first occasion that Suzanne realized that her sons would some day move out on their own, she said:

It made me feel a bit anxious and sad because I enjoyed my children very much and the prospect of them moving away or having a life of their own and leaving the nest is a bit of an anxiety because I do enjoy their company a lot. It makes me sad when I realize that it will happen.

One of the occasions when Dan experienced heightened anxiety in relation to the loss of being needed or wanted came when his last child reached the age of sixteen. Of this occasion Dan said:

You realize that, wow, hey, you know - no more have we got babies - and you sort of start thinking ‘wow, are we ever aging! Our kids are growing up and everything and soon they’ll be leaving home.’ - and you’re almost anxious to hold them back.

Anxiety was also experienced in relation to the loss of family cohesion. In the preadolescent context the self-contained family unit interacted with the community according to its own preference and parental anxiety was minimalized by the level of supervision over one’s children. In the adolescent phase the co-researchers reported that the family unit is fragmented and that the parent looses the
element of control over the interaction with the community. This heightens the parental awareness of the detrimentality that one's child is becoming increasingly exposed to.

Sub-Theme: Anxiety in Relation to the Experience of Bewilderment

According to the co-researchers in the present study the experience of anxiety is intimately associated with the experience of bewilderment. For most of the participants the experience of bewilderment as discussed earlier appeared to function as a pathway to anxiety. Regardless of its cause, the parent's inability to disperse the fog of bewilderment creates an opportunity for anxiety to catapult from the horizon into the foreground of the parent's consciousness.

During adolescence the parent observes new behaviors, but is frequently unable to fully access their meaning because of the adolescent tendency to withhold information about his inner thoughts. Lacking understanding, the parent naturally reads into the silence his/her own interpretations of the bewildering behavior. Accurate or not, these interpretations provide the material upon which anxiety feeds. The following example from the interview with Suzanne is helpful in demonstrating this point.

In her interview Suzanne noted how she was careful to respect her adolescent son's privacy (e.g., "I have not asked [about their dating] because I don't believe in poking into the life of the kids."). At the same time she admitted to expressing anxiety about the possibility that one of her
son's might be a homosexual because he showed no interest in girls (e.g., "... he was only going out with boys, with friends of his. Up to one point I said to [my life mate] 'God, I hope [my son] is not homosexual.'"). Suzanne further reported that her anxiety was relieved when her life mate said: "Well listen I live with him and I don't think you have anything to worry about." From this one can see that Suzanne's experience of bewilderment over her son's failure to date combined with her own speculations contributed to her experience of anxiety.

Overtly negative adolescent behavior provided yet another source for bewilderment and anxiety. For some of the parents of adolescents in the present study extremely aberrant behavior from their adolescent gave rise to a sense of self doubt. I refer again to the situation with Bob's 16 year old son (step son of 13 years) destroyed the new family car. Bob described his thinking processes as follows:

... as he put it, proudly or facetiously, 'As they put me in the ambulance, the cop gave me a ticket for speeding.'... afterwards, you get him home, you try to get back to sleep, there's a letdown. I felt very empty, that something like this should happen. you blame yourself. I blame myself. ... you wonder if maybe, well, that inner anger of his, frustration in life. Life could have been different for him; Either without me around or maybe if I would have treated him [differently] ...
For the parent fortunate enough to escape self recrimination, the parent's inability to understand or to provide plausible explanations for extreme behavior opens the door to the parent's worst fears. For example, Sherri's professional experience as an emergency ward nurse and personal exposure to her brother's schizophrenia came together to fill the void created by her bewilderment over her son's behavior. Sherri painfully explained that in the course of dealing with her oldest son's extremely defiant and irrational behavior, she could no longer hold the parallel between her son's behavior and her brother's schizophrenia at bay. As unpleasant as this possibility was to her she could find no other explanation more compelling. In her own words:

... in the course of this period [of extreme behavior] we were involved with my brother who is schizophrenic and he ... um ... [holding back tears] God, this is heavy duty stuff coming up here ... Anyway, while we were dealing with his schizophrenia and all his paranoia and his lack of insight and all the things that go along with that ... um ... we were watching this kid with a lot of [now crying] similar traits ... so, underneath there's always the fear that, you know, maybe [my son] was going to be schizophrenic. I mean it doesn't always show itself until late teens and early twenties.
Possibly the most common experience of bewilderment amongst the participants in this study was in the search for the right solution to the difficulties they were forced to confront. Rosanne reported an experience of coming to the sudden realization that her 14 year old son was out of control, and both physically and emotionally separating from the family. Returning momentarily to the foreign sports car analogy from the bewilderment theme, it was if she suddenly came into a fog bank and was in an instant acutely aware of the danger her new car was in, and completely ignorant as to how to negotiate the road safely. In her words:

There was this one night and [my son] was out [in the community] and we just really realized that he had just changed over night and I didn’t know what to do and I was in a state of panic ... It was kind of ‘What are we going to do with this kid?’ He’s going from a really good kid overnight. It’s just like his temperature had shot up ... phoom. Overnight! ... I was really scared.

As was stated in the discussion of the bewilderment theme, the experience of bewilderment represents a loss of predictability in the relationship with the child. In this loss there is an absence of security that births a new and multifaceted experience of anxiety. It was also suggested in that discussion that the loss of predictability contributes to the parent’s sense of a loss of agency over the development of the child. A discussion of how anxiety relates to this loss of agency follows in the next section.
Sub-Theme: Anxiety Related to the Transition of Power

The inevitable transition of power, whether it be handed over or taken, causes the parent to experience anxiety over his/her child’s readiness for the responsibilities that accompany the desired new freedoms. Although all co-researchers in this study viewed the transition of power as a positive and necessary step toward adulthood, anxiety remained about the adolescent’s preparedness for the challenge.

It appears one of the most powerful symbols of the transition of power for many parents is the achievement of a driver’s licence. In the following excerpt Ron’s words demonstrate his dual concern about safety and the acceptance of the responsibility of driving:

[my son] was more adept at learning to drive than [his sister] was and it came to him a bit easier but ... the same concerns are there. You know, the aspect of safety and that type of thing, and that he’s handling it properly instead of abusing the privilege of having a license. You’re always worried, you know, you worry about that to a certain extent when they’re out.

Fred also commented directly on this aspect of parental anxiety as it relates to the transition of power:

The one thing I never had was the fear of him not being able to drive well. That is one fear when they first start driving - ‘Can they drive in traffic?’ And number two is ‘Will they take responsibility when they are
driving?' Like, 'Are they going to get all their friends in and [do something stupid]?'

According to the results of this study the parents also share a sense of anxiety over whether their adolescent is mature enough to be able to resist negative pressures and temptations from his/her peers. The earlier quote from the interview with Anne showing her concern over her daughter’s choice of friends adds significance to this excerpt about peer pressure:

...[my daughter] for example, she is a follower. You know, if we don’t help her get through this time – which I think is pretty difficult for her too because of peer pressure and all kinds of things – she could be in trouble.

As has already been suggested in the discussion of the sense of loss of family cohesion, during the adolescent phase of the family life cycle the parent develops an increased consciousness of potential detrimentality that threatens the completion of the parental project. Without regard to having had direct contact with this detrimentality the parents in this study were anxious about a host of temptations or outright dangers that their adolescents were being exposed to.

It would not serve any function to generate an exhaustive description of this detrimentality, but a brief listing of the more frequently shared issues causing anxiety to the parents in this study may be helpful. This list
included: experimentation with drugs and alcohol, and especially in combination with driving or riding in cars was revealed as a clear source of anxiety; physical safety while driving; exposure to the random violence of others; engagement in sexual activity, and especially in an aberrant form and/or with pregnancy or disease consequences; academic failure resulting in lost opportunities for a happy future.

Sub-Theme: Anxiety Related to Disappointment and Frustration

The experience of anxiety in relation to the theme of "disappointment and frustration" can most profitably be understood in terms of the potential failure to realize parental dreams and hopes for both child and parent. The experience of anxiety in this context is the parent wrestling with the questions "What if my goals for this situation are not achieved?" and "Why is my son/daughter working against the achievement of this goal?". In this study these appear to be implied rather than explicit questions on the hearts of the parent of an adolescent.

Theme: The Emergence of Mutuality

According to information gathered from the participants in this study, parents of teenagers observe a gradual transformation of the parent-child relationship throughout the period of adolescence. "Emergence" represents a movement toward a time when the relationship will rest on the new foundation of mutuality. It is not the fulfillment of this mutuality because mutuality by definition implies an
equality which is not characteristic of the parent-child relationship during the adolescent period. In this study it was discerned that there was notable variance in the rate and the degree of mutuality achievement during the adolescent period. Also, the emergence of mutuality was notable in its occurrence towards the end of the period of focus in this study. Three aspects of the parental experience of the emergence of mutuality in the parent-child relationship are discussed below: the uneven progression towards mutuality with the individual child, the discovery of common ground, and the experience of fellowship.

Sub-Theme: The Uneven Progression Toward Mutuality

To the participants in this study the emergence of mutuality in the parent-child relationship developed unevenly across the various aspects of the relationship. Parents reported that they began relating to their adolescent more like an adult in some areas well before they did in others. The parent does not appear to plan this movement towarded mutuality first in one domain of life and then in another. Rather, it appears to almost sneak into the relationship without the parent really being aware of it until they look back on it. In the following quote, for example, Fred noted with curiosity how he relates to his children both as "child" and "peer" at the same time:

It's interesting how part of you deals with your child as a peer and part [of you] deals with your child in a parent-"child" relationship. ...you begin to realize as
a parent that with some areas you deal with [them on a] purely peer to peer [basis] and you can now give advice but you can’t preach and [set rules], and partly as a parent you’re [still] setting rules …..

Sub-Theme: The Discovery of Common Ground

Another aspect of the emergence of mutuality in the present study was the parent’s discovery that the child’s core values about life had, after a period of uncertainty, come to resemble those of the parent. Until adolescence, the parent feels that the child’s values have been more or less determined by the adult, but it is not until at least adolescence that the parent can see if these values will be integrated into the adult personality. The sharing of common ideas and values creates a new experience of partnership in which the members can conjointly look at a situation and discuss it as peers. Theresa explained how the similarity of her and her son’s way of seeing the world fostered their "friendship". In her own words:

... he is more like me, he is more like my side of the family. I can see a resemblance in the attitudes that we have, the way we approach life. ... so he often says things that I agree with or whatever, and that makes it easier earlier for us to be friends.

In the following quotation Jim expresses satisfaction over this sense of "shared values" when he describes how he and his wife vicariously participated when each of their sons undertook to go on short term summer mission trips:
[We] had a sense of fulfillment, gratification that they were picking up on values that we both see as being right. Both physical/temporal/social values in helping people, [and] ... spiritual/religious values and beliefs; and they would follow through on that. That is part of the desire of being a parent. That you would instill in your children a set of values that you believe are right and important for the welfare of society.

Sub-Theme: The Experience of Fellowship

The parents of adolescents in this study reported that one of the more positive aspects of their experience during the period of focus in this study was the joy of fellowship. While seemingly contradictory to previously discussed themes (for example, frustration), this aspect is nevertheless reported by participants as a legitimate constituent of the experience of being a parent of adolescent children. Children, during their teenager years provide parents with a level of companionship that they were previously incapable of. In contrast to how Bob enjoyed his two youngest as young children he said:

I’m enjoying them as people. These are great kids. They’re not kids anymore. Adolescents. We are really having a good time. They’re great to be around. I love coming home to see what’s happening in their lives. Fellowship occurs in positive shared activity. Even the normally independence focussed adolescent occasionally
welcomes the parent back into his life. Anne’s pleasure in reporting such a moment amply expresses this experience:

... when [my 14 year old daughter] brings a friend over and she includes me ... that is a great feeling, when she says ‘Oh, hey mom do you want to watch this movie with us?’ or whatever. That is a great feeling that ... that’s very important to me when that happens. ... So then when the kids come or even when I drive her friends home or whatever and she just sort of includes me in what goes on ... its just great!

But, to the parent cognizant of it even fellowship has an element of foreshadowing in it; an awareness that this positive "in house" togetherness is time constrained. Suzanne explained that her experience of loss was so potent to her precisely because she enjoyed so much the fellowship of her adolescents. In her words:

I enjoyed my children very much, and the [prospect] of them moving away or having a life of their own and leaving the nest is a bit of an anxiety because I do enjoy their company a lot. It makes me sad when I realize it will happen.

To the parent of the adolescent, cognitive development is like a double-edged sword. That which allows adolescent to be more capable of strongly and persuasively arguing his/her point of view also makes him/her more capable of positive adult to adult conversation. Dan described how
having adolescent children filled a need for extramarital adult to adult interaction with these words:

[Since the kids have been adolescents] I don’t have one guy that’s a friend, that I’m really close to. Before that I always did. ... I had a friend who was really close that I spent a lot of time with and that but now I feel more [inclined] to spend more time talking with the kids because I can talk on their level and you know they’ve become my friends as well as my family. ... I used to always look for a friend and I had one close friend around my age to share things with but now I can share a lot of my personal feelings, even my frustrations with my job, with the kids and just tell them that ‘I’m sharing but don’t get over anxious, don’t worry about it. It’s just my feelings and that.’

**Exhaustive Description of the Experience**

As outlined in the procedure section the goal of the phenomenological method of study is the achievement of an "exhaustive description" (Colaizzi, 1978) of the phenomena of interest. The following exhaustive description delineates the "fundamental structure" (Colaizzi) of the experience of being a parent of an adolescent child.

The experience of parenthood during the adolescent period of the family life cycle is distinct from previous periods of parenthood. It marks the beginning of the end of the parenting project as it has been lived. Parenting adolescents a complex time involving many changes in the
parents' perception of the child, as well as in the relationship they share. It is the experience of a prolonged period of transformation in which the parent progressively loses his/her traditional parental role and takes on a new as yet unclear role. For most participants it is the experience of an emerging awareness of one's own inevitable progression in life.

The experience of being a parent of adolescents is the experience of the dual loss of a sense of closeness with the inner world of the child as well as with the physical presence of the child. It is the experience of bewilderment over new behaviors, their causes, and their meanings. It is the experience of uncertainty over the correct way of responding to new and sometimes difficult situations. It is the experience of disappointment over wrong decisions made and opportunities lost by oneself and one's child. It is the experience of frustration over the ineffectualness of one's efforts, and the uncooperativeness of one's offspring.

Parenting adolescents is the experience of anxiety as the parent becomes increasingly aware of his/her lost ability to protect his/her child from the detrimentality of the world; to ensure the child's choices are wise; to ensure her friends are positive and his academics are successful; and to ensure the successful developmental outcome of the parental project. It is the experience of the loss of the parent's positive sense of control over his/her child.
The adolescent period of the family life cycle is a time of cautiousness for the parent. He/she parents in a context of increased dissonance and tends to spend more effort searching for confirmation of his/her perceptions of reality. It is a time of ambivalence for the parent; there is a tension between letting go and hanging on. At the same time the experience of parenting adolescent children is a time of graduation to new levels of accomplishment and symbolic adulthood. It is a time of movement toward mutuality; of increasing consultation as opposed to direction.

In summation the experience of parenting adolescent children is all of the above combined in an intricate and complex manner which is even further complicated by marital, personality, and cultural dynamics not explored in the context of this study.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The present chapter will review the purpose of the study, articulate its limitations, discuss its results, and conclude with a discussion of the counselling implications arising out of the study.

Re-statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to delineate the "immanent significations" (Wertz, 1983) of the experience of being the parent of adolescent children. This goal was pursued in cooperation with ten co-researchers who attempted to render a faithful description of the experience as they had lived it. The question that guided this study focussed on the "what" of the experience rather than the "why" of the experience: what is the nature of the experience of parenting an adolescent child? Through the pursuit of the "what" of the experience the investigator has sought to open a window of understanding into the experience of parenting adolescent children.

Limitations of the Study

This study was based on a phenomenological research design which utilized the co-researchers' self report as the primary source of data. As such the study is limited to what the participants were capable of remembering and describing about their experience. As the period over which the co-researchers were asked to reflect was a continuous and prolonged one (up to twelve years for one participant), it
cannot be presumed that all aspects of the experience were equally available to each participant's memory. However, this limitation was somewhat alleviated by the creation of a series of questions which were designed to assist the co-researchers to explore the parental experience as comprehensively as possible.

A second limitation of this study lies in the possibility that an idiosyncratic experience was misinterpreted as reflective of the common experience of parenting adolescents. This difficulty was mitigated against by placing emphasis on those themes of the experience that were shared amongst the co-researchers as opposed to that which was experienced by just one. Confidence in the accuracy of a theme thereby grew as it was identified in the experience of multiple co-researchers.

Another limitation in the present study lies in the lack of generalizability of the results. The validity of the findings apply to the ten co-researchers who were involved in the study. Generalizability is beyond the reach of this one study. These results represent a provisional beginning upon which other investigators can reflect (Colaizzi, 1978). Generalizability of these results must await additional investigation for refinement, clarification, and replication to ensure that the themes identified herein accurately identify the "immanent significations" (Wertz, 1983) of the parental experience of raising adolescents.
Discussion of Results

A phenomenological methodology was employed and resulted in the identification of seven major themes and nineteen sub-themes that were deemed to represent the experience of parenting adolescent children. The findings indicate that the experience of parenting adolescents is diverse and multifaceted; encompasses a significant transformation of the parent-adolescent relationship; and harbors significant personal meaning in the parent’s life. 

The writer acknowledges that in general terms the themes that have been identified in the present study tend toward the negative side of the parental experience of raising adolescent children. Although this is consistent with the bulk of the literature pertaining to raising adolescents, I had personally expected more of a balance than was found in this study. It may be that the long period over which the co-researchers were asked to describe their experiences had some subtle effect on greater recall of negative as opposed to positive experiences. Nonetheless, given the validation of the results received in the second interview process one must trust that the results reflect the experience of the ten co-researchers in this study.

Because there have been few qualitative studies that have considered the parental experience during the adolescent phase of the family life cycle there is a limited basis in the literature for direct comparisons with the findings of the present study. However, it is possible to
draw logical connections between the themes of the parental experience identified in the present study and other studies that have examined specific aspects of parenthood.

Although the focus of the present study was much broader than the somewhat dated debate over the conceptualization of adolescence as a "storm and stress" or "harmonious" period, this debate appears to be an appropriate starting point for a discussion of the present results due to the fact that the parental perspective on this debate has received so little attention. In addition certain elements of the parental experience identified in this study (e.g., the transition of power, the uneven progression toward mutuality, and the experience of anxiety) would appear to relate to the "storm and stress versus harmony" discussion.

In the literature review section it was noted that only recently has the historically dominant psychoanalytic conceptualization of adolescence as a "storm and stress" period been challenged by large scale survey evidence (Steinberg, 1990). As an example of this evidence Steinberg reports that approximately seventy-five percent of families experience harmony rather than stress during the adolescent years.

The results of this study fail to clearly conform to either the "storm and stress" or the "harmonious" conceptualization of adolescence, but rather indicate the existence of a more complex picture. For example, in this
study eight out of ten co-researchers reported having one adolescent who tended to follow the stereotypic "storm and stress" conceptualization of adolescence. Each of these same parents, however, also reported having another one or two adolescent children who the co-researchers described as tending toward the "normal" or "harmonious" conceptualization of adolescence. In both cases the parents admitted to experiencing periods of "storm" and periods of "harmony" with every adolescent child.

Thus, the results from this study would appear, on the whole, to support an alternative conceptualization of adolescence which argues for both conflict and harmony (see Hartup, 1979, Hill & Steinberg, 1976; White, Speisman, & Costas, 1983). From this perspective the parent-adolescent relationship undergoes a significant transformation during these years, but this transformation occurs within the context of an enduring affective bond.

As a further indication of this data's nonconformity to the stereotypic "conflictual" or "harmonious" view of adolescence it is noteworthy that the co-researchers in this study frequently reported that each adolescent brought forward a unique parental experience. While not ignoring such factors as personality and sex differences, these "unique experience" reports highlight the interactive nature of day to day family life. As younger children inevitably become aware of the older sibling's decisions, behaviors, and subsequent outcomes, it is probable that this awareness
influences, for better or worse, how they approach their own adolescent issues.

It is also likely that the parent approaches each adolescent child differently based not only on a different history with each child, but on his/her experiences with the preceding adolescent. These interactive dynamics may help to explain why the co-researchers in this study were cautious to suggest they understood the experience of parenting an adolescent even while living their third such experience.

There is some suggestion in the literature that familial strain is more common in relations between the firstborn adolescents and their parents (Buchan, Eccles, Flanagan, Midgely, Feldlausfer, & Goldsmith, 1988; Montemayor, 1982). Based on the themes identified in this study, this might be understandable. It may be that parents find their first time experience with adolescence (specifically the experiences of "bewilderment", "the transition of power", "loss of dependency", "disappointment and frustration", and "anxiety") more powerful on the negative side due to the higher level of parental uncertainty.

In the present study, however, the eight adolescents defined by their parents as the most challenging were evenly split between the first and later child status. Furthermore, the themes identified herein were drawn from the parents’ experience with all their adolescent children, not just with their firstborn adolescents. The participants in the present
study did not consistently define any one sex or birth order adolescent as being more difficult to raise. Several co-researchers, in fact, stated with equal conviction that either boys or girls were more difficult. This researcher's perception was that for those who had an opinion on the matter the individual's experience seemed to conform to the perception of the experience of others.

One remaining uncertainty in the mind of the researcher that may impact the reader's conclusions about the "storm and stress verses harmony" issue is whether or not the co-researchers have an unintentional bias toward the recollection of negative experiences. This question arises out of the general observation that the co-researchers seemed to have greater difficulty recalling positive parental experiences than they did negative ones. Due to the nature of the present study which asked the co-researchers to reflect back over a prolonged period this question remains a more potent one than it may be in other phenomenological studies. For this reason it may be advisable in future studies to use some type of positive memory prompters (e.g., photo albums which presumably record positive events in a family's history) to alleviate this situation.

The results of the present study are consistent with the findings of Smetana (1988b), and Paikoff and Brooks-Gunn (1991) which indicated that the conflict that occurs between parents and their adolescent children usually revolves
around the mundane issues of day to day life. Even in extreme cases of direct rebellion the participants in this study indicated that such behavior still centered on the adolescent’s refusal to accept parental direction over such personal management issues as dress code, curfews, and academic performance.

The results of this study suggest that the reason for conflict surrounding these mundane issues of personal management have to do with "the transition of power" theme. To the parent, adolescent independence in any area (e.g., dress code) is more than just a matter of taste; it represents the child taking over of an aspect of his/her life that was, in previous years, in the parental domain. The present study indicates that this experience tends to be defined by the parents in "loss of control" terms and, therefore, is something to be done slowly, cautiously and even reluctantly.

The present study interviewed only the parents and, therefore, cannot be interpreted to have a complete picture of the parent-adolescent relationship. While acknowledging the findings of Smetana (1988b) which indicate that parents perceive parent-adolescent conflict to occur less frequently than the adolescents do, this study appears, nonetheless, to concur with a number of studies (Montemayor, 1982, 1983; Smetana, 1988a, 1988b) which indicate that increased conflict does not indicate a reduction in a strong parent-adolescent affective bond.
In the present study only two parent-adolescent relationships could be categorized as having totally broken down during the adolescent period; one of those was restored in post adolescent years and one remained estranged at the time of this writing. Further indications of the enduring affective bond between parents and their adolescent children was revealed in the themes grouped together as "the emergence of mutuality". The participants in this study reported that intermittently during the adolescent period and increasingly toward the latter portion of it parents experience a positive sense of "common ground" with their adolescent child-come-young-adult.

The results of this study are also logically consistent with Csikzentmihalyi’s (1985) report that adolescent’s spend less time with their families. In the present study the parental perspective on this fact was revealed in the sense of loss of family cohesion. Although the driving force behind the adolescent reorientation toward peers may well be developmental and cultural (see Kegan, 1982; and many others), the parental experience of it remains a much more personal and symbolic "choice for others over family".

Closely related to the above experience is the parental sense of the loss of the child’s dependency. Steinberg’s (1987) evidence that adolescents become more emotionally distant from their parents is consistent with this theme. It is interesting to note that this one phenomena has such a divergent meaning to the parent and the child. These are
distinctly differing interpretations. When the adolescent "closes off" to the parent emotionally it is a way of solidifying his/her identity (Kegan, 1982). However, the parent frequently enough experiences this as being rejected. They each have personal interpretations, personal meanings which are made out of their own subjective being. The present results should help the counsellor to better understand the meaning making system of the parent of an adolescent child.

Gender Differences

This study was initially proposed to be a study of the experience of being the mother of an adolescent on the assumption that there existed a gender difference in the experience of parenting adolescents and that interviewing all females would allow a more thorough examination of the essential structure of the parental experience of one gender. Prior to commencing the study it was decided to include fathers of adolescents to allow the exploration of the parental experience of both genders. It was thought that this modification would allow the assumed differences in the experience of parenting adolescents to be documented.

The results of the present study, however, did not indicate a gender specific structure for the phenomena of interest. Rather, each theme and sub-theme appeared to accurately describe the essential structure of the experience for both genders. This, however, does not necessarily indicate that the structure of the experience is
identical. It would appear possible, for instance, that whereas both genders experience a given theme (e.g., anxiety) there may be gender specific cognitive pathways that lead to the experience of that theme. Clearly, these differing pathways are speculative and unarticulated in the present data, but logical given the known differences between the genders. In spite of the inability of the present results to identify and describe the nature of gender differences in the parental experience of raising adolescents there appears to be the possibility of doing so in future studies.

Counselling Implications

It is apparent that parents of adolescents are in the midst of a distinct and often unsettling period in the parental experience of the family life cycle. It is a transitional period in the parent-adolescent relationship that has many implications in and for the parents' lives. While many parents take the joys and challenge of this experience in stride without the assistance of professionals, the present study has shown that even amongst those parents who enjoy a supportive "parental alliance" there is a substantial percentage of parents who will seek out the help of an informed counsellor. In seeking such help these parents are looking for validation of their experiences, understanding of their child-come-adolescent, and practical advice for dealing with problematic situations.
The counsellor's task is to provide these concerned parents not only with an empathic listener who accepts and legitimatizes their parental experience, but also to provide the client with educational information about the normative process of the family life cycle and of adolescent development. To this end the effective counsellor will need to be well informed in the area of adolescent psychological development. He/she should also have a current knowledge of enlightening lay level reading resources for parents of adolescents, as well as information on a variety of parent support groups in the local community.

These latter two points are mentioned here in response to McLanahan and Adams (1987) observation that economic strain corresponds to parent's negative psychological well being during the adolescent phase of the family life cycle. This would suggest that the cost of professional help may be a significant deterrent to those parents most in need of support. The provision of low cost support through print media and lay level parent support groups may be the most professionally responsible approach for dealing with some clients.

Another objective of counselling is to assist clients to effectively cope with and grow through the difficult experiences in their lives. One difficult experience for most adults is coping with the reality of the passage of their own lives. It is apparent from the results of the present study that the experience of parenting adolescent
children includes an increasing awareness of the passage of one's life. In this context there is an opportunity for the counsellor to assist clients in acknowledging the inevitable progression of his/her life; in exploring the personal meaning of this progression; and in preparing for the transition to the "empty nest" period of the family life cycle. In addition to competence in basic counselling skills the counsellor dealing with these clients needs to be knowledgeable of "mid-life" and "empty nest" issues.

It is also apparent that the normative parental experience during the adolescent years involves the experience of fairly strong emotions. This study confirmed that some of the more difficult to deal with emotions experienced during this period included anxiety, frustration, confusion, and rejection. For those parents whose adolescent chooses to violate familial and/or societal standards the parental experience of shame and guilt also appear to be common. Further, the co-researchers in this study demonstrated that disclosing these negative emotional experiences can be a difficult and painful process, even in an empathic and supportive context.

Thus, the effective counsellor must be comfortable with the full range of emotions that encompass the parental experience during this period. Whereas the counsellor cannot in good conscience assure the parent in crisis that everything will work out fine, there appears to be solid evidence for holding out this optimistic hope as a means of
helping the parent to secure a broader perspective on the
difficulties at hand. To this end it would appear beneficial
for such a counsellor to be familiar with Montemayor’s
(1982) conclusion that the basic conflictual issues
affecting the parent-adolescent relationship in the North
American cultural context have remained constant since the
1920s.

Finally, one of the distinctives of the adolescent
period of the family life cycle is that adolescents are
undertaking real responsibility over certain aspects of
their lives. In order for this to occur smoothly parents
must cooperate by releasing appropriate responsibilities to
their adolescents. For various reasons some parents appear
to have difficulty with this process. The results of the
present study provide the counsellor fresh insight into the
parental perspective of this transition of power. Being
aware that the parent’s experience may include a sense of
loss of being needed or wanted in his/her adolescents life
the skilled counsellor can gently challenge the inflexible
parent to consider if such unidentified feelings are
coloring his/her judgement.

Practical Implications

This study constitutes an early effort to understand
the lived experience of parents of adolescent children and
its results can only tentatively be suggested as applicable
to the experience of the broader population. To the degree,
however, that these results do represent an accurate
understanding of the essential structure of the phenomena of parenting adolescent children they afford the helper with useful information for working with both parents who of adolescents and also parents of preadolescents. It would be possible, for instance, to use the present results to guide the development of a curriculum for a parenting adolescents seminar.

Recognizing the many benefits of low cost self help and support groups for people facing all kinds of struggles it would appear that the present results could also profitably by used to form the basis for a discussion guide for a parents of adolescents support group. Such a discussion guide could help parents to normalize aspects of their experience that may have previously been misunderstood by themselves or possibly unarticulated for a variety of reasons.

Implications for Further Research

This study has examined the parental experience of raising adolescent children. To my knowledge this was the first study to attempt to examine the breadth of this experience using a phenomenological approach. The results of a first attempt at such a broad experience are of course tentative. They require additional studies to begin the process of validation and, eventually, generalization.

Arising from the results of this study, however, are indications of where additional research is needed. Arising from the recognized limitations of the present study are
suggestions for design modifications that may help future research efforts at understanding this experience. This section will discuss some of these suggestions.

1. In view of the difficulties some co-researchers had in recalling positive parental experiences during the period of interest it may be fruitful to use positive memory prompters (e.g., the use of family photo albums) to assist in the data gathering process.

2. The criterion used for the selection of co-researchers in the present study (e.g., having one child who was 19 years of age or older and having another child who was between the ages of 14 and 16 years) resulted in a group of co-researchers whose perspective of the parental experience may have been unduly influenced by the post adolescent experience. In recognition of this it may be desirable to select co-researchers whose oldest adolescent is still in the period of focus (e.g., under 19 years of age).

3. As it appears that the nature of the parental experience may have some distinct characteristics during different periods of the adolescent stage of the family life cycle it may be profitable for future research to focus on the parental experience of one specific portion of this period (e.g., the parental experience of having pubertal adolescents), or on one specific event or marker during this period (e.g., the parental experience surrounding the attainment of a drivers
licence, or the commencement of dating behavior). Although this narrower focus may lose the complexity of the overall picture, it may produce deeper understanding of the parental experience within these specific domains.

4. The present study focussed directly on the experience of parenting adolescents within the context of a parental alliance. It has been assumed on the basis of the literature that the single parenting experience during the adolescent period of the family life cycle would be unique. This assumption needs to be examined using a phenomenological research design that would attempt to understand the nature of this experience for the single parent.

5. Notwithstanding the fact that one of the criterion for the selection of co-researchers in the present study was the existence of a parental alliance (meaning a supportive adult partner which shared the parental responsibilities for the adolescent children), it is the retrospective opinion of this researcher that the parental alliance formed in a blended family context remains quite likely to be significantly different from that of a non-blended family. Therefore, it would appear to be wise in future studies of the parental experience of raising adolescents to consider these two familial contexts as distinct even when a parental alliance exists in both contexts.
Personal Response to Investigative Methodology

The present study afforded me an opportunity to investigate the question of the parental experience of raising adolescent children utilizing a qualitative research design. As this was my premiere experience with a phenomenological study, both the investigative content and the process of investigation itself provided new insights. This brief section will focus on the personal insights related to the methodological process utilized in this research project.

In deciding on a phenomenological research methodology for this investigation I expected to engage the data more personally than a traditional quantitative research methodologies would allow. However, the reality of this experience was only fully grasped once I was immersed in the process. I was struck, for instance, by how close this methodology brings the researcher to the co-researcher's inner world of experience of the phenomena. As a counsellor interested in the client's perspective of his/her experiences in the world, the phenomenological method of research undertaken herein seemed like a natural extension of my counsellor orientation.

At the same time I was somewhat astonished to discover how easy it was to generate great quantities of data in a single interview while not necessarily generating great quantities of "naive descriptions" of the phenomena of interest. The inherent difficulty therein lies in the amount
of effort required to transcribe and analyze the entire interview in order to identify the significant statements, formulated meanings, and eventually clusters of themes that contribute to understanding the fundamental structure of the phenomena. It is this researcher's opinion that this situation was exacerbated by the long period of time over which the co-researchers experience occurred and the consequently lengthy descriptions recorded in the interviews.

Additionally, my inexperience as a phenomenological researcher resulted in occasionally allowing the interview to go astray of the desired focus. However, I have concluded that the extremely high post data collection effort is indeed integral to the methodology and refinement of the research question and the researcher's interview skills will only moderately influence this aspect of the phenomenological approach to research.

Finally, I found in the phenomenological methodology considerably more ambiguity in the research process than I had expected. This arises out of the nature of the phenomenological approach in that the researcher can vary his/her analytic procedures depending on what is most appropriate for the phenomena under study. Ultimately the goal of the discovery of the meaning of an experience to the person who lived it is of greater importance than the following of rigid procedural rules. I found this freedom to search for the co-researchers inherent meaning an intriguing
and enjoyable challenge. However, there were occasions when I found I wondered whether I was really accomplishing anything, and wished for a more clear cut analytic process. In the final analysis, however, I concluded that the opportunity to examine the meaning of experience of being the parent of an adolescent was well worth the struggles that using an innovative research methodology required.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

Public Announcement of Study
ANNOUNCING

A Research Project Exploring

"The Experience of Being the Parent of a Teenager"

Most books written today about parenting teenagers are written from the perspective of helping parents to deal successfully with the challenges of adolescence. "Successfully" usually means that the child grows up or moves beyond adolescence and into adult type roles and responsibilities.

These are helpful books, but their focus remains almost exclusively on the child with little attention being given to the experience of the parent during this phase of life. Consequently, many parents are left feeling isolated and uncertain about their experience. "I wonder if I’m the only one who feels this way?" is not an uncommon thought. In an attempt to increase our understanding of the experience of parenting adolescents a study is being undertaken.

You can help . . .

... if you are a mother or father who has raised one child through adolescence (who is now 19 years of age or older) and have another child who is now between 14 and 17 years of age.

Participating in this study will involve . . .

... describing to a male researcher what it is like to be the parent of a teenage son or daughter. For example, participants will be asked to help the researcher understand (through describing thoughts, feelings, and events) what it would be like to be the parent of a teenager in the early 1990s.

The study is completely confidential and would require about two hours of your time on each of two occasions. Upon completion the results will be shared with you.

If you, or someone you know, would like to participate in this study or would like further information regarding this research, please call me at the following numbers.

Contact - Dale Wagner
M.A. Counselling Psychology (Candidate)
939-5122 or 420-0761
Appendix B

Consent Form
Consent Form

A Phenomenological Study of the
Experience of Being the Parent
of an Adolescent Child

This study is designed for the purpose of increasing
the understanding of the experience of being the parent of
an adolescent child. The study is not intended to be a form
of counselling or therapy.

The study will involve meeting with the researcher on
two separate occasions (each for a maximum of two hours). In
the first interview I will be asked to describe my
experiences of being a parent to an adolescent child. This
interviews will be audio taped and subsequently transcribed.
All tapes will be erased following the transcription
process. All identifying information will be deleted and my
name changed to ensure that confidentiality will be
maintained.

In the second interview, I will be presented with a
summary of the first interview and the researchers analysis
of its important themes. I will then be invited to discuss
any points that I feel do not accurately represent my
experience and that feedback will be incorporated into the
final draft of the study.

My participation in this study is completely voluntary
and if at any time I should decide to withdraw from the
study, my decision will be respected. There are no harmful
effects that result from participation in the research.

This study is being conducted under the supervision Dr.
Richard Young who can be reached at 822-6380. Dale Wagner
can be reached at 939-5122 or 420-0761 if any further
information should be required.

I, _________________________________, agree to participate
in the study described under the conditions as outline above
and acknowledge the receipt of one copy of this consent
form.

Signature:_________________________ Date:_________________________

Investigator:
Dale A. Wagner, B.A.
Department of Counselling Psychology
Faculty of Education, U.B.C.
931-5122 (Res.) or 420-0761 (Bus.)

_________________________
Appendix C

Orienting Interview Questions
Orientation and subsequent questions to be used if needed

1) As a way of beginning I would like to suggest that you to think of this interview as an opportunity for you to tell me a story about your life as the parent of an adolescent. Maybe the beginning of that story should be at the point when you first realized that you were the parent of a adolescent.

2) What was the experience that lead to your awareness of being the parent of an adolescent? (possible supplemental questions include: What did it mean to you? What effect did it have on you?).

3) Many parents have in their minds a number of memories of significant moments that they have had as a parent. I wonder if you can describe for me some of those moments in your life as a parent of a teenager.

4) What kind of emotions come to mind when you think about being a parent of a teenager? Can you tell me about any specific situations in which those emotions were prominent?

5) Can you describe for me some of your more positive and negative experiences of being a parent of an adolescent?

6) Many parents seem to have a number of their own concerns or issues going on in their lives during the phase of having adolescents, could you tell me about any such issues that you’ve been dealing with in you life?
7) Are you aware of your relationships with people changing during this period of your life? (possible supplemental questions: With your spouse/mate? Your Child/ren? Your parents? Your friends? Can you describe how they have changed?).

8) Have you had any changes in your career/employment goals or aspirations during the period of having an adolescent child? In what way have they changed?

9) Some parents find that their spiritual life has played a factor in their experience as a parent of a teenager. I wonder if this has been the case for you, and if so, what way?

10) Can you remember what you expected parenting to be like during the period of having an adolescent child? Was your experience similar to what you expected? How? How was it different than your expectations?