ORIENTATIONS TO PARENTING:

FACTORS THAT FACILITATE PARENTS DOING THEIR BEST

by

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ABSTRACT

Despite the volumes of literature compiled on the study of parenting, there has been little qualitative research conducted from parents' points of view to investigate the processes that enable parents to do their best. The aim of this study was to explore what helps parents orient to their roles and their children. Orientation was proposed as a holistic construct that guides parents in their approaches and organizes the experience of being a parent and which can be viewed as a serving a function of maintaining an equilibrium for parents. The processes and factors that facilitate orientation were examined using Flanagan's Critical Incident Technique (1954) in two contexts: a) when parents are close to being the types of parents they wish to be, what is helping them to sustain their orientations to their roles, and b) when parents are off track and struggling in their roles, what helps them to make a shift in their orientations or return to their initial, preferred orientations. 271 critical incidents were collected from interviews with ten parents and fifteen categories of incidents emerged. These categories were organized into six groups: a) the supportive presence of other adults/parents, b) understanding the parenting endeavor, c) reflecting on self in role, d) emotional processing, e) actively establishing the desired parent-child dynamics, and f) spirituality. The findings of this study add to the literature on parenting by describing, in the voice of parents' experience, how parents maintain an equilibrium, in which they stay on track with their childrearing, and how they return to equilibrium when they have experienced disorientation in their parental roles. These categories provide clues to what factors support a sustained parenting style (Baumrind, 1967, 1973, 1995) and add a richness and holism to the research on the determinants of parenting (Belsky, 1984, 1993). They argue for

counsellors and parent educators to go beyond a focus on informing parents about child development and the behavioural performance of parenting strategies, and to attend to the processes that orient parents if they are to truly help struggling parents to maintain a shift in their childrearing. These and other implications for future research and practice are detailed.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

<u>Research Problem</u>

As a society concerned with its future well-being, we commit considerable resources towards the optimization of child development. It is largely acknowledged that the most potent environmental forces influencing child development are children's primary caregivers, usually their parents. It is also generally conceded that the parental role is one of the most demanding, complicated, and rewarding roles to which people can dedicate themselves. Parents can potentially view themselves as responsible for playing a vital role in their children's social, emotional, intellectual and physical development, requiring them to attend to such diverse needs as financial security, structure and rules, nurturance, discipline, mental stimulation, attachment, recreation, a balance of freedom and expectations of compliance, and guidance.

In taking on this task, many parents demonstrate great passion, pride and gratification regarding their style of childrearing and about the children they are raising, and yet also encounter varying degrees of stress, anxiety, anger, guilt, and confusion. It is enough to evoke a sense of wonder that parents can maintain their styles of childrearing with a sense of competence and confidence. This study intends to examine how parents keep it up on an ongoing basis and how they recover from setbacks to maintain a general state of equilibrium in the parent-child relationship.

Parents who come in to see professionals are often experiencing some distress about their children or about how they are handling themselves as parents. Despite the proliferation of self-help books published and the extensive research that has been compiled on the topic,

very little attention has been paid to what parents themselves have found that has actually helped them through their distress. In fact, beyond the plethora of expertly offered advice to parents regarding how they ought to approach their roles, little is known about how parents actually manage to stay on track as they internally navigate the demands of childrearing.

Counsellors, parent educators and writers tend to engage in trying to help parents to do their best, and they aim to accomplish this objective by orienting parents to their roles, especially in times when parents are stuck or at a loss with regards to understanding what is going on or knowing what to do. But while helpers make concerted efforts to orient parents to styles of parenting that are related to positive child outcomes (Baumrind, 1967, 1991), few opportunities have been taken to learn from parents about what personal and contextual factors or processes naturally facilitate parents' internally orienting themselves to do their best. In essence, this study intends to explore how parents point themselves in the directions they feel best about and what helps them do that on an ongoing basis and in times of significant struggle in their roles.

Introduction to the concept of an orientation to parenting

Researchers have managed to isolate a staggering number of factors which comprise a disjointed picture of what compels parents to conduct themselves as they do in their relationships with their children. Predictably, this has led the emergence of a multitude of parent education programs which vary tremendously in emphasis, methodology and outcome (Abrams, 1995). As this fragmented effort persists, intervention for the purpose of enhancing parent effectiveness remains an uncertain venture. Recently, there has been an attempt to bring some organized coherence to this disarray by developing theoretical models that describe the interacting patterns of influence among the variables that are thought to

contribute to parenting behaviour (Belsky, 1993). However, these models have only moved part of the way towards providing an experiential road map to parents and professionals working with parents of the internal routes along which parents can find a more solid grounding in their approaches to parenting.

Therefore, those who intervene with parents need some way of gaining an appreciation of a complex of internal processes and external circumstances in terms of their combined influence on the whole parent, disposing him or her to act. This needs to be a holistic understanding of the parents' phenomenological alignment to the parent-child relationship in which they construct its various components as a fluid, synthesized paradigm of parental reality.

A construct is required which encapsulates the totality of where a parent is coming from. I am proposing the notion of an orientation to parenting to refer to the holistic and fluid way that parents cognitively, emotionally, and behaviourally locate themselves in the parent-child relationship in terms of how they synthesize their experience and understanding of themselves and their children. Similar to an emotion-laden, cognitive schema, it is proposed as an evolving, experientially derived template which serves as an organizer of subsequent experience and as a tacitly employed referent, guiding behaviour.

This could be recognized by those in the counselling field as akin to a theoretical orientation to the counsellor-client relationship which serves to guide, help to interpret what is going on, facilitate decision points, and provide various techniques to implement. Most counsellors would also acknowledge that there are many personal factors beyond just the formal theory counsellors adhere to that orient them to conduct themselves as a they do in the counselling role. When it is going well, it could be said that the counsellor is well oriented,

and when the counsellor is stuck, confused or not performing as desired, it could be said that the counsellor is disoriented.

As defined here, an orientation to parenting is the tendency for parents to understand and experience their children and their parental role through an interpretive framework, simultaneously embodying a complex, yet coherent system of cognitive and affective processes. The way in which parents are oriented to their children would be in dynamic interaction with their experience of them, and parents would vary in terms of how fluid or rigid their orientations are, with some parents capable of evolving in how they envision their roles with other parents holding onto their perceptions and beliefs.

Breunlin and Schwartz (1986) conceptualize dyadic interactions, such as between parent and child, as following oscillating sequences that are calibrated by the participants to maintain a general state of equilibrium in the dyad. The concept of an orientation to parenting is to be investigated in relation to this process model to determine the factors that contribute to parents experiencing themselves as well oriented to their children and their roles and how such a state of equilibrium is maintained. There has been no qualitative research conducted thus far on the factors that facilitate parents' sense of being solidly oriented to their roles.

Purpose of the study

The objective of the present research is to examine how parents sustain a preferred state of orientation and how they return to it when they find themselves off track in their parenting. The term 'preferred orientation' is employed to refer to times when parents say to themselves: "I am parenting the way I would like myself to parent" and this study specifically aimed to investigate what keeps parents at that position and what returns them to such a

statement (even if it is according to new criteria after making an adjustment to their preferred orientation). This does not mean that parents who make such an evaluation necessarily parent "effectively" and it could even be that some "ineffective" parents feel justified and pleased with their parenting and that there is little that could ever waver them from that position.

But first, it was anticipated that it may be difficult to even elicit from parents a sense of what their preferred orientations might be in the context of their current relationship with their children, let alone what helps them maintain it. Although this was one of the central questions investigated, it was necessary to consider a method for accessing orientations, for parents will have reflected on this to varying degrees. For some parents, an orientation towards parenthood may be a consciously held philosophy of parenting, but for most it is a representational system outside of everyday awareness. Snively (1986) describes orientations as deeply rooted aspects of our conceptual and emotional system, not accessible with normal probing techniques such as pencil and paper tests or even conventional interview techniques. So how does one explore a nebulous, amorphous construct which is by definition unarticulated and irreducible? In essence, asking parents about their orientations and orienting processes is to solicit descriptions of the structure and processes of the lenses in their eyes.

If parents habitually feel their way through the parent-child relationship more or less automatically according to their orientations, then one way of accessing these orientations is to examine situations when the template no longer served the parent to understand his or her children or orient him or her to respond to them. I propose to ask parents about times when they or their children violated the parents' assumptions about their parent-child relationship or when they felt challenged or lost in their role as a parent, i.e., an experience of

disorientation. It was expected that the dissonant contrast of disorientation would reveal much about the content and process of parents' initial orientations to parenthood. It was also anticipated that much could be learned about the internal processes of parenting orientations from parents' attempts to re-orient themselves to their roles and relationships in the face of challenge.

In contrast to an orientation to parenting, disorientation is defined as an experience of struggle in the parental role in response to a parenting challenge which significantly disrupts parents' abilities to locate themselves in relation to their children. This struggle may be characterized by a sense of confusion where parents feel at a loss as to how to understand their child's behaviour or their own responses as parents. It could also be an experience of conflict in the parent-child relationship or a sense of not being the kinds of parents they want to be or are used to being - in essence, a it is a disconcerting feeling regarding a discordance between the parents' expectations and perceptions. Such challenges to parents' preferred orientations may elicit a sense of being outside of a comfort zone or a decreased sense of control. Ostensibly, a crucial aspect of parenting orientations that differentiates competent from incompetent childrearers would be how parents orient themselves in response to challenges to their roles as parents. Those who resolve disorientation by attempting to control and change the child's behaviour by way of power will have a much different effect than those who confront how they have been emotionally reacting to and understanding their child's behaviour and then attempt to connect more with their child's needs. How do parents effectively confront challenges to their roles as parents? What are the ways that parents can emotionally and cognitively engage with experiences of struggle that help them to be more the parents they want to be?

To summarize, this study seeks to enhance qualitative understanding of how parents orient themselves to their roles and maintain a sense of equilibrium by exploring what conditions and internal processes parents deem as helpful when they are close to being the kinds of parents they want to be and what helps them return to equilibrium when the parent-child relationship is off target. A critical incident methodology was employed to explore the factors that facilitated parents' sense of doing their best usually and a return to that sense after a period of not doing their best.

Assumptions

This study contained the assumption that parents' experience of their roles vary in terms of the degree to which they feel securely oriented to them and that parents could be conscious enough of these variations to be able to articulate them. I assumed that parents would be able to reflect on how they managed to recover from an experience of struggle and even that they had something to do with handling the struggle.

Overview

The following sections attempt to illuminate the internal processes which facilitate parents being oriented to their roles. Chapter two reviews relevant literature in parenting theory and research to examine what has already been explored on this subject and to help place the current study in its proper context. Chapter three describes the methodology and procedures employed in this study. Chapter four reports the results of the interview and chapter five suggests possible implications of those results for theory and practice.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The following review will provide a rationale for exploring factors which facilitate

parents' operating in line with their preferred orientations and for the research questions by

demonstrating how they emerge from both the evidence and the gaps and limitations in the

literature. This process should describe the theoretical and empirical grounding in which this

study is situated.

It is possible that the factors which determine parents' role orientations and

childrearing behaviours are related to the processes that facilitate the maintenance of

equilibrium around those orientations and behaviours. Therefore, this review will cover many

of the relevant theoretical perspectives and the important variables that have been

investigated as factors which determine parents' approaches and orientations to their children

and their roles. This will be followed by a review of the research that provides the greatest

impetus for the current the research questions being investigated.

Developmental Contextualism Theory

In combination with Breunlin and Schwartz's theory of recursive sequences (to be

reviewed more thoroughly later), the view of parent-child relations employed in this study is

grounded in the theory of developmental contextualism (for a thorough discussion, see

Lerner, Castellino, Terry, Villarruel, & McKinney, 1995) which takes an integrative approach

to human development and conceives of relationships and socialization as dynamic processes

with a bi-directional nature of influence occurring within an ecological environment

composed of nested levels of biological, psychological, and social contexts. Therefore,

within this theory, accessing parents' orientations is to illuminate the different ways in which

parents process the stimuli provided by their children within the contexts they find themselves.

Developmental contextualism shares the philosophical stance of this author that "the concept of integrative levels recognizes as equally essential for the purpose of scientific analysis both the isolation of parts of a whole and their integration into the structure of the whole. It neither reduces phenomena of a higher level to those of a lower one, as in mechanism, or describes the higher level in vague nonmaterial terms which are but substitutes for understanding, as in vitalism" (Novikoff, 1945; as cited in Lerner et. al, 1995, p. 286).

The holistic nature of this study does not pretend to transcend the validity of concrete, quantitative research on specific aspects of parenting behaviour. In fact, my notion of orientation focuses on just one level of analysis which subsumes and integrates such preceding levels and is in dynamic interaction with the contextual levels because it is concerned with investigating how the various external influences impact on the various internal processes to form a world of meaning for parents within their contexts. Lerner, Castellino, Terry, Villarruel, and McKinney (1995) depict the perspective of this study in a visual form, demonstrating how a parenting orientation can be viewed as an incorporation of the various developmental contextual levels as they impact parents' experience in a moment of interaction with a child.

This means that before embarking on an holistic investigation, there needs to be a sense of the parts comprising the whole. Therefore, this section will begin with a review of some of the research that has been conducted on the determinants of parenting, with a particular focus on the intrapersonal processes on the basis of which parents purportedly operate. From that literature, I will then argue that the synthesis and integration of this

research requires the conceptualizing of the subjective stance of parents in relation to their roles and their children as an orientation to parenting. Lastly, I will review research which has most closely approximated the current investigation and informs the questions posed and methodology used.

Contextual Factors

Many environmental and contextual factors have been linked to parents' orienting processes and behaviour. McGillicuddy-DeLisi (1982) found that parents' educational levels, experience with children, sex of parent and sex of child are relevant variables associated with differences in parental beliefs and parent-child teaching interactions. The cumulative impact of parents' perceived stress has an adverse impact on parental psychological well-being, attitudes toward parenting and children, and actual behaviour in interaction with children (Crnic & Acevedo, 1995). In his review of work quality and father interaction patterns, Parke (1995) concluded that there is a spill-over effect in which emotional experiences of the work climate transfer to the home environment, as well as an expansion in attitudes, skills and perspectives acquired in their work-based socialization which are applied to parenting.

In one of the few studies on parenting to utilize ecological theory, Meyers' (1998) examination of the relative relationships between parent, child and family context characteristics and parenting behaviour found that mothers' perceptions of the social support that they received from family and friends had the greatest impact on their ability to express warmth and control toward their young children, with marital satisfaction and retrospective attachment security also demonstrating significant correlation with the use of effective parenting skills. Marital status has been associated with parenting in other research as well. Single parents tend to have fewer resources and a greater tendency to experience stress and

exhaustion. Belsky, Youngblade, and Pensky (1990) observed a discernible ameliorating influence of a positive partner relationship on negative parenting in the case of mothers with negative childhood experiences in a sample of mothers not at risk of abusing. Furthermore, the compatibility of spouses' orientations, social support networks, and the availability of models of parenting affect parental functioning. This research demonstrates how parents come into their roles with multiple contexts.

There is substantial evidence that a bi-directional influence operates in parent-child relationships. Indeed, one study found that children initiate around half of all interactions with their parents (Bell & Harper, 1977). At different points, developmentally salient behaviours of children challenge the parenting system (Crnic and Avecedo, 1995). It is also clear that some child temperaments prompt different constructions of the parent-child relationship and consequently, different childrearing responses. For instance, parental reaction tends to be stronger when dealing with children's aggressive versus withdrawn behaviour.

Consideration of the contextual determinants of parenting are important in that they affect parents' subjective experiences of parenting through their impact on the immediate parent-child moment and through their developmental shaping of parents' orientations. Parents' developmental contexts would be pertinent inasmuch as they manifest in parents' ways of appreciating and experiencing their children and themselves as parents. This study will focus more on those internal processes of parents, the mechanisms by which contextual factors become relevant in parents' fluid experiences of childrearing, and thus, these factors are what are more directly implicated as orienting processes. Therefore, I intend to focus in

on the parent within the parent-child dyad without decontextualizing the many forces at large as outlined in this section.

Besides being directly correlated with childrearing behaviour, parental beliefs, attitudes, values, expectations, schemas, goals for development, working attachment models, psychological health and functioning, affective processes and perceptions are more central to my concept of an orientation to parenting because they both mediate the impact of contextual influences and child behaviours, and they are implicated in parents' creations of circumstances. Indeed, parents in similarly constituted families from similar socioeconomic echelons differ in the degree to which they are affected by their contexts and the manner in which they interact with those contexts. As a helper of parents, connecting with parents' orientations will include tapping the meanings they make of their contexts as they impact the meanings they make of their parenting. Therefore, it is on the characteristics of parents that I will now focus.

Parent Characteristics

In the context of the developmental-contextual perspective, parent characteristics constitute the processes that occur internally in the parent. These are the attributes, structures and processes which comprise the identity of the parent, and are implicated in all aspects of the life functioning of an individual. These various components are important in considering the parent-child relationship to the degree to which they serve to orient the parent in comprehending and experiencing the child and in the degree to which they predispose the parent to certain action tendencies in relation to the child. Researchers and intervention programs have only recently focused on those aspects of parents which support parenting practices. The research on parenting characteristics has been largely fragmented as a

multitude of variables have been separated out for empirical analysis. This review will attend to the characteristics which have received the most attention in the literature, including social cognitions, such as parenting beliefs and attitudes, and affective processes, such as emotional reactivity and working attachment models. I will then focus on previous attempts to integrate the various components into a picture of what determines parenting.

Cognitive Processes

Parental beliefs

This review has particularly highlighted parental beliefs out of the many factors which have come under empirical scrutiny due to their substantial promise as a significant determinant of parenting and due to the aggressiveness with which they are currently being researched and applied in parent intervention efforts to improve parenting practices (Okagaki & Johnson Divecha, 1993). A belief is defined as "knowledge in the sense that the individual knows what he or she espouses to be true, or probably true . . ." (Sigel, 1985, p. 384). Constructed from prior experience, beliefs have been proposed to serve an adaptive function by enabling parents to meet sociocultural requirements and cognitive demands by organizing their worlds in a psychologically consistent manner (McGillicudy-DeLisi, 1985). They have also been claimed to allow parents to set priorities, evaluate success and maintain self-efficacy in parenting (Goodnow & Collins, 1990).

Investigators of parents' beliefs have sought to address a key question identified by McGillicudy-DeLisi (1992) which is pertinent to this study: How do parental beliefs affect child development directly as well as indirectly, that is, through parenting practices which may be derived from those beliefs?

Research investigating the link between parent beliefs and behaviours has been moderately supportive. In particular, studies have met with some success in terms of relating beliefs about children's cognitive development to parental teaching strategies (McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 1982). Other research has uncovered many differences in the types of beliefs held by mothers and fathers (see Miller, 1988), and by parents with different educational levels, cultural or ethnic backgrounds (Goodnow, 1988), and experience as parents (Holden, 1988).

One such investigation which may be relevant to this study explored the differences between mothers and fathers regarding how their beliefs relate to their parenting practices. McGillicudy-DeLisi (1985) concluded from her study on parents' use of distancing strategies during learning tasks with their four year-olds that since mothers are typically around their children more, their behaviour is guided more by specific beliefs about what works with her specific child than by general beliefs about child development. The converse relationship was found among fathers.

Parent beliefs have been directly linked with child outcomes. Schaefer (1987; cited in Goodnow & Collins, 1990) found that verbal intelligence, curiosity/creativity and task-orientation, as well as the absence of discipline problems, at age 5 was predicted by the mother's ideas and behaviours regarding willingness to grant rights and self-direction to children when children were aged 12 months.

Beyond their beliefs about child development and their specific children, parents' beliefs about themselves and their role in relation to their children is also a critical aspect of their orientations. Parents who view themselves as responsible for negative child behaviours have been found to have less negative reactions to problematic child behaviours (Dix & Lochman, 1990). Conversely, the reaction of parents who believe they have limited ability or

skill to address problematic childrearing experiences tend to be more negative (Bugenthal, 1989). People who perceive limited control in stressful situations are more likely to respond with emotion-focused rather than problem-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Several studies of the relationship between general beliefs about child development and parenting behaviour use Caldwell and Bradley's (1979) Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME), a semi-structured interview consisting of several sub-scales which tap, for example, emotional and verbal responsivity of the parent, maternal involvement with the child, and avoidance of restriction and punishment. This measure has been positively correlated with measures of children's cognitive development. Luster and Rhoades (1989) found that parents who provided the most supportive care for their infants as revealed in HOME scores held beliefs that: (a) parenting does influence their child's development, (b) infants need freedom to explore their environments, (c) parents should be responsive to and attend to infant's cues, and (d) even young children need adequate verbal stimulation. Significant negative correlations were found between HOME scores and mothers' beliefs in the importance of discipline, child conformity and the avoidance of spoiling the child. Furthermore, Dix and Grusec (1985) concluded that parents' responses to children depend on parents' beliefs about whether a child's behaviour is stable, intentional, controllable by the child, and caused by disposition in the child. Attributions of intentionality and responsibility for child misdeeds are likely to increase disciplinary tactics and decrease parental attempts to reason with children.

Parental attitudes

Another social cognition, very similar to beliefs, whose relationship with parenting has been researched, is that of parental attitudes. Allport's definition of attitudes is closely

related to my sense of orientations: "An attitude is a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related" (1935; cited in Holden, 1995). Attitudes have been divided into an evaluative component, a cognitive or belief component, and a behavioural intention component (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; cited in Holden, 1995), and research has moderately supported a link between child adjustment and outcomes.

The research on parental attitudes has also yielded some insight into how effective parents approach their roles. In their observations of parents interacting with preschool children, Iverson and Segal (1992) found that positive attitudes towards such goals as responsibility, independence, and creativity in their children (as opposed to obedience) are positively correlated with parents' spending more time with children, asking more questions, and being less critical of their children. Egeland and Farber (1984) discovered that mothers of insecurely attached children were less likely than mothers of securely attached children to accept the emotional complexity of childrearing as measured by the Maternal Attitudes Scale. Conger, McCarty, Yang, Laney and Kropp (1984; cited in Holden, 1995) found that maternal authoritarian attitudes were negatively correlated with positive parenting behaviour and affect but positively correlated with negative behaviour. Holden and Ritchie (1988) concluded that the most effective and competent parents are the ones who do not hold rigid attitudes but rather are ambivalent in their beliefs and make adjustments in their behaviour based on a variety of considerations.

A review of the attitudes research reveals that, like parental beliefs, significant correlations with parental behaviours are moderately frequent and usually small, and that attitudes are associated with a myriad of factors. They have been found to be embedded

within the interdependent contexts of parental personality, the presence or absence of social support, marital relations, education, attitudes of their own parents, and cultural norms. Attitude surveys have frequently included questions which assess values, instrumental and descriptive beliefs, perceptions, behavioural intentions, and expectations which all share with parental attitudes the theorized functional relationship with parental behaviour (Holden, 1995). This indicates either that it is very difficult to isolate the independent contribution to behaviour made by attitudes or that attitudes are so intertwined with other factors that it may be better to view their influence in terms of the synthesis and synergy of the whole.

Other social cognitions

There have been significant correlations reported between parent behaviour and other social cognitions which, yet again, have been found to be very closely related to one another in terms of their functionality in the phenomenology of parenting. If these social cognitions could be amalgamated as a general process, their commonalities might be summarized as follows: the ideas that parents have about parenting include those about the kinds of behaviours they expect and value in the short run, the kinds of people they want their children to become in the long run, and their theories and beliefs about how best to accomplish these goals (Hogg-Ginsber & Tardif, 1995).

However, the consistently low to moderate correlations reported indicate that the relationship between social cognitions and behaviour appears to be more complex than simply looking for a causal link between specific cognitions and childrearing practices. This study is operating on the assumption that parents' orientations and worldviews are much more affective than just their propositional knowledge of "what objectively is". Iverson and Segal (1992) attributed the inconsistent results that generally support the relation between parental

social cognitions and parent behaviours to issues of measurement, the implicit and explicit nature of beliefs, and the possibility that beliefs may interact with feelings. Therefore, any concept of an orientation to parenting, proposed to act as a referent in perceiving, constructing and reacting to a child, cannot isolate the consciously articulated cognitive component of parents' constructions of child development and parental role while neglecting the evidence that parenting is an emotional enterprise.

Affective Processes and Working Attachment Models

In fact, there are many indications that affective processes often influence the development of parents' beliefs systems. Baumrind (1995) points out that some parents simply enjoy prolonged and intense contact and others are disconcerted by such contact. Parents also differ in their desire to reason with and listen to the ideas and objections of their offspring. As a result, parents differ in their adoption of beliefs about parental availability and receptivity.

Other research has generally found that emotions play a central function in parents' constructions of their children. Via their effects on parental motivation, cognition, communication patterns, and behaviour, activated emotions engage and organize processes affecting parenting (Dix, 1991). High negative emotions increase parents' tendencies to focus on immediate reduction of the negative affect, resulting in an emphasis on short-term, parent-centered goals over long-term, child-centered developmental goals. High negative emotion can disrupt parental reasoning and can contribute to more reflexive emotional responding from maltreating parents in efforts to gain control.

Indeed, apart from the volumous body of psychological literature on this issue, some parenting studies have found affective and cognitive processes to be inextricably interrelated.

Mothers who were depressed or anxious had less nurturant but more restrictive attitudes (Rickel, Williams and Loigman, 1988; cited in Holden, 1988). Negative expectations, perceptions, and evaluations of children are more likely when negative affect is aroused in parents. Conversely, parents with unrealistic expectations for their children's behaviour are more likely to experience negative emotion because their expectations frequently cannot be met (Azar, Robinson, Hekimian, & Twentyman, 1984).

Besides the more logical processes of which parents are more likely to be cognizant are affective forces which are theorized to contribute to the development of people's constructions of self in relation to other. The attachment theory of John Bowlby (1969b) proposes that early experiences with caregivers are particularly significant as they are the foundation upon which relational rules and codes of conduct continue to develop. Caregiver/child relationships are supposedly internalized by the child and play major roles in the ensuing development of substantive relational themes which integrate a person's ongoing relational experiences in a meaningful fashion.

Children's experiences with parental responsiveness, rejection, or ambivalence are thought to be carried forward in the form of internalized mental representations. Internal representational models of the attachment relationship, incorporating aspects of both the self and the attachment figure, are constructed along with the affect associated with experiences from the attachment relationship. Qualitatively different internal representational models are constructed by the child in accord with variations in the security of the relationship with the attachment figure. Increasingly, internal representational models are used to process information about relational experiences and to guide interpersonal encounters in order to maximize internal security. Also referred to as "working attachment models", they are

proposed to orient people towards interpersonal encounters by forming relational expectations and by processing relational information differently, selectively attending to and interpreting experience in ways that are likely to be consistent with the model.

These working attachment models would seem to be a central orienting process in parents' emotional constructions of the relationships with their children, and researchers have hypothesized that they influence the degree of responsiveness that parents are able to show toward their children (Bowlby, 1988; Main, Kaplan & Cassidy, 1985). According to Main, et. al., "parents who experienced a high degree of responsiveness in childhood are supposed to be more open to signals and needs of their infants than rejected or ambivalently treated parents, because the former parents are more able to take their children's perspective and to not feel threatened by signs of anxiety in their children" (cited in Van IJzendoorn, 1992, p. 79). However, far from being a construct of historical determinism, Bowlby and subsequent researchers (Main & Goldwyn, 1984) describe a person's sense of attachment as being amenable to alteration with subsequent experience - hence the term 'working attachment model'.

The problem with each of these research endeavours' attempts to link a given construct with parenting behaviour is that behaviour is multiply determined. For example, some parents' childrearing orientations may be as powerfully comprised by religious and cultural values regarding moral development as by their abilities to relate emotionally with their children. If one were assessing parents' orientations solely on the basis of their working attachment models, such strong attitudes and contextual influences may have been overlooked. Therefore, examining any one factor will not reveal a "magic bullet" which adequately explains how parents are constructing their children and their roles.

Developmental Contextual Analyses of Parenting

The most cogent attempt to consolidate this overwhelming array of empirical

relationships into a systematic picture of the relative contributions of the various determinants

of parenting was undertaken by Jay Belsky. However, in his developmental-contextual

analyses of the determinants of parenting (1984) and the etiology of child maltreatment

(1993), Belsky concluded that parenting behaviour is multiply determined by factors

operating at multiple levels of analysis which exert their influence interactively and in

combination. It would seem that how parents enact their roles cannot be reduced to singular,

simple constructs.

The interactive nature of the factors just reviewed has been well documented. For

example, parental beliefs and perceptions have been shown to mediate the influence of other

factors on parent behaviour. Beliefs seem to be important in the relationship between child

temperament and parenting. Parenting responses vary in relation to the extent to which

parents believe the child has volitional control over his behaviour combined with the degree

to which parents believe they have an influence in altering child temperament (Super &

Harkness, 1981). Researchers have determined that the beliefs that parents hold regarding

child development have an effect on their emotional experiences of their children (Crnic and

Booth, 1991) and that the emotional states of parents effect the degree of negativity regarding

how they cognitively evaluate their children's behaviour (Baumrind, 1995).

Even reviews of research investigating the influence of one factor on parenting portray

significant dependencies on the influences of other factors. Crnic and Avecedo (1995)

concluded that a "multiplicity of interacting factors contribute over time to the perception and

experience of parenting stress" (p. 294). Goodnow (1995) summarized that any examination

of what conditions shape parents' ideas about children and parenting which consider only conditions within or external to the individual is insufficient, and the challenge is to consider both and find ways of analyzing the particular effects of various combinations.

This convoluted matrix of interacting factors supposedly contributing to parents' experience and behaviour with their children leaves us with a murky picture of parenting. And the few attempts to coalesce this volumous body of research have neither brought clarity to the field nor made the information functional for practitioners other than providing an appreciation for the complexity of parental behaviour. Belsky has demonstrated that as a parent interacts with his or her child, each of these factors in the immediate and broader contexts as well as the parent's internal process conspire to impinge on how he or she is constructing, experiencing and thus orienting towards relating with his or her child. Partitioning these factors does not help helpers to work with the whole parent. Therefore, if all these factors converge in a given moment, why not look at the totality of their influence on parental subjectivity to gain a sense of the whole orientation which is greater than the sum of its parts.

Orientations to Parenting

According to Webster's Dictionary, orientation is defined as "the general tendency or direction of one's approach, thoughts, etc.", or, alternatively, "the ability to locate oneself in one's environment with reference to time, place and people" (Costello, 1992). Parenting orientation is used here to refer to the total content and process of parents' individual, subjective apperceptions and representations and psychological states regarding the role of parenting and their children.

Such an holistic construct could be deemed important because of the desire, to which Belsky referred, to simultaneously gauge both the emotional tenor and cognitive processes inherent in parents' subjective experiencing of their children and their parental roles because both are important in determining the parents' relational tendencies. As I have argued, it is the combination of one's feelings, thoughts and action tendencies that comprise one's orientation to a domain of the world. As parents are present with their children, the capacity to process parent-child experiences with such holistic fluidity enables parents to make sense of what is going on between them and their children, consolidating their senses of the relationship and providing scripts for behaving.

Similar to the concepts of gender and sex-role orientations, which have received substantial attention from researchers, parental role orientation refers to a self-concept regarding one compartment of life which dynamically interacts with an overall identity. And just as sexual orientations simultaneously describe people's sexual identities and their tendencies to direct sexual attention to certain others in a way that dictates their perceptual frame for viewing themselves and the world as it relates to their sexuality, so does an orientation to parenting describe how parents construct their parental identities and how they habitually attend to facets of their children and the childrearing environment that are made particularly salient in their orientations. Surprisingly, unlike other types of orientations, there is scant mention in the literature of orientation in the context of parenting.

In their attempts to consider how internal processes of parents influence the parent-child interaction sequence, Bacon and Ashmore (1986) have proposed a model of parenting that closely approximates this idea of an orientation. They describe affective and cognitive structures and processes which they claim serve as a frame of reference against which any

given fragment of child behaviour is perceived at the time of occurrence, and as a reference for decisions about responding. They argue that these affective and belief systems are structured sets of "knowledge," more or less affectively charged. By knowledge, they do not mean "facts" or even simply verbal or verbalizible information. Rather, they see affect and belief systems as composed of any cognitive or affective distinctions made by the parent. These systems must include: (a) verbal knowledge (e.g., "Mary gets A's in math"); (b) images (e.g., the "picture" of Mary in the class play last year); (c) feelings (e.g., the warm happy feeling when she comes in the door from school); and (d) expected action sequences.

Bacon and Ashmore describe "implicit theories" regarding child behaviour and child rearing which refer to the assumption that socializers have a relatively stable set of beliefs and expectations concerning child behaviour and the role of adults in relation to children. Because these beliefs and expectations are seldom verbalized except in a fragmentary and piecemeal fashion, most socializers remain unaware of their "theories", hence the term implicit.

They distinguish between two general types of implicit theories that are particularly noteworthy for this study, one pertaining to children and child behaviour, the other to adults and their role-relationships to children. This differentiation is seen as important to this study since parents will describe their experiences and evaluations of both their children and themselves as parents. It is anticipated that parents will vary in the extent to which their orientations are balanced between consciously attending to their children's behaviour and attending to their own roles and childrearing approaches. However, despite this distinction, much of the parenting literature considers both types of "implicit theories" to be highly related.

Beyond global representations of parenting, beliefs and feelings about specific children have an important influence on the cognitive activities of socializers. So, in addition to theories about children as a group, adults, especially parents, have special theories with regard to specific children which develop as a result of countless interactions and experiences with that child. Bacon and Ashmore (1986) explain how parents carry the history of their relationship with their children into each new encounter:

> Parents who have been the principal caretakers of their own child
>
> have in their memory a large body of facts and feelings concerned
>
> with the individual history of the child - the illnesses, accidents,
>
> traumas, joys, sorrows, and fears of the child as well as the
>
> parental feelings that accompanied these and other events and that
>
> persist and grow as a part of the parental attachment of the child.
>
> All of this stored affect and information influences how the parent
>
> experiences the behaviour of his or her own child in contrast with,
>
> say, the neighbor's child. (p. 12)

In this way, parenting orientations help give meaning to observed child behaviour and provide scripts for enacting the parental role. While Bacon and Ashmore's (1986) proposed framework for parental cognition provides a probing vision of the processes of the perceiving adult in parent-child interactions, there may be more holistic ways in which parents experience their roles and their children, and hence more cohesive ways of understanding and intervening with those experiences. I am arguing for the conceptualization of parents' affective, cognitive and behavioural structures and processes as parenting orientations which

serves to filter perceptions, represent experiences and guide behaviours in the parenting domain.

Some of the constructs previously identified in the literature on parent characteristics relate more closely than others with the notion of an orientation for their tendencies to organize experience and guide behaviour. Bacon and Ashmore (1986) contended that long-term goals are among the most important of the cognitive and affective structures that parents bring to their interactions with their children. Along with the goal of protection, they identified the "motivation to socialize" as a primary long-term goal. The higher such a motivation, the more likely a parent would tend to notice or attend to child behaviour prescribed by society. They conclude that the strength of this motivation varies with belief systems regarding children's malleability and their power to influence the development of the child. For parents with such a motivation, Bacon and Ashmore found a strong tendency to cognitively organize descriptions of the social behaviour of early school-age children along evaluative continua which discerned whether the behaviour was seen to be good or bad, mature or immature, and requiring parental encouragement or attempts to change the behaviour. This would be an integral aspect of orientation as it appears both to stem from and to influence both the rational and emotional.

Several investigations of orientations to behaviour have been conducted in unrelated fields. In her dissertation on students' relationships with the seashore, Gloria Snively (1986) used students' responses to teacher-presented metaphors to investigate changes in orientations and behaviours towards the seashore as a result of curriculum implementation. She found a generally consistent relationship between student's orientations and their behaviour. Specific correlations were rare, supporting my contention that parenting orientations are better linked

to patterns of childrearing. She also found support for a relationship between the types of orientations held, their beliefs and their individual metaphorical thinking about the seashore.

Metaphorical nature of orientation

As an orientation refers to experientially derived representations of reality, self and relationships, this concept shares much in common with metaphor. This theoretical similarity was examined to provide a clearer picture of what is meant by an orientation and what may be gleaned from the literature on metaphors to inform this study.

In their book, Metaphors We Live By, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that our phenomenal world is fundamentally metaphorical by nature. "It is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. . . . Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities (p3)." Linguistic philosopher Fiumara (1995) concurs with this view:

> Metaphoricity is a basic mode of functioning whereby we project
>
> patterns from one domain of experience in order to structure
>
> another domain of a different kind. So conceived, metaphor
>
> is not merely a linguistic mode of expression since it is one
>
> of the main cognitive and relational factors by which we
>
> develop a sense of coherence among our innumerable experiences.
>
> Through our metaphoric capacity we make use of patterns which
>
> evolve out of our affectual experience in order to organize
>
> our more abstract understanding. (p98)

In addition to its role in the organization of our worlds, metaphor structures our behavioral tendencies. Levine (1988) illustrates how our metaphorically conceived realities orient us to our experiences and guide us in our actions:

> We draw inferences, set goals, make commitments, and execute
>
> plans, all on the basis of how we in part structure our
>
> experience, consciously and unconsciously, by means of metaphor.
>
> The interest in a metaphor like ARGUMENT IS WAR is not that it
>
> displays the formal characteristics of metaphor (in fact, it
>
> is not even necessary that this, being a conceptual metaphor,
>
> even be expressed); what counts is that we conduct ourselves in
>
> argument as though we were in fact waging war. (p.158)

Young-Eisendrath and Hall (1991) noted that for Carl Jung, the emotionally infused image is the primary organizer of the human psyche. They claim that these images are assumed to be more motivating, more powerful, than any attempt to render them in language and that their meaning cannot be fully encompassed by language and rational forms of thought. Finally, Jungian theory posits that "images may lead to emotionally based organizations of thought, metaphoric models that eventually develop into representations of complex emotionally motivating schematic meanings" (pp. 2, 3). These theoretical arguments are congruent with the notion I am presenting here of metaphors as phenomenologically orienting people to reality. They suggest that the manner in which parents organize their childrearing experiences and represent their relationships with their children may be metaphorical in nature.

There have been very few studies examining the metaphoric constructions held by parents. One example in the parenting literature of metaphors that describe two different orientations to parenting illustrates the role of beliefs within those metaphors. Gunilla (1991) identifies the metaphor of "Child as Project" as an expression of a parental ideology. It readily combines with beliefs about directing, controlling and planning human life. "Child as Being", by contrast, is connected to the parent's belief that development is caused by the child's inner drives, thereby minimizing the power of the parental role.

Angus and Rennie (1989) conducted a more systematic investigation of the phenomenology of metaphor in the context of psychotherapy. They reported that the metaphors expressed in session were embedded within three distinct categories of associated meaning contexts, defined as "a private network of interconnected characteristics, identities and beliefs about the self" (p. 374). Although methodological problems limit the credibility of these categories, the anecdotal evidence gleaned from the interviews conducted does speak to the qualitative inquiries being made in the current study.

Most metaphors were found to act as an associative link between the phenomena being discussed and specific memories or images related to an inner experience. A second type of metaphor was identified as symbolic representations of a dimly perceived, implicit identity and belief about the self. Lastly, the experiential meaning conveyed by a third type of metaphor communicated a particular kind of role relationship between the implicit self-identity and another person or an alternative inner identity. These accounts, whether they represent the possible range of distinct categories or not, provide some indication to remain sensitive to any metaphor that parents express spontaneously as communications of their experiential representations of their parental identities and role relationships with their

children. It also suggests that it may be helpful to conceptualize orientations as metaphorical frameworks.

<u>Research on parenting orientations</u>

Now that the construct of orientation has been described, this review will consider how it has been applied to parenting in particular. Some theorists have conceptualized general differences in parents' 'role orientations' (e.g., nurturant role vs. disciplinary role) and 'goal orientations' (e.g., their children's moral development or scholastic achievement) and in orientations of the family environment in relation to the pressures towards conformity or openness in communication (McLeod & Chaffee, 1972).

One treatment of parenting orientations by Newberger and White (1989) delineated categories of parent orientations using a cognitive-developmental model of parenting organization which focused on hierarchical levels of perspective taking and parental awareness involved in conceptualizing children and the parenting role. The first level, an egoistic orientation, describes parents who understand their children as projections of their own experience, with parenting organized around meeting the needs and wants of the parents. These parents are not able to perceive children having rights or needs of their own which are separate from theirs, and they are more likely to be oriented to their own experience than to their children's. In the second level, a conventional orientation, parents see children not as individuals, but as members of the group called "children" and explain their behaviour in stereotypic, traditionally and culturally defined ways. These parents then view themselves in light of the role of parent, and "parenthood is defined on the basis of pre-determined, socially defined role obligations, and the parent-child relationship is understood as the fulfilling of role responsibilities by both sides" (p. 676). The third level, a subjective-individualistic

orientation, involves viewing the child as a unique individual and themselves as identifying and responding to the child's perspectives and experiences. Parenting is focused on meeting the needs of the child and the parent-child relationship is thought of as more of an emotional exchange than as a fulfillment of roles. At the fourth level of complexity, a process orientation, "the parent-child relationship is understood as a mutual relation of two autonomous but interdependent members, which is in a continual process of growth and change" (p. 676). At this level, parenting is centered around the recognition and balancing of both the parents' and children's needs so that both are met. These categories classify parents' orientations in terms of their relative sophistication of awareness in their social cognitions, and while useful for its depiction of the relative manner with which parents may be oriented towards their children versus their role as parents to those children; however, this category system fails to capture the emotional components of parenting orientations.

Although a parenting orientation refers to the way in which the parents are viewing and experiencing themselves and their children in the parenting moment, orientations are also in dynamic interaction with the ecological systems in which the parent is embedded. Research has demonstrated many cultural and environmental differences in parenting orientations. For example, in countries where the infant mortality rate is high and life is threatened, mothers are oriented to their infants' physical well-being more than to their psychological competencies (LeVine, 1988). Lieberman (1990) offered a comparison of Hispanic with non-Hispanic mothers' orientations to autonomy in children:

> Most [Hispanic] mothers in our sample believe strongly that parents
> should be in charge, that disobedience and disrespectful behaviour

should not be allowed and that good parents should suppress the expression of anger in their children. They also believe that boys and girls should be treated differently. Finally, they tend to have an idealized and self-sacrificing view of motherhood, which of course is very much in line with the importance given the family rather than the individual. (cited in Tower, 1996, p. 52)

An exploratory study by Gorman (1998) found that the predominant concept of parenting as "training" guided the childrearing practices of immigrant Chinese mothers, and what may have been viewed as an authoritarian parenting style from the perspective of Westerners stemmed from a different set of culturally-based attitudes and values of the importance of family, the responsibilities of parenthood and the duty to raise competent and successful adults. Furthermore, the subtlety with which these mothers exercised influence over their children's behaviour also suggests that although their expectations mirror a mix between authoritarian and authoritative parenting, this translated into qualitatively different approaches to childrearing. This supports the idea that it is insufficient to consider parents' expectations, values and beliefs as the determinants of parenting without considering how parents view the parental role and evaluate the behaviours that will promote the realization of that desired image of the developing child. However, Gorman's study demonstrates the power of cultural context in parent's developed orientations to parenting, or, in this case, to "training".

Even in Western society, parents may integrate the orientations which reside in the culture. It is easy to imagine a mother's orientation to her role being affected by a prevailing

social construction of and cultural attitude towards parenting such as the one described by

Covitz :

> Our children are victims of the increasingly prevalent view that
>
> parenting is a messy, frustrating job that gets in the way of one's
>
> own growth and life, rather than enriching it . . . To ask a young
>
> woman who is raising two toddlers, "But what are you doing with
>
> your life?" is to tell this mother that what she is doing - the job of
>
> parenting - is not worthy of respect. When a culture removes status
>
> from the role of mother or father, the self-esteem from assuming
>
> that role is lessened. (1986; cited in Tower, 1996, p. 124)

However, few researchers have attempted to assess how parents integrate the prevailing

cultural norms and values with their own subjective feelings about and appraisals of the

parent-child relationship as a fluid orientation. If this can be accomplished, the perspective

provided by the concept of a holistic orientation should facilitate the cultural sensitivity of

counsellors.

Palacios, Gonzalez, & Moreno (1992) viewed beliefs as existing within the culture,

which are then constructed by the individual through the person's interaction with that culture

and with the object of the belief. They identified three different types of parents based on a

combination of educational background and the manner in which they integrate cultural with

individual experiential ideas about child development: Traditional (i.e., rural, low education,

pessimistic expectations, innatist beliefs about child development), modern (i.e., urban, high

education, beliefs include aspects of nature and nurture in interaction, believe that parents can

influence development), and paradoxical parents (i.e., low-medium education, belief in

environmental determinism, but parents are not viewed as major influences on developmental outcomes).

Although these efforts have distinguished forms of parenting orientations, they have not researched the relationship between them and the childrearing practices of those parents. However, a point of clarification is required here. The agenda of this study is not to identify a stable, consistent correspondence between parents' orientations and their behaviour in specific incidents.

These classification systems are insufficient because they do not tap idiosyncratic differences in parents' orientations related perhaps to the personal ambitions and values of the parent. Parents who value achievement may be expected to perceive child behaviour in different ways than those without such an orientation. Similarly, sports-minded parents may monitor the athletic tendencies of their children with special interest and rewarding attention (Bacon & Ashmore, 1986).

Furthermore, as indicated previously, the research on parental social cognitions suggests that general constructs such as broad, global beliefs, values, attitudes, etc. do not adequately predict parenting behaviour in a given situation. There has been better success linking situation-specific beliefs with specific behaviours. So in order to examine general patterns of childrearing, the fact that behaviour is so multiply determined renders the proportion of significant correlations between the components of orientations and parenting behaviour few and the magnitudes small.

Many researchers have provided explanations for such results. In the parenting beliefs literature, Rubin and Mills (1992) found that when the beliefs are of the type that contain action we can predict parents' teaching strategies as well as their preferred actual teaching

strategies, while more global beliefs that have options for expression are not as good predictors of behaviour. This demonstrates the distinction between what anthropologist Caws (1974) calls "operational" ideas, having to do with the way people should act, and "representational" ideas which reflect the way people construct the world.

Grusec and Kuczynski (1980) propose that parents exhibit consistency in style and sensitivity to situational variations so that immediate needs may be met while orienting children toward long-range norms. McGillicuddy-DeLisi (1980, 1982), Sigel (1985), and Goodnow (1988) proposed that parents operate from a general belief system that includes presuppositions about ways children develop and learn. Actions would have to be tailored to specific circumstances that come up and would, therefore, appear dissimilar in a material sense. Conceptually, however, the various actions could be consistent because they emanate from a unitary belief system and are directed toward a common purpose.

Thus, although relevant operational orientations may better predict behaviour in a given context, perhaps it is the orienting processes which are representational in nature that have the greatest cumulative impact on the parent-child relationship. This broader perspective on the beliefs literature indicates that the general belief system is an important component of a larger orientation to parenting, encompassing more than narrow notions and is manifested in a pattern of childrearing behaviour. Likewise, the influences of contextual factors, parents' working attachment models, core values and general attitudes are thought to produce general relational stances.

Therefore, while the research reviewed thus far provides convincing evidence that each domain mentioned does impact on parents' childrearing practices, these arguments

would suggest that rather than serving as a predictor of parenting behaviour, orientations should correspond with a broader, cross-situational pattern or style of parenting.

<u>Parenting Styles vs. Parenting Orientations</u>

The closest we have come thus far to delineating the various qualitatively distinct ways in which parents conduct themselves in the parent-child relationship is Diana Baumrind's (1967) concept of the parenting style. Baumrind has identified three categories of parenting styles which vary in terms of commitment, responsiveness and demandingness, and they emerged from observations of the thematic ways parents behave with their children. Rubin and Mills (1992) concluded that sufficient data exist to suggest that parenting behaviour patterns are associated, perhaps causally so, with the quality of children's peer relationships as well as with the development of their social skills.

Considerable research has linked an authoritative parenting approach with positive child outcomes in the areas of cognitive and social competence (e.g., Baumrind, 1973) and decreased adolescent substance abuse (1991). Authoritativeness as a parenting style is described by Baumrind (1967) as a constellation of parent attributes that includes emotional support, high standards, appropriate autonomy granting, and clear, bi-directional communication.

Authoritarian styles of childrearing are characterized by high levels of demandingness and low levels of nurturance and receptivity. These parents have been described as obedience and status oriented, expecting their children to obey orders without explanation and conform to social norms. They are negatively oriented to willfulness and autonomy from their children and discourage any verbal exchanges. Parents who employ permissive styles of parenting are described by Baumrind as seeing themselves as resources for the children to use as they wish,

but not as active agents responsible for shaping and altering their future behaviour. The goal-orientation of permissive parents is to free children from restraint as much as possible.

Corresponding to these parenting styles, it seems possible that there may be three distinct orientations from which parents seem to operate; however, Baumrind has not researched the different internal processes which may be associated with each style. Nor has she given parents a "voice" to describe their orientations, but rather categorizes their behaviour patterns according to her own constructions of her observations of parents' enactment of the parental role.

Other researchers have attempted to distinguish parental orientations associated with Baumrind's patterns of childrearing behaviour. Dekovi, Gerris, and Janssens (1991; cited in McGillicuddy-DeLisi & Sigel, 1995) looked at levels of "parental reasoning complexity" which ranged from a self-centered, self-orientation of the parent to a process orientation, which represents a mutual interactive relationship. . Higher parental reasoning complexity levels were related to authoritative parenting, while lower level reasoning complexity was related to authoritarian practices (the parenting practices associated with lower reasoning complexity were related to lower levels of children's self-esteem and popularity among peers).

In his review of the parenting literature, Belsky, (1984) surmised that "across childhood, parenting that is *sensitively* attuned to children's capabilities and to the developmental tasks they face promotes a variety of highly valued developmental outcomes, including emotional security, behavioural independence, social competence, and intellectual achievement" (p. 85). On the basis of that literature, he went on to speculate that the sensitive parent would be able "to decenter and to appraise accurately the perspective of

others, would be able to empathize with them, and, in addition, would be able to adopt a nurturant orientation" (p. 85). This perspective suggests that certain psychological capacities and orientations are required as foundations for parents to employ an effective authoritative parenting style.

Attili (1989) found that the degree to which mothers disconfirm and attempt to control their children without providing them with appropriate rationales for their authoritarian parenting style is associated with the frequency of children's hostile behaviour with peers. He then focused on the social cognitions which may orient these parents in their interactions with their children.

According to Attili, mothers of anxious, withdrawn children believe strongly in a directive approach to the proactive teaching of social skills, and in their reactive strategies they may be described as over-controlling. This has been linked to mothers' tendencies to see their children as reflections on them as parents which may evoke over-directive parenting behaviours to assure the production of adaptive behaviour or the negation of maladaptive behaviour. Bugental (1992) described authoritarian parenting as the product of a "threat-oriented" family system, in which parents believe that they are at a disadvantage in a relationship, namely, that the child has more control over what happens than they do and that they are in a vulnerable position. So they hypothesized that these parents would be perceptually vigilant for care-giving problems and maximally reactive to variations in child behaviour. Bugental, Blue, and Cruzcosa (1989) found that mothers with low perceived balance of control over caregiving showed relatively high levels of coercive caregiving behaviours. This demonstrates how parents' orientations are not dictated simply by rational beliefs about how parent-child relationships are best conducted.

These findings also suggest that we should expect to see thematic variations in orientations in accordance with Baumrind's categories of parenting styles. But Baumrind's categories were derived exclusively from observational data and little research was conducted into what guides parents to develop or maintain their styles. How do they return to a cohesive style if they happen to get off track? Are there three distinct ways of orienting oneself as a parent to one's children, or is the phenomenology of parenting better characterized as highly idiosyncratic ways of experiencing? Ought helpers assume that, for example, all authoritative parents hold the same general worldview, or that the same factors help to maintain such a worldview, and tailor their intervention strategies accordingly? Certainly, more may be gleaned about the internal processes of effective parents by asking parents about how they orient themselves to their roles than by simply compiling an expert-driven profile of an authoritative parenting style from observations of parenting behaviours alone.

And perhaps what is more interesting is if we accept as a given that parenting is rarely a smooth enterprise, how is it that parents maintain consistency in their styles (if indeed they are as stable as suggested)? Baumrind has described each style in terms of how parents typically respond or react to their children, but not as much about the internal experience when one's parenting style does not flow smoothly. And if we accept as a given that parenting is rarely a smooth-sailing enterprise, what helps parents to remain oriented in the face of challenge and struggle? These remaining questions compel the current study.

<u>Orientations of Maltreating Parents</u>

One other area of the parenting literature which has made attempts to connect parent orientations with behavioural patterns of childrearing is found in research on child maltreatment. Again, the focus of this study is not to investigate what differentiates the

orientations of maltreating and non-maltreating parents, but to draw out a clearer picture of how effective parents emotionally and cognitively engage with challenging situations for the purpose of informing those who work with any parent attempting to enhance his or her sense of competence what types of orientational structures and processes facilitate such an outcome. Furthermore, there is a substantial body of research which suggests that the same processes considered responsible for determining the childrearing of so-called "normal" parents are also implicated in the behaviour of maltreating parents. Abusive and neglectful parents have often been conceptualized as a distinctive group from non-maltreating parents as having some kind of pathology. However, neglect and abuse has been empirically linked with many of the factors reviewed above, implying that perhaps these parents are simply following their uniquely derived orientations which fits with their experiential history.

This contention is endorsed by Rogosch, Cicchetti, Shields and Toth (1995) who claim that "maltreatment episodes are but an extreme subset of a larger matrix of parenting behaviours and orientations. As such, maltreatment events may be thought of as exaggerations or outgrowths of other parenting characteristics that also may be ineffective in promoting optimal child development" (p. 127).

Baumrind (1995) also claims that abusive parents are not severely or chronically disturbed. Rather, she characterizes them as tending to have deficits in empathy and role-taking, poor impulse control, low self-esteem, and an external locus of control. Furthermore, research has indicated that abusive and neglectful parents may have unrealistic expectations for mature behaviour and distorted perceptions of child malevolence, and are more likely to perceive the use of power assertions techniques as appropriate (e.g., Azar, Robinson, Hekimian, & Twentyman, 1984; Bauer & Twentyman, 1985; Rosenberg, M. S. & Reppucci,

1983). In fact, Newberger (1980) found that maltreating parents evidenced lower levels of parental awareness and reasoning and less developed belief structures relating to the parent-child relationship than demographically matched non-maltreating parents. These findings would seem to characterize these parents as operating from a disconnected, cognitively incoherent orientation.

Yet again, this appraisal does not incorporate emotional processes. Although focused on a different construct, one study consistent with the profile above found that highly insecure and disorganized patterns of attachment have been identified in maltreated infants and toddlers (Crittenden, 1988). In his assessment of the research on the etiology of child maltreatment, Belsky (1993) recognized a particular attributional style which presumes low personal control in combination with a particular "affective orientation" to be characteristic of abusive mothers. MacKinnon-Lewis, Lamb, Arbuckle, Baradoran, and Volling (1992; cited in Belsky 1993) found that mothers more likely to attribute negative intent to another in ambiguous situations were more likely to start a coercive interchange with their child, react negatively to the child's negative behaviour, and to continue to behave aggressively regardless of the other's behaviour. When parents are prone to make attributions of spitefulness or intentionality, they may also become more vigilant to perceiving confirmatory evidence from minor variations in the child's behaviour, resulting in greater intrusiveness and negative reactivity to the child's behaviour (Bauer & Twentyman, 1985). Another study found that abusive mothers were more physiologically reactive to the tape-recorded sound of a crying child, experiencing less sympathy and greater irritation and annoyance in response (Frodi & Lamb, 1980; cited in Belsky, 1993), and were hyper-reactive to videotapes of both

stressful and non-stressful mother-child interactions. These affective orientations seem to be organized around themes of hostility and appear to colour perceptual and evaluative frames.

Because this research demonstrates that various orienting structures and processes are implicated in differentiating parental effectiveness, it would make sense to examine the task of parenting more closely in terms of orientation. In his investigation of the etiology of child maltreatment, Belsky (1993) calls for a single research effort which would link "causal and affective attributions, negative reactivity, negatively affective personality traits, and problematic child behaviour" (p. 419). This study intends to do so, but with a focus on how self-described "effective" parents manage to remain oriented to their roles in both an ongoing manner as well as in response to challenges in their childrearing. Perhaps by ascertaining the factors that help orient parents to orientations and parenting styles that are more conducive to positive child outcomes, some light may be shed on what processes may be missing for parents who have maltreated their children, or even how it is that orientations - whatever they may be - are maintained.

Indeed, this author has not located any attempts by researchers to categorize the factors that help orient parents. Nor was there any literature found which documents a method whereby practitioners may access and understand how parents' are orienting to their children and their parental roles. There have been a small number of qualitative studies that have investigated parents' perceptions of the parental role.

Qualitative research on the parental role

One recent study investigated mothers of adolescents' perceptions of what they deemed to be important about themselves and their parenting (Riesch, Coleman, Glowacki, & Konings, 1997). Six themes emerged from open-ended questionnaires. The most frequently

endorsed theme was titled "Differences between ideals and practices" in which parents: a) identified practices from their own rearing that they wanted either to carry on or to avoid repeating and b) strategies for self-improvement or to gain the knowledge and skill of parenting. Next was mothers' "guiding principles", or their abstract, philosophical beliefs, focused on love, family involvement, values, and goals. The remaining themes were mothers with self-doubt, parenting styles (their concrete methodologies, such as behaviours, methods or techniques), stressors, and communication (mainly the desire to be an open, approachable parent and using communication for solving problems, showing affection and expressing opinions).

These themes relate to the current study in the sense that the themes reflect aspects of the idea of a preferred orientation and attempting to remain oriented to it in the face of factors that interfere with the parent's equilibrium. Guiding principles, parenting styles, and what they are calling communications refer to the more consciously held part of a parent's preferred orientation and differences between ideals and practices speaks to the tension and occasional discordance between how parents' would like to engage in their roles and their actual experiences of their children and their actual responses to them. The theme of stressors represents the elements that can impact their equilibrium and hence their capacities to sustain their preferred orientations. Mother's self-doubt could be viewed as a consequence of experiencing the differences between their ideals and practices. Although this lends some support for the theoretical frame of the current study, it does not sufficiently describe how mothers manage the self-doubt or the gaps between their ideals and practices. And statements about what mothers perceive as "important" do not qualify as factors which help parents orient to their roles.

Another closely related study investigated parents' views of the parental role as their children develop (Mowder, Harvey, Moy & Pedro, 1995). They found that parents see protection, sensitivity, responsivity and bonding as the most crucial characteristics of the parental role when the child is an infant, with an increasing emphasis on discipline and education for children in the preschool to adolescent ages. This study reflects the evolving nature of parents' preferred orientations and indicates some of the facets of the role that parents orient themselves to. However, this study does not examine how parents handle themselves to carry out those roles with the consistency and style that they would wish.

The one study that focused on what could be orienting processes was Meyers' (1998) examination of the relative relationships between parent, child and family context characteristics and parenting behaviour alluded to earlier. Although perceptions of social support, marital satisfaction and retrospective attachment resemble the kinds of conditions that may facilitate a parent's preferred orientation (Meyer's study focused on correlations with maternal authoritativeness), this study did not specifically examine the processes through which such conditions help to orient parents. They used behavioural observations of the mothers' parenting styles and correlated those with scores from questionnaires, so little was learned about how these parents internally manage to enact their parenting styles on an ongoing basis, or how they would return to those styles if they had gone off track. Furthermore, the variables investigated as potential correlates of maternal were limited to five questionnaires selected prior to the study. More factors may be gleaned from more open-ended, exploratory research.

The current study intended to examine the factors which facilitated parents' sense of doing their best by being the kinds of parents they would prefer to be and having the kinds of

relationships with their children they would prefer to have. However, given the myriad of potentially orienting variables reviewed in this chapter, a wide net needed to be cast that could simultaneously tap into the workings of parents' belief systems, affective and attachment systems, and behavioural repertoires. To achieve these goals, a holistic mode of inquiry was required which could synthesize and integrate the way a parent orients to her or his relationship with a child.

Pursuing such a qualitative appreciation for how parents sustain their psychological positions vis-à-vis their relationships with their children in an ongoing manner would likely prove difficult if asked for directly, much as a cyclist may be lost for words in trying to explain how balance is maintained. Therefore, because one's parenting orientation is typically such a taken-for-granted, established mode of operating in everyday life, it may be necessary to ask parents about times when their orientations were challenged and they felt disoriented in their roles as parents. Besides, a two-pronged approach is warranted because this study is interested in how parents orient themselves in response to struggle as addition to how they typically sustain their orientations.

Rationale for Disorientation Approach

This study aims to investigate two processes: a) what helps parents to maintain a sense of being oriented to how they would prefer to be as parents, and b) what helps parents to re-orient to their roles during an experience of struggle. This section provides a rationale for why this second part of the investigation was included.

As alluded to in the previous section, orientations contain both conscious and unconscious processes. In their treatise on social constructionism, Berger and Luckmann (1967) claim that the consciousness of existing in and apprehending the reality of everyday

life is taken as normal and self-evident, that is, it constitutes a natural attitude. However, the degree to which orientations operate beyond conscious awareness varies from person to person. For many parents, their orientations are different from a rationally constructed, consciously held philosophy, whereas for others, their parental stance may have evolved more out of a process of reflection. In support of this argument, Bugental (1992) and Iverson and Segal (1992) presented beliefs as originating out of interpersonal interactions, and classified them as either (1) automatic cognitions (i.e., caregiving schema that may not subject to conscious awareness) or (2) conscious or intentional (i.e., reflective and deliberate). The former type have become reified and embedded in their subjective frames over time, leaving their subscribers unaware of the premises on which their orientations are based and how these premises are influencing perception and behaviour. For parents whose beliefs are more intentional, their orientations are belief/attitudinal frames which they frequently access, revising when they deem appropriate. For these parents, then, it may be a matter of simply helping them describe what orients them in a holistic and coherent manner.

Therefore, I anticipate that parents will vary in the degree to which they can easily access and articulate their orientations and what helps to maintain them. Sameroff and Feil (1985) suggested that parents are unlikely to expend energy looking for explanations of a child's behaviour as long as things are going well. A satisfactory state of affairs confirms parents' orientations towards their kids and contributes to a mood state (i.e., no dissonance, low to moderate affect) that in experimental studies is associated with no active search for alternative explanations (Zanna & Cooper, 1978) and greater acceptance of whatever information comes their way, with few checks on the validity of that information (Isen, Means, Patrick & Nowicki, 1982; cited in Goodnow, 1995). In summary, when parent-child

relationships are status quo, there is nothing forcing parents to operate outside of the comfort of their habitual orientations or to consider their assumptions and understandings. So, although this provides one answer as to what can help to maintain a parent's orientation, it is also a situation that may render other possible orienting processes more elusive for parents to consciously articulate.

For this reason, I intend to take parents to a moment of interaction with their children or a time in the parent-child relationship during which they were very present in their experiencing of their relationships by virtue of its emotionally provocative impact. It is only when the expectations inherent in our orientations are broken that a sense of discomfort can put us in touch with the fact that we hold such fundamental tenets in the way we are constructing our reality. Dix (1991) made the point that affect stems from the outcomes of one's ideas, from expectations being met or violated.

Hence, parents are most likely to be cognizant of their implicit orientations is when they are challenged or feel lost or disoriented. Although they confine it to their discussion of "locating" oneself along the temporal dimension, Burger and Luckmann (1967) claim that when one becomes "disoriented" one feels an almost instinctive urge to "re-orient" oneself in the structure of everyday life. It is through examining such attempts to re-orient that we may discover the manner in which parents typically locate themselves in relation to their parental reality and how that sense of location is sustained. Through the following example, Jacqueline Goodnow (1995) succinctly and accurately expressed the rationale behind my search for the processes that orient parents to their childrearing stances, both habitually and, perhaps more importantly, in times of struggle:

Beliefs and ideas of children and parenting that are highly accessible are likely to be

processed 'automatically' rather than given the 'conscious processing' that we

normally think of information as being given (Barg, 1982, 1990). In times of parental

stress, for instance, the concept of children as property may be the

one to come more quickly to the surface, to be processed automatically, to require

some effort at inhibition, and to be the source of action. This may also be the view of

children that, when threatened, is particularly associated with affect. (Goodnow,

1995, p. 325)

Thus, I propose to apply the concept of disorientation to help generate or clarify the

processes that facilitate orientation, by exploring a situation in which either the parents felt

they or their children violated their own standards (i.e., values threatened, beliefs activated or

challenged, attitudes confronted, emotions stimulated) or the parents experienced significant

role strain (i.e., the felt difficulty in fulfilling role obligations) or role pressure (i.e., all those

factors relating to role which singly or in combination are sources of potential difficulty for

the individual) (Biddle & Thomas, 1966). By exploring scenarios in which parents

experienced disorientation in relation to their children, but managed to recover, it was thought

to be possible to ascertain those processes that facilitate re-orientation for struggling parents

and the parents may have better access to how they had been oriented to their role to begin

with and how their orientation was challenged or compromised. As Belsky (1984) put it: "In

the routine ebb and flow of life, its is often difficult to discern normal processes. Any

dysfunction, by creating a perturbation in this flow, reveals elements and/or relationships that

might otherwise go unnoticed" (p. 92). All parents, however generally effective, experiences

moments of at least mild dysfunction where they are off the track they would prefer to be on.

Examining those moments of being off track can help illuminate what that preferred track is and what normally helps them to be on it.

In addition to using parents' experiences of disorientation to elicit descriptions of parenting orientations, investigating how parents handle such states may be important in its own right. Although parents' expectations tend to match their later experiences, a greater discrepancy of expectations of parenthood from actual experience predicts more parental adjustment difficulties. Violated expectations of what parenting will be like are associated with stress-related outcomes such as decreased energy levels, lower confidence as a parent, and upset schedules and routines (Kach & McGhee, 1982). Certainly, these are feelings that would be undesirable for most parents, and the manner in which they are defended against or responded to would likely have a significant impact on parental identity and childrearing relationships.

Therefore, exploring how parents reconcile their perceptions and experiences of their actual children and of their actual relationships to them with their images of how they desire them to be would seem to be an endeavor of some import. In a broader sense, any experience of disorientation or disequilibrium can be viewed as a stimulus for parents to manage themselves, their children, or both, and there is much we can learn from those parents that manage dissonance effectively while maintaining the integrity of themselves and their children.

In the domain of parenting, disorientation refers to a sense that the parent has lost his or her way, when there is an incompatibility between: a) what they expect, prefer or are familiar and comfortable with and b) what they are perceiving or experiencing with regards to their children or themselves in relation to their children. The idea of parents experiencing a

need to re-orient from states of disorientation is similar to the notion of recursive sequences of interpersonal behaviour in cybernetic systems theory. Breunlin and Schwartz (1986) proposed an oscillation model of dyadic interaction sequences which display tendencies to maintain a state of equilibrium within the dyad. Equilibrium is closely linked to the concept of orientation. It is defined in Webster's as a state or sense of steadiness and proper orientation of the body, and can therefore be thought of as parents' experience of being well oriented to how they prefer to be as parents.

As it applies to the current study, Breunlin and Schwartz theorize that when parent and child are in a pattern of interaction that resonates in a familiar and agreeable manner for the parent where the child's behaviour and the parent's responses are in some sort of synchrony, and vice versa, the parent could be said to be well oriented to his or her role and relationship with the child. There is a degree of equilibrium between the parent and child which would likely be experienced as an equilibrium within the parent. The theory suggests that should their patterns of interaction fall into disequilibrium, there exist some sorts of homeostatic force in the dyad that presses them back towards equilibrium. Within any system of equilibrium, there will be discernible factors which are being monitored by the system. Hoffman speculated that "presumably, these are essential variables which the parents must maintain within certain limits if they are to function together successfully" (1976, p. 505). This study is not focusing so much on what those variables are (such as conflict, intimacy, child competence, symmetry, etc.) as the monitoring processes of parents. It is assumed that when the limits of those variables are maintained that parents are experiencing equilibrium and a sense of being well oriented. Therefore, this study was interested in how parents

maintain those limits and how they return to them (or adjust the limits) when the limits have been violated by themselves or the child.

Conclusion

The research reviewed in this chapter examined the various contextual and psychological factors that have been demonstrated to have a relationship to how parents come to enact the roles that are so vital to their developing children. A case was made for consideration of an orientation as a way of thinking about how all of these factors conglomerate in a given moment to create a parent's reality. Exploring what helps parents to sustain a solid orientation was hoped to provide a sense of the internal perceptions parents have about how they are maintaining their sense of equilibrium, which is information that will contribute to the parenting theory and practice by implicating the processes that will need to be taken into account if practitioners are to help parents to make shifts in their childrearing behaviours or to help them increase their sense of confidence and confidence in their roles.

Research questions

1. What helps parents to remain close to being the kind of parents they want to be?

2. When experiencing struggle (disorientation) in their roles, what helps parents to re-orient to their relationships with their children and return to a state of equilibrium?

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Rationale for methodology selection

A qualitative methodology was chosen for the current study because it allows for an investigation of parents' experience of their children from a holistic perspective. The very concept of orienting processes suggests a subjective quality of meaning that an individual

brings to bear on a realm of his or her experience which can be neither operationalized nor quantified. Osborne (1990) contends that "a growing number of psychologists are unwilling to accept the decontextualization of experience and reduced meaning as a necessary price for the elusive goal of scientific objectivity", pushing instead for a psychology that is existentially relevant when addressing human experience in its fullness (p. 79). Traditional psychology, with its operational definitions, tends to eliminate the phenomenon's experiential aspects (Colazzi, 1978). To know what a particular psychological phenomenon is, one must begin by contacting that phenomenon as people experience it.

Furthermore, parent education practices which simply promote beliefs and behaviours empirically demonstrated to lead to the healthy development of children (i.e., encouraging parents to change to an image of how to be) have not been found to effect enduring changes in parenting practice (Cedar & Levant, 1990). Perhaps programs planned from an objective perspective fail to be integrated into parents' ongoing orientations. Utilizing a qualitative methodology will allow parents to describe the essence of their parenting experience, and to reflect on the manner in which they have oriented themselves to that experience.

The research approach selected for this study may be best described as a qualitative interview informed by Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954). Critical Incident methodology intends to collect direct information from people of their observations or experiences of events which they deem to be critical in determining or influencing an outcome.

Flanagan's Critical Incident Technique (1954) was chosen to address the fact that despite the proliferation of parenting programs, the research which informs them has given scant attention to what effective parents do naturally to transform negative patterns. Their

voices deserve legitimacy and researchers and practitioners in the field of childrearing could benefit from the rich expertise embodied in the subjective experience of effective parents. This particular methodology was considered to be appropriate in addressing this study's primary curiosity of how parents effectively alter those orienting constructions of how the parent-child relationship is and ought to be which may help to perpetuate stuck or ineffective patterns in a given situation into guiding orientations that enable parents to move from stuckness or chronic negative patterns. In other words, what psychological incidents do parents deem to be critical in facilitating their childrearing in challenging moments? CIT seemed most appropriate for examining those internal factors which would differentiate effective from ineffective resolutions of struggle over challenging situations.

This researcher did consider employing other qualitative research methodologies to address the research problem, such as phenomenology, case study and phenomenography. Phenomenological methodology, which has as its goal the production of clear and accurate descriptions of "the meaning that constitutes the activity of consciousness" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 45), were considered for their power to elicit in-depth, reflective descriptions of experience (e.g., What is the experience of parenting in challenging situations). However, the latitude typically granted for such reflection on a phenomena of such breadth was felt to be potentially overwhelming for the participants of this study. And given the automatic, taken-for-granted nature of parents' orientations, acquiring a focused description of such a nebulous subjective experience would likely prove elusive, yielding unsatisfying data. Therefore, it was concluded that the critical incident approach would isolate scenarios when parents' orientations have been challenged in order to provide the contrast of disorientation, hopefully enabling parents to become more aware of that which generally orients them to

their style of childrearing. This is consistent with the belief that people are more aware of their assumptions when those assumptions have been confronted. Lastly, the critical incident technique was considered more appropriate than phenomonological approaches as it intends to identify specific processes that facilitate re-orientation and is not open to all aspects of the parenting experience.

Case study was considered as a possible avenue for richly exploring the psychological processes involved in making an orientational shift, but would not capture the diversity of resources that facilitate effective coping with struggle, nor would it provide the comprehensiveness desired in this study. Phenomenography (Morton, 1981a; 1988) was considered as a potential approach to explore parent's understandings of the parental role, but was not selected because of its emphasis on conceptual inquiry which was deemed to be less adequate in exploring the emotional aspects of the parenting experience.

In this chapter, the general nature of Critical Incident Technique is presented, followed by a description of the parent participants, interview procedures, collection, and classification of data.

Critical Incident Technique

Critical Incident Technique is designed to generate descriptive and qualitative data of an experience that is mostly unaddressed in the literature. Through interviews, people are asked to focus on their observations of things that happened that significantly affected the outcome. Description and meaning are the level of focus, and minimizing speculation and interpretation is imperative. Once the interview process is completed, critical incidents are extracted from the accounts and grouped to form similar thematic categories which encompass the events. These categories provide a comprehensive list of what facilitates or

hinders a certain psychological state. Flanagan (1954) posited that this list of categories may be used to inform practical programs, generate test questions and develop theory.

Flanagan (1954) initially developed the technique to ascertain a list of what was critical for effective pilot performance during WWII by asking combat veterans what incidents they deemed to be significantly helpful or harmful to their mission. Out of this study grew an effective training program that targeted specific behaviours. This approach of exploring phenomena qualitatively has been demonstrated to conform to methodological principles of reliability and validity (Andersson & Nilsson, 1964).

Subsequently, CIT has been applied successfully in multiple fields of inquiry. Increasingly used in areas related to counselling, CIT has been employed to identify factors critical to facilitating work motivation (Herzberg, Manseur & Snyderman, 1959), group process (Cohen & Smith, 1976), bereavement (Easton, 1986), and quality of life in the United States (Flanagan, 1979). Weiner, Russell, and Lerman (1979) used CIT to aid development of theory in the investigation of the relationship between emotions and cognitions in the context of achievement.

A few studies are closely related to the current study in their focus on determining psychological incidents critical in facilitating a psychological process. McKormick identified categories describing what First Nations people did naturally to facilitate their emotional healing in order to inform counsellors working with that population. Borgen and Amundson (1984) developed counselling approaches that help move unemployed people through grieving to training and innovative job search while avoiding the hindering factors which contribute to burnout after using CIT in their study of the experience of unemployment. Alfonso (1997) examined what helped HIV+ people overcome depressed moods. Even more

parallel to the current study, Rimon (1979) explored those aspects of how nurse's perceived their role in treating rehabilitation patients which were critical to their effective performance.

Procedures

Critical Incident Technique entails formulating an aim statement and writing a detailed interview guide before starting the data collection. The procedures for data collection and analysis will be described in the sections that follow.

Selection of co-researchers

The recruitment of parents was conducted by posting advertisements in community centres and neighborhood stores. Communities of different socio-economic levels were targeted for advertisement. Once several parents have been enlisted, an opportunistic sample was pursued through initial participants' word of mouth throughout their networks of parents. Parents were included if they were currently in guardianship of at least one child under the age of fifteen, and over the age of two and could recall at least one experience of struggle which they were able to overcome.

In CIT, sample size is considered to be the number of critical incidents collected. There are no strict requirements for sample size. Incidents were collected until redundancy appeared. Ten parents were recruited through this procedure before such redundancy was attained.

Interview procedures

This study intended to elucidate how parents alter their orientations to enable a shift in the patterns of parent-child interactions or a shift in their experience of those interactions. Questions asked in this interview were primarily intended to facilitate descriptions of what enabled parents to remain close to being the kinds of parents they wanted to be as well as

what enabled them to make shifts that led to decreases in the experience of struggle around their parenting relationship. In the process, I was interested in parents' descriptions of how they had typically been oriented to their roles as parents and the function their particular orientations played in the struggles they were encountering with their children (i.e., how are parents reacting to and responding from their pictures of their relationships with their children). In other words, this study is not only interested in incidents that are helpful in reducing disorientation, but in those aspects of parents' subjectivity that became violated, thus producing the initial disorientation.

The first interview was conducted at the residences of the participants, except in one instance when it was held in the Jewish Community Centre. It consisted of orienting the parent to the aim of the study and eliciting critical events that relate to the study. This interview was approximately one-and-a-half hours in length, or until the parent was unable to recall any new incidents, and was tape-recorded with participants' consent. The interview began with the following aim statement:

Hello X. Thank you for meeting with me today. As I explained on the phone, the purpose of this study is to find out what orients and guides parents in their childrearing. In particular, I am interested in learning from parents like you about what has helped you to be the kind of parent you want to be as well as what has helped you to move from an experience of struggle in your role as a parent to a sense of greater comfort. My goal is to come up with a clear picture of what enabled you to move beyond your struggle so that other parents may learn from your approach to parenting, and maybe prevent them from becoming stuck in unpleasant and ineffective relationships with their children. To get that picture I need your help, and I really appreciate your being here

today to give me a chance to talk to you about this study. I am looking forward to exploring with you.

At this point, there was a discussion of the nature of the study to ensure that the objectives of the study were clear, and to establish some rapport. During this interview, the parents were presented with a consent form explaining the purpose of the study, the type of questions to be asked, confidentiality, and their option to withdraw from the study at any time. The consent form was signed by both researcher and co-researcher when the co-researcher indicated sufficient understanding of the relevant details.

The tape recorder was turned on at this point, and the interview process began. Each participant was asked the following set of questions, subject to modification based on the responses given:

All parents experience times when things go smoothly in their parenting and all parents have times when parenting is a struggle. I would first like to know how you are when you are really on track with how you want to be as a parent. (Get a description) What helps you to be close to that kind of parent you have described? (Participant responses) Now I would like you to think about a time that you remember well when you experienced significant struggle in your role as a parent regarding one of your children but which eventually you were able to successfully manage. It could be a time when you could not make sense of your child, were stuck in a pattern of conflict with your child, you were not being the kind of parent you wanted to be, or you simply felt challenged as a parent. (Pause for them to recall such a time) What helped you to move to a place where you felt less struggle and you felt greater comfort regarding your relationship with your child and about yourself as a parent?

Clarifying and probing questions were asked in order to examine how parents emotionally and cognitively engaged with the struggle as the purpose of the study was to get a sense of how the parent was seeing herself and her child and how she or he worked with that. It was important to continually bring parents back to the orienting processes, asking what they did to re-orient themselves to the situations that helped them in their attempts to successfully resolve their senses of struggle. This also provided a sense of what beliefs about child development and parental intervention oriented the parents emotional and behavioural responses.

Statements were frequently reflected back to the parents to ensure that I was clear in understanding them and in order to prompt deeper reflection. Depending on their responses, parents were potentially asked probing questions such as the following:

- How did you manage to do that?

- What made this experience a struggle for you? In specific, how were you seeing your child that you came to feel a sense of struggle (or whatever term they used to label their disorienting experience)?

- How were you seeing your role as a parent that you felt the impulse to respond to this behaviour from your child?

- Did you do anything differently?

- How did you come to decide to make that change?

- What kind of thinking or feelings were you going through?

- What ways of looking at the situation were important in helping you to deal with it (or alternatively: what helped you to get a handle on what was going on and what to do about it)? What enabled you to be able to view the situation in that way?

- How were you feeling about yourself as a parent during your struggle (competence)? After you resolved it?

- What told you that you were closer to being the parent you want to be?

These probes were only be used if they were deemed to be facilitative in parents' elaboration of what internal shifts enabled the change in their experience of struggle and/or their behaviour. In keeping with qualitative research practice, this discussion was collaborative in the sense that the researcher attempted to refrain from overly influencing the content of the co-researchers' responses, but probed to deepen and expand their accounts of what helped them to orient to their child and their roles in less dissonant ways. Otherwise, participants were allowed to respond in their own ways with as little interjection as possible.

A second interview was conducted via telephone (one was done in person) as a form of validation in which the categories derived from the initial interviews were checked with the parents. These follow-up interviews were scheduled within a year of the first interviews. Each participant was sent a full transcript, a copy of the results sections including additional statements they made which were categorized, and a contact letter (see Appendix C) prior to the second meeting.

Data Analysis

All tape recorded interviews were transcribed in the participants' own words and number coded. The transcriptions were read several times in order to acquire a sense of the meaning of the participants' statements as well as a sense of the entire narrative account. Statements were defined as critical incidents if they met the criteria relating to the purposes of the study. Incidents were included only if: a) they were stated in a complete way, b) the event was clearly identified, and c) the outcome was related to the purpose of the study (Did

the event facilitate being close to the kind of parents they wished to be or did it facilitate the decrease in the experience of struggle?).

Incidents were labeled "sustaining" when the helping factor was described by parents in the context of responding to the question: "When you are parenting the way you would like to parent, what helps you to do that?". Incidents were labeled "re-orienting" if they were described in the context of recalling an experience of struggle and if they were in response to the question: "What helped you get back on track?". Participants' responses were flagged as re-orienting critical incidents to be included for categorization if they met the following additional criteria:

1. There was an initial experience of struggle which contained an aspect of disorientation. What constituted struggle was subjectively determined by the participant; however, the experience should have contained at least one of the following characteristics:

   a) the orientation no longer served the parent to understand the

      behaviour of the child or to orient them in their responses to the child.

   b) the child did something opposed to the parent's expectations/values.

   c) the parent felt lost or disoriented in the parental role or violated own

      standards.

   d) a sense of parent-child conflict which was concerning to the parent.

2. The outcome of this engagement had the result of feeling a decreased sense of struggle or an increased sense of familiarity or comfort (oriented) as a parent.

3. The incident either occurred within the last year, or is salient enough to be recalled in full detail.

4. The incident involved one child.

Once collected, incidents were then clustered according to their similarities regarding their impact on co-researchers and the meanings that they made of them. The clearest incidents were categorized first to be used as prototypes for the categories. As suggested by Novotny (1993), incidents which could be assigned to several categories were adjudicated on the basis of the extent to which they resemble the prototype of a particular category more than the other. These clusters were continually redefined and clarified until a coherent and organized system of categories developed in which all incidents had been allocated.

As a purely anecdotal addition, a tentative and informal assessment was made of each participant's parenting style. This was done by comparing the parents' descriptions of their styles of childrearing with Diana Baumrind's descriptions of authoritarian, authoritative and permissive parenting styles. This was included only for the purposes of speculating about possible hypotheses regarding Baumrind's categorizations of parents as they may relate to the various orienting principles (see Table 3). This 'analysis' is not intended to represent "data" about which definitive conclusions could be drawn.

Validation Procedures

Independent sorter

The data was evaluated by an independent sorter, as suggested by Novotny (1993) who was asked to sort a portion of the incidents into the categories that had been developed. Another student in the U.B.C. Counselling Psychology program, who is also a mother of two, was asked to perform this task.

Definitions of the categories had been printed along with some prototypical, sample incidents which reflected the range of each category as this researcher had interpreted it. The

sorter was oriented to each of the categories by having each of them read to her and the criteria by which they were differentiated from one another was explained. The first few incidents she categorized were discussed to ensure that the rater had an opportunity to clarify her understanding of the categories and the process by which these had been formed. She was then asked to randomly select critical incidents, which had been printed and cut into strips of paper, and assign them to the category she considered appropriate with the aim of following this researcher's logic. No communication took place between the sorter and the researcher during this validation procedure. Over a period of 90 minutes, the sorter assigned 58 incidents with 49 of them corresponding to the categories this researcher had placed them in, for an agreement rate of 84.5%, achieving the necessary level of agreement of conventionally agreed to be between 75% and 85% (Anderson & Nilsson, 1964). This level of agreement lends credibility that the category system is complete and accurate in describing the critical incidents.

Interpretive validity: Co-researchers cross-checking

As the parents in this study are considered the experts of their experience of parenting, any judgment regarding the validity granted to this data would be dubious without their consultation. Each parent was sent a verbatim copy of the entire transcript and a list of the categories with highlights over the categories to which they contributed. They were asked to look this over and determine whether the descriptions of the incidents accurately represented their intended meanings or if they had any further insights they wished to add. Unclear incidents were cross-checked by the parents in order to avoid distortion of their accounts. Copies of the fourth chapter with the addition of twice the number of examples were also sent to each parent for them to determine whether they agreed with my interpretations and

categorizations of their statements. Parents comments were solicited to facilitate clarification of the categories or placing unclear incidents.

Nine of the ten parents were reached by telephone for a regrettably abbreviated "second interview". Three additional incidents were collected as a result of these interviews and one category was significantly clarified. One parent provided editing of the examples of the critical incidents she described. Every parent stated that they were accurately represented, in their statements and indicated that they agreed with the categorization of their examples.

Exhaustiveness

This test addresses the question of category saturation and comprehensiveness. Approximately ten percent of the incidents from the first nine interviews and the entire tenth interview were extracted and left unexamined until all of the categories were formed and all other incidents were assigned. At this point, these incidents were examined and allotted into the existing categories. Although several of these incidents appeared to fit into more than one category, something that produced some re-clarification of some categories and a shuffling around of some incidents which had already been assigned, each of these delayed incidents fit into the category system that had been established and no new categories emerged. Because the existing category structure was able to accommodate these incidents, the list of categories was deemed comprehensive and exhaustive.

Participation rate

According to Flanagan (1954), the higher the participation rate, the more valid the category is considered. Borgen and Amundson (1984) suggested that a 25% rate could be considered adequate for a particular category to be considered valid, although others have argued that a single incident by itself is worthy of significance. The participation rates that

emerged from the ten parents interviewed ranged from a low of 40% (Attributions of Responsibility) to a high of 100% (Presence of others).

Theoretical validity

Finally, the categories were evaluated based on their theoretical validity. The findings were compared with the current theoretical positions in the parenting literature and other research findings. If theoretical support for the category was lacking, it would be considered to be questionable and was examined in light of the support provided by the independent raters and parents. If support was strong from these two sources, the category was retained but was considered to require further study. The results are evaluated in light of the existing theoretical literature in Chapter Five.

It was expected that the results of this analysis would provide a detailed and accurate collection of specific facilitative processes in parents' efforts to orient themselves to the parenting situation in ways that lead to more positive parent-child relations and more effective childrearing. It was hoped that such a map could help develop understanding of the experience of struggle in the parental role, and aid parent trainers and educators in their efforts to help parents stuck in a chronic state of struggle to shift their orientations to parenting.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the ten interviews conducted in which parents were asked what helped them to remain close to their visions of how they want to be as parents and what helped them to return to this vision after an experience of struggle in their roles. A total of 271 critical incidents were drawn from the transcripts of the interviews of

the eight mothers and two fathers. 134 of these represented what helped the parents to maintain their preferred orientations in an ongoing way (which I have termed "sustaining"), and 138 of the incidents were identified as critical in helping them to re-orient themselves to their roles during or after a struggle in their parenting (which I have termed "re-orienting"). The incidents were classified into 15 categories which were arranged into six groups. This chapter begins with a brief biographical outline of each of the parents interviewed, followed by a description of the categories with examples of significant statements which illustrate each category.

Description of the Parents

These descriptions convey some basic demographic information of the parents and their families and a brief sense of how the parents were oriented to their preferred roles and to their children. The situations around which the parents experienced struggle and disorientation are described. This is intended to provide a context for the study's findings.

Tanya

Tanya is a Caucasian mother of one nine year-old girl and a seven year-old boy. Living in the Interior of B.C. and not employed outside of the home, she depicted her spouse, their natural father, as being very involved with the children in a manner that she highly admired. In explaining her preferred orientation to her role, she described some of the latest parenting attitudes that she had recently adopted from various parenting books and courses, namely favoring the attitude of acceptance and approval, and being on the alert for engaging in "repetition compulsion" (the notion of reacting to one's children in a manner that repeats how one was treated by one's own parents). Tanya spoke extensively of battling fatigue and reactions of frustration and control - engages in efforts to avoid entering power struggles.

The disorienting experience Tanya focused on in this interview revolved around her father's critical reaction to how she was handling her daughter's temper tantrums, accusing her of spoiling her child by not controlling her. She related that "it made me feel confused about what I was trying to do with my daughter . . . and it made me feel very, very bad about myself". Subsequently, Tanya "started trying spanking for a while and being more punitive as a way of discouraging it", something that she stated went against the grain of how she ultimately wanted to be as a parent.

Evelyn

Evelyn is a Caucasian woman, in her early forties who lives in the Interior of B.C. and is not employed outside of the home. She is a mother of a seven year-old girl whom she is raising with her second husband, the girl's natural father, and she has two grown children from a first marriage who are living on their own. She described her orientation to her role as alternating between being that of a friend and a teacher. Most of the examples she used to illustrate her parenting were around her responses to situations where her daughter is emotionally distressed about something at school or with friends. She reported believes in ultimately according her daughter the freedom to make her own decisions when it comes to her own struggles, but she indicated that she also believes that she has to be consistent in enforcing limits with her and is even proactive in preventing power struggles by emphasizing the limits she sees as appropriate directly prior to entering a given situation.

The disorienting experience Evelyn described centered around a situation that was disorienting for her daughter when she was being laughed at by other school children for vocalizing her beliefs in God, something Evelyn found "very, very difficult" due to the complexity of her daughter's dilemma and the fact that "I really didn't have the answers".

Evelyn indicated that she felt at a loss as to how to advise her daughter as she claimed to feel caught between her desire for her child to feel openly enthusiastic about God while avoiding being made fun of.

Darlene

Darlene is a Caucasian woman in her mid-forties, living in the Interior of B.C. who characterizes her family as a blended one. She has two children from a first marriage, three children in her current marriage, and a step-daughter. Her youngest daughter is nine years-old. She characterized her orientation as having mellowed over the years, from strict to consistently firm with clear and non-negotiable expectations and rules for manners and choices. For example, she claimed to no longer be as oriented to her children's appearance, but has maintained other expectations (i.e., no dating until 16, children *will* go to college) and continues to aim to instill morals and model her values. She explained that she has particular values and beliefs that she desires for her children's behaviour, yet that she orients herself to her children as people who have feelings that are to be respected "it would feel like I had failed if I had to actually scream at anybody, it felt like I'd failed inside, 'cause you shouldn't have to do that"

The only truly disorienting experience she could recall was of her sixteen year old son, who was caught shoplifting, something she termed a "really traumatic experience" at which she was "absolutely horrified" and which put her into "unknown territory", something she was unaccustomed to as a parent.

Jennifer

Jennifer is a Caucasian woman in her mid-thirties. She is a married mother of a six year old girl and a three year old boy who enjoys working part-time for Project Parent and

lives in the Lower Mainland. Jennifer described herself as striving to be an involved parent who is kind and respectful towards her children while also maintaining a stance of being in control. She claimed that she sees herself as a provider of experiences for her children to figure things out for themselves and be challenged with things they also enjoy in order to develop socially and intellectually. She also emphasized the importance for her that her children feel secure knowing that someone is there for them and her primary goal for them is for them to feel good about themselves. Jennifer described two disorienting incidents: a) during yet another late night of soothing her crying baby when she caught herself rocking her daughter in a manner that she judged to be too rough and b) when she noticed herself becoming impatient and annoyed with her six year-old daughter after a prolonged pattern of wetting herself when they were on outings.

Natasha

Natasha is a single mother of a twelve year old girl and a ten year old boy, whom she home schooled for several years, before enrolling them in Jewish schools. She indicated that her authoritative orientation (her description) is firmly embedded in her immersion in Jewish faith, and she emphasized that her sense of authority as a parent is validated by the teachings of the Torah. Natasha explained that her focus on providing a sense of discipline to her children will lead to an enjoyment of her children over the long term. She claims that her preferred orientation to her role - as that of a teacher, a setter, limiter and occasional negotiator of rules, and a protector - and her actual enactment of her role are consistent. She described herself as being primarily oriented to the religious, intellectual and functional development of her children, and she holds high expectations for responsibility, discipline and striving, but also aims to be an approachable parent who is attuned to her children's

feelings and does not react with anger. Natasha claimed that she experiences a strong enjoyment of her children's company and that she seldom experiences self-doubt, ambivalence or struggle since she claimed to feel very confident and comfortable with her approach to childrearing.

Natasha's disorienting experience centered around a struggle she had with a period of time in which she was receiving phone calls because her quite intelligent son was frequently being sent to the principal's office for classroom misbehaviour. She recalled that she subsequently "felt drained, always tired. I wasn't enjoying being a parent - I was barely a parent at all. I barely had time to enjoy them and I was only in the role of a disciplinarian". Natasha also indicated that at one point she "felt totally inadequate, . . . and I remember crying to the counsellor and it wasn't necessarily that I had to get it out or anything but I felt like I couldn't protect him - it's not something I could do for him and not something that I should do for him. And that's when I felt really alone as a parent because there was no other person that could stand with me for David . . And so, it wasn't self-evaluating or anything but it was really emotional for both of us and it hurt me to watch him go through that because I knew his weakness, because when you teach your own child an you home school, you get to know your child much more emotionally."

Tim

Tim is a Caucasian man in his early forties and a father of a five year old boy living in Greater Vancouver. He has been separated from his son's mother for two years and they have a shared custody arrangement, meaning that his son lives with him half the week. Tim represented himself as having values grounded in Buddhism and certain New Age spirituality. He described his efforts to find the balance between giving his son "values and boundaries to

work against on the one hand and supporting his freedom to be creative, to know that he's in charge of himself, to give him a chance to explore and learn who he is and learn what the possibilities are both in relation to the outside world and in relation to ourselves". He indicated that he had recently evaluated himself as being "I think that I am a little too lenient in some areas and that could be a bit of a reaction to my own parenting", but that he characterizes his relationship with his son as mostly "pretty light, playful, fun, respectful, loving." Tim claimed to aim to give his son "the freedom of discussing what's going on".

Tim's example of disorientation was in connection with an incident on the eve of his son's departure with his mother for a week out of town when his son was stricken with a neck spasm that Tim - tired, slightly worried, and anticipating missing his son - had somewhat suspected that his son was perhaps feigning his ailment in order to get out of his trip, and became angry. Although he made a substantial effort to help him feel better, he claimed that he did not do as much as he might have if he had taken his son completely seriously. Tim explained that "the part that I absolutely hated was my reaction when I got angry at him. When in fact, whatever the reason, he was experiencing a huge amount of pain and I wasn't attending to him properly. The rest of that day was pure agony. I hated myself, I absolutely hated myself and I couldn't talk to him about it because he was on the airplane and I was really worried about how he was making out."

Mary

Mary is a Caucasian woman, married, in her mid-thirties, living in a suburban region in the Lower Mainland and working part time. She described herself as the primary caregiver to two boys, aged four and six. Mary indicated that she had the goal for her children to develop a self-assurance in their "inner voices" and she aims to provide them with a home

environment in which they can trust to feel safe to be themselves and to approach her openly with anything. She encourages her children to question her authority and she particularly expressed delight in her children's suggesting for her to go for a time out.

The disorienting experience Mary encountered was when her second child was an infant and the family had moved for the purposes of her husband's work and were living in a hotel. Mary described her eldest, who was two at the time, as being very hostile towards the new baby, and that much of her energy was centered around preventing his attacks on the infant. At one point, the older son jumped on the infant "he would kick me because I had Mark and so I shut myself in the bathroom and locked the door and he was just pounding at the door and kicking and screaming and I just remember sitting on the floor crying, thinking what am I going to do, like how am I going to cope?" Mary also remembered "feeling quite resentful (of her infant because of how his presence was interfering with her bond with her oldest) and then feeling very guilty, thinking I'm a terrible mother, why don't I love my child?" She also talked about a recurring problem with her children acting up when she is trying to drive, when she has difficulty with managing her children's behaviour without her frustration taking over.

Karen

Karen is a Caucasian woman, married, in her early forties, living on the North Shore and working in the unemployment field. She indicates that her husband is not much involved in the actual childrearing of their eight year-old girl and four-year old boy, and that carrying the full weight of the parenting role makes her "try to work harder to be rational". Karen explained that much of her preferred orientation developed out of a very positive recollection of her own childhood and has internalized her mother's sense of selfless responsibility. She

aims to provide her children with warm memories of their childhoods for their sake and also as an investment in a relationship for the future as she claimed to be anxious about preserving closeness and openness with her children through the teenage years so that they may receive guidance from her. Karen comes into her role of being a mother through extraordinary efforts of medical procedures to carry a pregnancy to full term and become a parent. One of the first things she informed me about was her belief in physical means of discipline: "I'm from the old school - I think it's terrible to abuse somebody, but I do not reckon that smacking the kid on the butt when they've been totally out of control is abuse". She is orientated to the children's development of manners and respect, established through her parenting style, structure, intentional modeling, availability and a warm relationship with her children. She indicated that she sees herself as a stimulator of her children to think consider deeper life issues. Karen stated that she has a different experience of her son than her daughter: "it's just a lot louder relationship."

The disorientation that Karen experienced in her role was centered around her when she has lost control of herself in reaction to her son's challenging behaviour. Karen indicated that she had felt particularly disoriented when her son misbehaves in public where her resolve of firmness seems somewhat undermined.

Katerina

Katerina is a Latino woman in her late thirties, born in Mexico, and has lived in B.C. for over thirty years. She is a mother of two girls, aged thirteen and nine, and is married to her second husband. Katerina has taught several parenting classes and is currently completing her doctorate degree, and she made it clear that "my kids are the most important thing in my life". She characterized her preferred orientation as an aim to be a guide to her

children via the closeness in her relationships with them. She emphasized providing an empathic attunement to her daughters, but also indicated that she has evolved over the years to be more relaxed with being a firm parent as she has come to view her children as more resilient. Katerina stated that she is very motivated as a parent and that she is very proud of who her children are.

Apart from a couple of times that she did only briefly experienced struggle when she "lost it" and raised her voice, Katerina did not pinpoint any specific incident that was significantly disorienting for her, but described three general struggles that she had encountered over periods of time. One related to a recurring difficulty she said she was having when she would get caught up in being overly reflective and empathic and becoming trapped in being too afraid of how she was affecting her daughters and how they were going to view her when they grew up. She later reflected that "many times, a lot of my actions toward them were pushed by: 'I'd better take the action that will ensure that they'll still like me.' And that's not been very helpful because it's not about being liked, it's about being effective". Another disorienting theme she described was when she had "gone through hard moments of feeling bad about it, or judgments of other people has been very hard", especially from her hero in life, her brother. Lastly, she described a time of transition in the family when her eldest (nine years old at the time) was acting out and Katerina was quite stressed and getting angry "and then we would just feed onto each other" in sequences of conflict.

Don

Don is a Caucasian man in his mid thirties living in the Lower Mainland and self-employed. He is the primary caregiver of an eight year old girl and a six year old boy with Autism. He and his wife have been separated for over two years and he has primary custody

of both children. Don indicated that he aims to be a source of unconditional love and comfort to his children as well as to be a "consistent", "authoritative", but "gentle, good and kind boss". He emphasized the importance of keeping "the inner activity cool so that (I) can focus on being a rational and fair and kind and loving parent" even in a situation of real difficulty.

According to Don, the most significant disorientation he has experienced in recent years as a parent was when his daughter was becoming overly "sarcastic and cheeky" and would disrespect his attempts to put some limits on her behaviour by muttering some rather shocking comments. When the usually effective techniques were not working with her, he "just found that I was getting so angry" and was "getting locked into these power struggles and battles" with her - something that contradicted his preferred orientation.

Description of the Categories of Critical Incidents

The critical incidents identified in the interviews represent processes which facilitated the maintenance of the preferred orientations just described in the previous section as well as the factors which helped the parents return to states of orientation to their roles in response to the disorienting experiences summarized above.

Table 1

Critical Incident Categories

A. Contextual factors: Supportive presence of other adults/parents

B. Understanding the parenting endeavor
    1. Developing an intellectual understanding/knowledge/beliefs about children and parenting
    2. Sense making/applying understanding to get a handle on situation/child
    3. Altering perceptions of the situation/child

C. Considering oneself
    1. Reflecting on own parenting/self-awareness. Evaluation of self in parenting role in contrast with preferred orientation
    2. Attributions of responsibility for problem - locate focus for behavior change
    3. Considering own upbringing
    4. Role flexibility - making orientation shifts
    5. Orienting to the rewards/goals of parenting - Sustaining or increasing motivation

D. Emotional processing
    1. Handling own emotional responses or states that throw parents off
    2. Positive self-concept/self-efficacy
    3. Self-care

E. Acting to establish desired parent-child dynamics or desired state of affairs
    1. Reconnecting with child
    2. Implementing parenting strategy

F. Spirituality

Group A: Contextual Factors

This group emerged as a single broad category that identified the contextual factors

that facilitated parents to more closely resemble the preferred roles they wished to enact with

their children. In contrast to the other groups of categories which described helpful factors

internal to the parents, this general theme was distinct in revealing those external, contextual,

environmental factors which had a beneficial impact.

Category A: Supportive presence of other adults/parents (34 total incidents, 10 sustaining, 24 re-orienting - 100% participation rate)

Parents reported feeling helped by the supportive presence of others who provided: a) pragmatic, physical relief from the parenting role, b) an additional source of meeting children's needs, c) emotional reassurance, comfort and nurturance, d) normalization of the parents' struggle and a validation of their experience, e) a sense of acknowledgment or appreciation, or f) an opportunity for emotional expression and personal connection. This support came from various sources, including spouses, extended family and friends, and one parent described how she felt supported by being in an environment that was more child-friendly. Parents indicated that the effects of such support was to reduce a sense of isolation or to bolster them in their roles through an increase in confidence and a diffusion of stress.

Several of these incidents overlapped with other categories. Some support people were used to help parents reflect on their parenting effectiveness, and to receive information or ideas about how to handle or make sense of struggles. The presence of others also helped some parents to handle the difficult emotions they were experiencing in their parenting.

EXAMPLE 1

Jennifer (Sustaining)

. . .Meaning that I'm not doing it all by myself. So, its easier to be patient and do all your little negotiating skills when there's other people around to support you, that someone else might help you out one day when you have a hundred things to do, or even when you get to that point when you've negotiated to heck and gone and you're just exhausted, that somebody can just take over or at least you can phone somebody if they can't take over. You know, you

can phone and say "aaaaah! I'm sick and tired of all this!" And vent to somebody else, so you're not venting at your kids. So, that's one thing that helps.

EXAMPLE 2

Natasha (Sustaining)

I made a conscious decision to move up to British Columbia . . . ostensibly because I wanted my children to be around their grandparents, but I guess when I think about it now, it's because I have a larger family unit that I can relax in the arms of so to speak.

EXAMPLE 3

Karen (Sustaining)

So it's great when other parents you know sort of commiserate with you. And for me a lot of it is the honesty in that we're all human and sometimes you feel this way. .... there is a good group of parents at the school that I have really connected with and it's amazing how just short little snippets of conversation, . . . like they're quite open about, you know, talking about the kids . . . so it's good that other parents are honest, like it's not this Stepford wives thing because that's really hard to take when everybody thinks they're, you know, puts on this thing about their kids being perfect; they're not, they're all learning, we all are and it's okay to screw up and you know, but it's about what you do about it afterwards . . .

EXAMPLE 4

Natasha (Re-orienting)

Asking a lot of people for advice and help. For example, . . . calling different men that I knew who were mensches, who I knew who David would enjoy talking to. I would tell them David's really experiencing difficulty at school, this is what's happening and can you talk to him. There were a few men who gave up their time. (So how did that make a difference for

you, what did that do with your struggle?) Well of course the obvious is it's shared. I knew

there was no way I could be the only person to help him so I put him in touch with sources

that could help him, . . . but the few people - I only asked a few people - who were always

there for us and who were willing to give of themselves was a real blessing, not just Grandma

or Grandpa.

EXAMPLE 5

Jennifer (Re-orienting)

And I also tell him (my husband) what I need him to say sometimes. But he can respond a

certain way: "Well did you try this, could you try that" and all these ideas and I'm like: "well

those are helpful, but what I really need you to do right now is to say don't worry about that,

or you're doing a good job" or whatever. And I'll feed him those lines to give back to me if I

need to. (For reassurance?) Yeah, yeah, 'cause its nice to hear it from someone else, you

know. He's not going to say it if he doesn't mean it either, he'd say: "well, no that's not

true". But sometimes he just doesn't know what I need to hear so I just tell him (laughs). "So

what I want you to do right now is say 'you're really good at that' or 'you handled that well'

or 'I love you' or whatever" and I'll just feed him those lines and he can give them back to

me. So is that self-talk through someone else or what? But it works for me.

EXAMPLE 6

Darlene (Re-orienting)

I got lots of hugs from my friends and family. There was one girl that was friend of ours at

the pool the night it happened and she just put her arms around me and held me and she said

it's going to be okay, he's a good kid, he's going to be fine. It made me feel, made me feel

better because you need a hug when your emotions are jarred like that, I was shocked. (So you got some comfort?) Lots of comfort.

<u>Group B: Understanding the parenting endeavor</u>

This group of three categories represents ways that parents gained an intellectual understanding of their roles and of their children. This group differs from the others in that here parents are describing how they view and understand children and parenting. This view involves the knowledge and beliefs parents develop about children and parenting that brings a "know how" to their childrearing approaches. It differs from Group C, "Considering Oneself", because the parent's focus in the Group B incidents is directed outside of themselves, on their abstract understanding of parenting, on their particular children's behaviour, or on given situations they are facing as parents. These more cognitive processes are typically engaged in prior to any decision to act, and they serve the function of informing and guiding parents in their childrearing behaviour.

<u>Category B1: Developing intellectual understanding/knowledge/beliefs about childrearing</u>

<u>(35 total incidents; 17 sustaining, 18 re-orienting; 90% participation rate)</u>

Nine of the ten parents described being helped to move closer or remain close to being the parents they want to be through the development of their understanding or beliefs of parenting (i.e., child developmental tasks, parenting strategies, children's needs underlying their behaviour, etc.). These incidents indicate that parents benefited from being exposed to practical and theoretical information or perspectives on children and childrearing. The parents developed a stronger sense of orientation (confidence, grounding, firmer beliefs) when they received: a) an enhancement of their capacity to understand the parent-child interaction, b) information about ways of responding to their children (e.g., strategies for

discipline), c) promotions of philosophical perspectives on parenting that helped them clarify their own views and approaches, or d) affirmations of their original orientations. These incidents describe parents looking to develop their schemas and scripts of parenting via: a) reading, b) attending parent education programs and lectures, c) talking with and observing other parents, d) personal experience and trial and error (i.e., learning from the feedback of their children's responses to the parenting approaches) or e) counselling.

These incidents helped parents to become more clear in their approaches and often provided a confidence in their styles since they were developing rationales that they believed had validity. Parents who developed their understanding of children after an experience of struggle tended to feel less confused and lost in their roles and more empowered to pursue a direction with greater conviction. Often, they were able to revise an aspect of their approaches that may have been contributing to the struggle they were having with their children after being exposed to other ideas. In other cases, having developed their intellectual understandings helped parents in situations with their children many years after they were initially exposed to the idea or information (see example 2). This category had a substantial impact on several other categories (other than Category B2, "Sense Making", which is later defined as an application of "Developing intellectual understanding ...) as parents described how the development of their ideas of parenting facilitated shifts in their orientations to their roles and their emotional responding.

EXAMPLE 1

Karen (Sustaining)

and I mean I remember in the prenatal classes they talked, they did one whole night out of only about five or six sessions was on crying and what to do and it was a really depressing

night, I thought oh my God a whole night focused on crying and they talked about things like when you've really, really had it and the baby won't stop you just put the baby in a safe place and leave the room. I mean and you think "oh God give me a break", but those things happen so I think back on stuff like that and that stuff does happen and I mean I will go out, even if it's just like he's going mental in the house, I will walk out in the yard and I'll leave him in here and just let him wail so I can distance myself from it.

EXAMPLE 2

Mary (Sustaining)

I do lots of reading and try to get lots of ideas all the time, talk to different parents about how they handle stuff just so I have lots of different . . . the more resources I have, the more ideas I have then, and if I put them into practice it gets easier for me to - because one isn't always going to work, even one thing if it's really good is not going to work all the time: number one because they are going to develop different needs over developmental stages, they might be having a different mood or it's a different . . . you know? You have to have quite a few back ups. And then when you practice them it gets a little bit easier. But to keep it up, to keep it up to find new things and to keep up with their stages and to keep myself up takes a lot of work on my part, but it does pay off.

EXAMPLE 3

Tanya (Re-orienting)

I took a parenting course that was offered free. And I think that they should be almost mandatory, or they should be greatly encouraged and they should definitely be free. It helped me recognize the different stages of development in a child, and it helped me realize that my expectations were too high for the age of the child, and a lot of what I was trying to teach her,

I would have to keep repeating for a long, long time, and that I had to be a lot more patient, that it wasn't like training a dog or a horse, you have to be a lot more patient.

EXAMPLE 4

Jennifer (Re-orienting)

The second is pursuing an answer to each question. If a baby is doing certain things, you go find out what other people have done when their babies have done that. . . . I only tried the things that felt O.K. to me. . . . If I read something and it doesn't fit with my own beliefs or values or whatever, then I'm not even going to try it. So, or if my girlfriend says to do something and it doesn't feel right to me, then I'm not going to try it. So, that's the first thing: go with what you know - not know, but what you believe is right, 'cause I have some clear opinions around that kind of stuff. If someone told me to leave a two month old crying in the crib to teach them to go back to sleep, I would say no because that to me would not feel right, so I would ignore it. I would say: "Oh, O.K. thanks." And then I would just not do it. So, I think the first thing is to go with your gut. Then read everything else and whatever fits with your gut belief or your socialized belief or whatever you want to call them, then try it.

EXAMPLE 5

Tanya (Re-orienting)

I read a book just recently about a little boy with Autism that I found really, really inspiring because the approach they used with him . . . the main premise of their approach was to convey an attitude of acceptance and approval. And, you know, you run into these situations constantly with kids where, you know, Summer especially, she won't hang her coat up when she comes in, she'll make her bed, but she won't put her pajamas away. And when you deal with the same situation over and over again, its hard not to sound mad, not to sound angry,

not to get frustrated. So, I keep remembering this and trying to think: rather than trying to

discourage her from forgetting, how can I encourage her to remember?

<div align="center">EXAMPLE 6</div>

<u>Don (Re-orienting)</u>

. . . I've also been spinning my tires in the mud. I think one of the problems is you isolate

yourself and don't look to other people, and especially professional help. If you don't want to

go there you can just get yourself so locked into certain patterns. . . . I've been to programs

offered by North Shore Heath and by far the best one was, has been this guy who came in

several days and kind of observed our kids and gave us this kind of practical advice based on

behaviour and stuff, and that - coupled with any values you bring - I would say to parents you

know talk to people who, well other parents, talk to professionals, you know could be an

education group. I think it's better than just staying in a rut thinking I'm really embarrassed to

ask, or too proud, you know nobody is born knowing how to be a parent.

<u>Category B2: Sense Making/Applying intellectual understanding and beliefs (19 total</u>

<u>incidents; 11 sustaining, 8 re-orienting; 70% participation rate)</u>

(i.e., maybe this is what's going on with my child. How can I understand and interpret my

child?)

Seventy percent of the parents related that they were helped to both sustain and re-

orient to a desirable enactment of their roles when they sought to make sense of what they

were encountering in their children. These incidents represent the ways in which parents

grappled with figuring out what was going on, and used their intellectual understanding of

children and parenting to orient their thinking. These incidents provided parents with a more

firm or an entirely different belief or cognitive appreciation of their child's behaviours or of

the interaction between parent and child, which assisted them in educating and guiding their emotional and behavioural responses. This category is dependent on parents' belief systems and their foundations of understanding and knowledge since it is from those bases that they search for comprehension. In a sense, these parents are re-orienting to their understanding of children by utilizing or playing around with their beliefs and perspectives on children and parent-child dynamics.

<div align="center">EXAMPLE 1</div>

<u>Katerina (Sustaining)</u>

Why do children need to say "You can't make me! You're not the boss of me!" and all that drives us nuts, but kids need to do that. That's the way they draw a fence around their developing identity, by trying to stand their ground. So when my kids do that, I don't take it personal - when my kids have tantrums, to me it was frustration, so I would say "you go girl, you hit that pillow, you cry it out! Let it out!" So it never became a four hour tantrum because I was supportive of the tantrum. So it didn't become a tool they used against me. But because I knew that that is just the way children let out their frustration, they have so little tools.

<div align="center">EXAMPLE 2</div>

<u>Mary (Sustaining)</u>

I know they don't have a conscience until they're eight or nine - but I think it's the whole process of developing when they have to go through the process of knowing why we do things a certain way. And it's hard for Mark especially because he's not at the age where he can put himself in somebody else's shoes, and Paul's still young too, but I can see it starting to develop, but Mark doesn't understand that it might hurt somebody's feelings.

EXAMPLE 3

<u>Katerina (Sustaining)</u>

So when I've allowed myself to be curious about those awful things they tend to say rather than put it down or criticize it, I've learned more about what they need. And then I can go back and make sense of what that means and maybe provide what I can. . . . So I think my kid's voice has really helped me to stay on track and take seriously what they are saying. I think a lot of us tend to kind of "Oh they're kids, what do they know." Or a lot of parents think: "they're just saying that to manipulate me", like I hear that from a lot of parents. But even if a kid wants to manipulate it's because they are not getting something what they need.

EXAMPLE 4

<u>Jennifer (Re-orienting)</u>

The only one is that when something's not working is to stop and figure out why. And that you learn, just from figuring it or because you've tried everything else and none of it works so you're thinking: "Aaah! Now what do I do?" So the key is to stop yourself and try and think about it. . . . Because if you're dealing with a problem behaviour that your regular techniques aren't working or whatever, then they are trying to tell you something. And they may not be conscious of what it is they want to tell you right away so they're just acting up or they're waking up at night or they're regressing in their toilet training or they're doing something, but they are trying to tell you something.

EXAMPLE 5

<u>Mary (Re-orienting)</u>

Paul has actually not been telling the truth. This is quite recent, about lots of things, . . . and I wasn't sure how to handle it because it shocked me, I didn't know where it was coming

from, was it something I was doing? He's made a new friend and I don't know the family, so I've had the friend over here when they want to play and I've noticed this friend tells lots of stories, outrageous stories where it wouldn't matter if you lied or not, like you wouldn't get in trouble by saying it, but he also doesn't tell the truth a lot of the time. So that's where it's figuring out where these behaviours are coming from, like he must be wanting to fit in and copy.

Category B3: Altering perceptions of the child or the situation (16 total incidents; 4 sustaining, 12 re-orienting; 90% participation rate)

All but one of the parents reported being helped to maintain or return to a solid orientation by adjusting their ways of viewing the parent-child situation. These incidents indicate that the parents worked to have different perspectives on either the particular child or situation they were facing. This category is different from "Sense Making" in that the parents were consciously shifting their perspectives from how they were initially viewing the situation, whereas "Sense Making" represents parents' initial use of their existing intellectual frames of reference to interpret what is happening without making an adjustment in what they are focusing on. In contrast with "Sense Making", this category was predominantly represented by incidents that re-oriented parents.

Parents benefited from these shifts in perception because viewing the situation through a different frame provided them with a different, less disorienting or struggled experience of the child or the situation for the parent. In the incidents that helped sustain parents' preferred orientations to their roles, their coming to appreciate their encounters differently prevented them from having reactions to their experiences that would likely otherwise have thrown them off. In the incidents that helped re-orient parents to their roles,

parents were struggling after holding a perception of their children's behaviours that contradicted their preferred visions of their children which encouraged them to take on particular roles as parents that went against their values. Reframing their children's behaviour or the situation provided parents with an indication of the need for a different type of intervention more in line with their values for their roles. In some cases, the shift in perception that moved the parents from struggle occurred simply because the passage of time resolved the intensity of the issue between them or the children exhibited signs that their difficulties had been resolved, which decreased the anxiety on the part of the parents.

<p style="text-align:center">EXAMPLE 1</p>

Mary (Sustaining)

That's right and this is the opportunity to teach them. They are giving me an opportunity is basically how I see it instead of thinking 'oh, no they're whining again' or 'oh, geez, they're fighting again', not that I don't ever think that (but when it's going well . . .), Yeah, and sometimes I stop myself and say that this is a great opportunity, 'oh great, let's practice my plan that I thought of' or 'let's see if this works', it's an opportunity for them to learn. This is their opportunity, not mine, well it's mine too to also, I look at it to become a better person or develop more patience or whatever, but this is their opportunity to practice, like this is real life stuff.

<p style="text-align:center">EXAMPLE 2</p>

Mary (Sustaining)

Spring break was quite interesting because at the beginning I was very good and they're at a stage when they fight constantly, they fight like twenty times a day and then play well twenty times, which I have to focus on: "they played well twenty times!"

EXAMPLE 3

Karen (Re-orienting)

Yeah, and I know it's a short time, this whole part is really an incredibly short time and you don't get it back and I'm really conscious of that and like I'm conscious of that when they start driving you whacko but you know in another couple of years he'll be outside and down the street all day playing with his friends, he won't even be here, he won't even, you know, need me, . . . but I know, I know it's a short time so I remind myself of that as well. Yeah, and every mom I know, because I'm of the age where a lot of their kids are 20, they all say if they had to do it again they would have spent more time with their kids when they were little.

EXAMPLE 4

Natasha (Re-orienting)

It had to go from my usual response, feeling like it's the school against David. I had to go from that very immature feeling - because that's all it was - to we're all in this together. (And how did seeing the situation that way help you?) . . . perhaps not to struggle so much against the struggle. And to anticipate that good would come out of it. Little things that David will say has shown me that he has grown through it, so that it's not an issue anymore.

EXAMPLE 5

Katerina (Re-orienting initially, but later became sustaining)

. . . But I think feeling good about your kids, really admiring them and feeling proud of them, truly proud of them! And telling them so, you know. I tell them all the time. "You guys are great kids!" (How does the feeling proud of them and seeing them as great kids. . . How does that help you?) Ahh, because it helps me not only focus on the negative. Because it puts the negative in perspective. Because a lot of parents are too worried about how am I

going to fix these faults in my kids and that becomes all they see. Whereas for me that's the smallest of what I see. The biggest of what I see is how great they are! ... And I think she is an amazing child. And then she is home and drives me nuts sometimes! But I have enough perspective. She's gotta make errors. She's gotta argue. She's gotta try it out somewhere. To see that this (her faults) is just a small part of who she is not all of who she is. So I don't need then to focus on scolding, changing, fixing, controlling her because this, because that.

Group C: Considering Oneself

There are five categories in this group, all of which contain incidents that reflect parents' critical evaluation of what they are doing as parents against their preferred visions of themselves as parents. In contrast to Group B - "Understanding the parenting endeavor" - the incidents described in this group of categories depicted how parents were helped when they focused their attention on themselves versus attending more abstractly to the world of ideas and concepts about parenting or to the meaning of what they are observing in their children. Another distinction is that the incidents in Group B referred more to internal processes that occurred prior to choosing a course of action, Group C incidents describe how parents examined their performance of those childrearing behaviours they had already engaged in which were contrary to their preferred orientations.

With the exception of "Attributions of Responsibility", these categories tended to represent more of the factors that parents found helped them to sustain their enactment of their roles more closely to their ideals. The "Attributions" category in some ways represents an overlap between Group B and Group C and was more indicative of a re-orienting influence. It was included in this group because it contained elements of self-evaluation that qualitatively separated it from the Group B categories.

<u>Category C1: Reflecting on themselves in their roles/Evaluating themselves against how they want to be as parents (47 total incidents; 29 sustaining, 18 re-orienting; 90% participation rate)</u>

Ninety percent of the parents reported that they moved closer to being the parents they wanted to be when they engaged in an examination of what they were doing as parents in a general sense, in the heat of a moment, or after an interaction with their children. These parents were monitoring and honestly evaluating how they were enacting their roles against their pictures of how they would prefer to be with their children, rather than parenting in an unquestioning and automatic manner. These incidents are moments of being less defensive about their parenting and more open to considering the impact they are having on their children and in some cases will allow themselves to be informed by feedback from their children.

This category includes sub-categories of different ways in which parents engage in this process such as: a) stopping what they are doing and recognizing or becoming aware of their own behaviours, b) monitoring their parenting in an ongoing way, c) evaluating the impact they are having on their children, d) orienting to particular signals that alert them that they are off track or that remind them of the track that they wanted to be on in their parenting, e) planning and strategizing for the next occurrence of the issue about which they are reflecting, and f) deeper reflection to develop some personal insight into what was motivating them in a direction that moved them away from their preferred orientations, although this latter theme was more rare. Another theme that emerged in this category was a group a statements which indicated that when parents viewed themselves as the evaluators of themselves, it helped them to maintain a congruent orientation to their roles and to cope with the other people's judgments of their parenting.

By bringing them a more conscious orientation to their roles, these incidents helped parents to have a more personal relationship to their parenting and gain a stronger sense of conviction after having engaged in such self-scrutiny. Reflection and evaluation often served as a springboard for parents to make shifts in their roles (see Category C4) which facilitated the resolution of some struggles in the short term and the development of them as people.

EXAMPLE 1

Don (Sustaining)

Not in every situation, but if I forget about it and you know in a situation later on I'll think about it and I did handle something not so well in that case and later on I'll think about it and think oh how could I have done that differently, or I didn't, that isn't the kind of parent I wanted to be, but I try not to beat myself up too much and just think well next time this happens I'll try and make this work and usually it works . . . to catch myself. Usually what it is you know with respect to problems in parenting, what does it for me is I watch my kid's behaviour, it changes and okay I sense some change of some sort then okay that's a cue for me to start monitoring what I'm doing and I won't say I do it all the time or I catch it all the time whatever but in the ideal situation I take misbehaviour as a cue, not always but if there's a problem, a problem like that, that's recurring I take it as a cue to kind of start looking at what's feeding, what's leading to this behaviour you know, not that I'm necessarily causing it but what is you know what is my role and contribution to it.

EXAMPLE 2

Jennifer (Sustaining)

And more often its like when you are just with yourselves. And when I find myself doing stuff that I wouldn't do if someone else was around, then I stop myself. Because a lot of

people can be really good parents when other people are watching them, but that's not where it counts because the majority of the time you are by yourselves. 'So if you are doing something that you wouldn't do when someone else was there, stop', I tell myself.

EXAMPLE 3

Katerina (Sustaining)

I have been the type of parent, from the very beginning I have made choices on how I'm going to do it but I'm always questioning. I really want to do a good job, okay? And I don't think everything I'm doing is the right thing. I'm not righteous about things. So I'm really open to, you know . . . So when I see issues in my kids or I see that my kids have issues I always think is there something I'm doing that might be contributing to that? But I want to do a good job so as I've gone along I've questioned various parts of my parenting, you know, just because that's the way I am. And then in one of those moments on my own I discovered that was part of what was moving me (her 'unconscious' need to be liked by her kids). . . . I need to reflect back on 'what am I mirroring to my kids?' So at that time after being in the crisis for a while I stepped back and thought, 'Okay what am I reflecting here?' And I'm reflecting all negative stuff. This isn't any good. It isn't good for me either because there is good in this kid and I'm going to make (claps her hands for emphasis) myself see it because I need to reflect it back to her. And that's what happened. And I've always known what's good about her but I was so focused in the crisis. So it was a lot of that self . . . I do a lot of that, not about parenting only. This is just the way I live my life. 'Why am I acting like this? What's making me feel this?' It takes me a while sometimes. But I tend to be quite reflective, you know, I mean, I like doing that. I think it's useful.

EXAMPLE 4

<u>Jennifer (Re-orienting)</u>

I don't know, like you can hear yourself when you are grumping at kids, when your sort of in that mode of, you know: "hurry up, do this! Do that! And oh don't do that! Oh not those shoes, its not raining!" You know, you can hear your voice and you're thinking: 'oh that's just not very nice'. And then they're tromping out to the car and you're thinking: 'here we are supposed to go do something fun and everyone's not having fun'. So you have to stop.

EXAMPLE 5

<u>Jennifer (Re-orienting)</u>

So, I think that when you do something as a parent that you don't like, you know, like when I felt myself rocking this baby really roughly, I thought: 'O.K., no! That's not me. That's not what I want.'

<u>Category C2: Attributions of responsibility for problem (10 total incidents; 1 sustaining, 9 re-orienting; 40 % participation rate)</u>

Four of the ten parents reported occasions when they could get back on track after struggling in their roles once they ascertained how much the struggle was due to their own behaviour as parents and how much was the child struggling for reasons independent of the parent's influence. These incidents helped parents determine whether they would contemplate changes to their approach or focus directly on the child's behaviour. As alluded to in the Group C description, this category represents parents who could simultaneously perform the processes of sense making, where they comprehend what their child's behaviour is indicating, and reflecting, where they examine if and how their own parenting may be contributing to the struggle or to the child's behaviour.

EXAMPLE 1

<u>Katerina (Sustaining)</u>

Something else that helps within me is 'What's my role in this? What am I doing here? What's happening?' So I step back as best as I can and try and see it from the perspective of an observer: 'What's going on here?' And so in reflecting back, in sitting back and reflecting, "Okay, what's my role here? What is her role here? What is our context like right now that is creating all this? And I do hold a belief in theoretically as you, developing in your young years, you do not have a clear knowledge of who you are. I really believe that. We really don't know, we don't have a definition of ourselves, or an identity that is crystallized. So that the way you start defining that identity is by what your parents mirror back to you. So if all you parent is mirroring back is constant arguments and scoldings this is the identity you're going to develop about yourself. . . . . I think it's personal responsibility. I think that, I think that a lot of parents do one of two things: either they take the responsibility to the point of feeling guilty all the time and worried about doing it right or they put all the responsibility on the kids. You know: 'well this kid got the spanking or got the thing because the kid did something wrong'. And I believe that when my kids do something wrong okay, there's their place in the issue and then it stops and then it's me. . . . I sit and own what part of that fit, that anger, that fight was me. You know, it could be PMS, it could be I'm having stress at work, I'm worried about something. And when the kids do something they need to get the limit setting. I mean at that day she needed to be told that that wasn't O.K. and taught. But there's a line between teaching and throwing my stuff on top of the teaching. You know what I mean? And that is completely ineffective.

EXAMPLE 2

Mary (Re-orienting)

I try to figure out what I'm doing first, 'cause I think maybe he can't trust me or maybe he doesn't feel comfortable coming to me or maybe he's looking for attention, like maybe I'm not spending enough one on one time with him he feels he needs to make up these stories so that I'm interested, like I go through those kind of themes.

EXAMPLE 3

Jennifer (Re-orienting)

I think the reason in that particular case, although I think I would do it in other cases now too, but part of the reason in that particular case is that I knew that I was dealing with an infant, and I couldn't . . Like a lot of behavioural change is supposing that you want to change the behaviour of your baby, and as an infant, I couldn't do that. I knew that it wasn't her problem, it was mine. So that made it easier for that.

Category C3: Considering parent's own upbringing (9 total incidents; 7 sustaining, 2 re-orienting; 70 % participation rate)

Seven of the parents reported that it helped them to stay on track or get back on track after struggling when they reflected on their experiences from their own childhoods. A form of reflecting, these incidents describe how processing one's own upbringing helps parents both to re-orient after a struggle that was connected to the modeling or unresolved experiences around their own parents and, more often, to maintain their orientations in an ongoing way as either differentiated from or incorporating the style of their parents. This category includes incidents when parents reflected on their experiences growing up and considered what aspects of that they would like to be similar or different for their children to

experience. This process facilitated the strength of parents orientations by enabling them to have a greater sense of ownership of the 'schemas and scripts' they were employing as opposed to unconsciously enacting those of their own parents.

EXAMPLE 1

Natasha (Sustaining)

I have good memories of my mother. We have good family memories. I have good family memories growing up and I wanted that for my children. I experienced a different parenting style from my father, who was, and is, a workaholic, so he was the one that was the provider but not home a lot. My mother went to work too when we were older, much older. I see her as a very healthy balanced person whereas my father is not. I think growing up under that made me more aware too, because I stood back and looked at my parents when I was an adult, and thought, "Who did I learn the most from and who did I want to emulate?" It tends to be more my mother. I know that I learned from my father 'cause he's good at what he does but emotionally he's not balanced. I'm aware of the emotional side of it because my father would negate our feelings when we were growing up, whereas my mother never would.

EXAMPLE 2

Evelyn (Sustaining)

Well I guess one of the things is that I had a pretty rough life when I was a child, so I guess I know lots of situations, or I think I do, that I don't want to put my children in. And I think that's, I sometimes look at myself and think it's better if you maybe grow up rough, I mean not better of course, but because you understand if Becky is protected so they don't really understand what can happen, what does happen and what will happen. I think that actually

has been a lot of what I've based wanting for her on . . . and I don't want any of that (a rough childhood) for her and that's, I guess even sometimes guided me in some situations.

EXAMPLE 3

Mary (Re-orienting)

Yeah, being spanked or being yelled at or just behaviors that were quite disrespectful and how it made me feel. I felt totally belittled, violated basically. Yeah, that's something that's not part of what I want for my kids to have. (Does remembering those feelings, does that help you to stay on track?) It does. And even though, I mean at the beginning there was this impulse, you know, you want to do what your parents did when you're frustrated and even though you know that wasn't the right thing to do or your remembering . . . just like that time in the hotel when I just kind of lost it and I gave him a smack, I couldn't even believe I had done that, but that's kind of what happens. Yeah, but when you have the resources - I mean I was lucky I had supports and kind of work through it, it's like the growing process. . . .

And having those parents who are authoritative and "you do this because your Mom says or your Dad says" and yeah, growing up in that kind of family, I mean I'm not blaming them, I don't think they did what they did - they felt it was the right thing to do, but remembering what I guess what I want for my kids, just because I grew up too, I remember questioning stuff or I was always quite good, never wanting to get in trouble so if an adult said to do something I would do it, and I always had a hard time standing up for myself until I kind of got out and grew up kind of myself and learned things, but I thought I want my kids - like when I didn't stand up for myself I felt really bad and I wish I had done it differently, so I want my kids - and that part I feel quite proud of because they have no problem standing up to me . . .

<u>Category C4: Role flexibility - Parents shifting their views on the nature or execution of their roles (18 total incidents; 15 sustaining, 3 re-orienting; 70% participation rate)</u>

Seven of the ten parents indicated that they were helped in moving closer to being the kind of parents they wanted to be when they made a shift in how they oriented to their roles. These incidents are either clarifications of the nature or influence of their parental roles or are larger paradigm shifts where they revision their orientations to their roles or what it means to be a parent either in general or in a given situation. Although clearly interrelated, this category differs from "Altering Perceptions" because they are making shifts with respect to their particular approaches to parenting. This category was necessary since it differed from incidents where parents re-oriented to their parental roles by changing their perceptions of the child or the situation without altering their conceptions of their roles per se. It differs from the category "Reflecting/Evaluating" in that incidents from that category refer to how parents could monitor their parenting in terms of how it fit with their own values and call themselves back in line with their preferred picture of how they want to be without necessarily making any changes to the picture. It is the alteration or clarification of that picture (or orientation as I have termed it) that the incidents in this category describe. There were sub-categories of such incidents such as: a) a shift in the metaphor that guided them in their roles, b) adjustments in their appraisals of the true power their role has on a child, and c) an altered sense of responsibility, commitment, and appreciation of the role.

<div align="center">EXAMPLE 1</div>

<u>Don (Sustaining)</u>

First off, reminding myself that she's a little person all unto herself and she's going to learn a lot of things on her own you know, most of what she's going to learn is she's going to learn to

experience not through me teaching, yelling or lecturing her or trying to teach her and that

kind of thing, and right now I'm thinking of her because so much of her life revolves around

school, she's in school, and often comes home and presents me with problems that are going

in through tears and stuff, and just kind of reminding myself that she's a little person, a little

voyager and she's kind of you know going to bump up against some shores and roll a little bit

and do that kind of thing and you know just reminding myself that you know the best help I

can be is to be cool and be calm and as much as possible an honest and that world outside

there's not, there's some things I can control but not a whole lot you know, but I don't mean

that to sound helpless, but just I think just kind of a realistic appraisal what you can and can't

control in your kids lives. . . . I think that's an incredibly good tool for parents.

EXAMPLE 2

Don (Sustaining)

Yeah, well I think too you have to be realistic and you can't be perfect all the time, you can't

be, live up to your ideals, there's going to be mistakes and there's going to be situations you

never expected, that's a big part of it too. I think it's important to be realistic and to realize

that you know your kids are individuals too and I know that for me having kids, before I had

kids it was like oh I'll have this nice little baby and she'll come along and she'll look great for

the family photos and she won't make a big fuss and not be too much of a disruption and we'll

both carry on with our careers and do all, and you know as soon as you have them you realize,

even the best behaved baby you're whole life starts revolving around them, and so that's a big

adjustment and right from the start, maybe that was just me being a guy and not having that

much experience with kids before having them, but not to set your goals too high and be

realistic but still hang on to general ideas of how you want to be, a couple of things you know,

one or two or three values that you really hold dear and keep those in mind and basically try

and control the anxiety you know and stuff.

EXAMPLE 3

Natasha (Re-orienting)

. . . as a teacher (this was how she described her role), I don't know if I can intelligently

answer that. I know that I had to, as far as role goes, become a counsellor to a certain extent.

Category C5: Orienting to the rewards/goals of parenting (15 total incidents; 12 sustaining, 3

re-orienting; 70% participation rate)

Six out of ten parents claimed that they remain or move closer to being the kind of

parents they wanted to be when they either experienced the achievement of their goals and the

realization of their values or when they reminded themselves about how their efforts may be

rewarded in the future. These incidents had the effect of reinforcing parent's efforts or

motivating them to sustain their efforts, even in the face of struggle by telling them that the

effort is or will eventually be worthwhile. The attainment or future promise of rewards and

reinforcement mostly served to sustain parents in their preferred roles.

EXAMPLE 1

Mary (Sustaining)

Like there's always a reason and so I need to just kind of calm myself down and take the time

to explain it, and it always works better, I have to keep telling myself, because the results

always are better than doing the quicker way. It's very easy to do (power down), but I don't

want ... its' very easy to use, it's bullying, too, like I'm bigger and if I raise my voice then I

think it's quite threatening, and I don't want them to do things because they're scared, I want

them to do it because they know or they're learning. . . . (Does experiencing the payoff help?)

Yes! Totally. When I see it I can pat myself on the back and say I did such a good job. And even if it doesn't work at the time, I feel good about how I handled it. Even if it happens and I know that they are going to do it again, but I feel really good about how it was handled, like if their self-esteem was maintained, that they felt okay about themselves and yeah, I just feel good about it.

EXAMPLE 2

Karen (Sustaining)

... even at my school there's a family there, there's three boys and a daughter who's Monica's age, the parents are lovely, all those kids are lovely - the kids (can be) naughty, they get into trouble - but they're all really connected ... I mean that's what I would strive for, I would love to have that. It makes you believe that it's possible, like that's what I think it is because a lot of times you think that you're just sort of on the treadmill going through the motions but you can have so much more. When you see people really you know sort of walk the talk it makes you believe that you know it is possible.

EXAMPLE 3

Karen (Sustaining)

I think what you see back in the children, what they give you back, you know because that closens .... like my daughter's 8 years old, she's almost as big as me but you know the cuddling, wanting to sit on your knee and talk about things and you know she'll come to me and say: "oh I feel uncomfortable about this" or something, you see that closeness that it is there, that that bond is really happening I think. I think just it reinforces that you are doing some of the right things

EXAMPLE 4

Karen (Re-orienting)

I guess him doing well at the daycare is really reinforcement to me that it's okay and I've

talked with the teacher about things and I've been there and seen other children and some of

the things that go on and I can sort of rationalize that, that I'm okay, that I'm all right

(laughter) you know . . . Yeah, like he's a nice kid, the kids like him, he's part of it, he's bright,

he's into it, you know he enjoys his little life

Group D: Emotional Processing

A distinct group of three categories of incidents emerged in which parents were able

to more closely resemble the kinds of parents they wished to be because they consciously

attended to their own psychological and emotional processes and overall well-being. Similar

to Group C in terms of parents' focus on themselves, these categories were grouped apart

from "Considering Oneself" because the emotional component of these incidents indicated a

qualitatively different process that the parents engaged in, entailing a different form of

awareness and a different set of skills. The category "Handling feelings about selves as

parents" could be argued to be a form of self-concept and hence more of a cognitive process

parents in which parents are engaging. However, it appeared that these incidents had their

greatest impact in terms of how parents carried themselves emotionally in their roles.

Category D1: Handling own emotions in the moment (30 total incidents; 8 sustaining, 22 re-

orienting; 90% participation rate)

This category indicated that dealing with emotions while engaged in the parental role

helped parents to stay on track or, more often, get back on track with how they wanted to be

as parents to their children. These incidents involved: a) simple awareness and

acknowledgment of current emotions, b) coping techniques regarding anger and other strong emotions, c) emotionally preparing oneself for struggle, d) putting boundaries around when to release emotions, to e) giving validity and permission to have the emotions being experienced. This category most often referred to parents' responses to a state of imbalance, and less frequently to a more ongoing, proactive awareness of maintaining an emotional balance in anticipation of future challenges.

EXAMPLE 1

Don (Sustaining)

. . . just being aware of what's going on inside myself you know, anxiety whether it's in myself, controlling that is the most important thing, you know and keeping the inner turmoil or whatever it is, the inner activity cool so that you can focus on being a rational and fair and kind and loving parent. I find that's the most, the most important thing, controlling your inner state even in a situation of real difficulty, and believe me both my kids you know, and any kid I think, is a real tester of anything, parent, any person cause parents are real, brings out the best and worst in them, and so there can be really incredibly difficult trying times.

EXAMPLE 2

Karen (Re-orienting)

Like consciously regroup and just say Nancy get a grip, like you know counting to ten and get a grip and deep breaths you know, just acknowledging. I think once you acknowledge that you're choked (laughter) then you know. . . I do, like I say if I ever felt really outraged or something then I would just walk out for a few minutes and it's amazing how just those couple of minutes are really cleansing, amazing you know, ... and it's amazing how powerful a

two and a half year old can be so I think that you know sometimes, and like that's part of it too is admitting. And then, "I'm out of here I can't stand it".

EXAMPLE 3

Natasha (Re-orienting)

I know I had to be very aware of my own defensive feelings and how they were not helping the situation, especially if I'd be feeling embarrassed. This is the first thing: never be embarrassed for your children in front of other people, it doesn't matter what they think. You are there for your own children. How could I let myself get in the way of David's growing through this in Grade 4? So for myself, maturing first of all. At the beginning, I think for me to respond in embarrassment was immature. I had to learn to take on the proper role of protector in that case. David definitely had to know that I was behind him all the way. He feels thrown off in to the school environment and he's totally new. He had to know that he had a protector with a capital P behind him. Before I could be that for him I had to make sure that I wouldn't be upset myself, so I could be a strong person for him to come to at the end of the day. . . . So I had to get myself out of the way, so to speak, in order to be what I needed to be for David last year. When you're sitting in the principal's office and you hear, "your son again did this and your son did this", the defensive feeling rises up in you. I had to become stronger as a person first before I could accept those criticisms of David and then go forward. . . . being honest, because you're always a little embarrassed when your child has a problem. What helped me feel better was having the courage to face this head on because it's scary. So getting the knowledge first I felt I needed and overcoming those feelings the next time I got a telephone call from the principal - not feeling protective, defensive - all those things that wouldn't help - not feeling angry myself.

EXAMPLE 4

<u>Mary (Re-orienting)</u>

And just actually being honest, 'cause I think I had those feelings (resenting the new baby for disrupting the bond and making things difficult between her and her first born) near the beginning, right when he was born, but I kind of hid them or denied them and that made me feel uncomfortable and not very good about the whole thing, and I think that was affecting my behaviors or how I was dealing with things as well. . . . I thought that was the worst, how could any good mother feel these feelings, . . . I think I had to not block out any feelings because that's really staggering. So I had to just let myself feel what I was feeling, . . . But once I was honest with myself and I just thought 'you know what, this is how I'm feeling' and just let myself feel it but also kind of walk myself through why I'm feeling this way.

<u>Category D2: Handling feelings about selves as parents (19 total incidents; 11 sustaining, 8 re-orienting; 80% participation rate)</u>

Eight of the ten parents claimed that it helped when they worked through their feelings of adequacy and confidence around their parenting. Especially for those parents who actively reflected on and evaluated their parenting, these incidents represent dealing effectively with guilt, holding onto some self-assuredness and security and maintaining a generally positive self-concept. Feeling more positively about their parenting seemed to have the benefit of freeing these parents up to operate from their preferred orientations instead of approaching the role from a reactive stance for the protection of an insecure self-concept.

EXAMPLE 1

Jennifer (Sustaining)

One thing was that I went into it - and I go into everything - feeling pretty good about myself. You know, I think that that's a base. That I know that I'm a good person and that if I don't know how to do something or if I mess something up that I can figure it out. So I think I started off with self-confidence. . . . And the other thing is not to have unrealistic expectations of yourself. (Me: As you said earlier, you don't want to be the perfect parent.) No, I don't. It would be too hard on me and it would be too hard on my kids and I would never be successful. So I'd just feel lousy all the time. I'm not into feeling lousy. Not saying that I don't sometimes worry about things and feel guilty about things and stuff like that. I do, but I don't hang onto it forever because its useless.

EXAMPLE 2

Katerina (Sustaining)

But at the same time I didn't walk away from that feeling guilty because I'm a human being, you know what I mean. Like I'm not going to be perfect all the time. .... So I've learned to forgive myself. I used to get very upset when I did that because it was like, "Oh no! They're going to have trauma. They're not going to like me." Whereas now, yeah for the most part, I don't feel very guilty, you know.

EXAMPLE 3

Natasha (Re-orienting)

That's perhaps that's one thing that might come out of this: the parent has to feel - in order to be a good parent or a good teacher or good in an authoritative role - secure in himself. I was

angry and tense the first times when I heard about David's behaviour. Parents have to be secure in and of themselves. They have to be secure in order to help someone else, otherwise they're simply reacting against, often in anger, or on some self-preserving motive, instead of responding with wisdom to a stressful situation. That's just life though, it doesn't matter if it's parenting or another role.

<div align="center">EXAMPLE 4</div>

<u>Mary (Re-orienting)</u>

Like it was very hard to admit it (that she resented her baby for coming between her and her two year old son). I thought: "that can't be it". And then when I did, I remember being very depressed and thinking I was a terrible mother, but then getting out of it and saying: "well why is this happening?" and figuring it out.

<u>Category D3: Self-care (12 total incidents; 10 sustaining, 2 re-orienting; 50% participation rate)</u>

Half of the parents stated that they are closer to being the kinds of parents they wish to be or are helped to recover from struggle when they do things that care for their own needs. The parents who described these incidents indicated an awareness of the importance of maintaining themselves through aiming for a balanced life, ensuring the basic needs for health are met, willingness to bring in supports, and dealing with personal issues that affect their parenting. This factor was generally sustaining to parents and was part of an ongoing tactic to maintain their ability to handle their roles. There were two examples of re-orientation when parents reminded themselves to improve their self-care in response to increased or chronic stress and burn-out.

EXAMPLE 1

<u>Don (Sustaining)</u>

you try to get some balance in your life, you know work, play, exercise, whatever for your own self and then having time for children as well and including them in activities and doing things with them, taking care of myself means having you know balance, somewhat of a balance in life, having some work, some play, some interests and hobbies, some friends, you know to do things with outside of having children and having family, and what that does is it sort of makes you feel like you know not everything in your life is dependent on how your family life is going that particular day. You know, it helps to have other things to look forward to and to do just in case you know, you know you're going to have up days and bad days, it just needs to be more relaxed, a little more, more even keeled, better able to deal with the ups and down of parenting. . . Yeah, yeah, there are times when you do, well when I do just get focused on my family life for whatever reason you know like spending a lot of time thinking about the kids or my personal situation and things like that and then if things aren't going quite right then you think, leads itself to getting kind of down, you know if you've had rough day with both your kids, a couple of altercations in the last few days or the kid's going through a cheeky phase or something, you know it's easier to take when your life is a little fuller so . . . I find, too, just taking care of your own personal life and I find that that counselling has you know really helped to keep me focused and on track and when that happens I'm better able to do whatever it is, work or parenting, so again it's a cliche but really taking care of yourself is really, really key to being a good parent too, you know, getting enough sleep.

EXAMPLE 2

Mary (Sustaining)

Yeah, when Mark is at preschool is when I like to get things done when I could do all those errands, but it's important to almost schedule like you would with errands to schedule a time when you know that you're going to have a long shower even or things you take for granted: I'm going to read a magazine or read the newspaper or just do something to take a breath. Because running errands is not, although it's easier to do without them and that's why I feel I need to, yeah, it's not relaxing and it's not something for me that's going to replenish me. It totally helps. Like you come back energized and ready to take on, like I feel like I could take on anything. But if you're totally exhausted and you've been dealing with . . . they've been practicing conflict all day, like they're fighting all day, by the end of the day, like you can see from the beginning when I've dealt with it to the end, it's just like I've had enough.

EXAMPLE 3

Mary (Sustaining)

Going to work is something very different in a lot of ways, but it was something for me to do to get out of the house, it was a different environment, you know, meeting and talking to grown-ups when I've been home with the kids all day it's just having different kinds of conversations, yeah that was kind of stimulating in itself. And I do look forward to going to work. . . . It just makes me feel good. Like just having something for me and developing my skills, learning different things, learning new things. . . . So yeah sometimes it's very important to just have a little thing that's just mine and nobody else's.

<u>Group E: Acting to establish desired parent-child dynamics or desired state of affairs</u>

This group contains two categories which could not be placed in any other group because of its exclusive focus on taking action. Although each of the other categories describe incidents where some internal or contextual process contributed to some behaviour on the part of parents, this category represents times when it helped parents to simply take action to assert their preferred vision onto a situation.

Sixty percent of the parents described how they responded to struggle or potential struggle by taking action to re-establish the desired state of affairs. These are incidents in which parents directly reflected with their children, made amends to them, resolved conflict, actively reconnected with their children, or implemented a strategy to address problematic child behaviour. Parents in this group of categories were helped to maintain or return to their pictures of how they want things to be between them and their children by switching into action mode when they ordinarily may not have.

There were two categories that loosely fit together as action-oriented incidents: a) establishing connection or initiating reconnection with the child after a struggle, and b) taking charge in a situation and using the parental role to return the child or the parent-child relationship to a more familiar or agreeable state (in the eyes of the parent at least). The effect of both types of incidents is to put the parent and child back onto a track where less struggle is encountered. In these instances, parents seem to be mobilizing to preserve their preferred orientations.

The incidents in these two categories differ from one another in terms of the parenting styles or particular tactics employed. Although the "desired state of affairs" the parents are attempting to re-establish in this category are varied, it is the intent on the part of the parent to

assert a state of affairs more familiar and desirable in terms of his or her original, preferred orientation to the parent-child relationship that is the consistent facet across the nine incidents.

Category E1: Reconnecting with child (7 total incidents; 1 sustaining, 6 re-orienting; 50% participation rate)

Five of the ten parents indicated that they periodically establish connection in an habitual way or that they responded to struggle by initiating reconnection with the child by repairing the damage done to the parent-child relationship. The latter took the form of either a parent's apology or some meta-communication in which the essence of the struggle is addressed between the parent and child. This represented a valuing of the closeness in the relationship and a willingness to be humble and contrite on the part of parents regarding their use or misuse of authority. This mostly re-orienting process was most frequently cited in connection to a time when the parents violated their own standards for how they would prefer to treat their children. Beyond re-establishing the spirit of the parent-child relationship that parents preferred to have, these incidents had the additional outcome of improving parents' self-concepts and alleviating guilt after a struggle in which they violated some value or important aspect of their preferred orientations.

<div align="center">EXAMPLE 1</div>

Tim (Re-orienting)

The second part was to call up and to talk with him (his son) and to acknowledge that I didn't treat him well, that it wasn't right for me to be like that. It was really not right, it was unacceptable and I apologized and asked him to forgive me. . . .and then we actually talked, we joked and laughed and played a little bit, so that was okay too. Actually, I deliberately did

that too because the night before I was thinking I want to talk to him and I want to lighten this up so I'm going to make a joke about something. I'm going to deal with it at first and then we're going to lighten up and we're going to make a joke, so I played a game with him. I just kind of made up a game. You know how you do the game of "I see something that's red". Yes "I Spy". I changed the game to hearing - "I hear something that's . . . " and you guess what it is and I kind of made it silly. I used what I learned in the movie the night before to do that deliberately. Well I don't know if I thought up idea before or during but I knew that the intention was to deal with it and to lighten it up too.

EXAMPLE 2

Don (Re-orienting)

I'm kind of a believer that it's okay if you made a mistake in doing something, if you were harsh with your kids say, that you admit and say you're sorry and next time I would rather do this. I found out it works with my daughter. I said, "you know, I think what I did was a little harsh with you then. I don't agree with what you did, but maybe getting grounded for three days is not a good idea".

Category E2: Implementing parenting strategy (5 total incidents; 1 sustaining, 4 re-orienting; 40% participation rate)

Forty percent of the parents reported that they remained oriented or returned to being securely oriented to their roles when they asserted the authority of their parental roles in a situation to return the child or the parent-child relationship to a more familiar or agreeable state. This most often took the form of parents' deciding to become active and implement a parenting tactic aimed at controlling the child's behaviour or quelling conflict.

These incidents seemed to return parents to a state of internal equilibrium, but did not necessarily do the same for the children; however, some incidents did seem to help re-assert who was rightly in charge between the parent and child. One incident (Example 1) represents a parent who was disoriented in her role initially because she found herself in an unfamiliar situation without a sense of what to do. The helpful process was one of empowerment, when she found a way to return herself to her more familiar and comfortable sense of being in control of the situation.

EXAMPLE 1

Darlene (Re-orienting)

then I made sure I went with Jamie to the police station and followed through with him there too, and I also went to the probation officer and talked with her with Jamie. I was there with him and I saw it through right to the very end until the slate was wiped clean, I drove him up to the ... where he did his community work, I took him to the station, I took him to the video place, the audio tape place so he could do that, I helped him with the notes, not helped him but read it through when he'd done it, so I saw it through each step until it's conclusion and then he was, then you gotta let go and you've got to hope and I know you never do that.

EXAMPLE 2

Don (Re-orienting)

(He is referring to a struggle with his child's problematic behaviour for some time)

"okay you know what Carrie? We're going to have to initiate some sort of reward, some sort of system okay and the problem seems to be you being cheeky and saying disrespectful and sarcastic things to me, and so for every day you don't do that, there isn't an incident, I'll put a star on the calendar and if you get 5 stars on the calendar in a calendar week you get to

choose something really special to do on the weekend", and those things help, all of a sudden there's a you know that kind of flip ... and she had a motivation to you know watch what she said and so I don't know if what I did was responsible but I know it couldn't have hurt and I'm sure it had some sort of effect.

<u>Group F: Spirituality</u>

This single category constitutes a separate group because spirituality denotes a discrete dimension of the parenting experience that renders these incidents thematically distinct from the other groups of categories. The impact of a spiritual orientation on a parents' sense of orientation regarding their roles differed qualitatively from each of the other groups, yet elements from each of the other groups are evident in several of these incidents.

<u>Category F: Spirituality (7 total incidents, 4 sustaining, 3 re-orienting; 50% participation rate)</u>

Half of the parents reported being helped to orient to their roles or their children through their spiritual practices, beliefs or ways of being. This category of incidents helped orient parents to a set of principles or values both in terms of what kind of people they wanted their children to develop into and in terms of embodying an attitude towards children and a style of childrearing. The five parents who contributed to this category identified themselves as Christian, Jewish, and quasi-Buddhist. In some instances where parents' approaches received validation from spiritual or religious tenets, this seemed to provide an increased confidence in their orientations. Spirituality provided these parents with a sense of grounding and patience in terms of how they approached their parenting tasks. Some parents used their spiritual beliefs as a basis for reflection and evaluation of their parenting similar to the incidents described in Category C1. Others incorporated their spiritual orientations into their perceptions of their children as illustrated by Example 3 below. For other parents, their

connection to a spiritual presence provided similar benefit to the incidents in Group A in terms of surrendering to the supportive power of a benevolent relationship (see Example 4).

EXAMPLE 1

<u>Jennifer (Sustaining)</u>

Spirituality. . . . keeps you calm. Sometimes. You know, you can ground yourself, or pray or think of your gifts that you have and be appreciative and stop yourself from getting too caught up in stress and life and whatever.

EXAMPLE 2

<u>Natasha (Sustaining)</u>

One thing I always tell my children is that I'm responsible to Hashem for how I parent them - I'm being judged by Hashem. I've always encouraged them to call my parents to confide in when they're upset. When I was growing up I remember asking my father's permission for something. If he said no, I'd ask him why and his response was always "Because I said so". I feel like I'm on solid ground because I have the authority of Hashem. My grounding is the Torah. When my children ask me why I am denying them permission to have or do something, I will tell them my decision is based on the principles of the Torah if my decision is based on a Torah truth.

EXAMPLE 3

<u>Tim (Sustaining)</u>

I have a kind of a spiritual orientation that helps. I mean I don't go to a church or anything. I have done different things. Aikido is a kind of spiritual practice. I have a kind of openness to Buddhism. . . . There is another man whose group of people I've spent some time with here in Vancouver. People that I hang out with tend to be I guess you'd say New Age, spiritualists

in the sense that understanding energy and allowing for the possibility that there are spiritual beings that exist, I mean I don't have any strong beliefs or feelings, I just don't reject that as a possibility. . . . Well I think that probably the number one way this helped me is just accepting Danny as a spiritual being - in that sense, no different from me. So I've got a job because he's a child but in another way, we're the same. (It helps you respect him?) Yeah that's probably the main thing.

EXAMPLE 4

Natasha (Re-orienting)

We prayed almost every single night. When we pray it becomes Hashem's problem so to speak. It doesn't mean that we don't have responsibility but we have the one who created us helping us to work things through.

Non-categorized incidents

There were two discrete factors which seem worthy of mention, but which neither fit thematically into the category structure nor warranted separate categories due to low numbers of incidents. There were some incidents that seemed to indicate that parents were evaluating aspects of their children or their own parenting which they initially were concerned about as potentially problematic and reassured themselves by concluding that they were not in fact off track in the situation, their children were going to develop just fine and that they were ultimately in line with the goals and values they believed in regarding their parenting.

The second factor that came across as helpful in maintaining a parent's solid orientation to her role, but which was not specifically articulated as a helpful incident came from Evelyn. Several times, she indirectly alluded to a strategy she frequently employed where she would anticipate situations where her daughter may possibly begin whining or

demanding (something which clearly went against her preferred orientation to a smooth experience of her child) and prepared her for the situation by talking to her about what to expect and setting the limits and possible consequences ahead of time. This proactive strategy pre-empted experiences of struggle for her.

Incidents eligible for inclusion in multiple categories

It is important to note that these categories are not entirely clean in differentiating incidents. Many incidents contained several factors that contributed to the parent's orientation or change in orientation. For instance, in Category C2, Example 1, Katerina is referring to how she evaluates to what degree is she responsible for what she is perceiving in her children, she is both an evaluator of her child and herself as she does "step back . . . and try and see it from the perspective of an observer". However, this stance is only supported by her belief that children's behaviour is at least partially dependent on a developing identity established partly through what their parents have mirrored back to them.

Another illustration of this was in Category C5, Example 4. Karen had felt uncertain about how her son was measuring up relative to other children and thus, whether she as a parent was measuring up. Her statement: "I can sort of rationalize that I'm okay, that I'm all right", indicates that in her orientation to her role, she had been evaluating herself as a parent as a reflection of how her children were developing relative to the values she held and that her disorientation had come from her uncertainty of what her difficulties with her son (to which she had referred earlier in the interview) meant about her adequacy as a parent to him. When she saw that her son was meeting her preferred picture in a setting where she could contrast him with other children, she was able to return to a sense of security about her preferred picture of herself as a parent. This would be essential to her orientation as she held

some very strong views about what makes a good parent and she maintained that she mostly

adhered to those views, meaning that a problem with her child's development would throw

her picture into some chaos. So, while this incident was placed in Category C5, "Orienting to

the goals/rewards of parenting", due to the rewarding and reinforcing nature of this statement,

there were clear elements of Category D2, "Positive self-concept/self-efficacy".

When critical incidents of this sort appeared, the aim for categorizing them was to

highlight the most central meaning evident in the incident. Despite this caution, the

independent rater was able to sort incidents with sufficient agreement to warrant a claim of

reliability in the category structure.

Table 2

Category, Frequency and Participation Rates

Category	Total Incidents	Sustaining	Re-orienting	Participation Rate
Presence of Others	34 (13%)	10 (7%)	24 (18%)	100%
Reflecting/Evaluating	47 (17%)	29 (21%)	18 (13%)	90%
Intellectual Understanding	35 (13%	17 (13%)	18 (13%)	90%
Handling Emotions	30 (11%)	8 (6%)	22 (16%)	90%
Altering Perceptions of Child	16 (6%)	4 (3%)	12 (9%)	90%
Positive Self-Concept	19 (7%)	11 (8%)	8 (6%)	80%
Sense Making	19 (7%)	11 (8%)	8 (6%)	70%
Role Flexibility	18 (7%)	15 (11%)	3 (2%)	70%
Processing own Childhood	9 (3%)	7 (5%)	2 (1%)	70%
Orienting to Goals/Rewards	15 (5%)	12 (9%)	3 (2%)	70%
Self-Care	12 (4%)	10 (7%)	2 (1%)	50%
Spirituality	7 (3%)	4 (3%)	3 (2%)	50%
Reconnecting with child	7 (3%)	1 (1%)	6 (4%)	50%
Attributions of Respons.	10 (4%)	1 (1%)	9 (7%)	40%
Implementing strategy	5 (2%)	1 (1%)	4 (3%)	40%

Table 3

Parents' individual contributions to categories and parenting styles

Parent	Categories to which they contributed	Parenting Style
Tanya	A, B1, B2, B3, C1, C3, C5	Authoritative
Evelyn	A, B3, C1, C3, C4, D2,	Authoritative
Darlene	A, B1, C1, C2, C5, D1, D2, E2, F	Authoritarian
Jennifer	A, B1, C5, D1, D2, E1	Authoritative
Natasha	A, B1, B2, B3, C1, C3, C4, C5, D1, D2, F	Authoritative
Tim	A, B1, B3, C1, C3, C4, D1, D3, E1, E2, F	Permissive
Mary	A, B1, B2, B3, C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, D1, D2, D3, E2	Authoritative
Karen	A, B1, B2, B3, C1, C3, C4, C5, D1, D2, D3, E1, F	Authoritative
Katerina	A, B1, B2, B3, C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, D1, D2, D3, E1, F	Authoritative
Don	A, B1, B2, B3, C1, C2, C4, D1, D2, D3, E1, E2	Authoritative

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the results will be discussed with reference to the research literature. Implications for theory, counselling practice and future research will be drawn.

<u>Summary of Results</u>

This study sought to develop a greater appreciation for how parents sustain a preferred state of orientation and how they return to it when they find themselves off track in their parenting. Six groups containing a total of fifteen categories of incidents emerged from ten interviews. The groups were: a) contextual factors (namely supportive presence of others), b) understanding the parenting endeavor, c) considering oneself, d) emotional processing, e) actively establishing desired parent-child dynamics, and f) spirituality.

The parents in this study were able to describe their sense of how they want to be as parents with regards to their own behaviours and their objectives for their children's development. More than just explanations of their unique philosophies of parenting, these descriptions involved multiple dimensions that differentiated one parent's approach from another's. Examples of these dimensions included: a) parents' values as reflected in their expectations for their children's behaviour, b) attitudes and beliefs towards the use of control, c) the emotional experiences of their roles, d) feelings towards individual children, e) the emphasis of concern on particular aspects of their children's development or behaviour, and f) the centrality of the parental role in their identities. Far from presenting these dimensions in a segmented fashion, parents represented their pictures of how they would like their relationships with their children to be in a holistic way, with beliefs, goals, values, feelings,

meanings, attitudes and philosophies very much interconnected. This admittedly subjective appraisal lends some credence to the idea of an orientation to parenting which dictates how they approach the role of childrearing. Parents began the interviews describing what I termed their preferred orientations, or how they consciously aimed to enact their roles.

When asked to consider times when they were close to being the kinds of parents they would prefer to be, they were all able to reflect and articulate what was helping them to live up to their preferences. The helping conditions and events, or critical incidents, that resulted from these responses were labeled "sustaining" in reference to those factors which facilitated parents in sustaining their preferred orientations. In other words, these descriptions generated clues as to what helped parents remain oriented to their preferred pictures of their roles. Future research may provide more rigorous tests on the impact of these helping conditions on parenting behaviour to examine the degree to which they do contribute to parents' approximation of their preferred orientations.

When asked to consider experiences of struggle when their relationships with their children were not what they desired and their responses as parents were not immediately clear to them, the parents mostly described a state of disorientation. When disoriented in their roles, their familiar ways of approaching their children did not fit or their responses as parents went against their values. In each case, it appeared that those factors which had typically sustained them in their preferred orientations were violated or absent. The factors that triggered the struggle produced strain or pressure on their orientations which challenged parents' responses. Those helping incidents which helped resolve the sense of struggle were termed "re-orienting" as the end of the actual struggle came when parents described themselves as being more solidly oriented to their roles and their children. The face validity

of these critical incidents as re-orienting factors is high since parents universally claimed that they would not have returned to a sense of congruence and confidence in their parenting without these incidents.

There were many fine lines which distinguished categories from one another, and several incidents could be argued for inclusion in more than one category. For example, Tim went to a movie in response to the degree of distress he was experiencing after he had gone against his own standards in terms of parenting his son. An act of self-care (Category D3) which enabled him to handle his immediate emotional reaction (Category D1), he reported leaving the theater with a much different perspective on how he could approach his son with a more lighthearted attitude (Category C4, "Role flexibility – making orientation shifts) as a result of seeing a particular film which displayed the innocent, magically-minded nature of children (Category B3, "Altering perceptions of child).

Some of the categories that emerged were theoretically dependent on others. For example, Category B2, "Sense Making", referred to a process which required a degree of range in knowledge and a system of beliefs about children (Category B1) in order to entertain different hypotheses about what their children's current behaviours meant. And clearly, parents' abilities to make sense of otherwise confusing child behaviour would be enhanced by increasing the sophistication or coherence of their intellectual understanding of children and parent-child dynamics. However, not every parent who demonstrated a breadth in their intellectual understanding (Category B1) engaged in a process of searching for understanding (Category B2, "Sense making") in order to sustain orientation or re-orient in a given circumstance. Instead of scanning for alternative explanations of their children's behaviour from their knowledge base, some parents simply opted to make more automatic assumptions

based on their first understanding and belief about the behaviour without questioning the certainty of the explanation. Nor did parents necessarily need to develop their understanding or beliefs any further in order to work to make sense of the child's behaviours with which they were confronted. Therefore, conceptualizing Category B2, "Sense Making", as a separate category from Category B1, "Developing Intellectual Understanding ...", was deemed to be justified. Another dependent category was Category C4, "Role flexibility", which required that parents would alter their perceptions of what was required from them in response to their children's behaviour, as represented by Category B3, "Altering perceptions of child/situation).

Although not a part of the formal analysis of the data, each parent described the nature of their struggles in their roles, and it was clear that it was often the absence of the factors they cited as helpful that contributed to the struggle. For example, Mary described a situation of isolation from potential sources of support, a lack of balance in her life in which her role as mother dominated, and a worrisome pattern of child behaviour which she did not have an intellectual understanding about and which triggered in her anger responses that went against the preferences of her ideal orientation. Natasha referred to a time when her typical experience of her child as a disciplined, high achieving child was replaced with a disorienting experience in which her son was being sent to the principal's office frequently. She had no script for how to respond to this and it activated defensive and protective emotions in her that oriented her to respond in ways that contradicted her. Karen had been experiencing chronic struggle in her role with her youngest child as his active and willful temperament did not match her preferences for control, whereas her eldest was much more responsive to her mother's childrearing strategies and seldom veered from her values for child behaviour.

In addition to the broad categories, some specific strategies were mentioned frequently by several parents, which helped them to stay on track in their parenting. For example, four parents stated that they would ask themselves whether what was happening between them and their children was really important enough to warrant their intervention, or to even warrant their experiencing struggle. Several such examples which may be of theoretical interest to researchers and which may be of benefit for parents, parent educators and family counsellors were included as examples in Chapter Four; however, the majority were not and can be made available upon request.

Sustaining vs. re-orienting incidents

The factors which sustained orientation and those which facilitated re-orientation appeared to share more in common than not. However, some trends emerged among the categories in terms of the balance of sustaining and re-orienting incidents. The categories which tended to be more represented by parents' responses to questions about how they sustained their orientations were "Reflecting on parenting/Evaluating self in contrast with preferred orientation", "Role flexibility", "Processing own childhood", "Orienting to the goals/rewards of parenting", and "Self-care". These factors seemed to provide ongoing stability for parents to perform their roles in a way that was close to their preferences. The categories which were more characteristic of processes which parents reported to have helped them during times of struggle in their roles were "Supportive presence of other adults/parents", "Handling emotional reactions in the moment", "Altering perceptions of child/situation", "Actively establishing desired parent-child dynamic", and "Attributions of responsibility". These factors appeared to assist parents most when they had been off balance and disoriented in their roles. Although some of these helpful factors may be taken

for granted in one of those circumstances more than the other, it would seem reasonable to suggest that sustaining factors ought to be highlighted to parents who are chronically off track or inconsistent in their approaches, and that the mainly re-orienting factors would most benefit parents who are encountering a markedly disorienting experience in their roles.

However, no categories emerged which contained only incidents that sustained parents' preferred orientation or solely incidents that re-oriented parents - there was always a mixture. This would indicate that at any time, these processes can be employed by parents to facilitate a coherent, grounded position from which to step into their roles.

Limitations

This investigation is limited in several ways. It is limited by the ability of parents to articulate their experience of the phenomenon of interest as well as their willingness to disclose. This could mean that some incidents which were helpful to parents were not reported. For example, many contextual factors were likely underrepresented in the results, especially regarding sustaining incidents, because parents are not likely to be as consistently aware of how their environments are impacting them in an ongoing way.

It was anticipated that social desirability would be a strong threat to the validity of this study in that parents may have wanted to appear to have a clear rationale for their childrearing practices and may have felt reticent to disclose negative thoughts or emotions in reference to their children. It was my hope that normalizing the experience of struggle and validating parental competence in addition to stressing the confidentiality of their participation and the benefits to exploring honestly how they experienced their children would help to elicit candid reports. Each parent was able to share in detail events which they experienced as negative

and that did not always reflect on their parenting in a flattering way as they were reporting often on occasions when they behaved in contradiction of their own values.

However, participant self-report is also susceptible to biased recall and interpretations that are overly cognitive and rationalistic which may miss out on the more automatic, emotional aspects of their orientations to their roles and their children. Although the researcher probed frequently for greater depth in parents' descriptions of their experiences, their reports are constructions of those experiences and they may not always be able to pinpoint accurately what the helping factors were. Miller (1988) warns that mothers can be incited to answer questions, and these answers may simply be transient, "newly constructed beliefs" and may not necessarily reflect pre-existent or enduring belief systems. Furthermore, Miller reports that correlations between what parents report that they do with their children and what observers report that parents do with their children are weak. This latter caution is a minor consideration in this study as it is parents' internal representations of their reality that is valued here as opposed to any observable, behavioural data. In fact, ecological theory emphasizes the importance of individuals' appraisals of events as determinants of their behaviour (Brofenbrenner, 1979).

As this was an exploratory, theory-generating study which relied on self-report methods, none of the incidents gathered can be used to deduce confidently the factors which orient parents and preserve a state of equilibrium. These results can generate hypotheses that can be more concretely operationalized in future research, but no cause and effect relationships can be drawn from these results.

Lastly, ten parents were interviewed, generating 271 critical incidents. This number of parents limits the translatability of the results reported. Although there was some range in

the parents' childrearing styles and role orientations, this range was restricted to possibly one parent who employed a permissive style and perhaps two who engaged in an authoritarian style, with the remaining seven resembling Baumrind's (1967) description of authoritative parents. All ten of the parents presented themselves as highly involved in their children's lives and having a high degree of warmth for their children. Parents who represented more of a range of the permissive and authoritarian styles may have maintained or returned to a state of orientation differently than the parents interviewed here. However, different orientations and parenting styles were represented in this study and an argument could be made that regardless of the particular orientation of the parent, there seemed to be some fairly consistent broad factors that assisted parents in remaining oriented to their roles.

Translatability is also limited in terms of socioeconomic status as most parents in the study were within the middle income range. Only two fathers were interviewed, with both of them raising their children mostly separately from the children's mothers. Because seven of the ten parents had two children and only one parent was raising an only child, the results cannot be claimed to reflect the experience of parents with varying numbers of children. Also, each of these parents saw their roles as vital to the development of their children and as central to their personal identities and presented themselves as quite passionate about parenting. Results coming from these parents may not apply to parents who place less importance on their roles, and therefore cannot be translated to them.

The re-orienting processes described by the parents in the current study emerged from their particular experiences of struggle. As such, the limited range of parenting situations represented in these stories do not necessarily illuminate how parents re-orient themselves to their roles in response to all disorienting struggles.

<u>Implications for theory and research</u>

In this segment, the relationship between the results and the existing body of literature on parenting will be discussed, in three parts. First, the results will be examined in terms of their degree of theoretical fit with the parenting literature. Second, the parenting literature reviewed in Chapter Two will be examined in terms of how the results of the current study extend and challenge existing theories. Lastly, implications for practice in counselling and parent education will be illustrated.

<u>Theoretical validity of categories</u>

This section will examine the theoretical support for the category structure of the current study that exists in the parenting literature. Since this study asked a relatively unique question involving a seldom used construct, most links to previous research are tangential in nature. The majority of the research providing theoretical and empirical support for these results is connected to individual categories rather than the structure of the categories as a whole. Therefore, this section will first review those studies most directly related to the current study which may provide comment on the overall category structure, and then move to a consideration of theoretical support for individual categories.

When viewed abstractly, the category structure that emerged in this study appeared to reflect in a general manner what is widely acknowledged in many theories of personality and counselling as the essential dimensions of the individual: a) the interpersonal (Group A, "Supportive presence of others"), b) the cognitive (as applied to thinking of other in Group B, "Understanding the parenting endeavour", and thinking of self in Group C, "Considering oneself), c) the affective (Group D, "Emotional processing"), d) the behavioural (Group E,

"Acting to establish desired parent-child dynamics"), and e) the spiritual (Group F, "Spirituality").

In terms of links to particular research, as referred to in Chapter Two, the qualitative study conducted by Susan Riesch, et. al. (1997) found six "themes" describing what mothers of young adolescents perceived as important about themselves and parenting. The three themes most frequently identified as important by the parents are similar to some of the primary categories that emerged in the current study. The most frequently endorsed theme in Riesch's study was titled "Differences between ideals and practices" in which parents: a) identified practices from their own rearing that they wanted either to carry on or to avoid repeating and b) strategies for self-improvement or to gain the knowledge and skill. The corresponding categories from the current study seem to be Category C3, "Considering own upbringing" and B1, "Developing intellectual understanding/belief system" around child development and parenting strategies. From the examples Riesch, et al. use to illustrate their category, it also seems that those parents are engaged in an ongoing evaluation of their parenting in contrast with their ideal orientations, as Category C1 of this study describes.

The theme of "Guiding principles" that emerged in the Riesch, et. al. study closely resembles the values, goals, philosophies and attitudes of the preferred orientations against which the parents in the current study reflected and evaluated their parenting (Categories C1, "Reflecting on own parenting . . ." and C4, "Orienting to the rewards and goals of parenting"). The third most frequently attested theme "Mothers with self-doubt" relates to Category D2, "Positive self-concept/self-efficacy", in which several parents in the current study described handling guilt and ambivalence around their childrearing.

The current study receives partial support from, and also expands on Meyers' (1998) examination of the relative relationships between parent, child and family context characteristics and parenting behaviour. He found that mothers' perceptions of the social support, information and feedback that they received from family and friends had the greatest impact on their ability to express warmth and control toward their young children. The current study adds to that finding to say that parents indicated that the positive presence of others also facilitates parents feeling well oriented to their preferred style of childrearing as indicated by Category A, "Supportive presence of other parents/adults". Marital satisfaction and retrospective attachment security also demonstrated significant correlations with the use of effective parenting skills in the Meyers study. These are both conditions that would contribute to a parent's positive self-concept (Category D2).

Beyond the relationships between the overall category structure of the current study to such studies of similar methodologies, individual categories receive theoretical validation from various sources in the existing literature. Several of these studies are reviewed in Chapter Two, so for the sake of avoiding redundancy, the points of theoretical agreement between individual categories and previously reviewed research are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

Theoretical agreement in the literature

Category	Source of Support in the Literature
A: Supportive presence of others	Belsky,'84; Meyers,'98;Belsky et. al.(1990)
B1: Developing intellectual understanding	Bacon & Ashmore, '86
B2: Sense making	Dix & Grusec, '85; Belsky, '84
B3: Altering perceptions of child/situation	Milliones, '78; Dix & Grusec, '85
C1: Reflecting and evaluating on self	Riesch, et. al., '97; Holden & Ritchie, '88
C2: Attributions of responsibility	Dix & Lochman, '90; Dix & Grusec, '85
C3: Considering own upbringing	Main & Goldwyn, '84
C4: Role flexibility	Riesch, et. al., '97
C5: Orienting to rewards/goals	Bacon & Ashmore, '86
D1: Handling emotional reactions	Dix, '91; Medic, '95; Azar, et. al., '84
D2: Positive self-concept/self-efficacy	Bugenthal, '89; Riesch, '97; Seagram, '99
E1: Reconnecting with child	Medic, '95
E2: Implementing parenting strategy	Medic, '95

F: Spirituality

To indicate how Table 4 was arrived at, two examples of how the validity of categories was determined through points of theoretical agreement in the literature is provided here. The importance of a sense of self-efficacy in orienting parents as described in Category D2 receives validation from a previous study which determined that the reaction of parents who believe they have limited ability or skill to address problematic childrearing

experiences tend to be more negative (Bugenthal, 1989). The parents who endorsed Category D2 referred to being helped by resolving that they are doing their best and that they can forgive themselves for making mistakes. They also tended to be parents who would seek out input that would help to develop their abilities and skills. Another example is Category B3, "Altering perceptions of child/situation", which received support from a study by Milliones (1978) who found a significant negative association between mothers' *perceptions* of children's difficultness and outreach workers' ratings of those mothers' responsiveness to their infants.

One group of categories that emerged from the current study which was not reviewed in Chapter Two and which has not received much attention in the existing parenting literature was Group E, "Actively establishing desired parent-child relationship". However, similar action-oriented responses, connected with particular internal processes, are thoroughly illustrated in a qualitative study on parents' constructive uses of anger (Medic, 1995). One pattern of responses to anger regarding children that emerged in Medic's study was where parents initially employed a coercive response followed by a constructive resolution in which they stepped back mentally and reassessed the situation, taking into account the child's perspective and then judged themselves and their use of coercion, i.e., "I've gone too far. I don't want my child to fear me". The feelings of regret and guilt which ensued were followed by parents' choices of: a) separating self from child to regain calm (as in Category D1, "Handling emotional reactions in the moment"), b) briefly explaining/restating expectations (as in Category E2, "Implementing parenting strategy"), c) apologizes (as was frequently reported in Category E1, "Reconnecting with child"), or d) comforts the child and restores good feelings (another aspect of Category E1).

To elaborate on the points of connection with this study, Medic indicates that handling emotion in the moment is facilitated by the processes described in Categories C5, "Orienting to goals" and B3, "Altering perceptions of child" of the current study: "Anger often is arrested by: (a) a goal realignment, e.g., 'what am I doing? I don't want to hurt my child. I don't want my child to fear me', or by (b) a reappraisal of intentionality, e.g., 'He/she didn't mean it' (Medic, 1995, p. 114).

This review indicates that there are points of connection between this study and the parenting literature which, although mostly peripherally, lend some theoretical support to the categories identified and extends the implications of the helping factors from processes that facilitate orientation to processes that likely facilitate effectiveness. The following section will address the flip side of the coin and focus on the theoretical commentary this study can make on the existing literature.

Theoretical implications

This is a different study from those which elucidated the determinants of parenting in terms of what contributes to differences in parenting style and childrearing practices (Belsky, 1984, 1991; Goodnow, 1988, 1995; McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 1982). The current study employed critical incident methodology to ask parents what helped them to approximate the kind of parents they wished to be as well as what helped them to return to that approximation when they encountered struggles in their roles. This revealed those internal resources which enabled parents to parent to the best of their abilities - according to their goals and values. Regardless of whether the factors are facilitating effective childrearing contributing to healthy child development, these are means by which some parents seem to move towards satisfaction and familiarity with their parenting roles and parent-child relationships. These

factors are important for researchers and practitioners as they represent the processes and elements that regulate equilibrium for parents in how they approach their children.

Utilizing Breunlin and Schwartz's (1986) notion of homeostatic processes in family dyads, the data suggest various processes internal to parents which function to maintain and return the parent-child dyad to the equilibrium of their preferred orientations (which are potentially fluid themselves and not necessarily rigid positions to which they return). Their metaphor of harmonic oscillation fits with parents' abilities to articulate a sense of how they wanted things to be and how sequential patterns revolved around the interactions between that vision and the child's behaviours. Parents in this study reported that this occurred both on an ongoing basis and during times of significant struggle between them and their children. When each of the parents described their struggles with their children, they claimed that their reactions triggered responses that indicated to them that they were off track which in turn triggered efforts to bring themselves back on track as a dyad. This study undertook a more detailed examination of those factors which were "being monitored by this cycle" and which Hoffman (1976) claimed were the "essential variable which the parents - or whatever executive dyad is operating - must maintain within certain limits if they are to function together successfully." However, whatever the variables were (i.e., intimacy, conflict, symmetry, control, behaviour expectations), this study revealed the processes by which parents maintained those parameters or responded to re-establish them if they were violated by either themselves or their children. This specific question had not been asked previously by other researchers in the parenting field.

To a limited extent, the current study supports transition theory as outlined by Shlossberg (1986) and Cowan (1991) which defines transition as a long-term process that

results in a "qualitative reorganization of both inner life and external behaviour" (Cowan, 1991, p. 5). Within the re-orienting incidents described by parents in the current study were examples of parents making a qualitative shift in how they were internally oriented to their roles, much in the same manner that transition theory posits that psychosocial structures are revised at both the intrapsychic and interpersonal levels. The theory describes intrapsychic shifts as incorporating a reorganization of one's sense of self or self-esteem (Category D2), revisions of one's assumptions and beliefs about the character of one's relationships (Categories B3 and C4), and regulation of one's internal affective state, especially the ability to experience and control one's emotions during periods of heightened arousal (Category D1). Interpersonal shifts involve the reorganization of one's relationships (Category E1), one's roles (Category C4), and one's emotional tone during communication (Categories C1 and D1). Parents indicated that on many occasions, the re-orienting processes facilitated such transitions to new ways of experiencing themselves in their roles and new ways of locating themselves in the parent-child relationship. On other occasions, re-orienting processes merely facilitated a return of parents to a state of equilibrium within their original ways of orienting to their parenting. More research would be needed to discern the factors that contribute to such differences in outcome of resolving disorientation - why some parents undergo a transition in their parenting while others are restored to the status quo.

Implications for research on parenting style

This study builds on the research conducted on parenting style (Baumrind, 1967) by asking how parents maintained and returned to their preferred styles, whatever they may be. Each parent was able to articulate a style of parenting they aimed to execute and each of them was able to describe the processes which facilitated the consistent use of that style or shifts to

another style that fit with their orientations to a particular circumstance. The data suggest that there are many dimensions of variability among parents within the same category of parenting style. For example, although the seven parents who most clearly fit the description of an authoritative parenting style contributed to many of the same categories, there were many differences in terms of how they oriented and re-oriented to their roles. In some cases - such as with parents # 4 and #10, two self-described authoritative parents who employed many of the same processes to sustain their orientations and styles in an ongoing manner - parents resorted to different processes when confronted with significant struggle in their roles (see Table 3). Furthermore, their orientations contained differences that determined much different susceptibilities to experiencing struggle even though they employed the same parenting style, according to Baumrind's categorization scheme (1967).

Not enough parents of varying styles were interviewed to provide reliable clues regarding possible differences in orienting processes between parents who employ differing styles. However, a cursory examination can provide a tenuous and tentative indication that there was considerable similarity in the processes which oriented and re-oriented authoritarian, authoritative and permissive parents, even if the flavour of that process differed. For example, Natasha used religion to sustain her orientation to a relatively more authoritarian style by referencing her accountability to Hashem to guide her decisions and use of control and to imbue her role with a sense of unquestioned authority in the eyes of her children. Tim, who was considerably more permissive relative to Natasha, used his spirituality to orient himself to his child as a spiritual being, perfect unto himself who required little imposition of control or external authority.

The very diversity of the incidents described by the parents in this study indicates that there are likely many more ways to be oriented to the parenting role than the number of parenting styles described by Baumrind would indicate, and there are likely to be more idiosyncratic differentiation among parents in their approaches to their roles than her gross categories suggest. Two authoritative parents can be oriented to drastically different aspects of their children. One parent may experience no internal reaction to her child's display of bad manners, but will move in to play a strong role upon seeing her child floundering on some math homework, while another authoritative parent will exhibit the opposite pattern. The notion of cycles of equilibrium indicates and the results of this study suggest that there will be different variables to which parents orient themselves in their roles, yet will employ broadly the same parenting style with which to respond. This study also extended beyond the parenting styles literature to investigate the processes that oriented parents to their stylistic approaches to their roles, which relates to the literature on the determinants of parenting.

Implications for research on the determinants of parenting

Based on research investigating the determinants of parenting, Belsky (1984, 1993) developed a heuristic process model outlining the factors that contribute to individual differences in childrearing approaches among parents. Although this study looked for processes common among parents which helped them to orient to their roles, the categories developed here could be thought to represent those factors which, if varied, could contribute to differences in childrearing styles and practices.

The data from this study support Belsky's model which posited that parenting is directly influenced by three forces: within the individual parent (personality), within the individual child (temperament), and from the broader social context in which the parent-child

relationship is embedded. The category structure developed in this study has significant points of connection with Belsky's model. Category A, "Supportive presence of other parents/adults", resembles Belsky's "Contextual sources of stress and support". Categories B2, "Sense Making", and B3, "Altering perceptions of child" are closely associated with the influence of child temperament which Belsky noted. It is the parent's experience of the child that is at issue here, and variations in child temperament would have an impact on that experience. However, to the degree that parents can have some control over the way they experience children of even difficult temperaments through making sense of their behaviours and reframing their perceptions of them, the effects of child temperament can be mediated.

Most significantly, this study moves beyond Belsky's contention of psychological well-being as the dimension internal to parents which determines their childrearing behaviour. In effect, in addition to broadening the understanding of those internal processes, this study gives some clues as to how parents might maintain satisfaction with their parenting and how they might handle it if dissatisfied. However, the categories in Groups C, "Considering oneself", and D, "Emotional processing" do loosely relate to much of what Belsky was referring to in his description of forces within parents, which he described as "psychological well-being", "personality" and "developmental history". The parents in this study were closer to being the kinds of parents they wished to be when they were: a) handling their emotional responses (Category D1), b) sustaining positive self-concepts (D2), c) maintaining a balanced life in which their own needs were met (D3), d) considering their own upbringings (C3), and e) doing the kinds of reflecting (C1) and sense making (B2) that mirror the desirable personality capacities Belsky described. The incidents identified in the categories of the current study provide a much more rich and descriptive understanding of the

internal processes Belsky referred to and translates them into helping factors which more easily lend themselves to being adopted by parents (i.e., "considering one's own upbringing" is more amenable to parents control than "developmental history").

The primary objective of research on the determinants of parenting is to discover what differentiates effective from ineffective or harmful parents. The current study cannot profess to make direct comment along these lines since it examined factors which facilitated parents' senses of being oriented in their roles; however, in conjunction with the results of other studies in the parenting literature, it is possible to speculate on probable links between some of these orienting factors and effective parenting practice.

For example, those parents who contributed to Categories C2, "Attributions of responsibility and C1, "Reflecting on parenting/Evaluating self ..." are likely to be more effective in responding to challenging situations with their children. This statement can be made because previous research has discovered that parents who take responsibility for negative child behaviours (i.e., believe child behaviour is under the parents' control) have been found to have reactions to problematic child behaviours that are less negative (Dix & Lochman, 1990). Other research has demonstrated that parents who see themselves as having limited control in stressful situations are more likely to respond with emotion-focused rather than problem-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Lastly, this factor in conjunction with each of the categories in Group B, "Considering the parenting endeavour", suggested the benefit of consideration and deliberation of children's and parents' behaviours in orienting parents. And previous research has revealed that higher parental reasoning complexity levels were related to authoritative parenting, while lower level reasoning complexity was related to authoritarian practices, and these practices demonstrated higher and lower respective levels in

the children's self-esteem and popularity among peers (Dekovi, Gerris, and Janssens,1991; cited in McGillicuddy-DeLisi & Sigel, 1995).

Just as most other researchers have done in the parenting field, Belsky has developed his model in terms of what conditions determine different parenting behaviours among parents. However, it would seem from the results of this study that these conditions may operate differently under different circumstances within parents. Some of the categories which emerged from the current study were dominated by incidents which sustained parents in their preferred orientations while other categories were predominantly comprised of incidents which helped parents get back on track with their parenting after a period of struggle and disorientation. It would appear from this that two separate processes could be added to the theoretical body, and researchers perhaps ought to consider habitually making the distinction of those conditions which sustain orientation and those which re-orient parents. This study suggests that parents handle the familiar differently in some ways than they handle the disorienting, and in some ways the responses share similarities. It will be up to future research to more thoroughly clarify these processes.

<u>Need for the concept of an orientation to parenting</u>

The confusing and unsettling nature of parents' experiences of struggle in their roles prompted various responses from parents. Borrowing from transition theory (Schlossberg, 1984), such struggle and disorientation provides opportunity for growth, where parents may expand the scope of their orientations, or shift out of rigidly held, old patterns. One poignant example came from Natasha who did not know fully what beliefs oriented her until she experienced the struggle of her son being repeatedly sent to the Principal's office. After a time of reacting in a manner that contradicted her preferred orientation to her role, she took

the opportunity to reflect on the automatic nature of her beliefs and her emotional orientation to her role, such as her strong need to have her child experience her as a protector even when it worked against a resolution of his problems. This mother who was otherwise secure and confident in her approach to parenting was suddenly confronted with a disorienting experience which did not fit her habitual frame of meaning and instead of responding by asserting her authority - as she may have done had she not been thrown off - she adapted by shifting her orientation to adopt a qualitatively different role from authoritarian teacher to "counsellor" (see example #3 in Category C4, "Role flexibility/ making orientation shifts").

The results of this study propose that when parents' guiding metaphors, or orientations, can no longer accommodate what they are experiencing in their roles that disorientation ensues and something has to give. Parents indicated that when it goes well, these helping factors are often responsible. This study reflects many of the same findings in previous research in the parenting literature: much of what guides parents are their intellectual understandings and perceptions of children and child development, their scripts and strategies for childrearing, their values and standards for their own parenting, their experiences of how they were parented, their guiding metaphors for their roles, their emotional experiences in their roles including how it impacts their attachment issues, the degree to which they take care of themselves, and their spirituality.

In response to this multiplicity of determining factors, orientation is being proposed as an integrating, phenomenological construct which looks at parents' whole experience rather than partitioning the various factors involved. While research on the independent contributions of specific factors on parents' behavior is indispensable, perhaps qualitative research like this will build on the existing parenting literature in a complimentary way.

Perhaps if orientations to parenting were studied in relation to parenting behaviors and child

outcomes in a more systematic manner, we may discern preferable types of orientations.

However, this is not to suggest that the desirable scenario is for a parent to arrive at an

orientation which yields a comfortable and contenting parenting experience. Some research

has argued that healthy development is most likely to occur for children of parents are

frequently off balance and anxiously oriented to their roles. As indicated in Chapter Two,

Luster, Rhoades & Haas (1989) found that mothers who evaluated themselves as being

relatively less competent as parents had higher HOME scores than did mothers who viewed

themselves as more competent. They hypothesized that parents who have greater reservations

about their parenting competencies have a greater appreciation of the subtleties and

complexities involved in providing supportive environments for children while those who

perceive competence tend to have a more fixed, authoritarian orientation. Indeed, such a

tendency for stern evaluation would likely indicate an orientation in which parents ascribe

importance to their role in their child's development and they have high standards for the

impact of their behaviour on their children. Furthermore, Egeland and Farber (1984) found

that mothers of securely attached infants admitted to more ambivalent feelings about the

childrearing role than mothers of insecure attached children. Belsky (1984) concluded that:

"In summary, the most effective pattern of parenting seems to involve being nurturant without

being too restrictive, responsive but not over-controlling, and stimulating but not too

directive." (p. 91).

The results of the current study would hypothesize that parents who endorsed

Category C1 "Reflecting on own parenting/Evaluating self in contrast to preferred

orientation" and did not endorse Category D2, "Positive self-concept", as a sustaining factor

may be most highly akin to these mothers. Using the findings in the literature on the cognitive and emotional aspects of parenting, future studies utilizing the concept of orientation may be able to find a category of orientations that are described as symbolic of this type of experience.

Thus an effective parent may describe his or her experience of parenting in a manner which resembles that of the author Rich (1976), who wrote, "My children cause me the most exquisite suffering of which I have any experience. It is the suffering of ambivalence: the murderous alternation between bitter resentment and raw-edged nerves, and blissful gratification and tenderness" (p. 21). This type of orientation may require someone who has support, is active in terms of refining and utilizing her intellectual understanding and philosophies of parenting, considers herself, processes her emotions, actively establishes her desired parent-child dynamics and has a spiritual orientation - in other words, a parent who benefits from each of the processes identified by the current study.

<u>Implications for counselling practice</u>

The critical incidents described by the parents in the current study represent events and processes that impacted parents to maintain or return to states of orientation to their roles. They varied from parents who actively engaged in a process that facilitated orientation to parents who were passive recipients of experiences that proved beneficial to them. Regardless, each incident represents something that other parents could actively implement in order to facilitate orientation and resolve struggle. It is my contention that parents are less effective when they are disoriented in their roles and that they can experience considerable distress when disoriented. The factors which facilitate orientation should be of concern to helping professionals who intervene with parents.

The results of this study argue that the goal of helping parents is to attend to these processes that maintain and return parents to states of orientation and equilibrium. Therefore, it is likely a mistake for helpers of parents to focus exclusively on the action component of parenting, educating parents about child development and parenting techniques. For parents who are coming to a counsellor because they are encountering significant struggle in their roles, this study indicates that it is their contextual and internal processes that must be tapped if they are to experience an enduring shift in their parenting behaviour because otherwise it is these processes that will return them to their original orientations or that will sustain any new orientation. This concurs with Dadds (1987) who suggested that interventions attempting to increase parental authoritativeness and optimize child development may be facilitated by attending to the variables that influence the quality of parents' interactions with their children. Counsellors can play a powerful role in helping parents to reflect on how they make sense of themselves as parents instead of only how they make sense of their children.

Although the form that such intervention may take is limited only by the creativity of the professional, one approach could be to follow the interview process used in this study. Counsellors could take parents through a process of fleshing out what their ideal vision of parenting is and have a look at how they are oriented to their children and their roles. Some of the parents in this study became most clear about how they had been oriented to their roles through examining experiences in which they were anything but solidly oriented, suggesting that one of the most efficient ways of illuminating a parent's particular orientation is through a processing of the parent's disorientation. The helper could also engage parents in the same processes that these parents indicated helped them: reflecting on parents' evaluations of what

they have been doing, examining their emotional reactions to their children, being a source of support, considering the impact of how they were parented, etc.

Furthermore, as this study suggests, even parents who consider themselves to be successful in their roles struggle in their parenting at times. This could help to normalize their experiences and make it easier to look at what part of their ideal picture is not being realized and how they are disoriented in their roles (or firmly oriented in ways that are contributing to chronic struggle). The spirit of this study emphasizes that parents likely have already developed their own ways of getting back on track. Their own ways of getting back on track could be explored with a counsellor's guidance, rather than having advice handed down from the expert who "knows better". Counsellors working with parents could have a ear open for which of the categories indicated by this study are being utilized by their parent clients, and which factors could use increasing.

Although not the primary focus of this study, parents who viewed themselves as mostly highly effective in their parenting described in rich detail their distressing experiences in the parental role when they were far from effective. A counsellor's appreciation of the struggles inherent in trying to parent a child may help buffer the demoralizing sense of personal failure for parents experiencing the dark side of parenting. Since the parenting process contains so many tales from the dark side it is important that adult educators have the chance to gain accurate insight into the emotional and cognitive ebbs and flows of this process so that periods of disorientation, confusion and apparent regression can be tolerated more easily (Brookfield, 1994).

The categories developed in this study indicate some factors that influence parents' sense of the quality of their parenting. Counsellors who have not typically attended to these

factors may consider ways of incorporating these processes into their practices with parents. For example, it would appear that the degree to which parents esteem themselves in their roles is an important goal and motivation for many parents, and it is also a means to staying balanced and on track. As a second example, in Category C5, orienting to the past, present and future rewards of parenting was described by seven of the ten parents as important in sustaining and renewing parents' motivation to maintain the difficult aspects of their approaches which they value.

Category D1, "Handling emotions in the moment", suggests some potential remedies for parents who mistreat children. As reviewed in Chapter Two, high negative emotions are strongly linked to many other internal processes in parents which tend to increase parents' proclivities to focus on immediate reduction of their own negative feelings. This contributes to an emphasis on short-term, parent-centered goals as opposed to the long-term, child-centered developmental goals - the opposite of what parents cited in Category C5 "Orienting to goals/rewards of parenting". High negative emotion can interfere with the more rational, reasoning side of parenting reflected in the Group B categories, "Understanding the parenting endeavour", and can contribute to more reactive, emotional responding in efforts to gain control from parents who tend to maltreat their children (Dix, 1991).

However, it seems important to note that several of the categories of incidents in the current study had additional effects on parents by triggering other facilitative processes. It is evident that several of these factors are inter-related, (some more strongly than others, of course), which implies that it would not be wise to help parents who are struggling with their emotional reactions to their children only by suggesting the strategies entailed in the category "Handling emotions in the moment". In many cases, the need to deal with difficult affect was

necessitated by experiences of struggle that were more the result of seeing their children's behaviours as discordant with their preferred orientations.. This concurs with previous research: Negative expectations, perceptions, and evaluations of children are associated with the presence of negative emotion in parents. Antithetically, parents with expectations for their children's behaviour that are beyond their developmental levels are more likely to experience negative affect because their expectations often cannot be met (Azar, Robinson, Hekimian, & Twentyman, 1984). This suggests that while a focus on strategies to deal with emotions would be helpful for parents, helping parents in "Developing intellectual understanding/beliefs of the parenting endeavor" as described in Category A would also be helpful.

Although it can be tempting for parent educators and counsellors to respond strategically to parents' complaints about problematic child behaviour, helping them to make sense of the behaviour and developing ways to respond effectively, this study emphasizes the importance of contextual factors in easing parents' struggles and helping them to be as on track as possible relative to how they wish to be. The incidents in Category A, "Supportive presence of other adults/parents" and Category D3, "Self-care" indicate that when parents are bolstered by other people and experiences, they are more able to respond as they would like - regardless of how their children are behaving. This emphasis is supported by previous research which concluded that the cumulative impact of perceived stress has a detrimental effect on parents' psychological well-being, attitudes toward parenting and children, and actual childrearing behaviour (Crnic and Acevedo, 1995). To the extent that support and self-care are buffers against stress, they are important elements to emphasize to chronically struggling parents. Aspects of parents' orientations can make them more susceptible to

perceiving encounters with their children that generate stress, making incidents from

Category B3, "Altering perceptions of child/situation" important to consider as well.

Other implications derived from the results argue for counsellors to move beyond the

crisis management, child-focused counselling often employed with parents. One aspect of

parenting found by the current study and previous research indicates the importance of

helping parents to work through their own attachment issues if they are to truly remain

oriented to their preferred styles of parenting. In the context of describing how they reflected

on their parenting and handled their emotions, parents four, five and nine did speak indirectly

about requiring a secure attachment in order to remain oriented to their roles and not react

personally and emotionally in a problematic manner to difficulties with their children. Some

parents indicated that reflecting on a deeper level revealed to them that some of their struggle

and disorientation in their roles may be resulting from how their children were triggering their

own unresolved attachment issues (i.e., Katerina wanting to be liked and resolving to let go of

that need because it was negatively impacting her efforts to be her version of an effective

parent).

Such processes are likely to facilitate the quality of attachment parents have with their

children, which is likely to facilitate child development. Belsky, Rovine & Taylor (1984)

have reported that quality of attachment influences motivational and social competencies of

children at 2, 3, and 5 and children's later abilities to establish and maintain intimate

relationships. They have also concluded that child overstimulation tends to lead to avoidant

attachment, understimulation to resistant attachment and intermediate levels of stimulation to

secure attachment. Parents with the secure pattern have been associated with caregiver

sensitivity and responsivity, whereas the avoidant pattern has been linked to caregiver rejection and intrusiveness and the ambivalent pattern to caregiver inconsistency.

However, as Category C3, "Considering own upbringing" and previous research suggests, this does not imply that one need only assess parents' childhood histories to get a sense of their orientations. Parenting styles will recur across generations only when early experiences are not remembered nor integrated into revised working models of relationships. Main and Goldwyn (1984; cited in Belsky, 1993) found that women who remembered and formed coherent narrative accounts of their troubled childhoods and relationships with their mothers were less likely to repeat patterns of rejection with their own children compared with mothers who had yet to come to grips with their problematic childhoods. Furthermore, subsequent experiences are posited to modify internal working models, allowing the possibility for parents to care for their own offspring in a manner decidedly different from the way they themselves were cared for. Consider Mary who claimed that she discovered that there were different ways to raise children that how she had been raised through her experiences in her schooling and subsequently her employment in social work. Thus, when attempting to understand a parent's orientation, one is assessing the current state of the parent's internal working attachment model as it impacts parents' experiences of their children.

In this vein, Category C3, "Processing own upbringing", is another aspect that counsellors can bring into their repertoires in order to assist parents in developing clarity and consciousness to how they cognitively and emotionally orient to their roles. Seventy percent of the parents identified that they were able either to avoid internalizing the modeling of their own parents that were problematic for them as children or to conscientiously adopt aspects of

their parents' approaches that they valued when they went through a process of reflecting on how their parents raised them and what impact that had on them. Some parents who had been struggling because they were reacting to their children in ways they did not like were able to reflect on how they had developed those reactions from their childhood and were then better able to consciously monitor themselves for those reactions. For example, Mary let go of the motto in her family of origin that "one must always be careful of the family's image" and was able to respond to her children when in public in a manner more in keeping with her preferred orientation rather than clamping down harshly with control as she had felt the impulse to do.

Other examples in the parenting literature illustrate how interrelated the orienting processes which emerged in this study are and how this interrelation may provide multiple points of possible entry for helpers of parents. Some researchers concluded that beliefs seem to be important in the relationship between child temperament and parenting regarding the extent that parents believe the child can "help it" and whether the parent can have an influence in changing child temperament (Super & Harkness, 1981). Crnic and Booth (1991) found that parents' conceptions of child development influence the degree to which they perceive normal childhood behaviour and parenting tasks as stressful, and Baumrind (1995) found that stressed parents often perceive child behaviour more negatively than neutral observers, suggesting that they may be "hyperreactive", a tendency leading to "cycles of coercion" in which "parents lose their ability to control the child's behaviour by other than threats and physical force" (p. 115). These studies, in combination with the current study, suggests to professionals who would aim to assist parents through experiences of struggle from which reactive, controlling practices are emerging, the processes described in Categories B1, "Developing intellectual understanding/beliefs...", and B3, "Altering perceptions of

child/situation" would provide a different orientation to otherwise overwhelming child behaviour. Introducing the helping factors of Categories D1, "Handling emotions in the moment", D3 "Self-care", and A, "Supportive presence of other adults/parents" may help to buffer the parent from their experiences of stress on an ongoing way and provide them with methods to handle the stress should they begin to react to it.

When parents find themselves continually dragged into a disorienting metaphor, enacting a role that is incongruent with their expected/preferred orientations, then they may shift their orientations or blame themselves or blame their child and spiral downwards into unhealthy patterns. The findings of this study, Reich (1998) and Belsky (1991) would predict that healthy parents will use the dissonant experiences to become more aware of their usual orientations and evaluate whether their metaphors are effective or not in facilitating their parenting. In fact, counsellors may alert themselves to parents who overuse the processes described in Group E, "Acting to establish desired parent-child dynamics or desired state of affairs", to the exclusion of the other factors in order to return themselves to states of orientation. Although Category E1 speaks to a sensitivity and responsiveness which befits an authoritative style and is linked to positive child outcomes, it could be a problem if it is part of a pattern in which parents resolve their sense of disequilibrium because they are frequently contravening their own standards and then apologizing and reconnecting with their children without undertaking the level of reflecting, evaluating and role flexibility that facilitate a more consistent adherence to the parent's own standards.

Category E2, "Implementing parenting strategy" also refers to a process in which parents are responding to struggle by asserting their parenting style, implementing strategies or tactics which put parents back on a solid ground by having their children back on their

terms. Parents who hold onto their preferred orientations without making any internal adjustments in their perceptions of their children or their roles will seldom accommodate their children's developmental needs, especially as they grow. This orienting process can also be problematic for child development if overused, as indicated by the literature on authoritarian parenting styles. After connecting with such parents' frames of reference, adjustments and additions to their orienting processes could be facilitated by a counsellor or parent educator.

Many parent education programs emphasize either factors that parents ought to incorporate into their childrearing on an ongoing basis or factors that parents ought to consider in the face of struggle, but rarely are both presented for parents. The possible assumption here that parents require only one type of assistance or information is refuted in this study since all of the parents in this study had times when they were well oriented and felt they were closely resembling the types of parents they wished to be, as well as times when they were disoriented in their roles and off track in relation to where they wished to be. Parents also described being helped by factors which sustained them in their roles in an ongoing way and by factors which facilitated them through their struggles and that these factors often differed.

Several incidents revealed in this study suggest that parents will incorporate or discard advice from parent educators and counsellors according to its fit with their preferred orientations. Many of the parents cited books and lecturers which espoused approaches that were essentially commensurate with their original philosophies and sense of emotional comfort with the role being suggested. This would imply to those who would intervene with struggling parents that the place to begin in with the parent's original orientation to the child

and the parental role. Parent Effectiveness Training and family therapy which is informed by an understanding of how parents experience their roles may be more prepared to facilitate an integration of any proposed metaphors, beliefs, attitudes, emotional coping skills, and childrearing practices into the parents' experiential frame of reference, so that it may become a congruent part of who they are as parents.

In summary, parents' assessments of successful resolution of struggle does not necessarily imply that this was an example of effective parenting, although the previous section suggested that there are likely relationships. These incidents tell us what helped parents back into an ego-syntonic state regarding the parent-child relationship, or returning them to states of equilibrium or orientation. But it would seem likely that authoritarian parents are frequently acting to maintain their more rigid positions around which they experience equilibrium, while permissive parents probably rarely feel struggle. The theory would also suggest that parents who employ either style will not be as likely to have their orientations evolve and their sequences will be more a matter of maintaining homeostasis. What shifts a parent back into equilibrium will likely reveal much regarding the true orientation to the role of that parent, giving parent educators an accurate picture of where to connect with and an avenue to connect with the idiosyncratic worldview of parents and join them on the arduous and rewarding journey that is parenting.

Implications for parent effectiveness intervention programs

Beyond the implications drawn here for counsellors of parents, the current study has more specific comments to make on the Parent Effectiveness Training movement. Since the 1960's, social programs have sought to elaborate a system of intervention that could systematically address the needs of parents to enhance their effectiveness as facilitators of

their children's development. While, many of these programs have been oriented towards providing support for parents, simple support and empowerment has been demonstrated to be insufficient in promoting change in parent behavior. Other programs went on to target childrearing practices, armed with empirical evidence of their correlations with child outcomes. For example, behavioural parent training involves reinforcing prosocial child behaviour, appropriately ignoring problematic child behaviour, using time-outs, implementing natural and logical consequences, and using reward systems (Sanders & Dadds, 1993). Those who focus on a relationship enhancement approaches attempt to increase parental sensitivity by developing parents' speaking, listening and limit-setting abilities (Guerney, 1983).

Interventions utilizing these approaches have generally demonstrated short-term positive changes in parents' behaviours and attitudes, these changes have been found to diminish upon later follow-up (Cedar & Levant, 1990). It is the contention of the current study and Meyers (1998) that such approaches neglect the role played by internal and interpersonal factors that orient parents and influence the sequences of equilibrium between parent and child (Breunlin & Schwartz, 1986) and that, over time, the processes presented in the current study will orient parents to what is familiar and comfortable to them. Of the internal processes that guide behavior, some practitioners have recently begun to focus on the belief complex as the central facet of their interventions.

Typically, the parenting literature has presented a fragmented portrayal of how parents represent and operationalize the parent-child relationship. When links between specific beliefs and child outcomes can be established, then these beliefs can become targets for intervention. For example, parents who believe in gender differences have children who tend to be rated higher in undesirable classroom behaviors and lower in desirable classroom

behaviors (McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 1992). So when parent educators encounter such gendered beliefs, they know that targeting them directly may facilitate the child's development of behavioral regulation.

However, to adopt the traditional approach of parent education programs and intervene at the level of parents' operational beliefs may be somewhat of a hit-and-miss approach. To enhance parent effectiveness, one would have to address each specific belief linked to each problematic behavior.

Parents ought to be equipped with versatile tools to deal with the complex behaviors and developmental needs of their children. Helping parents to make shifts in their orientations which incorporate a greater number of metaphors that are consistent with one another (the more coherent the orientation, the less likelihood for frequent disorientation) may provide them with greater awareness of how child behavior communicates developmental and current emotional and physical needs, and a heightened capacity to consistently respond with appropriate childrearing practices.

It was from this purpose that the parent education movement began. However, in their attempt to enhance effectiveness, many of these programs remained unaware of how the orientations implicitly endorsed in the philosophy of the program were also limiting their orientations to the parent-child relationship. Doherty and Ryder (1980) raised concerns about the metaphors of parenting that undergird Thomas Gordon's (1970) influential Parent Effectiveness Training program. They claim that his characterization of parent-child communication is rife with "quasi-technological" metaphors. The parent "uses" Active Listening, "sends" the child an I-Message which, of course, does not always "work." If an I-

Message does not "work," then the parent should "shift gears" into Active Listening "mode" in order to "decrease" the child's level of defensiveness.

Parent training programs prompt parents to adopt the implicit conceptualization of the parental role held by the educator, since behind every concrete strategy suggested is a particular way of orienting to children. To alter parenting behavior, educators aim most carefully at the parents' beliefs about reprimand. Many of the programs have been designed to promulgate a careful application of mechanistic notions about reprimand. Analysis suggests that, too often, the designers of mechanistic programs had not made explicit their own implicit theory (Mancuso & Handin,1985). In Gordon's program, effective parenting seemingly involves an identifiable set of techniques which can be applied in a unilateral fashion by the parent to the child, indiscriminant of developmental level, culture and situational considerations.

But the predominant metaphor of parent-as-therapist technically trained, which promotes a Rogerian approach that must be devoid of power tactics, may orient parents towards relationships with their children as being fragile and potentially jeopardized if the parent does not respond skillfully. This may leave the parent feeling precarious and threatened by the child as a reflection of parental worth (Doherty & Ryder, 1980). And when the Adlerian approach promotes the metaphor of parent-as-democratic leader or when the behaviourist approach sells the merits of the parent-as-detached reinforcer of behavior, these pictures of ideal parenting practice may fail to resonate with the parent's experiential sense of the parenting endeavor and the good intentions of the educator are more likely to be dismissed or unintegrated by the parents. This is, of course, speculative, but the power of

parents' natural orienting processes demonstrated in the current study illustrate the argument

that helpers need to be aware of how parenting is experienced from a given orientation.

The point here is that helpers need to check the orientations they are implicitly selling

and instead start with the orientations held by the parent if any new approach is to fit within

their experiential frame. Perhaps if we can come to understand how the parents orient to the

parental role through their metaphorical representations of it, then we have a potent image to

serve as a starting point to help parents modify or transform their metaphors. If such a

starting point is attained, then working towards change on the holistic, metaphorical level of

parents' orientations may prove more powerful, efficient and enduring than an exploration of

each internal process. One refreshing example of an author who has considered the

implications of different orientations to the parenting role and to children, as well as the paths

to achieving positive shifts in those orientations is Polly Berrien Berends in her book "Whole

Child/Whole Parent" (1997).

Recent efforts have come half way by painting pictures of the desired end result

towards which experts exhort parents to strive. Examples of helper-generated metaphors

have been proposed by Riera (1996), who attempted to encapsulate his endorsements for the

experiential flavour with which the parental role ought to be conducted in regards to power

dynamics at different stages of child development. He advocated the metaphor of "parent-as-

controller" in relationships with a young child, and "parent-as-manager" for parents of post-

puberty children where more responsibility for decisions are granted by the parent, who takes

a less intrusive stance as an available resource. While these analogies to other identifiable

modes of relating may communicate the essence of the views supported by empirical research

and practitioners in terms of the relationships between parenting style and child outcomes,

how well would they be internalized by a parent whose metaphorical orientation to parenting is that of a "tug of war" in which the child is often the "controller".

This is not to say that parent education programs ought to abandon the staples of what they currently offer. In fact, ninety percent of the parents in this study indicated that they were helped by exposure to ideas that facilitated development of their intellectual understanding of children and parenting strategies (Category B1, "Developing an intellectual understanding ...). The provision of behavioural scripts for parents to respond with was seen by several parents as indispensable and is part of what takes parent education beyond simple counselling models which stop at promoting reflection. In the second interview, Tanya described how reflection alone did not always sufficiently re-orient her when she was struggling: "(Learning about parenting from courses and books) helped to clarify the fine line between control and punishment that makes a difference in terms of how the child experiences you. And you can know in your heart that what you just said kind of stinks, but you don't always know what the alternatives are."

Traditional parent education programs provide much of what was described in the Group B categories: clarifying, informing, providing intellectual appreciation. It is this helping aspect which facilitates a second step for parents who have reflected and evaluated themselves as being off track in their parenting and have at least returned to the attitude they would prefer to have by indicating a concrete direction to make their shift in orientation. In other words, once parents have stopped themselves in their non-effective tracks, this helps show options of 'where to now?'. However, the indications in this study of how and what parents incorporate from others' suggestions, combined with the categories other than those in Group B, suggest that parent education programs which simply push expert driven

information and philosophy are missing out on some powerful dimensions which impact how parents orient to their roles.

Therefore, the findings of this study provide a strong argument for the importance of family therapists and parent educators to gain an understanding of the orientation any parent holds and to examine which of the helping factors described here are being utilized and which could be implemented by parents as a way of realizing their own pictures of how they want to be as parents or the new pictures they are developing. This is supportive of a humanistic enterprise that respects where the parent is at. As Atwood and Levine (1991) state: "Since, according to the constructivist/phenomenological view, people live a world created completely by their own experiences, the therapist offers healing not primarily by being the expert in the various forms of functional and dysfunctional parenting, but rather by forming a bridge to this world and seeing the unrealized possibilities within it." (p. 214). Another argument for this form of respectful examination of orientation is presented by Richard Kopp in his book Metaphor Therapy (1995) in which he distinguishes between what he calls "client-generated metaphors and therapist-generated metaphors" (p.xvi). He states that it is always therapeutically more effective for therapists to facilitate the exploration - and, he adds, the transformation - of the metaphors that clients spontaneously generate rather than for therapists to generate metaphors that may well be extrinsic to the psychic reality of clients and that may seem intrusive, distractive, or unempathic" (p.96).

Furthermore, although interpersonal skill is a large factor determining parent effectiveness, I believe that even more critical is the parent's orientation to the parent-child relationship. It is my bias that the internal processes which dictate the manner and level of involvement, demandingness, and nurturance subscribed to by the parent precedes the

behavioural execution of that orientation and is thus a more crucial focus for the attention of parent interveners. Furthermore, parent educators ought to be able to utilize approaches that address cognitive, affective and behavioral processes simultaneously which connect with parents' orientations. Hopefully, the parents who participated in this study have helped to offer some suggestions in that direction.

Lastly, this study has offered a remedy to the fact that most parenting education programs are developed where experts hand down suggestions to parents for how to handle various struggles in childrearing. This study has elicited a list of categories generated by parents which could be presented to struggling parents, detailing how other parents have effectively engaged with struggle so that other parents may learn some processes which facilitate successful management of disorientation. Even with the interpretive analysis removed, the critical incidents could stand alone as something meaningful for other parents.

<u>Suggestions for future research</u>

This study employed a qualitative, critical incident methodology to investigate what parents do to maintain or return to a state of orientation. Although it has addressed a gap in the literature on parenting and has introduced the notion of orientation as a construct which underpins parenting style, the results of this study mostly function to generate hypotheses which may be subjected to more empirically rigorous research.

The current study does not make comment on how the helping factors impact parents' effectiveness. Through links to previous research, implications have been tentatively drawn to suggest that many of these factors do facilitate effective parenting in addition to facilitating equilibrium and orientation. Future research could more thoroughly examine what processes or experiences facilitate the development of orientations to the parental role which are more

conducive to effective parenting versus what contributes to parents' simply returning to what is familiar to them and not necessarily effective.

Some of the categories in this study referred to outcomes which indicated that the parents were evolving their orientations and experiencing psychological growth, whereas other incidents indicated that some parents would handle disorientation by implementing control over the child so that it would be the child who was the one to accommodate the parent's preferred vision instead of shifting that vision to accommodate the novel demands presented by the child. Categories C2, C4 and some parts of C1 indicated a capacity for flexibility and appreciation of how the parent is contributing to the parent-child dynamic. In other words, future research may be able to answer the question of what helps parents to evolve in their parenting in ways that accommodate children's developmental demands and what helps parents to re-orient to rigidly held styles of parenting.

A curious outcome of the current study which may warrant further study was the distinct difference in the orientations to the parenting role demonstrated in the two categories of Group E, the only action-taking critical incidents cited by parents. Since these were categories which were predominantly facilitative of parent's reorientation to their roles, it would seem that there were two drastically different tactics to dealing actively with the struggle or conflict in a parent-child relationship. Parents were either: a) contrite and humble with a desire to re-establish a close connection with the child, or b) authoritative and decided in their implementation of a childrearing or disciplining strategy aimed to re-establish the parent's authority and to end the struggle. It would be interesting to examine what internal processes would be related to these contrasting behavioural responses to struggle of attending to the relationship through immediacy conversations and reparative overtures vs. taking

control through the assertion of role authority. Might the more humble and vulnerable response be connected with a greater sense of security in one's parenting? What sort of child outcomes are associated with these different parent-child dynamics?

Research which could more specifically build on the outcomes of this study would focus on examining the relationship between the internal orienting processes and actual parenting behaviour. For example, do parents who claim to reflect upon and evaluate how they are impacting their children demonstrate more sensitive and responsive childrearing behaviours in challenging situations? Do parents who experience guilt as a result of such evaluation and then work to retain positive self-concepts exhibit parenting styles which differ from parents who avoid experiencing guilt and typically feel fine about themselves in their parental roles? These types of questions continue to move beyond Diana Baumrind's quest to illustrate different styles of parenting to examine what processes orient parents to those styles. When such questions have been addressed, research could then explore which of these orienting factors are related to positive child outcomes to determine whether there is any predictive value in the notion of parents' orientation.

As described in Chapter Two, Newberger and White (1989) delineated categories of parent orientations using a cognitive-developmental model of parenting organization which focused on hierarchical levels of perspective taking and parental awareness involved in conceptualizing children and the parenting role. No qualitative analysis of the parents in this study was conducted in terms of how their orientations varied in their levels of complexity on those domains. A study could determine whether similar or different processes are responsible for sustaining, returning or evolving parents to egoistic, conventional, subjective-individualistic, and process orientations

Future research could ask this same question for the purpose of examining how maltreating parents sustain their sense of equilibrium (to the degree that they experience equilibrium) and how they re-orient themselves to their parental roles when they are challenged. Do parents who neglect their children handle dissonant experiences in their roles by putting the child out of their awareness? Does exercising power over children temporarily re-orient abusive parents to their familiar dominance?

Other qualitative research could look specifically into the role of disorientation in cycles of parental use of coercion in connection with the work done by Medic (1995). Are different patterns of responding with anger related to disorientation? How well oriented are parents when they are engaged in coercive responses with coercive resolutions? It could be possible that some parents typically orient themselves to their children as inherently anger-provoking and what sustains their equilibrium is patterns of control, thus disorientation never enters into the equation. So the question becomes: what is the relationship between disorientation and maltreatment? Are there parents who are oriented to abusive parenting styles as well as parents who are abusive only when disoriented and not rooted to their otherwise healthy parenting styles?

This study did not seek to analyze qualitative differences in orienting processes of parents to children of different developmental levels. Research could be conducted to determine if what helps parents sustain or return to states of orientation when their children are four years-old also serves the same function when the children are fourteen. Differences are also likely for parents of different numbers of children. It would seem likely that parents would experience more disorientation or disequilibrium in regards to their first born children

than to the fourth child in the sibline. If childhood experiences partly shape orientation, does it make a difference what the birth order of the parents are?

Although there was some diversity of culture and ethnicity among the participants of this study, more research could be conducted to examine the variability among parents of different cultural backgrounds regarding what helps to maintain and return parents to their preferred orientations. More systematic research could be done on the orienting processes of mothers in contrast to fathers, and what dynamics occur when spouses hold substantially differing orientations to parenting. The last suggestion to extend the translatability of this study is for future study into differences in the orientations and the struggles of single parents in contrast to two-parent families. The single parents interviewed here seemed to identify many of the same critical incidents as did the parents with co-habiting spouses.

For the applied aspect of counselling, research is needed to evaluate what types of interventions with parents who are struggling or who have been identified as parenting ineffectively facilitate the development of the helping factors distinguished in this study. Future studies could seek to determine how various orientations to the parental role that are espoused by parent educators are digested by parents with respect to their own tacitly held metaphors or orientations by introducing several novel metaphors of the parent-child relationship and assessing how palatable or potent they are for the parents as portrayals of the parent-child relationship. Is it important for the orientation introduced to be commensurate with that of the parent? What style of introduction is most effective?

At the end of each interview, I asked parents to develop a metaphor that represents how they perceive and experience their children and a metaphor of the role that they take in relation to the first metaphor. Each parent came up with a very unique and rich symbolic

representation which mirrored their descriptions of their orientations. Although no formal analysis was conducted by myself on these metaphors, they struck me as a powerful starting point any professional helper of parents could take. Perhaps future studies could examine the relationship between such holistic images that parents say guides and orients them to parenting and the actual childrearing styles that they employ.

The methodological and conceptual approach to investigating parenting orientations could also be applied to theoretical orientations of counsellors. What helps counsellors to maintain a sense of being oriented to their roles and their clients? What helps them when they get off track - if they are stuck not knowing how to proceed or they find themselves not performing as they would like in their roles? I suspect that many of the same categories of incidents may apply, and further qualitative research could check my suspicions.

Summary

This study has added to the body of research on parenting by generating a rich and comprehensive appreciation for the internal processes of navigation that parents experience in their quests to be the best parents they can expect themselves to be. Generated from the perspective of dedicated parents, the list of examples compiled here may be of use to other parents who are experiencing disorientation and to professionals who are helping them. Professionals may benefit from recognizing that the parents they are working with are naturally orienting themselves to their roles, even if in problematic ways, and that their interventions will need to take into account how any desired shift in parenting style will be integrated into a sustained orientation.

The role of parent is something that can involve every facet of a person, and when it becomes an integral part of someone's identity, is undoubtedly a complex, profound and

enriching commitment. It is a role that is very near to the center of my own identity, even though my children have yet to come into the world. I am grateful for what the parents in this study have taught me about what it will take for me to sustain the passion and the vision I have of how I aim to be with our children. I would like to end with an apt quote from Jon Kabbat-Zinn in the book, *Everyday Blessings: The Inner Work of Mindful Parenting* (1997), which eloquently encapsulates the thrust of this thesis.

As I see it, all parents, regardless of the ages of our children at any point in time, are on an arduous journey, an odyssey of sorts, whether we know it or not, and whether we like it or not. The journey, of course, is nothing other than life itself, with all its twists and turns, its ups and its downs. How we see and hold the full range of our experiences in our minds and in our hearts makes an enormous difference in the quality of this journey we are on, and what it means to us. It can influence where we go, what happens, what we learn, and how we feel along the way.

A fully lived adventure requires a particular kind of commitment and presence, an attention that to me feels exquisitely tenacious, yet also gentle, receptive. Often the journey itself teaches us to pay attention, wakes us up. Sometimes those teachings emerge in painful or terrifying ways that we would never have chosen. As I see it, the challenge of being a parent is to live our moments as fully as possible, charting out own course as best we can, above all, nourishing our children, and in the process, growing ourselves. Our children and the journey itself provide us with endless opportunities in this regard.

But the fact that I practice meditation doesn't mean that I am always calm or kind or gentle, or always present. There are many times when I am not. It doesn't

mean that I always know what to do and never feel confused or at a loss. But being

even a little more mindful helps me to see things I might not have seen and take small

but important, sometimes critical steps I might not otherwise have taken. (p. 3)

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