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FATHERS' CONCEPTIONS OF PLAY
IN THEIR RELATIONSHIPS
WITH THEIR SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

A Dissertation Presented

by

DANIEL CANTOR YALOWITZ

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

February 1995

School of Education

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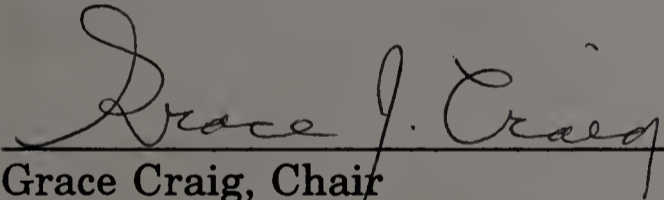
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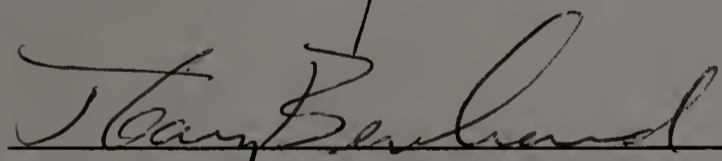
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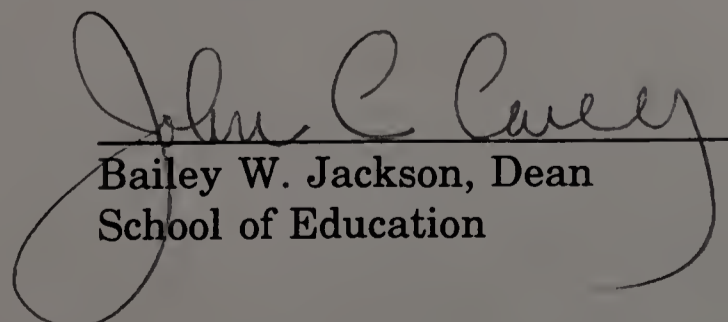
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ABSTRACT

FATHERS' CONCEPTIONS OF PLAY
IN THEIR RELATIONSHIPS
WITH THEIR SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

FEBRUARY 1995

DANIEL CANTOR YALOWITZ, B.S. TUFTS UNIVERSITY

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The aim of this qualitative study is to investigate ways in which fathers conceptualize and make meaning of play in their relationships with their school-aged children. Fathers' conceptions of the changing role, influence, and impact that play has had on their lives - and particularly on their relations with their children - will serve as the basis for their reflections. Fathers will be asked to articulate and then elaborate upon the subject of play in their lives as they have grown from childhood to their present day roles as fathers. A range of psychosocial influences that connect the fathers' developmental life experiences and play experiences will be explored.

A sample of eight fathers will be selected according to specific criteria including their age, formal education, profession and career, race, and the age of their children. Fathers will be prescreened via a written questionnaire and follow-up telephone survey for these characteristics.

Following this screening process, fathers successfully meeting these criteria will be informed of the considerations involving their consent and their rights pertaining to the interview process and data analysis.

Participating fathers will be offered several options concerning the use of audiotaping, audiotape storage and retrieval, confidentiality and anonymity, and transcription review. Upon their written approval to serve as participants in the process, fathers will be interviewed.

Following the data collection phase of the research, case-study and compare-and-contrast methodology will be employed in analyzing the available data gathered from the interview process. Patterns in fathers' ways of conceptualizing their play with their children will be informed by the interviews and analyzed and compared with significant trends and findings in the literature.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: AN OVERVIEW OF FATHERING AND PLAY

A. Background Of The Problems To Be Investigated

"Play" and "fathering" (or "fatherhood") are terms which have undergone significant metamorphoses in our culture over the past generation. Johann Huizinga's (1950) phrase, "homo ludens" ("man the player" or "the human player") demonstrates the importance of the role of play in human development. Ashley Montagu's (1981) seminal work in the newly-designated field of neoteny (the study of the evolution of humans through play) similarly points to the need to consider play as a serious field of inquiry and research.

However, to look merely at the concept and role of play in human development is vague if one cannot direct attention to the way or ways in which a given group utilize or disdain it as a form of interactive recreation and/or communication. How a particular culture or individual defines and uses the term "play" - and how it manifests in form and content - is influenced by a multitude of factors, both internal (psychological, spiritual, and cognitive) and external (social, institutional, environmental). What any significant study of play needs is a grounding focus, in terms of a phase of the lifespan, a particular "target" population, and a specific aspect or issue connecting these two. This study will specifically attend to fathers and the

ways they reflect on and conceptualize how they integrate play into their relationships with their children.

In his book, Fatherhood: A Sociological Perspective, Benson (1968) noted that, "when one considers how many fathers there are and the many, many problems they have in common, it seems rather surprising how little notice they receive." However, in the three decades since that statement, researchers have uncovered the father as a research subject and have been trying to overcome this notable deficiency. Various researchers have sketched the outline of a conceptual framework of the parenting process in general (Belsky, 1984; Belsky, Robins, & Gamble, 1984) and of fathering in particular (Cowan & Cowan, 1989; Lamb, 1984; Parke & Tinsley, 1981). Research on fathering during the period of infancy has proliferated since psychologists acknowledged the importance of the father's role in the dynamics of the family and in the socialization of young children (Lamb, 1976). This newly vitalized interest in the father role is directly related to changing definitions of masculinity and femininity which necessitate the restudy and redefinition of the roles held by males and females in the family. As the father has continued to become a more familiar "subject" of qualitative and quantitative study, so, too, have the roles and rules by which he lives and is judged.

The topic of play has been written about by several prolific writers from the fields of psychology, sociology, education, anthropology, the life

sciences, and human development. Most often these writers and researchers have tended to remain within their own disciplines; rarely has an attempt been made in the literature to integrate or cross these traditional domains. A brief review of some of the critical work linking the importance of play to the role of male parenting (or fathering) indicates some of the reasons why so many fathers in our society today feel confused and anxious about their diffused, complicated, and often paradoxical roles as male parents. Whether out of respect for traditionally drawn disciplines or lack of empirical procedures integrating or juxtaposing accepted modes of inquiry, researchers have maintained clear parameters as they have uncovered the connection between fathering and play.

Carl Rogers believed that parents played an important role in fostering their child's play. He believed that a parent must possess three psychological conditions in order to provide a creative environment that fosters play:

- 1) an openness to experience - a willingness to entertain another perspective or point of view;
- 2) an internal locus of evaluation - an ability to reflect, self-critique, and change one's mind or stance;
- 3) the ability to toy with elements and concepts - to imagine, fantasize, create, or change one's point of view.

Rogers stressed the importance of parents providing external conditions of psychological safety and psychological freedom (Singer: 1990, 153). Finally,

he states that parental attitudes can hinder playfulness and squelch creativity.

Biller (1982) interpreted the literature to indicate that the quality of a male parent's relationship with his children has a significant impact on his life satisfaction. Biller feels that, at this time in U.S.-American culture, both autonomy (a feeling of independence, of oneself as distinct and separate from others) and affiliation (a sense of connection with and interdependence upon others) are important, and may be vital to healthy, satisfying adult functioning in men. The connection of these two polar ways of relating to self and other is essential given the rapid changes in the way our pluralistic society has redefined men's roles in the workplace and in the home.

These changes have been well chronicled in the works of Bly (1990), Keene (1991) and Osherson (1986, 1992). Their work informs us that the depth of a fathers' commitment to his children - and his desire to become an intimate nurturer - are significant factors in the effectiveness of his parenting, and are also indicators of his interest in playing with them. The linkage between fathers' self-esteem and the extent and range of their play with their children has likewise been found to be significant (Lamb, 1976/1981; Bruner et al, 1976). Other research has shown that the measurement of separate dimensions of fathers' involvement with their children exist regarding their routine and play (Riley, 1987). According to Levy-Schiff and Israelashvili (1988), both personal and contextual conditions

are almost equally influential in two of the critical aspects of fathering: caregiving and play. They found that fathers' attitudes toward their parenting predicted to some degree both components.

Pruett (1983) reminds us that the traditional view of fathering (as established by Freud and his colleagues) is that it helps develop the child's autonomy and process of individuation. He referred to this view as "unattachment theory" and pointed out that traditional views of fathering say little about the other sides of father-child relationships, which have varying degrees of intimacy and relatedness (affiliative behaviors).

Grossman (1984) studied men's autonomy and affiliation in the transition to parenthood. These qualities, indicating males' contradictory needs for independence and insularity with intimacy and nurturance, set up a psychosocial schism that all fathers - indeed all men - wrestle with. This is the theme in Osherson's 1992 book, Wrestling With Love. Osherson writes, "when a man feels too strongly the shameful and wonderful sense of being 'mama's son' without a corresponding sturdy knowledge that he is also 'papa's boy', then his capacity for intimacy with both men and women suffers" (p. 64). Grossman (1984) found that men's capacity for attachment was very important to their parenting. Grossman states that, given the two essentially different paths of being and acting in the world - separate and together, autonomy and affiliation - men in our U.S. culture are usually better at the separate part. There seems to be little disagreement or

controversy on this point throughout the literature, though there are small yet significant indications that this, too, is changing.

Bruno Bettelheim believes that "the true test of a parent's beliefs about play is not what he says but how he behaves" (Bettelheim: 1987, 35). Kohlberg's moral development theory (1969) implies that the splitting of action and attitude, of behavior and thought, is more of an adult (advanced developmental stage) phenomenon, yet one to which their children are particularly astute and sensitive. Fathers can will, or want, to play, and will often speak of a hunger or thirst to do so, or to do so more often. Promises - to self, children, spouses, even colleagues - get made, with the best of intentions. Yet the competing need to focus more on work, or income, or becoming more self-sustaining around the home or car to keep bills down (and rationalize self-confidence and competence) - often renders the good intentions of more play with the kids inoperable. These very same children will hear some of the words, yet see more of the behaviors, much to the chagrin of fathers who sincerely want to engage in play - whatever its manifestations - with their children.

Erik Erikson's thirty-year follow-up study of children illustrates that those adults who had the most interesting and fulfilling lives were the ones who had managed to keep a sense of playfulness at the center of their lives (Bruner: 1975, 82). It is evident that play may allow a father to at least partially detach from his other vital roles in order to engage in intellectual

and physical activities of great importance to his children. The cycle carries on back to the father, who receives the good attention and affection of his children for playing with them. This adds a dimension, and therefore value and meaning, to his life in a way that "work" cannot exclusively provide.

Teresita Aguilar suggests that one's play is directly influenced by the attitudes of individuals and/or groups of individuals. She states that a young child's play is more often influenced by the immediate family, especially a person in a position of authority and leadership. If this person is playful, he is able to provide an example of playfulness for others to follow (Frost: 1985, 74). Thus it is the parent who is generally seen by researchers as responsible for structuring the child's play experience. The caregiver must possess some level of competence and playfulness in order to initiate play. Schmukler supports the importance of the parent as a motivator for play but proposes an optimal point for facilitation. She writes, "if a parent is too intrusive, the child plays less imaginatively than when a parent starts a game, makes a suggestion, then withdraws (Singer: 1990, 160). Fein, on the other hand, stresses the significance of the caretaker's role as the play collaborator (Sutton-Smith: 1979, 72). Singer (1990, 160) states that adults who foster imagination offer children a sense of security and closeness they remember long into adulthood.

Most of the research on father-child play is comparative, and statements of the father's role, style, attitude, and availability are usually

quantified or qualified relative to the mother. Whether the father is present in or absent from the family system, as long as he is alive (and often after his death), his role and influence as provider, caregiver, and playmate must be considered. Several studies allude to the extent and amount of time fathers versus mothers play with their children. Many found that fathers, who tended to be less involved overall, devote a greater proportion of their time to play interactions, especially play involving intense physical stimulation (Belsky & Volling, 1985; Lamb, 1977b, 1981; Parke & Tinsley, 1981; Yogman, 1985; Field, 1978; Yogman et al, 1976). Almost a third of early parent-infant interactions can be considered play, if play is defined as a purely social interaction that occurs when caregiving needs are met and the infant is alert (Emde, Gaensbauer, and Harmon, 1976; Field, 1979; Murphy, 1972). Of this time, fathers have been shown to spend one-fourth to one-third of the time that mothers spend with their infants (Clarke-Stewart, 1980; Kotelchuck, 1976; Pedersen & Robson, 1969). Power (1985) found that at 13 months, mothers spent a greater proportion of their time encouraging pretend play than did fathers. For both boys and girls, fathers of 10-month olds spent the most time directing infant exploration, whereas the amount of time mothers spent in this manner varied as a function of infant gender. Bailey's (1987) study found that fathers' average time involvement with their infant child(ren) provided 32% of his infant's parenting - 27% care, 54% play. Arco (1983) demonstrated that fathers

interacted playfully with their children for more frequent and shorter bouts of active stimulation than did mothers.

There is other evidence that suggests that fathers are spending more time and playing more with their children than they did in the past (Pleck, 1985; Pleck and Rustad, 1980; Ricks, 1985). Most researchers agree that the time involvement of fathers is important to the men themselves, to their children, and to their wives (Baruch & Barnett, 1986; Radin & Goldsmith, 1985). Bailey's summative reflection on the play/time element is thus:

The involvement scores indicate that, on average. . . children are cared for by "mother usually" but play with father and mother "equally". They receive a regular, if modest, degree of parenting from their father - but the degree is consistent. This male parenting is more likely to consist of social interaction and play rather than routine maintenance and caregiving. Fathers were equally involved with children in play regardless of sex - and this was not diminished by time.

Another consideration for fathers and play with their children has to do with the sex-role stereotyping and gender-based (and biased) socialization of their children's play. McGovern (1990) found that fathers' type of play is very similar to mothers' style of play. The exception that has been found has been that fathers tend to engage in more social and more physical play.

McGovern's findings regarding types and styles of play coincide with Stevenson, Leavitt, Thompson, and Roach (1988), Pedersen, Andersen, & Cain (1980) and Belsky (1984), all of whom found minimal differences in the type of play of fathers as compared to mothers.

Eversoll's (1979) study involving a "two-generational view of fathering" provides a couple of interesting and enlightening insights from the child's perspective. Her study demonstrated that the overall picture which emerges is one in which the sons expected their fathers to be more involved in the "nurturing" and "societal model" roles than did their parents. However, both fathers and sons expected the male parent to serve as the "problem-solver". From the adult fathers' perspective, the literature abounds with the conclusion that fathers, more so than mothers, are responsible for the style and content of their children's play as measured by gender and sex-role characteristics.

In a study conducted by Snow, Jacklin, and Maccoby (1983), the differential treatment of infants by their fathers was observed. When the children were 12 months of age, fathers were already found to be exhibiting sex-typed behaviors toward them, and boys and girls already differed in the sex-typed play they displayed in the presence of their fathers. They found that fathers were more likely to use verbal and physical prohibitions and restrictions with their sons than with their daughters. At the same time, father-daughter interactions tended to include more holding and intimate proximal behavior as compared with father-son interaction. In his 1979 study on men's roles in the household, Tognoli noted that children are socialized into fairly rigid sex-typed roles regarding their play activities and the way they are expected to related to their physical environment. This

sex-typed, stereotypical play behavior continues through childhood, reaching its peak during the early and middle adolescent years, where behavioral conformity to the gender-norm reaches its most rigid point.

Bronfenbrenner (1961), Fagot (1974), Lansky (1967) and Lynn (1976) all found that fathers, more than mothers, are most concerned about "sex appropriate" play. Within this major finding, several of these researchers observed that fathers' concern was greater for their sons than their daughters and that fathers tended to sanction and even encourage roughhousing and aggressive behavior more often for the boys, and passive play for the girls. In their study of early gender differences in parent-infant social play, Roggman & Peery (1989) cite research by Langlois & Downs (1980) which concluded that fathers of preschool-aged children - especially those with sons - are more likely than mothers to reinforce gender-typical play. Fathers of toddlers also express more sex-typed play restrictions than do mothers (Fagot, 1974; Snow, Jacklin, and Maccoby, 1983). Fagot (1984) found that fathers may also enhance sex-role development in their sons by showing preferential treatment toward boys in their second year of life.

One other significant difference between mother- and father-child play seems to be more contested and controversial, however. Roopnarine et al (1992), in their cross-cultural and observational study on parent-infant rough play, found that the most frequent types of father-infant games involved tactile and limb-movements - games that are generally more physically

stimulating and arousing. Their extensive review of the literature in this area failed to show that fathers had a uniformly greater propensity to engage in vigorous play activity than did mothers. Mothers were found to be more likely to engage in toy-mediated play than were fathers. The data they reviewed do not support the contention that rough play is a major activity between fathers and infants across cultures.

Others, however, including Lamb (1977a), Clarke-Stewart (1978), Crawley & Sherrod (1984), Lytton (1976), Power & Parke (1982), and MacDonald & Parke (1986) all contradicted Roopnarine et al's findings. These researchers stated consistently that fathers are more inclined to use rougher, more physical play with their young children than mothers. Clearly the empirical evidence is divided on this point, with neither side demonstrating conclusively that they are correct. Whether this aspect of parental play with children is universal or cultural or gender-specific warrants further and deeper study in the future.

The measurement of "success with play" is another area upon which the literature focuses. In reviewing studies on this point, a comparative gender analysis yields the following key findings:

- 1) McGovern (1990) found that fathers are less sensitive than mothers to their infant's communications, for they often missed cues or responded slowly or inappropriately to their infant's signals. Fathers also tended to demonstrate less reciprocity in their play interactions. When fathers interact with their young children, they tend to be more directive and involved in playful, physical social interaction while the mothers are more apt to be nurturant and verbal with their infants (Lamb, 1976, 1976b; Kalasch, 1981).

- 2) Because fathers have less experience in the toy play context than mothers, it was predicted and found that fathers would be less skillful than mothers, and therefore more interfering and less effective in their toy play interactions (Clarke-Stewart, 1978; Lamb, 1977).
- 3) Power (1985), in his developmental analysis of mother- and father-infant play, suggested that, based on his review of the research, mothers should show a greater responsiveness to infant cues during caretaking and play, where-as fathers should excel during physical play.
- 4) Power and Parke (1983) found that fathers were more likely to be unsuccessful in play because they ignored the focus of infant attention and often presented objects when the infant was attending to or manipulating a different object.
- 5) Stevenson et al (1988) reiterated this finding by stating that mothers were more successful than fathers in eliciting "complex play behaviors" from their infant children. They found that the difference in mother/father overall effectiveness (also in regard to play) was due to greater levels of inappropriate father interference.
- 6) Power (1985) found that fathers were more likely to engage in idiosyncratic and rough-and-tumble types of play. According to Power, this may be due to the greater variety and unpredictability of the play with the fathers that the child's response to play with them was more positive than with mothers.
- 7) Lamb (1976) states that "overall there was neither a great number of play episodes nor a greater amount of time spent in play with fathers than with mothers, but the average response to play with fathers was significantly more positive than to play with mothers" (p. 276). He also suggests (1975) that, when both parents are present, fathers are more salient persons than mothers: they are more likely to engage in unusual and more enjoyable types of play; hence, they appear to maintain the infant's attention more than do mothers.

- 8) In general, there appears to be what has been described as "complementarity in parenting and play": when mothers are able to do it well, the fathers tend to concentrate less on parenting tasks (Grossman, 1983; Grossman, Winickoff, & Eichler, 1980; Pollack & Grossman, 1985).

In summarizing the gender socialization issue regarding infant and child play interactions with their parents, it appears that there are differences in style and content according to the gender of both the parent and the young person. Distinct social environments are being created for each generation and each gender, beginning with early infant-parent play. Mothers and fathers contribute to these social and playful environments and activities in unique and separate ways, both of which are necessary for gender balance and depth in the overall development and growth of the young person.

Those researchers who have focused on father-child play have done so with a nearly exclusive devotion to fathers and their infant and preschool children. Very little in the way of either quantitative or qualitative research has taken place to date with fathers and their elementary school children. However, from the body of research in developmental psychology, it is readily apparent that much in the way of social bonding, values formation, and work/study/play style evolves and begins to take root during the child's elementary school-age years. There is clearly a paucity of data on father-child play during other critical periods of a child's development as a separate and individuating being. Fathers continue to impact and influence their

children far beyond infancy, yet little has been written to document the role of the father as a playful caregiver (among other things) beyond the child's first years of life. When one considers the significant psychosocial changes (both tangible and intangible) in the role of fathers as parents, income-earners, and nurturers, it becomes clear that there is a need to develop a study which explores the reflections of fathers on the way they think play has impacted both them directly as individuals and as fathers of their school-age children.

B. Problems To Be Investigated

This investigation will be done in such a way as to carefully elicit fathers' perceptions, reflections, and responses to the roles and influences play has had on their relationships with their children from a lifespan developmental perspective. The interview methodology employed will stimulate fathers' conceptualizations of several aspects related to their development and play.

The central, or thesis, question which fuels the all-important queries which form the basis of these interviews is: "How do fathers conceptualize play in their relationships with their school-aged children?" Given this larger concern, there is a series of "mid-level" questions which serve to inform this thesis question. These queries are as follows:

- 1) How does a father's reflections on his own playing experience, especially in his formative years, affect his current play and his play with his child(ren)?

- 2) How is the manner and quality of a man's fathering influenced by his own earlier play experiences?
- 3) How do fathers influence their children's play, and, in what ways?
- 4) How can males who did not have opportunities to play - or were stifled in their own play as youngsters - learn how to play with their own children?
- 5) Do males stop playing or change their definition and/or style of play at any point or points in their lifespan? How do they define "play" at different and critical points in their development?
- 6) What feelings do fathers experience if they do not play with their children in the amount or for the quality of time they would like?
- 7) What are the patterns of stability or change regarding play over the father's lifespan?
- 8) Is there a pattern of response from the data that seems to indicate the way fathers establish and maintain "masculine" definition of play?

Since, in Kegan's "Constructivist" model (1982), these questions offer information in a "compare/contrast" institutional or systems frame, they must be broken down still further for the father interviews. The emphasis must be placed on individual phenomenological data-gathering, and so must be based on specific experiences of the fathers in order for them to reflect, conceptualize, and make meaning on the relative importance and value of play in their lives and with their children. These more concrete questions will thus form the spine or frame of the interviews:

What are the fathers' ideas about:

- 1) the importance of play in their relationship with their child(ren)?
- 2) different kinds of play and their various functions?
- 3) their own play experiences as children with their own parents?
- 4) the influence of that past on their present behavior with their own children?
- 5) their own development and changing notions of play and the role play has had in their lives?
- 6) what types of play they are most and least comfortable with, in their own lives and in their roles as fathers to their children?
- 7) the impact or influence of gender and gender-role socialization upon their play?
- 8) the relationship between the type and extent of his work and his ability and time to play with his children?

What will be defined and established, through fathers' own words and reflections, is the meaning-making they create with regard to the role of play in their lives and with their children. Kegan's "Constructivist" approach and Erikson's (1950) eight-stage psychosocial model will be utilized to explore the various ways in which the fathers in this study assign meaning and value to the role of play in their lives as boys, men, and fathers. These approaches will serve to offer a developmental perspective to the reader regarding fathers' attitudes toward and conceptions of play with and without their children.

C. Design Of Study

1. Overview

Since this project will rely exclusively on fathers' verbal responses to interview questions, the process will be both reflective and selective: fathers will only be able to offer their (selected and sometimes random) memories and feelings and thoughts based on what the interviewer is able to elicit from them. Therefore, no attempt at statistical analysis will be made, although a consistent interview process will be employed with all fathers receiving an initial set of "standardized" questions with time at the end of each interview for additional individualized prompts and follow-ups. Thus, this study does not intend or pretend to answer the question of "What factors influence fathers' play with their children?"; rather, its stated goal is to pursue the central and initial question, "How do fathers conceptualize play in their relationships with their school-aged children?"

2. Participant Sample

Approximately 6-8 white male professionals who are fathers in "mid-career" with at least one child living in their home with them at the time of their interviews will be included in this study. The term "professionals" is here used to indicate a level of work which requires at minimum a Master's Degree in a specific field or discipline, and for which one is compensated on a salaried or fee-for-service basis. "Mid-career" will indicate the fact that a father has been in a given career or position in his field for a minimum of

five years, and has achieved recognition and status (by his peers and colleagues) that is manifested in terms of externally accepted rank or achievement.

Fathers will be screened and then selected based on a written form with these variables in mind:

- 1) fathers' age (40-60 years of age at time of interviews)
- 2) child(ren)'s age (at least one child of elementary school-age, 5-13 years)
- 3) number of children currently in full-time residence (minimum one)
- 4) father's career (salaried or fee-for-service and at least five years in current field or endeavor)
- 5) formal education (minimum Master's Degree or related professional degree)
- 6) currently in a dual-parent family
- 7) biological parents of their children
- 8) race (white/Caucasian)

An initial call to professional colleagues, peers, and friends of the interviewer will delineate the above information in raising the need for appropriate participants. Those in these circles will be asked to offer names and basic information (addresses, day and evening telephone numbers) to the interviewer so that he may send an introductory letter [see Appendix] and a Survey Questionnaire [see Appendix] to each referred potential participant. These individuals will be asked to return their completed questionnaires

within two weeks of receipt. Following receipt of these surveys, the interviewer will determine, according to the criteria articulated above, who of the initial potential participants qualifies to assure some consistency across the sample. Those qualifying on the basis of their survey forms will then receive a follow-up telephone call through which the following considerations will be discerned:

- 1) fathers who consider themselves to be 'actively engaged' in play with their children;
- 2) fathers who appear to be articulate about the value, meaning, and role of play in their lives and in their lives with their children;
- 3) fathers whose work as 'helping professionals' emphasizes the values of interpersonal communication and support they claim to manifest in their relationships with their children.

The hypothesis which states that cultural variables play a significant role regarding the influence of play in childhood and fathering is controversial, and the research on it has been divided as we have seen. The present study will not further or refute this consideration. Rather, it intends to deliberately narrow its variables on issues and concerns of cultural variability or diversity by focusing its sample as outlined above. Because the concepts and realities of cultural diversity are so complex in and of themselves - and their analysis even more so - this study will not attempt to collect nor analyze data in this area.

Finally, the data will be useful in pointing out areas for further study and research based on trends and patterns that will be noted. It may well be that independent variables other than "culture" - such as socioeconomic class, values formation, fathers' role/number in his birth family, or other such considerations - will be generated through the interviewing process. The data will be analyzed with a critical eye for consistency or the lack thereof in terms of the ways fathers access their reflective and selective information - whether it be primarily in the form of anecdotes, dialogue, visualization, question/response, or other methods.

3. Procedures For Collected Data And Evidence To Be Obtained

A qualitative approach will be used according to the following procedure:

- 1) An introductory letter [see Appendix] will briefly introduce the investigator and the purpose and scope of the study. An accompanying one-page "Survey Questionnaire for Fathers and Child-Play Study" [see Appendix] will be distributed to approximately 15 fathers meeting all eight of the initially stated criteria. These potential participants will be located based on the interviewer's outreach to academic, professional, and community contacts in the greater Boston area. Based on initial contact response, approximately six to eight fathers will be selected for a preliminary interview. These fathers will then be contacted first via the telephone in another attempt to discern their suitability as participants according to the criteria listed above. This telephone call will also inform successful participants of the process and their rights within it, and will also respond to any questions regarding the study, their participation, and to set up a first interview.

- 2) At the commencement of the first interview, participants will be asked to carefully read and sign the "Participant Consent Form [see Appendix] and to initial and sign the "Participant Options Form" [see Appendix]. Only after these papers are signed - with any questions or concerns responded to by the interviewer - will the interview begin.
- 3) Each interview will take approximately 75 minutes and will take place approximately two to three weeks apart. This first interview will follow a lifespan/developmental format, with specific questions arranged according to their particular developmental sequence. It is hoped that all participants will permit their interviews to be taped in order that they may be professionally transcribed. Transcriptions of the first set of interviews will occur while the second round is in progress. The second interview will continue along the lines of the first one, having as its particular emphasis the father's relationships with his elementary-aged children and how he conceptualizes his play with them. Time will be provided in this second interview for follow-ups based on the data received up through that time.

4. Treatment Of Data

The transcribed data from the interviews will then be coded according to appropriate categories to be developed upon a comparative analysis of the transcriptions.

Some of the operative assumptions and hypotheses that the interviewer is making (based primarily on a review of the literature) prior to interpreting the data are as follows:

- 1) There are internal (intrapersonal) and external (interpersonal/environmental) factors involved in how fathers perceive and reflect on their play experiences over the course of their lifespan and the duration of their parenting.
- 2) Fathers will use a variety of reflective methodologies in describing and recalling their responses to interview questions.

- 3) There is a correlation between a father's early childhood play experiences and the way he plays with his child(ren).
- 4) There is a relationship between the type and extent of a father's work and his ability and time to play with his children.
- 5) Fathers have changed their definitions and styles of play over the course of their lifespan and both have evolved according to internal psychological and socio-environmental changes in their life experience.

A modified case-study approach will be utilized in the organization and analysis of interview and research data. A cross-participant compare/contrast methodology will be employed according to the eight central questions designated in the "Problems to be Investigated" section. References to relevant research and related studies will be made throughout in an effort to support or dispute various claims that have been made to this point.

D. Significance Of The Study

With a greater understanding regarding how fathers reflect on their own early childhood and adult fathering play experiences, we may be better able to comprehend the significance of the father-child relationship. Additionally, this will enable us to view the father's role as a socialization and recreation agent and value transmitter within the family system. The meaning these fathers make of their play in their own lives - and as fathers with their children - will afford insights into what fathers value in their

relationships with their children, and what importance and influence play has on their lives as adults and male parents.

One of the central elements in this study is to observe and analyze how fathers reflect on the evolution of their play style as a young person and with young persons a generation later. The inferences that can be made from these reflections may yield new insights into how play may affect fathers' relationships within their families as fathers and parents. It is conceivable that these findings may have significant implications for family development and counseling, family/school relations, and male personality development.

Given the relatively small sample in this study, whatever claims, conclusions, or generalizations that are reached through data analysis and inference will no doubt require validation from a larger-scale study before they can be recognized as significant and reliable over a population as diverse and large as "fathers".

As Bettelheim (1987) stated, there indeed is a critical difference between what people (fathers) say and what they do. Since this study proposes to explore the meaning-making of fathers with regard to play and their relationships with their children, one is reminded here that this is indeed a limitation in the design and, ultimately, the results of this study. As qualitative research, it intends only to record, analyze, and interpret the actual words - and not the behaviors - of the fathers in this study.

Therefore, what will go on record here will only be the verbal, and not the behavioral, manifestations of the participants.

The investigator is also mindful that, due to the subjective and qualitative nature of this study, participants may offer only select and random memories, reflections, and perceptions based on a host of factors and influences. This necessarily creates a limitation and an obstacle in making any broad-based claims as the data is only partially based on the time-limited interview design. Thus, each participating father will, by the structure of this study, offer only a partial - though meaningful - glimpse at the ways in which they conceptualize play in their relationships with their school-aged children. While realistically this becomes but a piece of a larger puzzle, this study nevertheless becomes a foundation upon which to build and explore in greater depth in the future.

CHAPTER II

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE: FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE FATHERS' PLAY WITH THEIR CHILDREN

"Play is history, poetry, and prophecy."
-- Erik Erikson

In his book, Fatherhood: A Sociological Perspective, Benson (1968) noted that, "when one considers how many fathers there are and the many, many problems they have in common, it seems rather surprising how little notice they receive". However, in the past three decades, researchers have uncovered the father as a research subject and have been trying to overcome this deficiency.

Various researchers have sketched the outline of a conceptual framework of the parenting process in general (Belsky, 1984; Belsky, Robins, & Gamble, 1984) and of fathering in particular (Cowan & Cowan, 1984; Lamb, 1984; Parke & Tinsley, 1984; Pedersen, 1981). Research on fathering in the early period of infancy has proliferated since psychologists acknowledged the importance of the father's role in the dynamics of the family and in the socialization of young children (Lamb, 1976). This newly vitalized interest in the father role is directly related to changing definitions of masculinity and femininity which necessitate the restudy and redefinition of the roles held by males and females in the family (Eversoll, 1979).

The first part of this review will outline the various formats, styles, and contexts of the available research. Following this overview of research-related issues and problems, the content of these studies will be reviewed.

From my review of the literature on fathering and play, it is evident that paternal functioning determined by many factors and related to three general sources of influence:

- 1) the individual characteristics of the father;
- 2) the social context in which the father-child interactions evolve;
- 3) the individual characteristics of the child.

Broadly speaking, three distinct phases of past research can be discerned that indicate fathers are significant influences upon family experience and on the development of children:

- 1) the father as a marker of socioeconomic status (SES);
- 2) father-absence studies;
- 3) correlational studies of father and child characteristics.

(Pedersen, 1981).

In the late 1960s and 1970s two new trends emerged in the methodology and substance of developmental research, both of which encompassed budding interest in fatherhood. The first was a disaffection with measurement of either parental or child characteristics based upon self-

report procedures, along with a consequent increase in emphasis upon direct-observational studies. The second was a burgeoning interest in the study of infancy. Both trends converged in the first observational studies of father-infant interaction, which have continued into the present.

Currently, intensive small group research is particularly valuable for understanding how societal pressures and counter-pressures related to family roles impact on family life (Lein, 1979). Although such research does not have a high generalizability in the manner of large-scale survey and questionnaire studies, it is nevertheless compelling. Only through intensive study can we understand the meaning of large-scale social trends for the family and its members. Across many disciplines and problem-areas, policy analysts, human and social service practitioners, and researchers are calling for in-depth research to explore family process and individual roles and the complex motivations underlying the behavior of family members. Work such as that of Stack (1974), Rubin (1976), and Howell (1973) exemplify the richness and strength of intensive studies of family life. Their work elicits the complexity of detail that forms family life and analyzes the meaning of daily experiences to its participants.

In his review of the research concerning fatherhood, Pedersen (1987) found that a number of observational studies of father-infant interaction were conducted in the late 1970s. On the whole, these took the form of comparisons between mothers and fathers in (1) amount, (2) style, and (3)

content of interactive behavior, often with sub-comparisons for male and female infants from the newborn period through toddlerhood.

One framework appears to summarize much of the critical content and controversy in the fathering literature. Carol Gilligan (1982) described two contrasting ways of comprehending the world. One, which she called intimacy, focuses on relationships and connectedness; the other, which she termed identity, focuses on separateness and differentiation. Gilligan tied these two modes to gender differences, arguing that women tend to experience themselves essentially as connected, and are comfortable with and good at intimacy, but fearful of separateness and identity. Men, she stated, are strong in developing their identity but have difficulties with creating intimacy. Much of this concern around closeness and distance as it involves the father and familial relationships is at the core of the research of men, fathering, and play with their children. Michael Lamb (1976, 1977, 1981) appears to borrow from some of Gilligan's interrelational approach when he cites a sampling of observational studies of paternal interactions and called attention to the high rates of affiliative (connected) behaviors that were more characteristic of infants at home with their fathers than with their mothers. Lamb also found that the father and male child had a special affinity for one another evident in the second year of life.

This topic of play has been written about by several prolific writers from the fields of psychology, sociology, education, anthropology, the life

sciences, and human development. A survey of some of the central ideas of a few will serve to highlight critical issues and perspectives in the play literature. Carl Rogers believed that parents played an important role in fostering their child's play. He believed that a parent must possess three psychological conditions in order to provide a creative environment that fosters play:

- 1) an openness to experience - a willingness to entertain another perspective or point of view;
- 2) an internal locus of evaluation - an ability to reflect, self-critique, and change one's mind or stance;
- 3) the ability to toy with elements and concepts - to imagine, fantasize, create, or change one's point of view.

Rogers stressed the importance of parents providing external conditions of psychological safety and psychological freedom (Singer: 1990, 153). Finally, he states that parental attitudes can hinder playfulness and squelch creativity.

Biller (1982) interpreted the literature as indicating that the quality of a man's relationship with his children has a significant impact on his life satisfaction. It seems likely, according to Biller, that at this time in U.S.-American culture, both autonomy (a feeling of independence, of oneself as distinct and separate from others) and affiliation are important, and may be vital to healthy, satisfying adult functioning in men.

Pruett (1983) reminds us that the traditional view of fathering is that it helps develop the child's autonomy and individuation. He referred to this view as "unattachment theory" and pointed out that it says little about the other side of father-child relationships, which have varying degrees of intimacy and relatedness (affiliative behaviors). In her study of men's autonomy and affiliation in the transition to parenthood, Grossman (1987) found that men's capacity for attachment was very important to their parenting. Given the two essentially different ways of being and acting in the world - separate and together, autonomy and affiliation - men in our U.S. culture are usually better at the separate part.

Bruno Bettelheim believed that "the true test of a parent's beliefs about play is not what he says but how he behaves" (Bettelheim: 1987, 35). Erik Erikson's thirty-year follow-up study of children illustrates that those adults who had the most interesting and fulfilling lives were the ones who had managed to keep a sense of playfulness at the center of their lives (Bruner: 1975, 82).

Levy-Schiff and Israelashvili (1988) found that fathers in the pretatal period who viewed fatherhood as a "self-contributing experience" were found later to participate extensively in child care. This helps to confirm the importance of fathers' attitudes and perceptions as intermediary variables in determining fathering. It is also in line with previous findings on the

linkage between fathers' perceptions of their own roles and their paternal involvement. Bailey's (1987) hypothesis that fathers' involvement with their children would and did remain stable during the first four years of their child's life supports the research of Levy-Schiff and Israelashvili. Bailey remarked that it is "axiomatic that the best predictor of behavior is past behavior" (p.32).

Only relatively recently, according to Levy-Schiff and Israelashvili (1988), have we begun to recognize that affiliation is also vital to men, as well as to their families. Men need both dimensions to feel good about themselves, to live comfortably within enduring relationships, and to be good fathers to their children. The cultural definition of masculinity, and its harsh training of boys to fit that model, needs to be broadened, they conclude, to allow the softer, more expressive, and more vulnerable feelings to emerge and effect men's behavior. In his book, Wrestling With Love, (1992), Sam Osherson writes, "when a man feels too strongly the shameful and wonderful sense of being 'mama's son' without a corresponding sturdy knowledge that he is also 'papa's boy', then his capacity for intimacy with both men and women suffers" (p.64). He states that we need a more careful look at the ways that boys form and transform their attachments and identifications to both mothers and fathers as they develop.

Teresita Aguilar suggests that one's play is directly influenced by the attitudes of individuals and/or groups of individuals. She states that a

young child's play is more often influenced by the immediate family, especially a person in a position of authority or leadership (in functional two-parent families, this is often the father). If this person is playful, he is able to provide an example of playfulness for others to follow (Frost: 1985, 74). Scholars and researchers have struggled to define what play is and is not, as we have already seen in the first part of this review. Within some generally accepted parameters, they have established various categories and modes of play in their observational and quantitative research with fathers and their children. While these elements tend to overlap somewhat, some of the individual distinctions are worth noting in creating a better fit between the context and content of fathers' play with their children.

Mary Ann McGovern (1990) found four aspects of play: physical play, social play, object play, and active object play. In their analysis of the Social Relations Model, Stevenson et al (1988) developed six categories of father-child play: (1) functional play, (2) constructive play, (3) physical play, (4) instructive play, (5) games, and (6) pretense play. In his article on mother and father infant play, Power (1985) investigated four aspects of parental behavior during toy play: play mode, play technique, interference, and effectiveness. Within these behaviors, he uncovered six modes of play: (1) visual exploration/attention, (2) individual object manual inspection/simple motor exploration, (3) pretend play, (4) relational play, (5) communicative, turn-taking play, and (6) play involving the production of

auditory and visual effects. Lamb's (1976) four categories parallel some of those above: physical play, idiosyncratic games, toy-mediated play, and conventional play. Finally, Yogman (1984), in his study of father-infant caregiving and play with preterm and full-term infants, discerned seven categories of play. He specifically defined games as "marked moments of shared affect and mutual delight", and saw them as "episodes during which an adult uses a repeating set of behaviors either to engage or maintain the infants' attention in an effectively positive manner". The seven kinds of play he ascertained were: pure tactile contact, conventional visual behavior, non-conventional visual behavior, conventional limb movement, non-conventional limb movement, verbal games, and combinations. Yogman and others divided all their categories of play into two larger groups: (1) arousing games, which are defined as proximal, and include physical, tactile movement, and are assumed to encourage a higher level of arousal in the infant, and (2) distal games, including verbal, visual, and auditory games, and are assumed to maintain rather than arouse infant attention, and are labeled as non-arousing games in contrast to the more energetic tactile or kinesthetic types of play.

Given all of the above - the categories, qualities, characteristics, modes, and styles of play - it is the parent who is seen as responsible for structuring the child's play experience. The caregiver must possess some level of competence and playfulness in order to initiate play. Schmukler

supports the importance of the parent as a motivator for play but proposes an optimal point for facilitation. She writes, "If a parent is too intrusive, the child plays less imaginatively than when a parent starts a game, makes a suggestion, then withdraws" (Singer: 1990, 160). Fein, on the other hand, stresses the significance of the caretaker's role as the play collaborator (Sutton-Smith: 1979, 72). Singer (1990, 160) states that adults who foster imagination offer children a sense of security and closeness they remember long into adulthood. Recent research has shown that the measurement of separate dimensions of fathers' involvement with their children exist regarding routine and play (Riley, 1987). According to Levy-Schiff and Israelashvili (1988), both personal (internal) and contextual (external) conditions are almost equally influential in the two critical aspects of fathering: caregiving and play. They found that fathers' attitudes toward their parenting predicted to some degree both components.

Most of the research on father-child play is comparative, and statements of the father's role, style, attitude, and availability are usually quantified or qualified relative to the mother. The number of research studies has proliferated over the past fifteen years. While there are clearly some general trends, it is important to survey the content of some of what has been found in this area of late.

Several studies allude to the extent and amount of time fathers versus mothers play with their children. Many found that fathers, who tended to

be less involved overall, devote a greater proportion of their time to play interactions, especially play involving intense physical stimulation (Belsky & Volling, 1985; Lamb, 1977b, 1981; Parke & Tinsley, 1981; Yogman, 1985; Field, 1978; Yogman et al, 1976). Almost a third of early parent-infant interactions can be considered play, if play is defined as a purely social interaction that occurs when caregiving needs are met and the infant is alert (Emde, Gaensbauer, & Harmon, 1976; Field, 1979; Murphy, 1972). Of this time, fathers have been shown to spend one-fourth to one-third of the time that mothers spend with their infants (Clarke-Stewart, 1978; Kotelchuck, 1976; Pedersen & Robson, 1969). Power (1985) found that at 13 months, mothers spent a greater proportion of their time encouraging pretend play than did fathers. For both boys and girls, fathers of 10-month olds spent the most time directing infant exploration, whereas the amount of time mothers spent in this manner varied as a function of infant gender. Bailey's (1987) study found that fathers' average time-involvement with his infant child(ren) provided 32% of his infant's parenting - 27% care, 54% play. Arco (1983) demonstrated that fathers interacted playfully with more and shorter bouts of active stimulation than did mothers. There is other evidence that suggests that fathers are spending more time and playing more with their children than they did in the past (Pleck, 1985; Pleck & Rustad, 1980; Ricks, 1985). Most researchers agree that the time involvement of fathers is important to the men themselves, to their children,

and to their wives (Baruch & Barnett, 1981; Radin & Goldsmith, 1985).

Bailey's summative reflection on the play/time element is thus:

The involvement scores . . . indicate that, on average . . . children are cared for by "mother usually" but play with father and mother "equally". They receive a regular, if modest, degree of parenting from their father - but the degree is consistent. This male parenting is more likely to consist of social interaction and play rather than routine maintenance and caregiving. . . . Fathers were equally involved with children in play regard less of sex - and this was not diminished by time.

The measurement of "success with play" is another area upon which the literature focuses. In reviewing studies on this point, a comparative gender analysis yields the following key findings:

- 1) McGovern (1990) found that fathers are less sensitive than mothers to their infant's communications, for they often missed cues or responded slowly or inappropriately to the infant's signals. Fathers also tended to demonstrate less reciprocity in their play interactions. When fathers interact with their young child they tend to be more directive and involved in playful, physical social interaction while the mothers are more apt to be nurturant and verbal with their infant (Lamb, 1976, 1977b; Kalasch, 1981).
- 2) Because fathers have less experience in the toy play context than mothers, it was predicted and found that fathers would be less skillful than mothers, and therefore more interfering and less effective in their toy play interactions (Clarke-Stewart, 1978; Lamb, 1977).
- 3) Power (1985), in his developmental analysis of mother- and father-infant play, suggested that based on his review of the research, mothers should show a greater responsiveness to infant cues during caretaking and play, where as fathers should excel during physical play.
- 4) Power and Parke (1983) found that fathers were more likely to be unsuccessful in play because they ignored the focus of infant

attention and often presented objects when the infant was attending to or manipulating a different object.

- 5) Stevenson et al (1988) reiterated this finding by stating that mothers were more successful than fathers in eliciting "complex play behaviors" from their infants. They found that the difference in mother/father overall effectiveness (also in regard to play) was due to greater levels of inappropriate father interference.
- 6) In general, there appears to be what has been described as "complementarity in parenting and play": when mothers are able to do it well, the fathers tend to concentrate less on parenting tasks (Grossman, 1983; Grossman, Winickoff, & Eichler, 1980; Pollack & Grossman, 1985).
- 7) Lamb (1976) states that "overall there was neither a great number of play episodes nor a greater amount of time spent in play with fathers than mothers, but the average response to play with fathers was significantly more positive than to play with mothers" (p. 276). He further suggests (1975) that, when both parents are present, fathers are more salient persons than mothers: they are more likely to engage in unusual and more enjoyable types of play, and, hence, appear to maintain the infant's attention more than mothers do.
- 8) Power (1985) found that fathers were more likely to engage in idiosyncratic and rough-and-tumble types of play. This may be due to the greater variety and unpredictability of the play with the fathers that the child's response to play with them was more positive than with mothers.

Another consideration for fathers (and mothers) and play with their children has to do with the sex-role stereotyping and gender-based socialization of their child's play. McGovern (1990) found that fathers' type of play is very similar to mothers' play with the exception that fathers, as we have seen, engage in more social and more physical play. Her findings regarding types and style of play coincide with Stevenson, Leavitt,

Thompson, and Roach (1988), Pedersen, Andersen, & Cain (1980), and Belsky (1980), all of whom found minimal differences in the type of play of fathers as compared to mothers.

Eversoll's (1979) study involving a "two-generational view of fathering" provides a couple of interesting and enlightening insights from the child's perspective. Her study demonstrated that the overall picture that emerges is one in which the sons expected their fathers to be more involved in the "nurturing" and "recreational" behaviors and less involved in the "providing" and "societal model" roles than did their parents. However, both fathers and sons expected the male parent to serve as the "problem-solver". From the adult/father's perspective, the literature abounds with the conclusion that fathers, more so than mothers, are responsible for the style and content of their children's play as measured by gender and sex-role characteristics.

In a study conducted by Snow, Jacklin, and Maccoby (1983), the differential treatment of infants by their fathers was observed. When the children were 12 months of age, fathers were already found to be exhibiting sex-typed behaviors toward them, and boys and girls already differed in the sex-typed play they displayed in the presence of their fathers. They found that fathers were more likely to use verbal and physical prohibitions with their sons than with their daughters; meanwhile, father-daughter interactions tended to include more holding and close proximity as compared

with father-son interaction. In his 1979 study on men's roles in the household, Jerome Tognoli noted that children are socialized into fairly rigid sex-typed roles regarding their play activities and the way they are expected to relate to their physical environment.

Bronfenbrenner (1961), Fagot (1974), Lansky (1967) and Lynn (1976) all found that fathers, more than mothers, are most concerned about "sex appropriate" play. Within this major finding, several observed that fathers' concern was greater for their sons than their daughters and that fathers tended to sanction rough-housing and aggressive behavior more often for the boys, and passive play for the girls. In their study of early gender differences in parent-infant social play, Roggman & Peery (1989) cite research by Langlois & Downs (1980) which concluded that fathers of preschool-aged children, especially those with sons, are more likely than mothers to reinforce gender-typical play. Fathers of toddlers also express more sex-typed play restrictions than mothers do (Fagot, 1974; Snow, Jacklin, & Maccoby, 1983). Fagot (1984) found that fathers may also enhance sex-role development in their sons by showing preferential treatment toward boys in their second year of life.

One other significant difference between mother- and father-child play seems to be more contested and controversial, however. Roopnarine et al (1992), in their cross-cultural and observational study on parent-infant rough play, found that the most frequent types of father-infant games involved

tactile and limb-movements - games that are generally more physically stimulating and arousing. Their extensive review of the literature in this area failed to show that fathers had a uniformly greater propensity to engage in vigorous play activity with infants than mothers did. Mothers were more likely to engage in toy-mediated play than were fathers. The data they reviewed do not support the contention that rough play is a major activity between fathers and infants across cultures. However, others, including Lamb (1977a), Clarke-Stewart (1978), Crawley & Sherrod (1984), Lytton (1976), Power & Parke (1982) and MacDonald & Parke (1986) all contradicted Roopnarine et al's findings. These researchers stated consistently that fathers are more inclined to use rougher, more physical play with their young children than mothers. Clearly the empirical evidence is divided on this point, with neither side demonstrating conclusively that they are correct. Whether this aspect of parental play with children is universal or cultural or gender-specific warrants further and deeper study in the future.

In summarizing the gender socialization issue regarding infant and child play interactions with their parents, it appears that there are differences in style and content according to the gender of both the parent and the young person. Distinct social environments are being created for each generation and each gender, beginning with early infant-parent play. Mothers and fathers contribute to these social and playful environments and

activities in unique and separate ways, both of which are necessary for gender balance and depth in the development of the young person.

In reviewing the research on fathering and play, it became clear that many scholars and practitioners were observing and reflecting critical issues beyond the father-child dyad, and beyond the father-mother-child triad. The influence of external factors such as cultural and societal mores has had a tremendous impact on the ways fathers interact and play with their children. No study of this subject can and should ignore these "macrosocial" considerations.

Several researchers point to the role of work and the workplace and the effect of employment (and its negative corollary) on fathers' play with their children. Grossman, Pollack, and Golding (1988) found that several of men's psychological characteristics, particularly their autonomy and job satisfaction, predicted their play time and the qualities of their interactions with their children. They go on to say that the more voluntary aspects of child involvement - weekend time and time spent playing - were predicted best by a characteristic of the men themselves: the extent to which they described themselves as satisfied with their jobs. Feldman, Nash, and Aschenbrenner (1983) concur: they found that low salience in jobs was an accurate predictor of men's playfulness and caregiving with their infants.

There are several other external and internal considerations in the fathers' intrapersonal and interpersonal environments in which researchers

have shown some interest. All of these may indeed merit further study and exploration based on some intriguing initial results. Bailey (1987) found that father's play with children was predicted by neither attitude nor personality. According to Riley (1987), the extent of father's formal (school-based) education was unrelated to his participation in play with his children.

Marital satisfaction was found by Levy-Schiff and Israelashvili (1988) to be influential in determining fathers' caregiving and play with their children. They also found the qualities of "interpersonal warmth" and "interest" to be especially powerful in predicting fathers' involvement in playful interactions and affiliative behaviors. Mitscherlich (1969, 151) observed that, "...where the father is on the periphery of the family, relating to it mainly as breadwinner and disciplinarian, there are often cultural images of fathers as either fearful 'bogey men' or as bumbling, incompetent figures of fun". Saegart & Hart (1976) gathered support in their research for the idea that girls and boys, through their play activity, are preparing for adult roles inside and outside the home, respectively. They cite, for example, the notion that building blocks are essentially training toys for boys. Thornberg's (1973) study indicated that girls appeared to have greater difficulty with doll house construction than boys. Hart (1978) noted that dirt play areas, often under trees, were places where boys made miniature landscapes of large-scale environments while girls would only engage in this play if they were with boys; otherwise, they would spend the time decorating

the interiors of doll houses. Such findings are not of a fixed and permanent nature, however: Yogman (1984) noted that differences between maternal and paternal play become less tied to parental gender as social institutions and sex stereotypes change in step with the socialization of young children.

There is a limited amount of research which looks at cultural attitudes and mores toward fathers and their play with their children. Roopnarine et al (1992) make the assertive and necessary statement that for the most part, our developmental studies and theories have been Eurocentric and substantiated on data collected on white North American or European families. Roopnarine and Carter (1992) found that this biased and limited focus prevents researchers from making more comprehensive statements about the origins and development of specific father-child behaviors and interactions. They point out that the bulk of the studies on father-infant rough-and-tumble play has been carried out only in North America, Europe, and Israel. In their cross-cultural study of the antecedents of fathering, Levy-Schiff and Israelashvili (1988) noted that although non-Western fathers were less involved in caregiving than Western fathers, they tended to be more playful. Although not a lot of cross-cultural research has yet occurred on this topic, it is clearly a direction that will yield greater understanding and will underscore the impact of culture and cultural forces on how, why, and when fathers play with their children.

In conclusion, Pedersen (1987) remarks that more recent developments in research on fatherhood suggest three considerations for future study:

- 1) individual differences in paternal adaptations appear to be receiving more attention;
- 2) longitudinal studies are more prevalent;
- 3) paternal adaptations are being viewed within the context of other family members and other relationship parameters.

What touches on all three of these aspects is a transgenerational study of the influences on fathers play with their children, and the factors involved in the transmission of play interactions and attitudes from father to child. This is precisely the research I intend to carry out for my doctoral dissertation. My goal in this study is to discern and ascertain through in-depth qualitative research the ways through which fathers' play styles, contents, and philosophies are developed and handed forward across generations.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

A. Introduction And Overview

This chapter focuses on the methodology and process selected and implemented during this study. Consideration is given to the particular methodology chosen with reference to its strengths and limitations and the specific process that was undertaken in selecting and collaborating with the participants in the study. A brief profile on each participant is offered to provide the context for which each individual's responses.

This study utilizes a qualitative, in-depth interview procedure as its basis. Quinn (1990) states that "qualitative inquiry cultivates the most useful of all human capacities -- the capacity to learn from others" (p. 7). Interviewing is a basic mode of inquiry, and the recounting of narratives of experience and telling of personal stories has been the major way throughout recorded history that humans have made sense of their experience. According to Heron (1981),

the purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to "evaluate" as the term is normally used. At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience (p. 3).

Heron further points out that the original and archetypal paradigm of human inquiry is two persons talking and asking questions of each other.

He says

The use of language itself . . . contains within it the paradigm of cooperative inquiry; and since language is the primary tool whose use enables human construing and intending to occur, it is difficult to see how there can be any more fundamental mode of inquiry for human beings into the human condition (1981, p. 26).

It is this process of selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting upon them, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them that makes telling stories a meaning-making experience. Interviewing provides access to the context of people's behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior. A basic assumption of in-depth interviewing is that the meaning people make of their experience affects the way they carry out that experience. Interviewing allows us as researchers to put behavior into context and enables us to better understand their actions. Seidman (1991) states that, "if the researcher's goal . . . is to understand the meaning people . . . make of their experience, then interviewing provides a necessary, if not always completely sufficient, avenue of inquiry. If the interest is in what Schutz calls their 'subjective understanding', then it seems to me that interviewing, in most

cases, may be the best avenue of inquiry" (p.4). The role of the researcher in qualitative interviewing is critical. Patton (1990) states,

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the instrument. Validity in qualitative methods . . . hinges to a great extent on the skill, competence, and rigor of the person doing fieldwork. (p. 14)

Given the subjective and somewhat unfamiliar nature of this study, it is especially significant that the interviewer "toe the line" regarding how structured and how flexible to be during the interview sessions. Seidman (1991) emphasizes this point when he notes that

In the process of conducting the interviews, the interviewer must maintain a delicate balance between providing enough openness for the participants to tell their stories and enough focus to allow the interview structure to work. (p. 13)

Having the necessary knowledge base, practical skills, and intuitive understanding and sensitivity are clearly critical components of effective and efficient qualitative research. The combination of these elements affords the interviewer and participant to go to great length in creating an atmosphere where the meaning of language and experience are understood.

One of the major values and advantages of the qualitative interviewing process is the opportunity for the interviewer and the participant to collaborate in helping to make sense and give depth and

meaning to the participants' responses. Mishler (1986) states that, "interviewers and respondents, through repeated reformulations of questions and responses, strive to arrive together at meanings both can understand" (p. 65). On the other hand, Seidman (1991) points out that,

interviewing and qualitative research can become a process appropriated for the benefit of the researcher. Interviewing as exploitation is a serious concern and provides a contradiction and a tension. . . Research is often done by people in relative positions of power in the guise of reform (p. 7).

Given both the benefits and problems inherent in in-depth interviewing, Seidman nevertheless concludes that, "as a method of inquiry, interviewing is most consistent with people's ability to make meaning through language. It affirms the importance of the individual without denigrating the possibility of community and collaboration" (p.7). It is to this relatively new research tradition that this study turns in its effort to identify the meaning that fathers make of their play experiences with their elementary-aged schoolchildren.

B. Selection Of Participant Sample

Participants for this study were chosen on the basis of several criteria.

Some of these criteria (as listed below) were developed in order to enable the interviewer to work with a small sample of fathers. A purposive or judgmental sampling method was selected by the researcher based on a

thorough review and analysis of the literature on fathering and play in order to test some of the critical findings and conclusions reached to date, and to set up the potential for the formulation of new hypotheses.

It was presumed (on the basis of their formal education/degree, choice of employment and career, and age/life experience) that these fathers would be able to articulate reflectively on their own and their child(ren)'s play experiences. Their educational background and self-selected training and career in the helping professions were seen as critical factors for this study.

Given that the eight fathers selected are all in lines of work which call on them daily to make decisions about the quality of life of other people (their clients and/or students), these fathers would appear to have found ways to make meaningful connections between the thoughts, feelings, and attitudes of their clients and their actions and behaviors. Thus, where their professional endeavors are concerned, the fathers selected for this study are considered to be meaning-makers. A bridging assumption was made that there was a good chance that the meaning-making which is so integral in their work would in fact generalize to some degree to their personal lives.

As this study intended to investigate the meaning that fathers make and place on play in their lives and in their relationships with their children, the facility to make meaning and connections was of the utmost importance. While extent and type of education and choice of work do not in and of themselves guarantee the ability to make meaning of one's

experience, they are certainly helpful in the evolution of this process. These criteria were seen as necessary but not sufficient in the selection of the participant sample. Thus, the fathers selected for this study had to be considered to be conscious and conscientious meaning-makers in order for beneficial data to be generated.

Other criteria included age of the child (school-age was designated for this study as very little has been studied to date with fathers and their elementary-school-aged children); membership in a dual parent family (due to the plethora of available research in "father-absent" studies); biological fathers (to clarify the father-child relationship and related factors); and race (an effort to hold in abeyance the controversial research on cultural and ethnic factors).

To summarize, the seven criteria for fathers to be included as participants in this study were:

- 1) father's age (40-60 years of age at time of interviews)
- 2) child(ren)'s age at time of interviews (at least one child of elementary school age - 5-13 years)
- 3) number of children currently in full-time residence (minimum one)
- 4) father's career (salaried or fee-for-service and at least five years in current field or endeavor) in the helping professions
- 5) formal education (minimum Master's Degree or related professional degree)
- 6) currently in a dual-parent family

7) biological parent of his child(ren) (minimum one)

As little has been done in terms of research and follow-up with fathers and their school-aged children - the more so when "play" is factored in - this small and select sample was drawn upon. The intention in utilizing this judgmental sampling of fathers was to enable the researcher to formulate and pursue questions deemed to be on the "cutting edge" of a new and emerging image of fatherhood: one that is deeply connected to raising children actively, responsibly, and consciously, and that engages by choice and desire in a range of ludic activities with their children.

By design, this sampling of fathers may be considered "beyond the mainstream" as they have conscientiously chosen to be involved in their children's lives in ways that have been heretofore undefined, ambiguous, or cast aside in favor of other, more conventional "father" and male concerns. Whatever hypotheses are reached and conclusions drawn, there is no doubt that a larger-scale, more open sample might be used at a later time to check the reliability, validity, hypotheses, and initial conclusions of this study.

With each of these seven criteria in mind, it became increasingly important to justify them individually in light of the research, and to consider possible synergistic effects of the juxtaposition of these variables as developed by the interviewer. Some of the questions which occurred in the creation of these criteria included:

- 1) How - and would - the fathers' "middle-age" status affect his ability, energy, and stamina to play with his child(ren)?
- 2) How involved would elementary-aged schoolchildren be with their fathers as "co-players"? What roles would each adopt in play, and how adept would they be? How well would each be able to adapt to their "roles" in this play-dyad?
- 3) How - and would - fathers change their play-style with each child? What, if any, variables did they consider if they changed their style or approach over time with each ensuing child? Would there be any particular correlation in terms of birth order and/or number of children in the family, comparing the fathers' family of origin and child's family of origin?
- 4) What impact would the father's relatively stable job/career have on his play with his child(ren)? Given that each father has been in a job or career for a consistent number of years, how and does a father integrate or separate work from play, both on his own, and with his child(ren)?
- 5) How would a relatively high achievement of formal education influence a father's desire and interest in playing with his child(ren)? What would fathers say about the role of their education in terms of its impact on their play, with and without their child(ren)?
- 6) In a dual-parent family, could - and would - fathers articulate play-style differences when they compared their approach to play with their own wives? To what would they attribute any differences? Given the "choice" to play with either or both parents, whom did the child choose, and for what reasons?
- 7) Given a biological/congenital relationship with at least one child, how would fathers describe the evolution of their play relationship with that child from his/her birth to the present?

These questions were largely responsible for the development and justification of the seven criteria listed above. Some of the major issues and

considerations regarding fathers and play with their children were as follows:

- 1) the fathers' success in and relationship to their work lives;
- 2) the fathers' employment record and "employability";
- 3) the quality of the fathers' relationship with their spouses;
- 4) the fathers' images and perceptions of what is most critical in their parenting of their child(ren) - role identity

C. Procedure

Based on the above considerations, the interviewer put the word out to his faculty colleagues on his own campus and within the greater Boston area. He also identified other non-faculty professionals to solicit potential participants. It took approximately three weeks for the interviewer to find his minimum of fifteen referrals. He then sent a Letter of Introduction and a Survey Questionnaire to each referred father [see Appendix]. Within two weeks after this mailing, thirteen of these potential participants had completed the form, and, following receipt of these surveys, the interviewer followed up with a telephone call to each one. The stated intention of this telephone call was to ascertain the following things:

- 1) Is the father currently "actively engaged" in play with his child(ren)?

- 2) Is the father generally articulate about the value, meaning, and role of play in his life and in his relationship with his child(ren)?
- 3) Is the father currently engaged in work as a "helping professional", that is, in a role he states supports and demonstrates some of the values similar to those he espouses in his relationship with his child(ren)?
- 4) Is the father available for two interviews within the next month?
- 5) Is the father open to sharing personal details and information with the understanding and guarantee that everything will remain confidential?
- 6) In the father's own words, does he meet each of the eight stated criteria?

Based on the responses to the above questions, eight of these thirteen fathers were selected as participants, and initial interviews were scheduled by telephone. Confirmation letters were sent immediately following the scheduling of these first round interviews.

Prior to the formal commencement of the first round interviews, each father was asked to sign a Participant Consent Form and a Participant Options Form. Any questions of process or procedure to this point were clarified and the first interview took place. Following the first round of eight interviews, all tapes (with participants' permission) were given to a professional transcriber to be transcribed on computer and printed. All participants were asked to sign two forms:

- 1) A Research Participant Consent Form, [see Appendix], and
- 2) A Participant Options Selection Form [see Appendix]

Fathers were given the opportunity to select a code name, or to have the interviewer do so for them, or to maintain the use of their given names for the interviews.

Approximately one week after the first round of interviews, fathers were again contacted by telephone, and a second round interview schedule was established, beginning approximately three weeks after the first round had been concluded. Computer-generated transcriptions were then sent to each father for review and feedback. Fathers were given the option to send back their copies of their transcripts (within a week of receipt) with any comments, deletions, additions, or changes for inclusion into the final record.

These amended transcripts were then used as the official (revised) transcripts and then coded via the Windows-based HyperResearch software program.

D. The Interview Instrument And Process

Two 75-minute interview protocols were developed. These interviews were designed to elicit participant response to issues and concerns raised by available research studies and the interviewer's interest in juxtaposing two separate yet complementary topics, namely fathering and play. The two

interview instruments had as their primary unified objective fathers' conceptions of their own play history (first round interviews) and reflections on the impact of individually generated considerations (second round interviews). In particular, the second interviews focused on the following four areas:

- 1) the impact on the father's work on his own play and play with his child(ren);
- 2) fathers' conceptions and reflections on the way his family of origin and current nuclear family plays;
- 3) differences and similarities in play style, approach, and implementation between father and mother with their child(ren);
- 4) fathers' conceptions and reflections of his play as father to his child(ren) in terms of his perceived role(s), identity, and responsibilities as the male parent.

These considerations have been identified as some of the more salient variables and considerations regarding the topics of fathering and play.

Within these general topic areas, specific probes and follow-ups were built in to enable fathers to have the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and then elaborate on these experiences from various perspectives. Where specific information proved particularly intriguing to the interviewer - or when it seemed apparent that from the participants' affect or gestures that their response to a query was either just "scratching the surface" or "loaded with emotion" - the interviewer took particular care to remain both sensitive

to the participant and open enough to allow for spontaneous commentary from the participant.

The vast majority of questions within each protocol was designed to be personal, open-ended, and non-judgmental. Each interview had several questions designed for metacognitive thought and reflection to be introduced to the extent that the father was able to do so. Questions probing the fathers' concepts about what other family members might say were integrated throughout each interview with the idea that a "decentering" perspective might yield information which either contraindicated or reinforced a father's own response to a previous question.

The first interview was specifically designed to help participants to reflect on their earlier play experiences and "play history." Questions in the first session were developed and utilized within a developmental framework, enabling fathers to hear themselves sharing an aspect of their lives chronologically. This general framework, in a sense, helped to serve as a harbinger for the more specific "topic area" queries (as delineated above) in the second interview. In this second session, fathers were asked to respond more thematically, the themes being those articulated by the literature.

The interviewer allowed in all cases for a minimum of three weeks between the first and second interview with each participant. This waiting period was seen more as an "incubation period" for participants to reflect on the questions, themes, and issues they explored in the first interview. Two

of the first questions in interview two were, "Is there anything you've thought about or wanted to say regarding any of the things that came up in our first interview?" and "Reflecting back on our first interview, when you look at your previous solitary and interpersonal play experiences, is there any one particular element or theme that unites them? In what way or ways are they similar?" These questions, in particular, were aimed at helping the fathers to recall what they said in the first interview as well as to warm them up to the present moment for the series of queries which awaited them.

Finally, participants had the option of asking and responding to a question of their own making at the very end of interview two. "What is the 'missing question' for you in all of what we have discussed? Please ask it and respond to it as your final statement." All participants thus had the opportunity to "fill out the record" (so to speak) by exploring a new area not previously considered or to follow up on an area or issue to which they wished to return. Although the interviews were designed to last approximately 75 minutes each, the actual range was 62 to 87 minutes for the first round of interviews, and 72 to 98 minutes for the second round of interviews.

E. Review Of The Participant Sample

Eight fathers were ultimately selected for this study. What follows is a brief demographic profile of each participant. All fathers who began the process completed both interviews.

Steven turned 40 years of age in May of 1994. He is a psychotherapist, administrator, trainer and workshop leader who lives and practices in rural Western Massachusetts. He and his wife live in a co-housing situation with one other family; he and his wife have an eighteen month old boy and a twelve year old girl. Steven received his Doctor of Education Degree from a land-grant university in Massachusetts in 1988 and has held his current posts since that time. His psychotherapy practice is held in a small cabin he built in the woods adjacent to his family's home.

Paul is a fifty nine year old man with a girl aged sixteen and a ten year old boy. He, his wife, and their two children live with a dog in a home on the North Shore of Massachusetts. Paul is both an ordained minister and a faculty member at a college in the Boston area. He teaches courses in group dynamics, counseling, and spirituality; in addition, he maintains a small psychotherapy practice. He has been a college professor for more than twenty years and prefers to carry a heavy courseload to other faculty responsibilities. One accomplishment of which he is quite proud is an article he has written about his life as a commuter, (as yet unpublished) entitled "Life in the Centered Lane."

Ken, a 40 year old medical doctor, lives with his wife and two girls, aged 5 and 8, in southern New Hampshire. Although both he and his wife grew up in the greater New York City area, they and their girls are comfortably settled in a newly-inhabited part of their southern New England town, and they live in a sprawling pre-fab home. In addition to his medical practice, Ken enjoys watercolor painting and sojourns in the woods and on the water with his family. He has recently become involved with men's groups and issues and claims that this involvement has had strong benefits for his own growth and development.

Jim is fifty four years of age. He received his Ed.D. degree fifteen years ago and has been a psychologist in private practice since that time. He lives in a suburb forty five minutes north of Boston with his wife and two boys aged ten and seven. The household also includes two cats and one dog; he says his wife is the primary caretaker of these pets. Jim commutes approximately twenty minutes from home to office four days a week; Mondays are reserved for chores and self-paced time and activities. He has been extremely supportive of his wife as she completes her doctoral dissertation, and takes their boys for both "outings" and "inings" on a regular basis both because he enjoys his time with them and to relieve his wife of distractions and interruptions.

Brion is a community activist and administrator in a Boston-area Public School system. He turned forty five in early May of this year. He

and his wife - a college professor - and their two girls, aged 16 and 12, live in and own a two-family home. All members of his family are quite active within the community, and all keep heavy schedules around their work, school, and interests. Brion works both in his school-based office and at home. His work hours are not, in his mind, clearly delineated from his non-work time. He pursues his work on violence and dropout prevention in the school system with passion.

Mark, 40 years of age, is a social worker with a home-based private practice. He, his wife, and two girls, aged 9 and 6, live in a house they built eight years ago in rural western Massachusetts. Mark received his MSW in 1980 and has built a large practice with occasional consulting and training work on the side. He has taken a strong professional and personal interest in men's issues and fathering and has become known as a local spokesperson for these concerns. Mark is an athlete who plays on seasonal sports teams, as well as refereeing and coaching his girls' school and league teams and games. Mark is an active jogger who finds that living and working at home enables him a flexibility he enjoys.

Jep is a chaplain at a large Boston-area university. He received his Master of Divinity degree and was ordained in 1978 and has been in his current post for more than ten years. His wife is an academic administrator at a college based in the Boston area. They have one son who is twelve years old. Jep is an avid outdoorsman and enjoys both solitary and team

sports, in addition to engaging in physical activities with his son. His family has an active dog; all live in a mansion maintained by his university; the home is often utilized for his school's functions pertaining to his job. Jep's hours are flexible; he often has hours at night or on weekends which are integral to his job as chaplain. The family has an active schedule of commitments as individuals, yet tries to have time together at least a few evenings per week.

Arlo is a forty three year old administrator at an undergraduate college in the Boston area. He lives in a rented home by the ocean on the North Shore of Massachusetts with his wife and twelve year old daughter. His commute, usually by commuter rail, averages two and a half hours per day; Arlo uses this time to attend to written administrative details so that, when he arrives home (usually at 7:30 p.m.), he may have one or two waking hours with his wife and daughter. He has worked as a faculty member and administrator since earning his Ph.D. in 1978. Although he grew up in a city one hour west of Boston, his most memorable professional years were spent in rural Indiana. Arlo is also president of a local land preservation association near his home and spends some weekend time volunteering his energies in support of community endeavors.

This sample of eight fathers provided the interviewer with nearly twenty three hours of data which entailed the following things:

- 1) their selected experiences as "homo ludens" (cf J. Huizinga; defined and interpreted as "man the player");
- 2) their reflections on the role(s), impact, and influence that play has had in and on their lives as individuals, males, and fathers;
- 3) their insights as to how their play has evolved over the course of their lifetimes to this point;
- 4) their perceptions of successes, failures, fears, frustrations, and hopes related to play in their future as fathers, men, and wage earners;
- 5) the range of and examples of their emotions and affect related to their experiences of and reflections on their play histories; and
- 6) their ability to move between concrete experience to abstraction on a topic all said they had "never thought about" before as a subject in its own right - "fathering and play".

The interviews utilized both the more traditional "linear" mode of question and answer and less conventional "circular" query and response. This enabled fathers to access information in multiple and, in some cases, previously unfamiliar methods. The data they generated - the subject of the next chapter of this study - demonstrated their own multidimensional abilities to reflect on their (play) experience and reflect in a metacognitive way on their reflections.

CHAPTER IV
IN THEIR OWN VOICES

A. Fathers' Images Of Their Early Developmental Play

1. Introduction

One of the key considerations in getting fathers to reflect upon their experiences with play in their relationships with their children is to help them understand that they indeed carry a "personal play history" with them over the course of their lives. This play history begins right from the moment of birth, if not before. They play and are played with from the moment their senses are alive to the world. It is not unusual that these first ludic moments are with their parents who share intimacy and joy of being in relationship with their children in ways only hitherto anticipated.

This chapter on play turns its initial attention to the play relationship fathers have had with their parents. The words of the participants will be drawn from verbatim throughout this chapter in order to most effectively present their voices and images. The focus of the fifth chapter will be to analyze and interpret these fathers' voices and to compare and contrast their words with recent research and the literature. Thus, references to "the literature," as such, will be emphasized in chapter five of this study.

It must be noted that these fathers - like those before them and those to follow - are rooted both in their families and in the cultural history which surrounds them. These eight participants "came of age" in an era when the

"Leave It To Beaver"-type family (intact mother-father dyad with two children living with them full-time under one roof) was more de rigueur than it is today. According to a 1990 U.S. census, this "traditional" family constellation accounts for only 7% of all U.S.-American families (Woodside & McClam, 1992, 178). In fact, all eight fathers grew up with their fathers engaged in full-time, out-of-the-house jobs while their mothers stayed at home with them - up to a point. The sheer availability - or lack thereof - of their mothers and fathers had a major impact on their play relationships with each parent. (See Chart 4.1, page 89)

2. Fathers' Conceptions Of Their Early Play Experiences

With Their Parents

In their interviews, fathers spoke candidly about their birth parents' availability and interest in playing with them as children. Steven stated, "I played a great deal with my mother who was very attentive and kind." Arlo concurred, stating his mother "would take us swimming, regularly, at parks, to the library, take us places. . .fishing. . .She was very actively engaged in play. . . ." Jep said, "When he'd come home from work. . .we'd play catch in the front yard." Mark's experience was typical in this group of fathers, as he recalled that, "my father was basically an executive in a company and he was gone a lot and had to travel, and so when he came home he would basically collapse." Jim echoed this response, reflecting that

Chart 4.1. Capsule Review Of Eight Fathers

| Father's Name (Age) | Wife's Name (Age) | Father's Familial Home Location | Father's Parent's Work (F = Father, M = Mother) | Father's Siblings (B = Brother, S = Sister) Age | Current Socio-economic Class | Father's Occupation |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|---|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Paul (59) | Reisha (49) | Suburban/ small town | F = Full-time away M = Part-time teacher | B = 61 S = 57 | Lower/ middle | Professor/ therapist |
| Mark (41) | Ann (48) | Rural/ small town | F = Full-time away M = Full-time teacher | B = 39,37 S = | Middle | Social Worker / therapist |
| Steven (40) | Joan (42) | Suburban | F = Full-time away M = Full-time home | B = 37 S = 33 | Middle/ lower | Trainer / administrator |
| Arlo (44) | Maryne II (43) | Urban | F = Full-time away M = Home, PT Nurse | S = 56,55, 43 | Middle | Professor / administrator |
| Brion (45) | Linda (49) | Suburban | F = Full-time away M = PT home/away | B = S = 42,40, 38 | Middle | Public School Administrator |
| Jim (54) | Nan (44) | Urban/ Suburban | F = Full-time away M = Full-time home | B = 60,57 S = | Middle / Upper Middle | Psychologist/ therapist |
| Ken (40) | Vivian (38) | Suburban | F = Full-time away | B = 44 S = | Middle/ Upper Middle | Medical Doctor |
| Jep (42) | Carol (44) | Suburban/ Rural | F = Full-time away M = Full-time home | B = S = 38,33 | Lower Middle/ Upper Middle | Chaplain/ Minister |

his "father worked a lot so the only things that I remember is that occasionally he played catch with us." However, he stated that his mother "didn't always participate in dramatic plays. . .but she would. . .relate to it."

Paul said that, "I don't remember them ever playing other than at home, we'd. . . play checkers. . . that's the only memory I have of playing with them. . . . I don't remember playing outdoors with either of my parents."

Brion had similar parental play experiences growing up. In his words, "[My father] left at 6 in the morning and came home at 7 at night so I didn't mess around with him at all. . . .I don't remember playing very much with either of my parents in the kind of way that we today as parents would view as play. . . ."

When their parents did enter into the fathers' play experiences, even though it was minimal, it seems to be divided by gender and specific activities. Seven of the eight fathers (Paul being the lone exception) stated that whatever play experiences they recalled with their own fathers was centered around playing catch - throwing, catching, and hitting. Usually this took place in the backyards of their childhood homes. The seven fathers who spoke of this activity were generally evenly divided between it being spontaneous or one that was agreed upon in advance by both parties. These seven fathers recalled that this was a fairly repetitive activity, and that only in Jep's experience did his mother come out to play catch. In almost all

instances, the fathers had happy and joyful recollections of ball-playing with their own dads.

Mothers, when involved in their sons' play, would be most likely to participate in board (sometimes referred to as "box") games and reading. Otherwise, they served as supports in terms of encouraging their sons to go out and play, providing props and sometimes snacks, but, otherwise, mostly repeated encouragement. When mothers tended to play interactively with their sons, the play was more centered around indoor, structured activities which were specifically time- or rule-bound.

What play contact the fathers had with their own fathers in particular seems to have been centered around skill development and refinement. In this regard, Steven told of going camping with his family as a child. "I have incredibly wonderful memories of all that time. . . .A lot of my young memories of that was watching, then helping my dad doing campsite things - like setting up the tent or making a fire, or cooking over a fire, or, just dealing with the camping experience." Jep recalled being rewarded for fine athletic achievement: "I remember my father buying me an ice cream sundae where I actually caught three fly balls that were hit to me. It was like he was really proud of me." Jep also remembered feeling that "I wasn't driven. . . .I wanted to get better at playing with my father." Over time, he "got good, got coordinated - developmentally or because of practice - so then I actually became a pitcher in the Little League after that." Brion spoke of

“playing chess, relatively young, I remember my dad playing with us and teaching us how to play chess.” Arlo's mother “was a great believer in reading and so we'd always go to the public library which was in the nature of an adventure and a trip in itself which was a good deal of fun.”

Overall, the affect attached to fathers' reflections on play with their own parents seemed to be tender and warm. A few comments from them stand out. Arlo recalled that he had “some very fond and very explicit memories of evenings that we would spend together.” Jep said that “Play with my family has to do with baseball and playing with my father and mother, then playing catch with my father and that feels good and warm and pleasurable.” Mark remembered that “it was great to have - a thrill really - [my father] pitching whiffle ball and it was sort of a big physical exertion for him even though he didn't chase it, but just the thought that he was participating was pretty thrilling for all of us.” Jim's dad “cracked me up - I rolled on the floor. . .mostly from surprise that he had cracked a joke - he did a sort of slapstick thing; most of the time he was quite serious.” Paul recalled his father “drawing a face, a profile with a pipe and then I'd put in the smoke and it was a lot of fun. I remember enjoying doing that.”

3. Fathers' Conceptions Of Their Early Play Experiences With Their Families

The range of play activities the fathers described with their families of origin was diverse. Steven spoke about "the two months of summer would be spent basically playing outside in the woods, camping, traveling, and hiking, and doing the 'camping trip'." His indoor family play experienced ranged from Monopoly to watching television and playing with blocks. Steven's family "would also set up croquet in the yard and play." Jep remembered "singing in the car. . .and playing Cribbage, checkers, and chess." However, when he recalls his family playing, it "has to do with baseball. . .and watersports - water skiing and fishing and stuff." Mark's family "played played cards and those kind of less active games." Jim's experiences are similar to those above: card games, poker, canasta, rummy, parchesi, and checkers - but no chess. He added, "there were quite a few times when we did a lot of imaginative play." Paul stated, "I don't remember my family getting involved" in play. Brion concurred, saying, "I remember most of my time with family being around chores, around work projects." Thus, it appears that there was an indoor/outdoor split in the play activity continuum. Most of the fathers' families found ways to act and interact playfully throughout the course of the fathers' childhoods.

4. Fathers' Conceptions Of Their Early Play Experiences With Their Siblings

Many of the fathers spoke of their siblings in terms of the way they connected through play, and certain issues arose from their reflections - namely the kinds of activities, competition, and collaboration.

Steven recalled that "we would play card games and box games and checkers and chess in the house and I remember that we would often get into fights, arguments, and tensions about being competitive with each other and who was winning and who was cheating and who was teasing whom and sometimes they would escalate into big fights." Jim's sibling experience was along the same lines: "My other brother and I were common playmates but he would - there was always a lot of competition and there's always - he always made it clear that he thought I stole his friends and stuff like that." Brion added, "My sister Kathy is a very good, was a very good athlete, probably a better athlete than I was, so we could do sports and probably my competitive juices got stirred up around how good she was compared to me."

In Brion's case, at least, competition seemed to enhance the relationship in a positive manner; the other fathers did not seem quite as enthused nor did they wax as positive.

There were, however, indications of cooperative and collaborative sibling play. Paul, in particular, had a lot to say about this aspect of play with his siblings. "I remember us kids going out after supper to our backyard. We just kind of ran around out there. . . 'cause we got along in

that way. For indoor activities we'd have board games and we'd all be playing together though more my brother and I than my brother and sister.

As I was growing up, my brother and I and a number of other kids were all part of the same playing gang, and so I saw a lot of my brother in that setting. . . .He and I - just the two of us - would do a lot, I'm sure we would have gone out together as young kids and played together in the backyard or in the field before we were old enough to have a whole gang around us."

Arlo recalled that "my older sisters taught me my ABCs and to read and would play with me in very imaginative ways, so I enjoyed my time with them and going places with them a lot." He added, "I have a sister. . . . We did spend a lot of time playing together. . .my sister and I both went to boating lessons and were playing out on the row boat together at the same time, and learning to ride bikes together." Mark played "some board games, card games" with his brothers, while Jim stated that "my brothers and I didn't always play." However, as Jim reflected on this, he seemed to do an about-face, adding, "We would be pretty busy making things at all times. . .we played in the street, we would play any game we could find. . . .My brother, who was two years older than I, would be doing the same thing, and we'd be making motor noises and riding around and stuff." Steven remembered that "my brother and I. . .would collect [beer tops] and organize them by type."

Not surprisingly, the issue of gender play differences and preferences was raised by several fathers. Half of the eight fathers interviewed had brothers - older or younger - but no sisters. For the sub-group of four fathers with sisters, play with their female siblings was a mixed experience. While Steven spoke of the competition, rivalry, and "passion" involved in playing with his younger brother, he also recalled, "I don't remember playing at that age with my sister. . . .[It was] my brother and I. . . ." Jep's experience echoes Steven's. He recalled, "I don't remember playing with my sister Lori - she was a girl and she was five years younger than me. . . ." However, Arlo's early childhood sibling play experiences were much the opposite: "I have a sister who's one year younger than myself, and we spent a lot of time playing together at home." Paul's experience seemed to integrate all of the above elements. He stated, "Yeah, well there was quite a sex split - I didn't play with my sister - she was three years younger - she was a little girl, they played with dolls. But as far as boy games, we'd all play together." He added, "We'd have board games and we'd all be playing together though more my brother and I than my brother and my sister." He sounded a note of gender inclusiveness when he further states, "In our backyard when we were all playing it was just a lot of - a whole bunch of kids and she [his younger sister] would have been a part of that. . . .It was a more gentle game versus the boys' athletic stuff in which she had no part." Brion's experience was similar to Steven and Jep: "I don't think I played

with my sisters all that much." The factor of age proximity and age order apparently had a lot to do with whether these fathers, as boys, included or were included in their sisters' play: those fathers who played with their sisters growing up were within two years or so of each other. Those fathers who did not play with their sisters were further apart in age and shared little in common with them.

5. Fathers' Conceptions Of Their Early Play Experiences With Peers

The question of gender played out as well when fathers spoke of their peer play experiences. In discussing their peer play, all fathers spoke of a high degree of shared and cooperative ludic behaviors. Examples that they gave reflected competitive play more with males than females, and also more scenarios of same-gender cooperative play. Cooperative play spanned activities from soccer, basketball, and baseball, to sand play, badminton, stamp collecting, bike riding, and fantasy/imaginative play. "Hanging out" with no specific activity focus was something all of the fathers mentioned. This, by its very nature, seemed to convey mutually beneficial understanding and cooperation. While many of the fathers talked about their experiences with traditional, competitive, win/lose games with their peers, the actual memories they shared were more about process (enjoyment) than product (final score). This will be elaborated on in the next section on fathers' evolving attitudes toward play.

Brion engaged in what has come to be known as traditional boy/male play. He reflected that, "with my boy friends, we just rode bikes, and played war, and did sports. We probably did some arty kinds of stuff as well." Paul's experience with his peers was similar to that of his sibling play - both positive and negative. "As far as boy games we'd all play together, 'cause we got along . . . until she [his younger sister] got to have her circle of friends who came in and played with her. . . ." Yet, with these same boys, Paul added, "in our backyard when we were playing, it was. . . . a whole bunch of kids and she would have been a part of that - playing tag and hide-n-go-seek and blind man's bluff and all that. . . .The girls in some of these games got active - but not the sports - the sports was just boys playing. . . . We had a gang of boys and girls - actually it started pretty young and continued through high school; generally we were just buddies, and cronies, and chums. And we'd be playing board games or hiking or whatever - the whole gang of us." In concluding, Paul reflected, "boys played sports and girls played with dolls and jacks and bicycles. . .the sex roles were clearly stated and in those days there were no girls' sports." Jim's comments were quite similar to Paul's: "We didn't play dolls. That was a definite. . .that's what girls did supposedly." Yet, as with Paul, Jim recalled that, "we liked girls who would play the games with us that we [the boys] wanted to play which were like running fast, throwing, hitting, stuff like that, and there weren't very many [girls] around that would do that. There were a couple

who would - especially the running part. But, a lot of the time the girls wouldn't play the kinds of games that we would play - we [the boys] were pushing and shoving. . .not as much with the girls as with the boys." Jep said, "I think I didn't play with girls at all I have no memory - we're talking strict segregation of the sexes." Mark's reflections on gender and play concerns echoed others: "I basically only played with boys until junior high. . . .I'm trying to think of exceptions, and I'm not coming up with any, so I basically only played with boys." Arlo, who engaged in much play with his older sisters, as we have already seen, said, "there was an interesting board game that I received as a gift, [but] my sister wouldn't be interested in playing with that so that would be something one would play with boys . . . pretty much." Later on, in college, Arlo related an experience somewhat out of the norm of this group of fathers: "In college, I dated a basketball player - not tall at all but extremely skillful and athletic so there was somewhat an anomalous combination then of an out-of-shape intellectual boy with this extremely athletic girl, and I would always be very happy if she picked me for her team - although I would tend to get picked last." Here we see that the girl was the "playful aggressor," or the one in power. Steven recalled a similar experience, in which the girl played a similar role: "I have one memory in my backyard of some girl that was over - and we were playing "kissing bug" and she would be chasing us - the goal, her idea, was she was going to chase us so she could kiss us. And we would. . .run away

desperately trying to get away from the kissing bug." Other than this singular play experience, Steven said, "I don't remember a lot of play with girls although there was some."

The other issue that emerged from peer play as children was one around specific roles that the fathers took on. Paul spoke of thinking of himself "in the group as not a leader and not a follower either - just kind of in the middle." Jep's experience paralleled Paul's, in that he recalled, "with my friends, I fell sort of like in the middle, which is. . . I wasn't strictly a follower or a leader. I don't have an image of myself always. . . following, nor do I see myself, remember myself, as this sort of captain of the neighborhood - like always organizing." In the seventh grade, Jim recalled that "I really liked to be the one in charge" when his peers played together.

Mark "liked being free to make up my own rules, or to work out my own rules with other kids. Sometimes in my own head, sometimes with other kids whether it be sports or the activity we were going to do. I liked just sort of the control, I guess, that I had over those times." Arlo voiced an experience similar to Mark's: "I remember just having a great deal of freedom to range a-round the neighborhood and to invent things to do." He added, "in organizing the theatrical activities I took very much a leading role, so I did think of [myself as] a leader there. It probably wasn't my idea to play baseball and lose everyday, so I was deferring to this other fellow's tastes and interests in that regard."

5. Fathers' Conceptions Of Their Early Solitary Play Experiences

Finally, fathers spoke about their experiences and reactions to solitary play. For most fathers, solitary play formed the minority of their childhood play experiences. What little solitary play they experienced - more early, less later on in childhood - they expressed joy around. Arlo stated that, "I found that as time went on. . .reading competed for time with fun. . .there is sufficient fun in that. . ." Mark added "I remember having some fun play by myself. . .out in the streams and woods or throwing balls around, bouncing them off of things. . .solo play continued to be meaningful. . . independent playing with myself stayed important." Jim's recall of playing alone was much the opposite: "I remember times when there were very few people to play with which was very boring." Brion had several positive memories of playing alone, among them, "I have fond memories of riding bikes. . .of reading books. . .of like hanging out in the living room in this little rocking chair drawing and redrawing my parents' house and yard." For him, "solitary play [was] having to do with doing what you like to do."

B. Fathers' Evolving Attitudes Toward Play

1. Introduction

Several themes evolved from fathers' efforts to define "play". Their six ways of thinking about play translated into these clusters:

- 1) social/interpersonal,
- 2) intellectual/cognitive,
- 3) physical,
- 4) versus work,
- 5) structural,
- 6) spiritual

In their words, this section will delineate and elaborate on fathers' ways of creating their own evolving meaning of play in the broader context of their lives.

2. Attitudes Toward Social And Interpersonal Play

Brion's broad definition of play included as one of its components that play "involves other people and the issues of service or doing something as leisure that will. . .be of help to somebody else - like social service kinds of projects I really love to do for. . .the collective good." His definition values "connection and more connection. . . ." Steven added, "mutual enjoyment which is play. . .is. . .just being together and enjoying each other." Terms he used in a word association question all turned out to be interpersonal and social words: "silly, intimate, loving, teaching, attentive, and sensitive to feeling." Steven feels play can only take place with "lots of support and

safety in affirmation - it's gotta be an exchange - they gotta like to do it or get involved, so it's gotta be mutual." He added, "there's no criticism and nobody gets come down on." Jim spoke in this same vein: "Play is helping each other, don't tease, and compete with each other and don't feel that. . . one person has to be humiliated and vanquished." He, like Steven, "needed to feel largely secure enough to play." Jim's word association yielded terms with an interpersonal and prosocial orientation such as "tickling, caring, laughing, fooling around, smiling, chasing, and. . .listening." Mark commented that "the real play I do has to be sort of mutually supportive. . . something which I feel like I care about the people I'm doing it with." His word association brought the following things forward: "closeness, fun, interaction with people for the joy of interaction. . . .", and, "play can be fun, dads can play, men can play, they [sic] can be close to a male. . . ." Brion felt that "There's a very strong moral element in it in terms of how to behave. . .in play." He plays primarily "if I can lighten things up - whether it amuses anybody else, I find it's fun. . .to do that." He added that "a sense of trust that play involves and the sense of connection that it implies" were critical aspects of the play experience for him. For Ken, what is most essential in his play experiences is "camaraderie. . .having a close relationship with other people, men, during the experience, and enjoying one another for who we are and depending on one another which is also fun." He cited "a sense of group accomplishment" as one of his play goals.

Embedded within this framework of play as a social, interactive experience is the issue of competition. In this regard, the fathers interviewed experienced a range of feelings and situations on a continuum from competition to cooperation. While, for the most part, this sample of fathers did not experience - nor seem to enjoy - the cutthroat "suburban Little League" style of competition, virtually all were exposed to competitive play environments. Save for Mark and Jim, none of the other fathers indicated the slightest interest in competitive team or solo sports. Of the eight fathers interviewed, only the two of them had tried out for positions on school teams.

For Jep, "very early on competition was an unpleasant, slightly threatening thing because it was sort of a way of me not being as good. . ." Paul never "had the conception of myself as sportsman, and. . .had nothing to do with trying out for a team - I mean, I never did any of that - but, beyond competitive activities, what else was there for a kid?" Mark said that, "If I play on a basketball team, winning or losing isn't really that important." He added that he is "very sensitive to not overwhelm my girls by any need I have to win or to teach them to lose or to get them more competitive or more driven. . .generally I will let them win unless it's apparent to me that they need the challenge of losing sometimes to make it more exciting." For Brion, "slowly sports fell out for me as a form of play in high school - it really became a way of being accepted. It was something

that I pretty much enjoyed but...since I wasn't so good at it, because I'd lose more and more." He felt that in terms of his play, "I don't think I'm really very competitive. . .and I don't think I really ever was - but I minded people losing. I think my empathy levels were pretty high - and, it just didn't seem right." Steven said that "most of our play was in some form or another about competition." Ken declined any comments on the issue of competition in childhood play.

Competition clearly existed in the fathers' lives growing up, and into the present, but this group in particular seemed to feel that it is not a healthy element in play because the valuable sense of interpersonal connectedness could be destroyed, minimized, or lost altogether if the competition outweighed the positive elements of cooperation and collaboration. Thus, their definitions of play tended to both consider and downplay the importance of interpersonal competition.

3. Attitudes Toward Intellectual And Cognitive Play

Play also involves an element of intellectual and cognitive stimulation in these fathers' eyes. All eight fathers included this aspect in their overall definitions of what play and ludic behavior involves. What unites their thoughts here are the aspects of play involving learning, teaching, challenging and being challenged with their minds, and thinking which are all integrally bound up in their concepts and experiences of play.

A survey of comments from each of the eight fathers demonstrates that all considered part of play to be intellectually or cognitively challenging. Play for this sample of fathers clearly included the notion of playing with ideas in addition to playing with their own bodies. It is more the extent of the influence of "mind-play" rather than its existence that is up for question here.

Brion said, "One [aspect of play] is this notion of food for the mind and sharing those kinds of things." He added that, "part of my play was solitary and that was much more intellectual - drawing, and reading, and writing, and coloring." He found in his experience that "it's much easier for me to play if I'm learning something. . ." and that "intellectualness [sic] is a value to me around play." Brion also stated that "of course play was learning." In thinking about playing with his son, Paul said, "I can't be thinking long about playing with Thomas without. . .reading coming in." He added, "thinking, and playing with ideas is. . .and can be very enjoyable." Ken mentioned an aspect of his recent play and how it utilized his mind: "for a while there I was doing some fooling around with some artificial valves and thinking about a new way to implant artificial valves in a new technique - that was play - it was actually great to think about it - it was enjoyable." He added that, "through play [I] learn about the world and different aspects of life." In Jep's word association question, he responded by saying, "This is a strange word but the word didactic comes to mind." Jep

included "reading under the definition of play." In Steven's words, "the thing that I sometimes struggle with is to not lose sight of that frame of mind which allows me to have more of that quality of play in all my activities. . . .It's more the frame of mind that determines the quality of that play experience." Jim said, "I think it's inventive and the use of fantasy and stuff like that is what makes play." He added, "I think one of my values is imagination and the use of fantasy and creativity." Arlo's ideas on the intellectual meaning and value of play was thus: "The play that I was involved in tended to run to historical or literary themes in terms of games or role-playing or acting - these seemed to be what interested me or drew me - much more so than the traditional form of organized athletics."

4. Attitudes Toward Physical Play

The third aspect of these fathers' definitions of play included the physical element. The use and movement of the body is what has been traditionally and centrally found in definitions of play. Seven of the eight fathers - Arlo being the lone exception - spoke of the physicality of their play, both as children and in the present. These fathers varied in their feelings of relative comfort with this component of play.

Brion, who had earlier spoken of his negative feelings around competition, said, "I was never comfortable with physical aggression." Despite this feeling, he stated that, "if you asked me about the word play

when I was a kid I think of my friends and that was very physical." For him, play was "about sports and being around playing soldiers in the woods and riding bikes. . . ." Brion's word associations regarding play included "outdoors, woods, cowboys and Indians, and sports." Today, his play involves "physicalness [sic]. . . I love to run around and play frisbee and do that kind of stuff." Paul virtually echoed these comments, saying that, for him, play "is physical - throwing a ball or a frisbee or moving through space or drawing or bicycling. . . play recreates, refreshes, or it can physically exhaust as well." He recalled "how much fun I had playing out in the field as a kid growing up." For Jep, "one of the ways I play is running." Similarly, fast physical movement resonated with Steven in his recall and definition of play. As a child, Steven said, "I would spin. I would typically be outside and often be with other people and I would just start spinning. I would jump. . . and it would be this ecstatic expression of energy. . . a great experience of release and of joy and of letting go and of expressing energy without judgment." Steven brought the physical aspect of play back to its essence when he stated that "breathing is the ultimate for of play as far as I'm concerned." Jim reflected, "I think I'm a little bit more aggressive in my play - a little bit more hands-on tickling. . . ." On this last point, Mark's experience is quite similar: with his two girls, "I roughhouse with them. . . and I'm more apt to pitch a baseball to them and chase them around the

bases than I am to be an active focal point." Words he associated with play were "outdoors, energy, exuberance, hard, hard play, active play."

5. Attitudes Comparing And Contrasting Play And Work

Another way these fathers attempted to define play was as an experience opposed to work. This, too, is typical of the U.S.-male experience. In this context, all eight fathers interviewed took some of their time to attempt to integrate work in their experience with and definition of play. As we will see, for many of them it was and continues to be a struggle to separate these two aspects of their lives, and to give play a more central role.

Steven spoke at great length on the topic of work and play. He stated, "I do have some separation between those work activities and those play activities but I . . . think that there are plenty of activities that I engage in that could be either." He sees that he has "a particular role to play and responsibility that has certain work elements in it and that isn't simple. . ."

He, like most men, feels that he "still gets hooked in to living under the gun, so to speak, and so the changes that I hope to see are continuing to play more - to be having more of that quality of playfulness about my whole life." Steven feels strongly that "there are ways of redefining responsibility that help to put it in the service of play and liberation rather than in the service of suppression and obligation." In many ways, what he feels he has

"to do in the world. . .is a contradiction to play. . . ." Mark, who, like Steven, is a psychotherapist, spoke of these qualities and paradoxes as well: during play, he experienced "some level of freedom, a certain amount of permission to enjoy myself or. . .to sort of really put myself into the activity - I was doing it only because I wanted to as opposed to obligation and duty."

For Mark, play "carries the spirit of adventure, sort of a creative process whereby no one knows what's going to happen in a [therapy] session until it's happening. . .which I consider sort of a creative playful spirit that often enhances the work." Like Steven, Mark finds it hard to dig his way out of work and settle into play: "I'm just not prone to being irresponsible or procrastinating about major things, so for me play is freedom from that. . .but. . .I'm so fucking responsible about things that. . .it's incredibly hard to let go."

Brion spoke of the transgenerational transmission of values in work as play, stating, "I think I've also taken on my dad's value system and world view that my work is my play." He saw this as a developmental occurrence in his life, recalling that "this merger of work and play meant for me that play disappeared around 4th grade as a separate activity." He adds, "As I got older probably that notion of play disappeared because work was not really over." He struggles to play for its own sake, and rarely does so unless it involves some greater social good or connection, but is learning that "you can use your non-work energies for enjoyment." Nowadays, for Brion, "play

is what you like to do that kind of becomes fused with work." Ken spoke of this as well, saying that "down and play time for me is only something I've become comfortable with recently." He saw play as having value as "a needed alternative activity from what I do day-today." Paul, nearly fifteen years older than all other fathers interviewed (except Jim), had a strikingly different perspective on the work/play disconnect. He said, "To me, leisure seems the center of life - that is not having to work to get somewhere else, and I'm not terribly interested in a career in terms of I'm not going anywhere. . . .Play is not about the grim work of having to do things and produce things in order to either make a living or develop a career. . .or push forward some meaningful work in the world - play is just sort of in-the-moment experiencing. . . ." Paul, like other fathers, "savors the sense of trying to make work playful, in which case nothing is lost by playing all the time. . . .It can be included in work." However, siding with the majority of fathers on this issue is Ken. For him, "play time is time when I'm not working or engaged in work. . . .Play is, in my mind, any recreational activity that's not spent around work - I think play is time spent away from work duties doing anything that's enjoyableBy definition play has to be enjoyable otherwise it's work or it's tedious."

For Paul, "even to have goals seems contrary to play; play is just the exercising of one's capabilities for the sheer enjoyment of it versus the instrumentality in order to get somewhere". However, for Ken, the goals of

play "are to unwind from work, to be distracted from work, to have an emotional outlet depending on what I'm doing, and to learn about the world and different aspects of life." For Ken, "the joy I take [in play] is in the accomplishment, pride in doing my best during play." Jep integrated an aspect of work into his own play goals: "There's this sense of a kind of coach aspect which is I know stuff that if I tell him will help him to get better. . . ." Teaching is thus a goal in Jep's play. For him, play includes "this sense of acquiring competence that probably for a kid feels a bit like work. . . . I would say windsurfing is like that for me - I both enjoyed it but it was an element of acquiring competence in that thing - the element of work at work in play." Like Ken, when Jep plays, "I always try as hard as I can - that's a real important value for me which is to do it as well as you're able to do it." While for Jep "playing is fun and it's not work," in his mind, his son, Josh, "clearly and unambiguously does not get any sense of drivenness around play from me." Here again we see the values of play being transmitted across generations, from father to son, at least according to the minds and the perceptions of the fathers.

6. Structures And Definitions Of Play

With these at times disparate and contradictory pieces now in place, it is opportune to look at the final parts of how and what fathers included in their definitions of play. These final components include their sense of the

structure of play and the spiritual element of play. These are larger and perhaps more abstract aspects of the play puzzle, involving a metacognitive view of fathers' own play experience in order to extrapolate meaning and impart a sense of cohesion and coherence to their definitions.

Mark "liked being free to make up my own rules, or to work out my own rules with other kids, sometimes in my own head, sometimes with other kids whether it be sports or the activity we were going to do. . . .I liked just sort of the control, I guess, that I had over those times." His "whole definition of play includes having some freedom, feeling in control of it." In terms of structure, Mark also thinks "elements of spontaneity are part of what defines play - an impulse gets in you and you decide to go with it . . . sort of break out of any restraints that are from the outside and you start doing things that are spontaneous." Steven feels the same way: "my definition of play is very much about the sense of permission to be spontaneous, the sense of spaciousness to respond to impulses in the moment without being fixed or predetermined." For Steven, "to do play is a bit of a paradoxical thing for me - 'cause any time I have to "do" something it starts to be work, with goals. . . ." He also sees "play as kind of a continuum from ecstatic play [sic] to structured play. . . ." Ken states that "sustaining play does not necessarily have to be goal-oriented, although I still find it the most enjoyable." He feels that "you can define play very narrowly as time spent in an organized activity, but that excludes a lot of stuff." Jim feels that

"some of the best opportunities for . . . promoting these values that I have about play come up when there's more spontaneity." For Jim, as for most of the other fathers, "time is always a factor." Ken agreed: "Play is time - I would say any kind of recreational time set aside to try to unwind and recharge your batteries, and there's not enough. . . ." For Paul, "play is not achievement-oriented - it's for its own sake, for the experience of exercising or whatever rather than getting ranked and rated and promoted and paid." For him, "sometimes it's nice to have a day where you don't have to do anything - that's playful, 'cause you don't have to go out and have a scheduled day. . . . There's a certain amount of spontaneity. . . that feels a lot like fun and feels playful."

One aspect of the fathers' definition and experience of play that arose was novel, in that it never appeared in the literature. This is the experience of play as a spiritual endeavor, of play having a spiritual component. While only four of the eight fathers spoke directly about this connection, they did so with passion and verbal artistry. In a certain sense, it is justified to place this element last in the list of six characteristics, as it seems that all preceding qualities are built into play as a form of spiritual endeavor, at least for those who specifically mentioned spirituality.

Steven articulated this aspect in great depth. "The spiritual significance of play. . . is about profoundness both in terms of physical presence as well as other dimensions of being in connectedness. . . ." For

him, "the goals of play are liberation in dealing with God, because that's my concept of what God is about - God is play - and it's about communion in the deepest and brightest senses of that word, and it's about exchanges of energy with other people and with objects, the exchanging of energies in a free-flowing way, connectedness and letting go, transcending fear, breathing deeper, and in the fullest experience, opening energy. . . ." Steven also sees "one of my biggest challenges is. . .to make more room for playful energy in my life, and I struggle with that internally, in part as a legacy of my father and in part a legacy of my culture and probably in part my own karma. . . .Because play can be so powerful and transformative, I'm afraid that it can and will shatter the structures of my life which I've grown attached to." It appears that there are several levels of duality here which Steven is intimating as a struggle: the rigidity of daily routine versus spontaneity, going with the known versus the novel (taking risks), and the issue of growth and change versus the status quo.

Mark sees play as an attitude, "carrying the spirit of adventure. . . a creative process whereby no one knows what's going to happen." In his life, "play is reflective of where I'm at but once in a spirit of play it's rejuvenating and satisfying and it. . .opens me up. . . ." He elaborates on this spiritual element by saying further, "with real play. . .it feels like I'm entering a world where I sort of suspend the agenda that I think is so real. . . ." Paul, a former cleric and the third father to discuss the spiritual

dimension of play, added, "I do like to play with contemplation and meditation. . . .I think our culture's really off the mound [sic] in terms of even play has to be regimented and clothed and the right garments and it just gets all sucked back into being consumers again. . . ." And, finally, Jep, a practicing Episcopal priest, stated that, "moments of play are. . .in a religious way, the incarnation of play. . .like the equivalent of a priest saying mass. . .those moments are the sacraments of play. . . ."

7. Evolution Of Fathers' Attitudes Toward Play

The nature of each interview session with these fathers was both topical and developmental. Fathers were asked about the evolution of their attitudes toward play from childhood through the present. The next sections offer their ideas and feelings about play over time. Three particular areas came to light as they talked about their ludic attitudes:

- 1) gender,
- 2) competition,
- 3) the structural nature of play.

Each of these will be viewed in turn.

To place fathers' comments in the appropriate sociohistorical context, it must be recalled that they generally "came of age" during the period from the late 1940's through the late 1960's - a span of approximately 20 years or so. Nearly thirty years have passed since then, and with this passage of time, another generation of children has grown into adulthood and

parenthood. This next section will focus on the evolution of the gender attitudes of these fathers toward play in this period of time.

Oftentimes these reflections and perceptions arose in fathers' discussion of their play as themes unintended in the line of questioning of the interviewer. Whereas many of the fathers who reflected on their play with their peers also discussed the "boy versus girl" issue, the comments which follow occurred out of the context of the developmental line of questioning pursued in the first interview. A non-developmental theme - gender and play - emerged of its own, without the prompting that generated the earlier discussion on early childhood peer play. The section that follows reveals a deeper dimension of the gender and play issue.

a. Fathers' Reflections On Gender And Play

Recalling his style of play as a child, Jim said, "well, we didn't play dolls. . .that's what girls did supposedly, and I remember spending a lot of time saying that's girl stuff. . . ." He and his gang of boys "liked girls who would play the games with us that we wanted to play which were like running fast, throwing, hitting, stuff like that. And there weren't very many around that would do that - there were a couple that would - especially the running part. But a lot of the time the girls wouldn't play the kinds of games we would play. I thought that girls got to be soft and sort of got away with it; I can remember fooling around - not as much with the

girls as with the boys I guess. . . ." Mark concurred on this point, saying, "I basically only played with boys until junior high, until I was twelve. . . .I'm trying to think of exceptions, and I'm not coming up with any. As far as adults, I certainly don't remember playing with any female adults." Ken's experience dovetails with Mark's: "For myself, not having any sisters, there really was a lack of knowledge of playfulness with women. . . .My contact with women only really developed coincident probably with puberty and interest in women as part of sexual play." Steven stated that, among other things, his childhood included a "fear of girls." For him, "some of it was similar in terms of the role that I played of being chased with at least the more aggressive boys and girls. . . .With my male peers there was much more of a cooperative, mutually engaged peer level of play. . . ." Arlo's experience did not coincide with those above. As a child, in "theatrical presentations, they would obviously include girls a whole lot more than the cowboys and Indians role-play or the World War II role-play. . . .If it would be Snow White or Sleeping Beauty of course you would include girls in that. . .it makes sense." He made a delineation in his view of gender and play: "The distinction I think would be like girls within the home and boys outside the home - if one wanted boys one had to look outside for outdoor activities and maybe that accounts for some of the difference in that the outdoor activities would be with boys and the indoor activities would be with girls."

b. Fathers' Reflections On Competition And Play

Regarding the notion of competition in their childhood and adolescent play, Steven recalled, "the idea was definitely not to get caught, and there were times where I was caught and. . .I don't remember ever getting beaten up so that I was badly hurt, but I do remember that infliction of pain was a component of the dynamic, that that piece of pain infliction if you got caught seemed to come with the game, with the dynamic." His image of playground play was vivid: "the great wasteland of the playground without any close adult supervision and you're at the mercy of the predators and there is a sense of having to be on your guard." His word associations with play at this time in his life included "competitive - most of our play was in some form or another about competition." Arlo's recall of play in high school involved his peer group as "just killer debaters. . .we would win big too. . .a lot of the competition in sports was displaced to this. . . ." Jim's recollection of his childhood and teenage play furthered the notion of competition, as he said, "there was always a lot of competition, it was constant. . . there was always the fastest, the strongest. . . .My brother was a much better hitter in baseball than I was and he was a better player and it was hard for me to admit that." For this sub-group of fathers, competition and winning and losing seemed to matter, and it appears that on some level they were drawn to and enjoyed it. This, however, is not the whole story.

Brion's attitude growing up was that, as far as sports and competitive play, "I wasn't bad at any of them and I wasn't great at any of them, so it didn't much matter." Jep's attitude was similar: "I was never that good or anythingThere's a sense of "I'll get better if I practice this. . .but I was never driven to practice in a kind of manic way, so I'm good at some things but I'm not great. . . ." However, he arrived at this attitude only after a lot of childhood competition. For Jep, "very early on, competition was an unpleasant or slightly threatening thing because it was sort of a way of me not being as good and then I got good and then. . .I'd have all these tiny little victories along the way and so I just have a sense of enjoyment and pleasure now when I think of sports." Jep's reflections indicated that he had to do a lot of work to overcome the challenges and the competition to get to a point where his attitude around play and competition is more neutral now than it ever was.

c. Fathers' Reflections On The Structure And Organization Of Play

Several fathers commented on the way their early play was structured. It seems that this notion of structure is based on a continuum of play being organized, on the one end, and spontaneous on the other. Mark recalled that he "was into organizing. . . even though I liked to play alone sometimes, other times I liked to organize clubs and. . . activities with a gang of neighborhood kids. . . . If it was a group game, I was almost always

playing some sort of organizing, regulating function, a leader kind of role. . . ." This coincides with his desire for control over his play time and the sense of freedom it gave him: "I felt like that [play] was my world and I was in control of itPlay felt like it was very much up to me and whoever I was playing with to decide, and I could choose what I wanted to do." For him, "getting into neighborhood sports, pick-up sports, always felt more or less like play, but. . .once I got into organized sports. . .it became more about. . .a work field, a performance field, and. . .it became more confining, more rigid in its goals, and more confining in terms of the relationships. . . ." Opposing Mark's perspective on this was Jep, who remembered "playing soccer - kind of loose -I think it was because it didn't require much supervision - you just gave two sides a ball and you sort of ran back and forth and kicked it. . . ." In recalling his role in this type of play, he said, "nor do I remember myself as this sort of captain of the neighborhood, like always organizing. . .in terms of structured organized sports" He spent a lot of time " hanging around, sort of unstructured, with friends, later on from the age of nine. . .and I'm comfortable with it [play] sort of being unstructured. . . ."

Interestingly, only Mark, Jim, and Jep mentioned play and games facilitated by adults during their early years. These comments focused on typical gatherings of children, such as at birthday parties, school outings,

and local fairs or festivals. There was nary a mention beyond this of fathers' involvement in games organized by adults.

d. Early Adult Attitudes Toward Play

What stood out most as these fathers reflected on their attitudes toward play as adults before fatherhood was the tremendous variety of activities they considered play, and what types of play activities in which they engaged. This diversity of play styles and events is considered natural for young children, even for teenagers. As boys age into manhood, the list of activities narrows considerably. This particular group of eight fathers thus seems somewhat out of sync with the mainstream of adult fathers and men in this country at this time. Some of their play choices are typical - stereotypically "male"; others seem to stretch traditional definitions of play and shake up the conventional stereotypes of men at play.

For Ken, "sports remained the same, in terms of enjoyment of being involved in sports. . . .Clearly fantasy played much less of a role in playing and as a result play became much more channeled and defined and organized and more geared toward accomplishments, and always was geared toward accomplishing and goal direction even in childhood. . . .There was less room for spontaneity in play growing up to some extent." In college, he "had time set aside for play and played hard and worked hard. . .and didn't feel I was lacking playtime. . . .I probably spent a lot less time in play than

many other people I know and that's certainly followed through into my professional life for a variety of reasons." Something he did "throughout college was drawing often. . . ." Speaking of the present, Ken states, "in some ways I'm able to tolerate play more than I used to - as an adult."

Brion's response is in some ways similar: "the notion of going out to play, to drink, or even to throw a frisbee around in college - I wouldn't know what that meant really - except that it was something I was supposed to do. . . ."

Mark spoke of his experience of play into manhood by stating, "once I got into organized sports. . .in college. . .it became more about a . . .work field, a performance field: how I did became more important than the feeling of doing it." Play activities in Mark's "young adulthood. . .[included] some creative improvisational dance and. . .personal growth workshops where I could go and just sort of follow my impulse in fun with other people more than any particular agenda." His pre-fatherhood play activities also included "sex, some games, and fishing." Jep "played collegiate sports - lacrosse, pole vaulting, and playing with friends. . . ." After college, he said that he "played club lacrosse for a couple of years which was fun, and running off and on in my sort of haphazard way. . . .I played tennis, and then again socializing, including. . . hanging out, going to movies, talking, that open-ended sort of stuff." In college, one form of play for Steven "was actually getting into drugs and that provided a whole new arena for play. . . .It gave me permission and gave room for experiencing interaction with myself and

the natural world and other people in a variety of more open and creative ways, which was very playful."

e. Current Attitudes Toward Play

As they talked about their attitudes toward play as fathers and in the present, one theme which emerged was fathers' affect, moods, and feelings resulting from their ludic experiences. Given the earlier challenges around competition, work time, and relationships that they had to overcome or balance, their current feelings about play serve as indicators of their own growth and internal processes.

Some fathers have personal, emotional, and other obstacles to overcome in being able to play freely and fully. These may come from social and cultural conditioning or from within one's personality. Brion said, "I'd love to do sports with my peers. . . I love physically moving." In play, Brion states that, "I'm almost always happy, 'cause if it's play it is something that I'm doing 'cause I want to. . . .When it's really play for me - which means it's voluntary and democratic and with the people I want to be with, then I'm always happy." In terms of his lack of regard and interest in competitive play, Brion defies the stereotype of the typical 'man at play': "in that sense I think I resist - that's one way in which I resist what most people would consider play as I'd just rather be at home reading a book, listening to classical music, as my play. . .so I'm a resistant player." Mark

stated that, "I do some organized sports, those have some nice elements to them, but . . . don't have sort of a free form of play. . . ." He says that he "still enjoys sports, playing with my kids, and bringing a playful spirit into the work that I do. . . ." "Oftentimes", he noted, "there's a threshold of letting myself get into play which I sometimes struggle with - especially with my kids - letting myself be free to play." Nowadays, Mark feels he is "more controlled, more constrained, more reactive than proactive to play. . . but, once in a spirit of play, it's rejuvenating and satisfying. . . it opens me up. . . ." With his two girls, Mark said, "There are times when I get into play with them where it feels like it's gotta be on their terms and I'm not really in that kind of a mood where I can enjoy that, and. . . I begin to feel used." In concluding his comments on this topic, he stated that, "What's most important is that I'm feeling the right kind of chemistry with the people I'm playing with and I'm getting enough, and enjoying the different things that I do well in playing." Like Mark, Paul likes to "just have fun and don't feel too inhibited once I get going and my creativity comes up. . . but I have to get through my inhibitions to begin with. . . ." Steven admitted that, "it's relatively easy for me to short-circuit play in my life as I feel all of the responsibilities." Sometimes it's awkward for him, as well: "when Joan [his wife] says, 'she [their daughter] should go to bed now,' and then I feel like I must be a bad parent or feel some shame that can sometimes come in around ecstatic play because it's so in contradiction to

judgment that it's also vulnerable to the shame elements of social norms."

At the same time, Steven has a "feeling of lovingness as part of my play. . . ." In general, he says of his play, ". . .I feel great about it. . .but I feel I should be doing more, I should be figuring out more play, I should be taking more initiative. . . ."

Arlo sees the function of play in his life positively: "I value what elements of fun I have or play that I have because it does kind of keep alive that. . .part of life." When he reflected on his limited play time due to his daily commute and volunteer activities, Arlo said about play, "Oh, I love it - I really enjoy and look for opportunities for doing it and I think it's very relaxed and natural and it's part of the week that I really treasure. . . ." In a slightly self-deprecating attempt to summarize his current view on play, he added, "I think play is very important - I'm making it sound very pretentious, aren't I? But I think if there were an end in mind that that would be it then, in the sense that, 'Yes, things are important but not desperate. . .'" Ken "still takes a great deal of pleasure in doing play activities that are either goal-directed or physically challenging. . .a game of soccer in the middle of the winter in a field that was covered with a foot and a half of snow. It was a lot of fun. It was a playful experience. I think with. . .play, the joy I take is in the accomplishment, pride in doing my best during play, and camaraderie." He also stated, ". . .enjoying one another for who we are and depending on one another. . .is also fun. I think it's just the

joking, the playfulness, the teasing each other, the being able to rest and take humor in each other, with any friends. . .is fun."

C. The Impact And Influence Of External Variables On Fathers' Play

1. Introduction

Two themes emerged regarding the impact of external (sociological) factors on fathers' play. One theme focuses on fathers' work and careers and how they influence their interest, energy, and attention to their own play and play with their children. The second theme that arose from the interviews was how marriage and the establishment of a family and family concerns impact a father's ability to play for himself, with his spouse, and with his children. These two considerations will form the basis of the third part of this chapter.

All eight of the fathers interviewed for this research project are employed on a full-time basis either on their own (as therapists) or by an educational or helping services institution (university, medical clinic, mental health clinic, school system). Most of these men have been employed in this or a related manner since the birth of their youngest child. This means that for as long as their youngest child has been alive, "dad" has been out and about in the work force, and this is a fact both have had to reckon and come to terms with, however easily or uneasily each has made peace with this reality.

Three sub-themes appeared over the course of the interviews. For the sake of clarity and brevity, these categories have been delineated as follows:

- 1) the work/play continuum from fusion to isolation: how fathers view the integration or separation of their work-time and their playtime;
- 2) the time element and time pressure involved: "a limited supply (of time) for a great demand (they and their children mutually desiring playtime)";
- 3) emotional and psychic energy: the choices fathers saw and made around their ability to focus on and attend to playing with their children as compared with lending their concentration to other endeavors.

Not all of the fathers spoke of all - or any - of these concerns, but when put together, the transcription record holds some important data which is useful to highlight.

2. The Work-Play Continuum

By far the largest part of this topic was up taken by fathers' feelings and reflections on the separation or integration of work and play. For most of these fathers, the idea of integrating or juxtaposing work and play was both an idea and an ideal - something to aspire to, perhaps, but not something easily reached, and far less easily maintained. Yet on this continuum fathers all leaned toward the integrative aspect of these two

endeavors, and there was clearly a lot of conscious and conscientious thought put onto this topic.

Brion, an educator and public school administrator, stated that, "my work has generated interest in playing with my kids not so much because of duty or responsibility but because it's consonant with what I want to do with the rest of my life. . . ." Such an integrative attitude is clearly conducive to incorporate play and work. Paul, who is both a professor and a psychotherapist, noted that, "I actually consider teaching a fortunate kind of work because it seems it's creative and therefore playful. . . things come up in the course of the class itself that feel like a lot of fun and feel playful. . . my work is play. . . ." These two fathers, in particular, seemed to have a more natural fit with their work and their play.

Ken, a doctor in general practice, pointed out one difficulty - among many - around the integration of play at work. He said, "I think work can sometimes be very serious dealing with very serious topics, and transitions between work and play are not always easy. I think spontaneous play at the end of an evening is not always so spontaneous or easy when there's death or you're dealing with serious illness or you're counseling people with serious problems." As a university chaplain, Jep noted "my work gives me greater flexibility and access to Josh [his son], and the flexibility allows me to sort of mix in recreational things in a way that I think other people don't have who have a more rigid job schedule." For Jep, given his flexible

schedule and somewhat ambiguous working schedule, "the amount of time that I'm physically in his presence doing stuff is greatly increased. . . ."

However, as we will soon see, there is a price that he must pay for this easier access to play and to play with his son.

Steven, a therapist and program administrator, stated that, "my work life often feels like it infringes on my ability to play", and, similar to Ken, "the shift from being in the work mode to being in the play mode. . . is a hard adjustment for me." Similarly, for Jim, a clinical psychologist, "When they [his two boys] see me coming home I'm. . . a little frazzled and I still have things to do that night before I go to bed. . . ." He added, "When I work. . . night and day and work on projects all the time I feel like I don't have fun. . . ."; for Jim, there is clearly a division between his work and his play. Mark, a social worker in private practice, noted that "some of my work involves play quite consciously as a therapist; some of the work I do with children is play therapy and it involves creating a playful opportunity for them and being part of that, and that can be satisfying for me but also there are times when it can be draining for me. . . ." Mark's work, "if it carries the spirit of adventure or a sort of creative process whereby no one knows what's going to happen in a session until it's happening - then I consider that a creative playful spirit. . . that often enhances the work."

Arlo, a college administrator, said, "the idea that play has to be incorporated into work for work to be worthwhile I always thought to be true, more or

less consciously." He believes that "joking with students is a sign of my highest regard for them that they're clever enough to get the jokes. . .I think it's an important pedagogical tool". He found, however, "less and less opportunity for play" in his role. For him, the interview "questions have caused me to reflect on that element drying up in life. . .so the elements of fun and play have gradually been completely refined out. . .and a consistent theme of play and fun that has been there throughout is now largely gone from work".

3. Play And The Element Of Time Pressure

As workers in the general field of service to others, these fathers have found their jobs to be both demanding and absorbing. For this group, their careers involve both long hours and stimulating work. As such, "time" is one of the considerations or challenges with which they must deal in order to be able to be effective workers and players, in particular in the eyes and hearts of their children. Most often, these fathers felt that time, as such, was of the essence, that there wasn't enough of it, and that its perceived scarcity served competing interests simultaneously.

Steven noted that, "because I spend x amount of time doing work, there is that much less time available for play activities or for a feeling of play because a feeling of work and responsibility or a kind of certain constriction that doesn't provide for the same sense of play." He reflected,

"I'm often working in the evenings or have spaces of time in-between work obligations where I'm actually doing other kinds of work and so it's sometimes hard to have clearly designated play time. . . ." He lamented, "it wouldn't hurt to have more play time. . . I tend to be very structured in my time and there isn't a lot of loose time, and I should be playing more with her [his daughter Ellie]." Jim shared his concern that he hears "you didn't give me enough time" [to play] from his two boys, and that "time is always a factor. . .it's just sort of a natural limit." For him, "there aren't too many negative things I can say about play, other than I don't get enough time to do it." Arlo's brief comment on this aspect was that, "it [time] affects it [play] logistically and in a kind of banal sense. . .there's just less time now".

He cited "a number of factors which militate against it. . .one is the longish commute I spend twenty hours a week commuting which is an enormous chunk of time." Brion felt "there is always the notion of time pressing. . .I've gotta get back to this. . . ." and "I wish there were more time for play." However, he added, "I don't think that I want it to be different enough that I'm going to go about doing what needs to be done to change it - like not do political work or do less of it so I can read at night, or not try to do what I'm doing in the school department so that I could say at 6:00, 'It's over, I'm not doing any more work tonight. . . .'" Ken, who said he "tends to distinguish work from play", noted that play time is "definitely sparse - I mean I wish it were more plentiful. . . ." Jep, despite his flexible

work/play schedule, noted that, "there's always something. . .I might play with him [his son Josh] from 3:30 to 4:30 but I have a counseling appointment at 4:30 and. . .in the back of my mind I'm thinking that - not in a tense preoccupied way but I really discovered this when we went away on sabbatical." Jep said he is "much more aware that I have limited time to play with Josh and to be with him. . . ."

4. Psychic And Emotional Energy And Play: An Inherent Contradiction?

The accumulated stress and friction between fathers' work and their play takes its toll on them both psychically and psychologically. Their emotional energy and attention to playing with their children - and on their own - is apparently very limited by their output on the job. A few fathers spoke of this in their interviews.

Brion's comment was among the few to sound a bright note on this topic. He stated that, "My work has generated interest in playing with my kids not so much because of duty or responsibility but because it's consonant with what I want to do with the rest of my life." Here is a father who seems able to integrate work and play and integrate his children into both, and all seem to benefit on the emotional and cognitive levels because of this.

As we've already seen with Jep, his "work gives greater flexibility and access to Josh but it also in some ways takes a little psychic peace from me when I'm with him. . .whether I'm psychically and emotionally present

during that time may be decreased because of what is on the horizon. . .
though. . .he doesn't necessarily know that when we're shooting baskets that
maybe I'm thinking about something else - that may be much more present
in my mind than in his. . . ." Steven noted that "mentally I find that even
when there might in fact be play time available I'm still in a frame of mind
which is work-oriented. . . .Sometimes it's hard for me to shift out of
thinking about all of the "work" that needs to happen to being open to just
being open to playing with Ellie (daughter) and Micah (son)." In reflecting
on this transition, Steven commented that, "I know I carry a lot of mental
structures that are in contradiction to a sense of play, and so I need to
challenge those and keep opening them up." Mark also noted the difficulty
in making the psychic and psychological shift from work to play: "It's
important for me to not sort of get burned out or exhausted or so absorbed
in the work that I do professionally that I can't devote a high quality of
attention to my daughters. . . .It's hard for me to think of play as bad, partly
because I'm so fucking responsible about things. . .and I'm not prone to
being irresponsible or procrastinating about major things, so for me play is
freedom from that. . . ."

a. The Impact Of Marriage And Family On Fathers' Play
With Their Children

In addition to the work dimension, fathers spoke of the impact and influence that their marriage and family had on their play, both on their own and with their spouses and children. Two key themes that emerged from this topic were:

- 1) the changes in play that are caused by marriage and family;
and
- 2) the impact of marriage on spousal play.

Paul - whose wife Reisha is the only one among the wives of the eight fathers interviewed to not work for pay outside the home - noted this about play and family: "partly because of having a couple of children in the current . . . economy, and having a wife who isn't working - by our choice - means that I do extra work and therefore the time that I can just enjoy myself on my own terms shrinks. . . although with the kids, part of the time that I don't have to myself is time with my kids and that then becomes playful in its own way. . . so I've gained some play time by being a parent."

Mark - who works mostly in an office above his attached car garage while his wife commutes a half-hour each way daily - had this to say about becoming a parent: "it's changed, radically, once I became a parent, and that's got to do with other priorities entering my life. Both pressures of work a little bit more and then the choice - the necessity - to be with my

children a lot more" have impacted on his play and playing with his children. For Mark, "being involved in other people's play, so to speak, or play centered around them sometimes can make me less . . .eager to pay attention to my own children." Mark also commented that, "the feeling is, if I allow myself to be in the spirit of play, I'll lose track of some agenda that I've become wed to. . . .I can, for instance, do grocery shopping and be playful about it and loose or I can be grocery shopping and be uptight about it and not playful. . . ."

Occasionally awkwardness and negative attitudes around family and play seem to originate from the children themselves. Jim noted that, "the younger one [of his two boys] feels that, if I don't share my time with him equitably, basically he wants to just leave [me] and go back into the house and tell me I'm a terrible father and things like that." Arlo's daughter "said initially that when we moved. . . .five years ago, I think she did complain at various times about having less time for play." Paul noted that "one of the chief things we [he and his son] do together is I read in the evening after supper before he goes to bed. . . .I think he misses that when I'm not here so he would say about my work that sometimes it means I can't read to him. . . ."

There are the high moments, too, for family play. Several fathers noted with delight some of their memories and recollections of favorite ludic moments they have shared with their spouses and children. For Arlo, "some

of my happiest memories are. . .not about the vacations themselves interestingly enough, but about the three day trip on either side of it, when it's just the three of us and we have games that we play in the car and along the way." Steven's needs for family play time appear relatively broad-based: "all I need is to make the time to be with my family. . . Whatever we do is fine because I'm getting what I need which is time with the family and that's what's important to me. . . ."

The daily and seasonal time-frames have an impact on the extent to which fathers can play - and do so most effectively - with their children. Brion acknowledged that, "the thing about our family is that summers have always been really ours - no work. So I think their [his daughters] notion of how we play has a lot to do with summer. . . .We've been together as a family every summer since they were born, so I think that is probably where they would locate that piece of our relationship." Paul recalled that "in terms of playing with them, another way during the week that might happen is an evening where we might play a board game. . .or sometimes go out in the back we'll get into a soccer game after supper - all of us - and that's just uproarious - carefree and light-hearted and sometimes just plain funny."

Family unity and harmony seemed important for some of the fathers, as we saw with Paul's comment just above. Another example of this came from Jep, when he fondly reflected, "It's just fun to be the three of us

playing something that all of us enjoy and watching Josh progress - there's kind of a parental thing of. . .it's nice to have someone else that cares as much about this kid as you do watching him. . .hit the ball or make a basket. . .so there's a kind of probably deep unconscious sort of childhood kind of happiness. . .like, 'oh yeah - this is how it's supposed to be'. . . ." He also stated that, "I play much more like a kid playing with another kid than a dad who comes home and takes his suit off and changes and then throws the ball around with his son - I'm more sort of like pals. . .and that has to do with the sort of fluidity of my job role and the lack of boundaries. . . ."

b. The Impact Of Play On The Spousal Relationship

Given the overall busyness of each father's daily schedule and the various pressures that inevitably conflict and occasionally erupt both professionally and personally, a few of those interviewed spoke about the impact of marriage on their play with their spouses. Not surprisingly, the lack of time was a factor, but there were a few other considerations that they mentioned as well.

Steven noted that "Joan [his wife] and I have some difficulty in building play into our lives in a more micro way. . .the camping we do is more macro, it's like totally stepping outside of the routines and leaving and breaking it wide open and then we're reasonably capable of doing that - but in the course of the routine of day-to-day life and the responsibilities and the

ways in which we each engage in our work lives, I think we find it hard to build in family play 'cause often it's one or the other of us parenting while the other person is doing something else." He also noted that "I get more silly with Ellie and Micah than I do with Joan." Jep also pointed out the lack of spousal play time: "I'd say one of the tolls of a two-career family is a kind of 'Pony Express' parenting which is each of us is present with Josh but it's like the mail and we hand him off to one or the other, and I'll play with him and then I'll leave and then Carol [his wife] will be with him in the evening watching TV. . .and very often the times when Carol and I are together. . .it's 9:30 or 10:00 at night so there's a level of tiredness. . ."

Paul indicated a similar type of concern about what it means and what it's like for a married couple to play: "with Reisha [his wife], when I think about playing then I get a little confused, as far as that category and how it applies to grown-ups being together. . .I'm not sure if they [his two children] would think of Reisha as playful, and me as kind of more serious, so that's the question that they will have to be the final judges of. . ."

In terms of external factors affecting and influencing their interest in and ability to play with their children, these eight fathers generated an interesting range of experiences and images. The external factors of work, career, family, marriage, and time pressure are dynamic considerations for their lives and lifestyles as both of these continue to evolve. Collectively - and as individuals - they point out some of the confusion, the contradictions,

the paradoxes, and, more than occasionally, the joys of playing in various contexts. These critical points will serve as some of the foci for analysis in the fifth and penultimate chapter. Before reaching this larger analysis, however, the last section of this chapter will focus on fathers' play with their children based on what we have seen thus far.

D. Fathers' Reflections On Their Play With Their Children

1. Introduction

After reflecting on their personal play histories and the internal and external factors which influenced and shaped them, the fathers interviewed spent the majority of their second interview sessions reflecting on the nature of play with their children. In their first interviews, most fathers stated outright that they had never given thought to the subject of their own fathering and play; indeed, several of them exclaimed throughout the second interview that what was coming to them was no less than a series of revelations and smaller "ah-ha's".

In this section, five specific themes will be explored. Each one serves in a foundational way to enhance and expound upon the how, what, and why of fathers' play styles and activities with their offspring. These considerations are:

- 1) spontaneous physical play;
- 2) structured physical play, including organized games and sports;
- 3) board and box games;

- 4) verbal, linguistic, and other forms of interactive games and play;
- (5) the question of initiative and who leads play.

2. Spontaneous Physical Play

Spontaneous physical play involves the flow of flexible physical contact between a father and his child(ren). It is unplanned, unrehearsed, often without pattern, and usually voluntary. For Paul, "tossing a ball back and forth with my son - that I love to do, and. . .to play soccer with him or my daughter who's sixteen - I play a little bit but it's too tiring." Despite his occasional physical fatigue, Paul happily recalled, "sometimes in the back [of the house] we'll get into a soccer game after supper - all of us. . . ." His other spontaneous physical play activities with his children include "hanging out together and tossing a frisbee, flying a kite, and taking walks." Jim recalled that, "I play with my kids a lot - they say, 'Come on dad, let's kick the ball around, come on dad, let's play catch. . .that's fun for me. . . ." He added, "I really got into skiing last year so we did a lot. . .that's what I've chosen to do with them." As he reflected on being a player in all seasons with his two boys, Jim noted, "they want to play in the waves and play with sand castles and take big long walks on the beach. . .so it's pretty busy in that time." He pursues spontaneous play actively: "they're sitting there zombied out on the couch watching TV or something like that and I go over

and sit down with them and tickle them and stuff like that." On tickling as a "contact sport" Jim noted that, "I guess I'm the Chief Tickler Wiggler." His spontaneous urges to play are backed up by his philosophical approach: "Some of the best opportunities for promoting these values that I have about play come up when there's more spontaneity." Steven said, "we have wonderful play times together ranging from just rolling around on the rug and giggling for no reason at all except that we want to be silly when playing cards or going on walks. . . ." About his nearly-two year old son Micah, Steven said, "With Micah I'm likely to just go out and wander around." Mark noted that, "I'll do more wrestling - the girls love to wrestle. . . . I'll get involved in more physical kinds of play and later outdoor things and throwing a softball" Mark's stance on tickling diametrically opposes Jim's: "I don't tickle my kids as a way of getting a reaction or getting them to laugh - I roughhouse with them and get them to laugh by just looking at them if I'm in the right mood and they're open to it - because tickling feels like a sort of physical invasion. . . .at the same time I can tune in with the wrestling to make sure that I don't overpower them." Arlo recalled "an amusing activity that she [his daughter] seemed to like was being wrapped up in a blanket and just carried around the house - and so we'd carry her around the house and she'd have to guess where she was based on how long we'd been doing this and if she could imagine from the motion. . . ." Brion noted the physicality of play with his youngest of two

daughters: "Play with Sophie was always more active - going out throwing a ball, running, bicycling. . . .If you don't play with Sophie while she's moving, you don't play with her." Ken's spontaneous physical play with his two young girls is "mostly outdoor activities. . .swimming, beach stuff, hiking, picking blueberries. . . ." Jep noted, "I have memories of playing whiffle ball in the front yard of this house." What is consistent with these fathers seems to be their desire to engage in physically challenging and interactive activities, primarily outdoors, with their children.

3. Structured Physical Play

In addition to spontaneous physical play with their children, several of the fathers spoke of more structured physical play, including organized games and sports. Here, rules must be taught, followed, and monitored more closely in order that the child learns to play the sport or game in question effectively and efficiently. Specific physical (gross and fine motor, hand-eye coordination) skills are developed and refined and mental attitudes are similarly effected.

For Steven, "one of the most structured ways right now [with his daughter Ellie] is that I coach her soccer team, and so that's a chance for us to play together in certain ways." He added, "I might go out and shoot hoops with Ellie" as another way of their engaging in structured physical play. Mark and his daughters have "recently played soccer and whiffle ball.

. . . Playing with my children I'm much more apt to pitch a baseball and chase them around the bases than to be an active focal point." Jim said, "I'll play soccer on the lawn with them, soccer, basketball, baseball, almost every time that I have any time they want me to come out and play with them." He said, "he'll sort of make it so the kids can win. . .we do a lot of kicking a soccer ball back and forth. . .trying to get a ball away from each other. . . ." Thinking more about structured play, Jim added, "there's these organized things that go on. . .a lot of times kids will come over and we'll play basketball in the driveway. . . ."

In the winter time, Jim added, "we've gone out skiing for two years - all three of us - and for three years, me and the older one, that's been one of our winter things. . . ." By the same token, Jep recalled "having this very distinct image of this winter going to Attitash [ski area in New Hampshire] with him [his son Josh] and a friend and skiing and realizing. . .how great that was to be with him and to ski with him and how much fun that is to be sort of chasing him." Brion's track, so to speak, was different on the ski situation: "I'm less likely to take my kids skiing than other fathers might be - or to take them bowling. . . .I would say that my play with my kids is much more social service-oriented [working on socially-conscious and conscientious projects] than most fathers. . . ." Brion indicated that what he meant through this statement that play with his children is for him not only

"for fun" - he prefers his play with his daughters to involve socially and politically engaging activities with a larger meaning and purpose.

4. Board And Box Games

The third element of father's play with their children brought forward the time-honored tradition of board (also known as box) and card games. Virtually every father's family (in both generations) had one or more of these and they formed one of the social gathering points for fathers' families, both birth and present. Fathers' interest in this type of structured and sedentary play waxed and waned, although almost all of them had both positive and negative feelings about this form of play. The content and structure of playing these games was generated spontaneously through the fathers' responses to interview questions of a more general nature.

Brion was brief in his reflection on board and card games: "I never played board games very much with either of them [his two daughters]." Paul said that with his children he "would in the evening play a board game or two. . .we sometimes get into Scrabble or Boggle or there are always new games coming out and really hilarious to play. . .this one called Forbidden Words or words you can't say - you have to describe something without saying the word. . .anyway we get a big kick out of that - just a lot of fun." Ken mentioned that he "sometimes plays cards with the kids. . ." Jep recalled "there were board game phases where he [his son] would play The Game of Life. . .and of course the omnipresent video games which were

introduced. . . ." Steven noted, "I got away from box games and card games although we still play them. And now with Ellie, our ten year old, I've been doing a little bit more of that." Jim said, "sometimes we play board games - I would say maybe the most would be twice a month at this point. . . .Both of them [his two boys] really like the board game stuff more than they used to. . . .I've played enough checkers with my oldest, but the second one - I haven't played as many checkers with him. Ahh, but I think the board game phase is probably just about to start and we play a lot of cards with them actually. . . .", even though "I'm not really a huge board game person." Mark noted, "We've occasionally played board games" without adding more to this particular reflection.

5. Verbal, Linguistic, And Other Forms Of Interactive Play

Another way these fathers play with their children is through language and the arts. This is particularly true with fathers whose children are young, in the early elementary grades. They use fantasy, imagination, and creativity in evolving these play activities and involving their children in them.

Jim noted that, "I'd like to see more of the contemplative thing. . .the discussing thing. . .as a part of our play together. . . .We do a lot of fantasy play, and. . .my kids at home really love it when I do puppet play and storytelling. . . ." Something both he and his boys enjoy "is when we sit

down and we talk and chitchat and fool around and then maybe there's kidding" He added, "I wish I had more time to do more puppet play, more telling of stories - moral stories. . .and more intellectual things - more puzzles and games, but. . .I'm an interpersonal person and I don't do as many puzzles and games."

One of the more interesting elements of father-child verbal play is its remarkably versatility and adaptability across a multitude of environments.

Mark spoke of this when he talked about how he brings these types of games on the road: "we've actually developed all sorts of car games we like to play. . . ." He likes to "make up games - we found that if we just sat down to eat, chances are that Ann [his wife] and I might start talking and if we did then the girls would lose interest and leave the table so we had to think of a way to get them involved and so I've developed a bunch of creative games to get their interest, like. . .'What would you do if's?' to get them to sort of think about problems and ethical dilemmas and stuff like that, so I've got a zillion variations and each thing leads to another question, and each question helps me think of another question in response." Brion commented that, "play with Gretchen [his older daughter] was more sedentary. . .more drawing, reading, music - she likes to do more things that I guess would be considered more solitary and that you could kind of do together." Of his own choice, he noted that "I'm much more likely to watch a video with them about something I care about or read a story with them

or take them on a project or something like that. . . ." Paul also pursues a similar experience: "One of the chief things we do together is I read in the evening after supper before he [Thomas, his son] goes to bed. . . ." He added, "What I love to do with Thomas, since he has a certain amount of artistic interest, is if he's drawing something, I join him; we draw something together and we have fun making birthday cards. . . ."

6. Leading The Play And The Question Of Initiative

Given all the different types of play in which fathers engage their children, the questions of "Who starts?" and "Who leads?" are important in bearing out the specific activities and how they are made manifest. A few of the fathers commented on the concern around who initiates father-child play.

Brion noted that "joining their activities has been more a part of my play now - although it's always been a part - it was always a question of joining into their activities as opposed to inventing activities for us to do." This contrasts with Mark's car and meal-table games. Paul found that "at their [his children's] insistence I come in [the ocean] for a little bit - but I don't stay long". Ken observed, "I think the kids sort of wait for me to initiate play because they assume if I don't initiate it that we're not going to be in that mode, so I think most of the time I initiate play activity because I

don't think they would." He noted, however, that "both of them will ask if I want to do something, but they know that there's so many things that they do that I'm just completely uninterested in." Ken found that "most of the time that they are playing, they don't engage me in it because it's not something that I have any interest in being engaged in, so most of the time when we do something together it will be something that I ask them if they want to join me in. . .so actually when we play together it's more my initiating it than their initiating it."

Jep noted that "it's more equal when I play with Josh. . . .When he was younger, I would initiate it a little more than I do now or he would initiate and say, 'Hey dad come here and do this'. . .but now, when he's becoming more independent, I say, 'Do you want to go outside and shoot hoops'. . .so, in terms of initiating it, I would say he initiated a little more than I do. . . 60% him, 40% me. . . ." Steven noted that with his son, Micah, he lets "him [Micah] lead the way and go look at this or go look at that or stop and sit in someplace and explore and that's kind of different from how it would be with Ellie. . . .I might go out and shoot hoops with her. . . ." With Ellie, Steven estimates that "it's probably 50/50 in taking into account all of the different ways in which we interact playfully. . . .It's at least 50/50, maybe I get 60/ 40. . .but I think it's actually changing toward her initiating play more, and . . .I really have to give her a lot of credit." Jim feels that "it's gotta be an exchange; they gotta like to do it or get involved;

their response is as important as my precipitating and the other way around. . .so it's gotta be mutual." He added, "especially when they're anxious for instance, at night, often they'll ask me to tell them a story. . . ." On the other hand, "they like to put on a record or a tape and dance, and we started them doing that but . . .now they're starting us doing that."

The spirit of compromise seems to dwell in Jim on this topic of who initiates play as is exemplified in this statement: "They [his boys] want to fish but I have to confess I'm not much of a fisherman - I think I've done it twice with them - and the older one was very big on it last year so we went off with a friend of mine and his kids. . . ." Mark's girls pursue him and more: " they are sometimes curious about my work - sometimes they'll play with me. . . . They'll say, 'I need a therapist today', or 'What kinds of things do people do with therapists' - they'll ask questions, but also because my office is attached to the house, they come up here and use some of the things that I use in play therapy, and I think there's something about these toys because they're not really theirs but they are available to them - and there's something particularly interesting about these toys for that reason. . . ."

Depending on his reading of their moods, he will pursue them as well: "at this point I know them so well that I can tell whether they are wanting to play something or not - and I have to admit I've been known to grab especially my younger one, kiss her or just cuddle her up or ruffle around with her just because I feel like doing it and not knowing how she'll respond

- sort of doing it spontaneously - but very quickly I can tell whether she wants to or not" Arlo stated that he, too, will not hesitate to pursue play with his daughter, and offered this example: "when she came back on Saturday [sic], she immediately wanted to have a friend over and I said, 'No, let's you and I hang out today - we've got a number of things that we need to do around here, and I'd like your help on', and so we ended up doing that together, working in the garden for a couple of hours and then going out."

It is evident from this distillation of data that most, if not all, of these fathers play both the pursuer and pursued in their play with their children.

It is just this kind of flexibility and adaptability that enables and enhances their relationships with their offspring to develop through play. What appears to be an intuitive knowledge and understanding of each child's needs and nuances, coupled with their own desire for play and intellectual and physical connection, supports their creativity and positive attitude toward play.

Above and beyond the specific content of the fathers' play activities with their children lie four larger methods of ludic behavior. In this next section, these four categories are elaborated upon by the fathers' descriptions of how they play, or, rather, how they think about their play with their children. This metacognitive understanding may enable them to move freely among the areas of play in that they recognize the need for balance, both for

themselves and their young ones. The four categories that emerged from the interview transcriptions are as follows:

- a) cooperative/mutual/sharing types of play;
- b) competitive play;
- c) play involving paternal teaching/coaching/skill building;
- d) play specifically aimed at involving laughter and humor.

a. Cooperative Play

Cooperative play is ludic behavior which is mutually agreed upon and shared, equal in power, and easily initiated by either party. There's a sense of "we-ness", togetherness, that goes a long way in both bonding and building father-child relationships.

Steven noted that, "I'll play cards with Ellie, and the three of us might play cards together." He recalled that, "when Ellie was young I was in a play group with two other fathers and their children and we would meet every couple of weeks or every month and we'd get together and spend a bunch of hours together playing. . . ." Jim places cooperation and mutuality of endeavor high on his play scale: "I want to be with them - I want to have a nice exchange, and I want them to remember that it was fun to play. . . .I want to do things that they want to do. . .there's a bond and I

want that bond." Mark, too, wants "to do more activities that don't mean anything other than the joy of doing them together rather than any number of things that they feel like they're doing to sort of keep the ship floating." He added that he feels it is important "to find room in my play to enjoy it even if it's mostly on their [his daughters'] terms, there has to be a way to find that I feel it is free and fun." Brion has always felt that, "joining their activities has always been a part of my joy in playing with [them]. . . .It was always a question of (my) joining into their activities as opposed to inventing activities for us to do." It's been his perception that "the majority of the time I'm responding to what they're doing in their leisure time and trying to support them." Brion also feels that "it is good to follow your kids' lead and not initiate too much. To be with them on their terms in that sense as opposed to defining what play is for them." Paul noted that, "I think if we're going to play it's more likely that he [his son] would say, 'Let's do this or that', and then what we actually do though I might take the lead in so I . . . might get something started, and he might take the lead or he might say, 'Let's do something', but once we do it, depending on what the activity is, I might be more involved." Ken stated that "we don't have a lot of organized time when we play games as a family, except when we're on vacation and we're traveling. . . .It would definitely be cooperative." Jep added to the chorus of cooperative father-players: "I'd say that I'm flexible - I can do practically anything that he [his son Josh] can do, and I'm easily

entertained, so I enjoy doing different stuff with him. . . .It's not as though there were only a couple of things that I can do with him." Steven perhaps summed it up for all these fathers with his statement that, "probably the first thing that comes to mind in my play is a means and a mode of connection with my children."

b. Competition In Play

The other side of the cooperative/collaborative play continuum is competition. As has already been documented, these eight fathers grew up in familial, social, and educational environments which enabled - and sometimes forced - them to develop cooperative and competitive play skills. Several of these fathers spoke to how successfully they integrated this element into play with their children. While competition has occupied less of their attention and play-time energies than its counterpart, cooperative play, it was nonetheless clear that competition had a niche in their play endeavors with their children.

Paul noted that he saw "the interaction around play diminishing as their [his two children] play became more sports-related, and now they're off on these organized sports. . . ." One insight he made joining the issues of gender and competition was: "when my daughter was growing up, I thought it was great that she was playing sports, but I didn't have any investment in whether she did it or not or how well she did it - whereas with my son, I

don't want him to fall into this awful categorization that the "real men" play sports; on the other hand, I noticed, 'He's playing soccer now', and I like that he's decent as a soccer player. . .I think that sports for a boy are more central to his success and self-image." Ken stated that, "it's certainly not competitive. . .with the family, which is how I tend to play. . . ." Thus, for himself, Ken apparently prefers more traditional competitive play forms, but, when the venue changes to his home and family, he (with his wife and two daughters) opts for a more cooperative method of play. Steven volunteered that with his family, he, too, is "not overly attached to the winning components of play. . . ."

Mark's views on competition in his play with his children is something he consciously tries to avoid: "I try to make most of our play non-competitive and if there's anything that has a competitive piece to it - like lately we've been playing sort of a game of hide-and-seek outside and tag games and things like that - I'm very sensitive to not overwhelm my girls by any need I have to win or teach them to lose or to get them more competitive or more driven. . . .I'm just not into that and generally will let them win unless it's apparent to me that they need the challenge of losing sometimes to make it more exciting." It is interesting to note that, around the cooperative/competitive continuum, the fathers themselves seem to dictate the agenda more than their offspring. Whether this preference is based on their own childhood and play history or their perceptions of their

childrens' needs and nuances is a question for further speculation, and one worth pursuing.

c. Play And Skill-Building

Another way these fathers see themselves as playing with their children is through teaching, coaching, and skill-building. Although only three fathers spoke on this element of play, it was an important consideration for them. It is of note that three of the four fathers who raised this issue - Brion, Steven, and Arlo - have been and continue to be educators and trainers. They found that they are able to "play with" teaching skills and coaching their children in playful activities, perhaps, in part, due to the "second nature" aspect of teaching in their work lives. Jim, primarily a therapist, stated that he disagreed with the notion that teaching and coaching can be effectively integrated with the spirit and reality of play with one's offspring, in that he felt the two - playing and teaching - were primarily separate ventures.

Brion enjoys "helping them with science projects - that to me is a kind of play, and I'm drawn to any of that." Steven stated that "one of the most structured ways right now is that I coach her [daughter Ellie] soccer team and so that's a chance for us to play together in certain ways." When Arlo plays with his daughter, he noted that "I think learning is one of the primary things - I think of myself as a teacher. . .like teaching my daughter

to play chess, there's a formal element there and we work on that together, and. . .I try to turn her school work into play." Jim took a minority stance on this consideration: "the athletic stuff in many cases is about skills. . . . When I'm actively trying to teach these things, it doesn't work as well because it interferes with the sort of spontaneity of play. . . ." He explained his strategy in this way: "One of the tactics that I use is that I try not to come down on them heavily and too moralistically, to sort of shame them out of stuff." He appeared concerned about how he plays with "some of the gentler stuff like puzzles together - I guess I think I get more preachy when I do that."

d. Laughter And Humor In Play

One other aspect that emerged has to do with the use of laughter and humor to engage children in play. While laughter and humor are certainly elements of many forms of ludic behavior, several fathers spoke of laughter and humor as a form of play unto itself. In these instances, father-child play does not fit neatly within the scheme of other categories which have been elaborated previously in this discussion. It appears as though the fathers who spoke on the laughter/humor component saw these particular experiences as joyful interactions without stated or intentional goals or objectives.

Steven spoke of "just getting into giggling for giggling's sake as an ecstatic expression of energy" in his play with his daughter Ellie. He noted that "I think she has more access to her silliness than I did and I think I had less support for that piece of it." Mark "roughhouses with them [his two daughters] and get them to laugh by just looking at them if I'm in the right mood and they're open to it. . . ." Arlo recalled a particular play incident with his daughter and said, "she was very funny there. . .it was like that infinite capacity for repeated activity, and we even have a joke about it now, and then she recollects it." Brion reflected that "It's fun to be with us as a family - I enjoy being with us as a family. . .because I find my kids really interesting human beings. It was fun when they were little 'cause they laughed and they had a good time." In discussing his family's play time, Paul said "it's fun, that's all - carefree and light-hearted and sometimes just plain funny - those are the feelings I associate with playing and release of the cares and the burdens. . . ." Knowing this about himself, Paul added, "I think they'll pick up that playful sense of joking and playing and having fun with whatever one is doing - as in the pleasure of reading and drawing for example."

The fact that these fathers appear to genuinely enjoy playing with their children is what stands out from their interviews. They seem to be sensitive to meeting the balance of at times competing needs and desires, and are eager to ensure that their children enjoy both their companionship

and playfulness. For these fathers - whether their play is in cooperative, competitive, teaching, or humor mode - it seems to be intended to forge a sense of connectedness in their relationships with their children.

It is inevitable in human relationships that one will make comparisons between and across individuals to arrive at a better understanding of oneself and other. The next three short sections explore fathers' responses to generational, child gender, and spousal differences as considerations in their ludic attitudes and behaviors with their children.

In detailing their personal "play histories", the fathers were asked to take the long view, a developmental approach to the evolution of their ludic attitudes and actions. As they reviewed and reflected upon these highly individual and idiosyncratic histories, comparisons between how they were played with by their fathers (and mothers) and how in fact they play with their own children were raised. Four elements were identified as significant in this comparative transgenerational view of fathers' play with their children:

- i. organized play;
- ii. unstructured play;
- iii. play style - physical versus intellectual;
- iv. extent of adult involvement and intervention.

i. Organized play. Jep recalled, "The only organized sports I remember were Little League (baseball) - Josh has soccer in the fall and

recreational basketball in the winter and baseball in the spring - and none of that existed, at least where I lived. Everything was baseball in the spring and summer, so other than that I was on my own playing." Steven felt similarly restricted in his organized sports opportunities: "she [his daughter] plays basketball, which I didn't play at all. . . ." Jim "thought we [his generation] played more board games than they did, 'cause I remember lengthy Monopoly games and checkers and I played enough checkers with my oldest, but the second, the first grader, isn't - I haven't played as many checkers with him. I think the board game phase is probably just about to start and we play a lot of cards with them too, actually." Brion compared the extent of his organized play with that of his two girls: "It's more purposeful and planned than it tends to happen. . .like most kids in this generation, as opposed to most kids in my generation, activities are planned for kids today - they go to afterschool programs or they go to lessons or they go to dance. . . .In my day, when I was a kid, that stuff didn't exist. . . .I was on my own with my friends. . . ."

ii. Unstructured Play. Unstructured, or spontaneous, play is something that most of these fathers had experienced throughout their respective childhoods. Some compared the type and extent of play across two generations. Jim "lived in a residential neighborhood in a large city and we didn't have the access to all the different playing fields as much - we

played in what they call empty lots and there on the street and there weren't many other places like that. They [his two boys] have access to all kinds of fields and the street by our house is very heavily traveled, so for them to be playing in the street would be just ridiculous, so they play in the driveway. We have a big driveway but they also have to be taken to places to play, where we could leave the house and be gone all day but my mother would know that we were just a couple of houses away. . . ." Some similarities between his and his childrens' early experiences exist for Jim, however: "they go out and play in the snow no matter what the temperature, which is what we used to do. . . ." Mark sounded a different note: "I liked to be outdoors more than they [his two girls] do. . . ." Brion noted that, "they're [his two daughters] less physical than I was and they're probably less social because a lot of their friends are not in the neighborhood, and that's another big difference."

Paul lamented the lack of an available pool of youngsters for his own children to play with in their neighborhood. He noted, "when I was a kid there were, in the neighborhood, a lot of other kids and after school we went out and played together and that was that. . .there wasn't even Little League that I remember - whereas now to my dismay. . .if Thomas didn't get involved in various programs, he wouldn't have anyone to play with." Steven commented that, "she [his 10-year old daughter] doesn't play quite as much with friends as I remember playing. . . .Of course, I was in a suburban

neighborhood and she's in more of a rural situation so there's less spontaneous neighborhood play." He added, "she reads a lot, and I read a lot. . . .She plays a little bit of card games and box games and stuff like that which I did. . .and I think the quality of her play is similar to mine."

iii. Play Style: Physical Versus Intellectual. In addition to comparing the structure of play transgenerationally, a few fathers commented on the particular style of play, breaking it down to physical versus cognitive/intellectual play modes. Steven noted that "I think she [his daughter] has more access to her silliness than I did, and I think I had less support for that piece of it." Brion stated that, "my kids. . .tend to be more intellectual and less physical. . .but I think that's mostly gender." He added, "If I had boys I'd be doing more sports no doubt. . .'cause I love that stuff. . . it's how to relate to them." Paul said, "Thomas spends more time inside playing video games. . . .When I was a kid we played until the sun went down and then came in and so we could listen to the radio at supertime and did our homework and all, but there wasn't as much pulling one inside. . . ." Ken responded by saying, "I grew up very much in a male-oriented family and now I find myself very much in a female-oriented family, and my play away from my family is time that I spend doing things that are physical - that are things I can't do with my family - and I guess I would like in many ways my kids to be more physical and play. . .to enjoy

soccer a little bit more and do other things I tried. . . ." Jep's comment was: "his [son's] entertainment has to do with his own sort of playing inside with video games and there's much more structured activities."

iv. Extent Of Adult Involvement And Intervention. Several fathers reflected on the extent of adult involvement and intervention in their play with their children. Jim noted that his "father was working a lot. . .he wasn't around to tickle and play games." Partly because of this, he remembered "really not having much interference from any adults - we really went out and it was our own thing." He also noted how, as a child, "we were all sort of afraid of our parents' disapproval", but that his children "sometimes feel in a sense that they don't really have to worry about the parental response, though I don't want them to fear my response, though I don't mind if they worry about it and have it be part of the consideration." Arlo said, "for instance, building a fitness trail or going and working out on the fitness trail would have been unimaginable to my father. . .he simply came from a more formal age, and my mother came from a more formal age, and both came from a more formal society than our own. . . ." Mark recalled, "I don't think I played with my parents as much as they [his two daughters] do with me . . ." Brion observed that, "of course when your kids are linked up into things, there's less role for you as an adult 'cause there are other adults there playing that role. So other people come to take more

of your place." He added, "I think I make more time for [his two daughters] Gretchen and Sophie than my dad did for me. . . ." This time/attention/energy differential may be due at least in part to the fact that, "he also had very much less time than I did since I've had school vacations and summers. . .in the sense of how we compared that way I would say I have light years more time than he did and therefore much more time to build a relationship in that sense." Paul, the oldest father in this sample of eight, looked at age considerations: "My father was fifty when I was born as I was fifty when Thomas was born, so I did not grow up with the idea that parents played with kids. . . ." He added that, "I think I'm physically more active and therefore involved with the kids in some of the sports playing they do and actually the reading thing and the drawing stuff and all that. . .my mother was a school teacher so most of the time parental involvement with our work came from my mother, not my father. . .so anyway, I think I'm much more involved in that comparison." For Ken, "the differences in terms of play with myself and my girls may be that I indulge them a bit more than I was indulged - and I'm not sure that's good or bad, that's just different." He added, "I don't think in my father's generation most parents spent a lot of time thinking about how they are going to play with their children - I don't think there was a high priority, nor should there be a high priority on how one plays with one's children. . .kids take care of themselves, they play with each other. . . ." Jep responded with: "I'm around way more than my

dad was around, but I was comfortable with the amount of time my dad spent with me because that's the amount of time he spent with me I just figured that's the way it was." He sees this as part of a greater evolutionary development: "My father was much more present and playful than my grandfather was and although I remember playing rummy with my grandfather, he seemed. . .more removed from my father than my father was from me, and my father was more removed from me than I am from Josh."

Do fathers play differently with their daughters than they do with their sons? For most of the fathers interviewed, this questions remained on the hypothetical level, as only two fathers - Steven and Paul - have children of both genders. For the remaining six, those who commented did so speculatively and on the basis of either vicarious or once-removed (themselves growing up, or peers with children of both genders) experiences.

Although not much was spoken on this topic, four mini-considerations appeared:

- (1) comparisons on competitive play;
- (2) comparisons on cooperative play;
- (3) comparisons in content and activities;
- (4) comparisons of style: aggressive/active versus sedentary/ quiet.

Paul alone spoke of child gender and the notion of competition, noting that he had less of an investment with whether his daughter engaged in competitive sporting activities than his son. He shared his concern that his

son not fall into the societally-conditioned and imposed notion that "real men" play sports. Paul added that he felt that playing sports was indeed more central to a boy's success than a girl's in regard to the development of self-image and self-esteem.

Ken talked about the differences in cooperative play between boys and girls, and what they chose to play with. He stated, "I'm struck by how different the gender differences are. . . .When my first girl was born, I was going in with a very non-sexist attitude and planning to buy all kinds of construction toys and trucks and other stuff and was truly astounded with how little interest she displayed in the building items and constructive toys and the like. . .and much more interest in playing with people-oriented items such as dolls or interactive items or the like with other people just from the onset of formal play". He discovered critical differences between the genders. Paul noted that, "with Tara [his sixteen year old daughter] being into teenagerhood, I don't see her playing as much in the sense of sitting around and drawing as Thomas might do." Jep wondered aloud about these differences: "I'm real curious to know how my experience compares with people who are parents of daughters, and how they play with their daughters and what's the difference, how the mother interacts with the daughter as opposed to how the father reacts with the son and all that kind of stuff. . . ."

A few fathers commented on how boys and girls compare regarding aggressive and active play and sedentary, quiet play. Jim pointed out, "from the time you're twelve years old or so, the only way you [as a male] can get in touch with people is to. . .either fight with them, or fall in love with them and hug them. . . ." Brion noted that "I played different because I'm a boy and they're girls. So, I did much more physical play than either of them do. . . if I had boys I'd probably be doing more sports, no doubt. . .'cause I love that stuff, it's how I relate to them." Paul stated that, "it's much the case with the two kids - Tara likes sports so although an obvious thing might be involved with sports with your son than daughter given the typical sex roles, that isn't the case - Tara runs track and plays soccer and likes to toss a ball around - has a good arm - is very good at frisbee - it's not that she's primarily a jock but she's good at that sort of thing, so in playing with her I do all those things. . . ." Ken's comment was: "obviously aggression is a little bit different. . . .The girls. . .have plenty of their own sorts of aggression but they don't have organized games playing with guns or teams or that sort of thing. . . ." Those fathers who spoke on this topic seemed to understand that each gender has different ways of "playing out" its aggressiveness through play, and that for each it is important to do so. They see that there indeed are distinctions to be made between the ways that boys and girls play aggressively and what our culture says in allowing them to do so.

The last area of exploration in this chapter focuses on spousal differences and child play. The few fathers who spoke on this subject provided nearly unanimous agreement: fathers played more aggressively and more competitively than did mothers with their children. In only one case - Paul's - were the traditional spousal gender roles somewhat reversed. It must be noted that Paul is the oldest father in the study by more than six years, and his wife is ten years his junior. Most of the other fathers stated that their play matched conventional sex-role stereotypes, as did the play of their wives.

On the competitive/collaborative continuum, Steven said, "she's [Joan, his wife] not involved with Ellie [their daughter] in the same way as me." Jim attested to the fact that it is "very clear that I'm a lot more aggressively involved. . . ." He added that his wife's "competitiveness comes out in terms of asking them about their homework." However, when it comes to box and board games, he tells his boys, "Watch out for Mom, boys, she's a real tiger at this, she's really gonna go crazy." His wife "doesn't care much about the rough play, that's not a turn-on for her, whereas with me it is; I do more rough play. . . ." Mark stated that he'll "do more wrestling; Ann [his wife] doesn't like to wrestle with them." He added that he is "more likely to push limits, getting wilder I guess - I'm more likely to try to play and move their play outdoors than I'd say she is. . . ." Paul was the sole father to speak in reverse of this trend: "Reisha [his wife] will be wrestling and giggling and

physically playing with them, and I don't do much of that, as also was not done with me, and occasionally I feel regretful about that." Paul noted that "she might tickle her [their daughter] and get her engaged in some kind of horse play that I don't, and ditto with Thomas. . . ." Ken observed that "she [his wife Vivian] has a very different personality from myself and she's much less competitive than me and much more laid back than me and enjoys taking things a lot more slowly than I do - much less goal-oriented and able to schmooze a lot more - so there are enormous differences in terms of our playstyles and lifestyles." Jep noted that, "if Josh and I play basketball, we keep score and she'll [Carol, his wife] just say, 'Why don't you just shoot and have fun?', and I say, 'We'll shoot and have fun and [keep score]. . . .'"

On the other side of the play continuum is collaborative, cooperative, and intimate play. This, most of these fathers acknowledged, is the primary turf and focus of mothers in their child play. Jim stated, "she likes the dance part, it's big. . .she does the more imaginative play, and. . .probably touches them a little bit more than I do." He added that "she was much more gentle, I think with the child and I wasn't - I wasn't as interested in being gentle." Mark referred to meal times as a source of intimate play: "I play a lot at dinner and Ann tends not to get actively involved." On the other hand, "her play would be more. . .cuddling and things like that - her play would be making something, sewing something, maybe baking

something. . . ." Mark added, "Ann [his wife] perhaps would put a higher priority on cuddling or maybe listening to them or taking care of them as a way of giving to them whereas I might be more apt to play and listen to them - probably not so much - some cuddling certainly and probably not so much taking care of them as a way to relate." Brion noted that his wife, Linda, "is surely more intimate, but. . .in some ways I think I'm more nurturing than she is in the sense that it's easier for me to kind of be with them and shut out the rest of the stuff. . . ." Jep reflected that, "one of the ways that Carol [his wife] plays with him [his son] is watching TV - they get on the couch together when he's finished his homework and watch TV and I don't." On the scorekeeping, Jep said, "even when she does play with him, she's inclined not to keep score." On this subject in particular, it is difficult to find a trend or common thread to the fathers' comments.

In summation, the fathers' voices offer an intriguing range of viewpoints, perspectives, and experiences concerning their actions and attitudes toward their play with their children. Their images and beliefs about father-child play appeared to come from their developmental and chronological circumstances in their lives as well as from thematic and topical orientations about the subject matter itself. There is a sensibility in their words that seems to point to the notion that the ways in which they play in their lives and with their children are evolving and dynamic. Some of the factors involved in the evolutionary and dynamic aspects of father-

child play appear to be focused on their perceptions of their own growth and how they experience the development of their childrens' personalities and attitudes. The learning and understanding curves for these fathers regarding how and why they engage in ludic behaviors with their offspring appear to have not yet peaked. In the next chapter, the words and voices of these fathers will be analyzed with particular reference given to some of the key findings in recent research around fathering and play.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA: MAKING MEANING OF THEIR MEANING-MAKING

The interview data, as suggested in the previous chapter, were extensive and largely self-generated, based on a few specific questions and follow-up probes. What remains as a goal is to distill and make meaning of their commentary. Beyond an interpretation of their voices as revealed in the previous chapter, specific reference will be made to the available research focusing on fathering and play in comparing and contrasting these fathers' images and words to a few key findings to date in the literature. These will be the two integrated aims of this fifth chapter.

Several major themes and findings reveal themselves in the data generated from the interview transcripts. While it is not the objective to deal in great depth with all of them, ten are significant enough to merit a mention at the outset. Among these eight fathers:

- 1) There has been a significant generational shift of ability to play with and an interest in playing with their children.
- 2) Both of the above appear to have increased greatly over the past generation.
- 3) There is a clear movement away from traditional and conventional notions of play; current emphases and definitions have more to do with collaborative and mutually beneficial play as opposed to competitive, win/lose play.

- 4) The aspect of spirituality is embedded in the activities of play and in the philosophical attitudes about and approaches to both play and child-rearing.
- 5) The lack of available time impacts negatively on their abilities to focus on play and to play often and deeply enough with their children to satisfy both children and their fathers. The major reason for this appears to be the consuming nature of the fathers' professional careers.
- 6) The majority of these fathers' physical contact with their children during play is more about gentle touch than competition or rough-play, though a few of the eight indicated enjoyment of "rough-and-tumble" play.
- 7) The most important aspect of fathers' play with their children - according to this sample - is to connect, both emotionally and physically, with their children.
- 8) These fathers appear to be more inclusive and open in their definition of what constitutes play than definitions found in the literature.
- 9) There was much variation among these fathers regarding the separation of "work" and "play". Some wanted to better integrate the two, while others felt that this integration was either impossible and/or unwarranted.
- 10) These fathers see their father-child play as a mutually initiated and equal endeavor.

These ten findings are supported by the data generated by the sixteen interviews with the eight fathers in this study. While several of these conclusions in fact have already been established by previous research contained in the literature - which will be reviewed briefly - a few of the above themes seem to point to new ways that fathers view play in their lives and in their relationships with their children.

It is the specific intention of this chapter to focus on those findings either new to or in contradiction of what the research has found to date. Since the sample itself was selected on the basis of specific criteria to support the concept of fathers' meaning-making in their fathering and play with their children, so, too, have the specific areas of analysis been chosen. The "emergent themes" - those not found in the current body of research and those which seem to cut across or against the grain of what is already known to exist - are areas of particular interest meriting, in the opinion of this researcher, a lengthier and more detailed interpretation.

In the interest of both clarity and brevity, what follows is a summary of those findings supported by, in contradiction of, and new to the literature.

Chart 5.1: Extrapolation Of Findings By Category

| Supported by Research | Contradicting and Expanding upon Research | New to the Literature |
|--|---|-----------------------|
| Generational Shift | | |
| | Gentle not rough play | |
| | | Away from competition |
| | | Play as spiritual |
| Impact of lack of time based on job/career | | |
| | | Play as connector/ion |
| | More inclusive definition | |
| | | Father-initiated play |

The first area of content analysis will be the two themes in this study which have been already established by research findings to date: (1) the generational shift in fathers' interest in and ability to play with their children and the increased attention that play has received in the father-child relationship, and (2) the lack of time for play between fathers and their children due to workplace demands.

A. Findings From This Study Supporting Established Research

Several studies have indicated that fathers are spending more time playing with their offspring than they did in the past (Pleck, 1985; Pleck & Rustad, 1980; Ricks, 1985). Most researchers agree that the time involvement of fathers has increased in its importance to the men themselves, to their children, and to their wives (Baruch & Barnett, 1986; Dickie and Gerber, 1980; Easterbrooks & Goldberg, 1984). Supporting this contention, Grossman et al (1988) note there has been a shift in fathers' own priorities, away from an exclusive focus on workplace endeavors to a more family- and child-centered emphasis, with play becoming a critical factor in the overall quality of fathers' parenting. Eversoll (1979) notes that the overall picture that emerges from her cross-generational analysis of fathering is one in which both fathers and their children expect fathers to be more involved in nurturing and recreational behaviors and less involved in the providing and societal modeling roles than was true a generation earlier.

From what the fathers in the current study have indicated, there has been a pronounced increase in father-child play from their own childhoods to their current role of fathers. Many of the fathers in this study spoke about how, in their tremendous enjoyment of ludic behaviors with their children, they had come to a greater appreciation of their father-role and their children in particular.

In direct correlation with fathers' increased desire to and interest in playing with their children is their frustration with the lack of time and energy they have to participate in play with their children. In a study of male participation in home life with 25 Boston-area families, Lein (1979) found that husbands perceive their paid work as their primary contribution to their families and that they have difficulty relinquishing responsibility for this primary role as breadwinner. Thus, it may be inferred from this finding that fathers appear to struggle with the notion of "letting go," despite the fact that they may have the desire to do so in order to be a more "at home" parent, available to play more with their children. Grossman et al (1988) found strong negative correlations between fathers' job satisfaction and the amount of time they spent playing with their children. They go on to cite the fact that the world of work is a central arena in which men's healthy adaptation in their fathering role is expressed. Levy-Schiff and Israelashvili (1988) concurred, as they found that fathers' work satisfaction is influential in determining the extent of fathers' involvement in play and

affiliative behaviors. While the current study did not query fathers on the extent of their job or professional role satisfaction, the majority of the fathers interviewed in this sample spoke of a greater desire to play with their children but were constrained by work responsibilities. Many of them had indeed faced difficult choices and difficult decisions regarding the conflicts inherent in their professional commitments and ludic preferences. This finding seems to further support that which has already been established through other father-child studies.

Much of what appeared through the fathers' own voices in Chapter Four points to areas not previously studied or cited in the literature. Referring back to Chart 5.1 in this chapter, several of the themes which emerged in this study as either "new findings" or "contradicting previous research findings" will now be examined in light of the literature. These areas have been identified as follows:

- 1) father-child play as a primary form of relational connection
- 2) fathers' preference for cooperative and collaborative play
- 3) fathers' preference for gentle rather than rough-and-tumble play
- 4) the movement toward balanced initiation of father-child play
- 5) father-child play as a form of spirituality

Before moving into an analysis of each of the above, it is important to note that the unique sample of fathers identified in this study may be in part responsible for the novelty and contraindications of these findings.

These fathers were selected for this study specifically because they were perceived by the researcher to have the skills necessary for introspection, meaning-making, and sensitivity (at least professionally) to others' needs and nuances. It may be, therefore, of no surprise that the five findings listed above (and others listed in Chart 5.1) exist because of the uniqueness of these fathers' work-roles, education, values, and priorities.

The next section will examine two themes which, in this study, appear to contradict the findings in the literature. They are: (1) fathers' preference for gentle rather than rough-and-tumble play, and (2) a more inclusive and open definition of play.

B. Findings Which Appear To Contradict The Research

1. The Rough-And-Tumble Play Issue

To frame the context of this aspect of play and fathering, it is useful to give an abbreviated and researcher-accepted definition of the concept of "rough-and-tumble play." This form of ludic behavior involves children or children and adults that takes on the appearance of a physical confrontation. Upon closer observation, however, one may be able to discern smiling or laughter displayed by one or more of the players. Physical contact may be observed but can be distinguished as play by its exaggerated delivery such

as slow motion or "soft" delivery (with animal-based or imaginary sounds or gestures) not intended to injure or aggravate participants.

Although there is some controversy in the literature concerning the extent to which fathers engage in rough-and-tumble play with their children, the majority of findings have indicated that fathers prefer rough-and-tumble play to gentler forms of ludic behavior. Roopnarine et al (1992) found little in their own research and review of the literature to support fathers' preference for this type of play. Others, including Lamb (1977a), Clarke-Stewart (1978), Crawley & Sherrod (1984), Lytton (1976), Power & Parke (1982) and MacDonald & Parke (1986) and Power (1985) all contradicted Roopnarine et al's findings, stating that fathers are inclined to utilize rough-and-tumble play more than mothers and, furthermore, as a preferred form of ludic interaction with their children. The evidence is preponderant in supporting the notion that fathers do indeed engage in - and appear to prefer - rough-and-tumble play with their children.

Given the very physical nature of play that most boys are familiar with over the course of their childhood, it is of no surprise that, as fathers, these same males would prefer to "physicalize" their playful interactions with their own children. In reactivating and recreating their childhood play experiences with their offspring, fathers' so-called "comfort zones" - or "flow channels" to borrow Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) term - are often expressed through modes of interaction that are most familiar to them. For most

males, according to the studies cited above, the "flow" and "comfort" in play has to do with active physical, bodily engagement with others.

In the current study, there was a rich diversity of experience and opinion among the eight fathers regarding the extent of and preference for rough-and-tumble play. Only two fathers - Jim and Mark - stated a clear preference for this form of play behavior with their children. They seemed to enjoy and initiate active physical play, through wrestling and "contact" sports such as football and soccer. While both of them had very different ideas of the use of tickling as a form of play and connection (Jim being very much involved in tickling his two boys, Mark feeling tickling is highly inappropriate with his two girls unless they specifically requested it), they both gave numerous examples of experiences of highly physical play activity, usually paternally initiated.

On the other end of this continuum, Paul, Arlo, Brion, Ken, and Steven seemed to disdain rough-and-tumble contact-based play with their children. One of their modus operandi with regard to play was indeed physical play, but not in the rough-and-tumble mode. Some of them enjoyed sports with their children more than others, but generally all five of these fathers were clear in their preference not to engage in high-contact physical play behaviors. Jep stood somewhere in the middle of this, in that his only boy enjoys highly competitive contact sports such as basketball and Jep will partake in this form of play but not engage in wrestling and tickling.

The two-to-five ratio of fathers preferring rough-and-tumble play to those not engaging in it seems to contradict the findings pointed out in all but Roopnarine et al's research. When they spoke of their more physical play experiences with their children, all eight fathers pointed to their concerns about their children not being hurt physically or emotionally. Indeed, some of their comments were almost protective of their children insofar as fathers did not want to injure, scar, or mar their children or their children's play memories and images.

The majority of these fathers - Steven, Brion, Jep, Mark, Paul, and Ken - added their concerns for how rough-and-tumble play - if and when it was enacted - might negatively impact on the father-child bond and relationship. Their sensitivity around both protecting and enhancing this bond led them to carefully monitor, minimize, and even to eschew, contact-play behaviors. Looking more closely at the three fathers who utilized some rough-and-tumble play (adding Jep to Mark and Jim because he was an occasional engager of this type of play, though usually at his son's insistence), it is important to note that their rough-and-tumble routines came about only through a conditional rationale: to always manifest caution and respect for their children's bodies and moods. Jep and Mark, in particular, voiced their conditional interest in and use of roughhousing with the following concerns:

- 1) the importance they attached to role-modeling in and through play;
- 2) knowing when to stop and how far to go - and looking for signs of this from their children in terms of fatigue, fear, irritability, or other signs of changed affect;
- 3) the value they placed on active listening and good communication;
- 4) the importance they placed on the function of teaching, skill-building, and coaching as aspects of their roles as players'; and
- 5) keeping the issue of competition and the stigmas of winning and losing in perspective and up front throughout their play experiences.

While there is clearly a leaning in this sample toward gentler play, it is also evident that there is a range of feeling and practice along this continuum. To a certain extent, the leaning away from much physical contact in play may be informed by the sample itself: educated middle-income males in the helping professions. Even when there is a decision or a desire on the part of one or more of these fathers to go ahead with rough-and-tumble play, this type of play behavior appears to be reasoned out and implemented carefully and with sensitivity. This brings most of the research findings in this area (other than those of Roopnarine et al) a step further in that these fathers not only play gently, they also can articulate their ludic philosophy and speculate about its origins. Whether this sample and its opinions and actions on the rough-and-tumble play issue indicates a

transition away from "the norm" or is a quirk of the sample itself is an item for further research and documentation.

2. Fathers' Definition Of Play

As a word, concept, and specifically human endeavor, "play" defies a simple dictionary definition, though one exists. In reality, however, play is an extraordinarily broad and complex form of human activity. Much like the notion of "beauty", "play", too, is in the eyes of the beholder: what looks like play to one person may in fact look like a struggle, or outright competition, or work to another. Our uniquely human perceptions of what play is and is not often boil down to a series of micro-to-macro factors in which the individual and/or group is inextricably embedded: culture, language, family, religion/faith, ethnicity, gender, line of work, and level of formal education.

Given all of the inherent complications involved in pinning down an acceptable definition, there are still several general concepts which have formed the basis for understanding and interpreting the literature on play. While most of this material has been explicated in the first part of Chapter Two of this dissertation, it may be helpful to bring forward a few of the most salient features of play for the sake of review, and to compare and contrast them with what the fathers in the current study had to say.

Play takes on a variety of forms: exploratory, functional, constructive, symbolic, games with rules, and rough-and-tumble play. In Bruner et al's (1976) seminal study on play - a volume now unfortunately out of print - five elements were identified in ludic behavior:

- 1) play behavior exhibits dominance of means over ends;
- 2) play behavior is in the simulative mode;
- 3) play provides a temporary moratorium on frustration;
- 4) play's deliberate deemphasis on consequences releases one's attention to explore and realize the possibilities inherent in objects and events;
- 5) because the player is free from environmental threats and urgent needs, play is voluntary in nature and self-initiated.

Taken together and in the larger context of play as both an individual and collective phenomenon, it becomes clearer that, although there may be room for individual or idiosyncratic expressions of play behavior, there are indeed ways of knowing what play is and what play is not.

The eight fathers in this study appear to have gone at least one - if not more - steps beyond this definition. In Chapter Four, Steven spoke of "ecstatic play"; Arlo talked of plays on and play with words; Ken described playing with new modes of surgery in his professional role as a medical doctor; Mark mentioned his playfulness with clients in his therapy sessions; Paul recalled the play in reading and telling bedtime stories at night to his children. In each of these, and other instances, the fathers in this study

focused, albeit perhaps unconsciously - on play as a much more inclusive and expansive form of human behavior than had been previously articulated.

Beyond activity, play for these fathers is attitude - a way of viewing the world, of understanding oneself and one's relationships to people and things of great value in their lives. Several of these fathers appeared to struggle with the role that play had and continues to have in helping to define and enhance some of the key relationships in their lives. Steven, Mark, Ken, Paul, and Jim all made specific mention of how playing with their wives - and their families - created a certain deeper form of intimacy in that it seemed to them to be a mutually engaging endeavor. Indeed, the idea of play having such serious and far-reaching meaning in the lives of fathers is a stretch, a growth mark perhaps, from what has been commonly held as a definition of play. This stretch, coupled with the grappling many of these fathers experienced in making meaning of play in their lives, yielded a new focus altogether - the theme of play as a form of spirituality. This theme will be looked at in greater depth later in this analysis.

For play to include many of the non-dictionary-based activities mentioned by the majority of these fathers, one might infer that they, too, were going beyond the bounds and limits of what they had previously seen as play. If, for example, Paul is convinced that the reading and telling of bedtime stories is indeed a ludic behavior, then he would likely bring to this activity an attitude of playfulness, in order to encourage and support both

himself and his offspring to enter into a joint and mutual play experience. Other fathers who cited situations beyond the normally accepted confines of play would, most likely, have brought similar playful attitudes.

Thus, it appears that the somewhat straightforward and linear definitions of play found in the literature seem to be a restriction to a fuller understanding as to how these fathers think and act. It is as though they literally and figuratively "played" with the very definition of play. Many of them brought their own conscious and conscientious styles of parenting to play and allowed their own spirit of adventure to bring them into territory not necessarily found in their own childhoods with their parents.

C. Findings New To The Literature

Perhaps due to the intensity of the interviewing process - or, again, the sampling of fathers interviewed - there were several themes which appeared to be novel given the current state of research on fathering and play. It is, of course, difficult and perhaps impossible to discern precisely why these new findings emerged as they did. What is perhaps more important at this point is to articulate them, and this will be the focus of this section.

The four particular themes which have either not been addressed or addressed only minimally in the research to this point in time are:

- 1) the shift from competition toward collaborative and cooperative play;
- 2) the shift to father-initiated play;
- 3) play as a form of connection and bonding;
- 4) play as spirituality.

1. The Shift From Competition Toward Collaborative And Cooperative Play

Curiously, there is very little documentation in the literature that discusses the competitive-to-collaborative play continuum within the father-child relationship. Given recent books documenting the functional and dysfunctional roles that competition "plays" in our society today (Kohn, 1986; Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Czikszentmihayli, 1975, 1990) this paucity is particularly surprising.

What exists on fathers, their play with their children, and the competition/collaboration continuum focuses exclusively on fathers and their infants. Naturally, as infants and toddlers do not have the necessary social or fine and gross motor skills, or intellectual prowess to compete, most play at this level tends to be child-centered and cooperative. Aguilar (1985) points out that a young child's play is most often influenced by members of that child's immediate family, especially a person in a position of authority and leadership. Often, this person is the father, who has grown up with competition surrounding him. Competition - and competitive play - have, for most fathers, played a central role in their socialization process. When

Kohn (1986) speaks of "family relations," he focuses on the tremendous extent to which family dynamics are indeed governed by the parents' competitive yearnings and needs (both directly and vicariously). According to Kohn, these competitive urges - some conscious, some unconscious - filter through to the children from birth and are - at least in part - responsible for that awkward dynamic known as "sibling rivalry."

In McGovern's (1990) and Stevenson et al's (1988) *Social Relations Models*, there is no mention made of competitive play between fathers and their children. Conversely, in Johnson and Johnson's 1989 volume dedicated to theory and research on cooperation and competition, there is not one mention of the father-child or familial relationships. One of the definitive volumes on play, edited by Bruner (1976), similarly makes little mention of competitive and cooperative play between fathers and their children, although its more than forty articles span virtually all other aspects of social interactive play.

In this study, it seemed that fathers were willing and able to explicate their views on competitive and cooperative play above and beyond what has been documented previously in the literature. Both themes of competition and cooperation are present throughout their interviews. It appeared that many of them grappled with how to balance these points, with an awareness that both aspects existed in their play relationships with their children.

There seem to be dual considerations in regard to how these fathers engage in competitive play with their children. On the one side, fathers compete in a physical manner; the other side includes verbal play. Steven spoke of serving as his daughter's soccer coach; Jep plays one-on-one basketball with his son; Mark plays softball with his two girls and chases them around the bases; Jim engages in several athletic endeavors and board games with his boys where he sees that winning is an outcome and doesn't shy away from it. Arlo talked of his own adolescent experiences as a debater and how he continues to play, sometimes as sport, with words with his daughter. Mark spoke about the word games he and his wife Anne invent for their family to play at the dinner table and on outings. In many of these instances, fathers noted that they (or their children) would keep score; Jep even volunteered that his wife, Carol, suggested he and his son drop this aspect of playing together - but they kept at it. There are thus numerous examples of how these eight fathers do engage in competitive ludic behavior with their children.

What is particularly interesting about the way in which they spoke of and appear to engage in competitive play is the strong sense of caution and awareness about its possible consequences for both their children as individuals and the father-child relationship. Many of their comments were prefaced and/or followed by reflections about "damage-control" and concern that winning/losing/scorekeeping not dictate the experience or their child's

perception of that experience. This gets back to one of the core definitional aspects of play itself: that of play as an attitude, not simply or wholly an experience. For the most part, while these fathers tended to accept and occasionally encourage competitive play, they were decidedly unenthused by its presence at home with their children for a few reasons:

- 1) Mark, Steven, Ken, and Brion each noted that they feared and had experienced the fact that competition tended to break down the bond and connection they had with their children;
- 2) Competition occasionally distracted fathers themselves from maintaining full and complete attention on their child and the activity itself as a vehicle for closeness;
- 3) Ken, Mark, and Arlo noted that they found competitive play a more desirable experience in their work than in their home, as it was a more acceptable workplace endeavor and attitude;
- 4) There was a note of concern sounded by Steven, Paul, Jep, Mark, and Brion that playing competitively could negatively impact their children's self-esteem or their interest in particular activities - the loss of self-esteem through play being something which these five had experienced themselves in their own childhoods;
- 5) Paul, Ken, Arlo, and Jim spoke at one point about how they preferred competitive play to be an entire family activity rather than one which focused exclusively on the father-child dyad; they felt the broader inclusion of their wives helped in some way to defuse winning or losing because their wives for the most part were less interested in competition and outcomes than they were; the inclusion of their spouses was preferred by them for the sake of balance.

On the cooperative side of the play continuum, these fathers appeared much more enthusiastic. Experiences such as Paul reading and sharing

bedtime stories with his boy, Steven playing hide-and-seek with his girl as she left for school on a bus, and Jim's tickle-games are but a few scenarios that exemplified ways in which fathers chose to play in a cooperative manner with their children. Their words bespoke a greater sense of safety and comfort when they engaged in this form of ludic behavior; it seemed "closer to home" in terms of their own value and belief systems. The examples and situations including cooperative play were far more numerous and enthusiastically reviewed than those involving competition.

While it appears that these eight fathers did indeed engage in competitive verbal and physical play with their offspring, their preference was more toward cooperative play. It seems that the predominant attitude of the fathers interviewed for this study is one of benign acceptance and utilization of conventional competitive play with their children. They allowed it, sometimes they pursued it, but it seemed that they were aware of its risks and perils in engaging in competition. One hypothesis to explain this attitude is that as comfortable, financially and professionally successful men, they may not have as much to "prove" by winning over their children in play. In a sense, they may feel that they have already "won" at two other forms of play: work and healthy and successful marriages. Beyond winning in play with their children, these fathers tended to demonstrate "life's lessons" - discipline, respect, tolerance, open-mindedness, living "by the

rules" and so forth - through noncompetitive play (including games, role-modeling, mimicry, word play) or other forms of interactive activity.

2. Fathers' Desire To Initiate Play

What does it mean for a father to initiate play with his children?

The act of initiation - regardless of endeavor - is imbued with certain risks, responsibilities, and power. When Jim sneaks up behind one of his boys to get into a "tickle fight" he is, in a sense, initiating a play sequence. He takes a risk in this activity in that his boy may reject his approach; he takes on the responsibility of ensuring that his child doesn't get hurt (physically and emotionally) through this endeavor; and, finally, he has a certain amount of power over his boy in that the "tickle fight" was premeditated and, at least initially, under his control - his boy was "vulnerable." Similarly, when Mark begins one of his "ad-libbed" verbal dinner games with his two girls, he has already had the opportunity to think it out in advance, "play out" the options of rules and "tricks," and take the lead in moving the game forward responsibly.

In general, as a form of interactive human endeavor, play requires that someone leads and another person follows. Leading and following may alternate, either spontaneously or on a planned basis, but this action/reaction chain of behavior forms the foundation of the interactive play experience. Jep's one-on-one basketball with his son Josh is reinitiated after each basket; the "loser" begins by taking the ball out of bounds and starting

the play. Or, Paul's son may decide that tonight he wants to read the bedtime story, or maybe just the first paragraph, or the first page.

Schmukler (1990) supports the importance of the parent as a motivator for play but proposes an optimal point for facilitation. According to her, if a parent is too intrusive, the child plays less imaginatively than when a parent starts a game, makes a suggestion, and then withdraws. Fein (in Sutton-Smith, 1979) states that the father should demonstrate a willingness to take on the role of play collaborator as well as initiator and follower. McGovern's (1990) study stresses that the father should be able to communicate, preferably in both verbal and non-verbal (symbolic) modes with his children in getting play going. She believes that fathers are not nearly as adept at this as mothers are. As a player, the father should be responsive, and efficiently so, to his child's cues and clues around what works and what doesn't with regard to his play with his children. The lack of fathers' ability to discern his children's cues and clues has been cited in several studies (Clarke-Stewart, 1978; Lamb, 1976, 1977); Kalasch, 1981). Most of what the research seems to indicate with regard to the initiation of play emphasizes the fathers' role as being one of delicate balance, of holding back to enable the child to activate or even to dictate the direction and flow of play.

Despite findings to the contrary in the literature, the eight fathers interviewed voiced a strong and clear desire to actively engage and initiate

play with their children. This stands out as one of the foremost findings in the current study. This goes a step beyond what several researchers (Ricks, 1985; Pleck & Rustad, 1980; Pleck, 1985) have found in terms of fathers being somewhat passive and even impassive about spontaneously leading play with their children.

The eight men on this study all felt a strong pull to not only overcome the conventional wisdom that says "wait for them to come to you" but also to invent, create, and experiment with ways of playfully engaging their youngsters. What they seemed to struggle with was not whether or not to initiate but, rather, wanting to initiate more than they could due to work obligations and constraints. Their apparent confidence in serving as "play initiators" may be attributed to their familiarity and skill in working with people and beginning conversations in their daily jobs, and/or their awareness of their lack of available play-time and energy, leading to a "let's get started" attitude toward play with their children. Many of these fathers - Jim, Mark, Ken, Jep, Steven, and Paul in particular - indicated that they had no problems with vocalizing or manifesting their availability to play and that most often, this was welcomed by their children.

3. Father-Child Play As A Form Of Connection And Bonding

It is perhaps one of the major surprises - and disappointments - that the literature is not explicit in pointing to father-child play as a form of bonding and connection. Rather, it is approached and alluded to somewhat

indirectly through the use of terms such as "higher levels of arousal."

Yogman (1984) is one of the few to speak of connection in play when he refers to it as a series of "marked moments of shared affect and mutual delight" (p. 182), yet here he is focusing exclusively on father-infant play interactions. Singer (1990) mentions only the negative aspect of play as a connecting agent or force, noting that parent intrusiveness may cause a child to lose focus, quickly become overwhelmed and give signals such as crying or pulling away in order to disconnect.

Other than these two, most researchers do not suggest nor even imply what fathers' aims, goals, or objectives are in playing with their children. These researchers may be overlooking the obvious by assuming play automatically bonds fathers and children, or they are looking high-and-low for other details, or perhaps they aren't finding anything qualitatively or quantitatively significant with regard to this consideration. Nevertheless, this omission seems to be a glaring one in light of the preponderance of evidence to the contrary in this particular study of father-and-child play: virtually all eight fathers interviewed, at one time or another, were explicit in identifying the primary importance of play as a "connecting" activity with their children. Indeed, much of the research to this point - virtually all done with fathers and infants - points only to the fact that fathers' play engagement has increased over time (Arco, 1983; Bailey, 1987; Power, 1985;

Pleck, 1985; Baruch & Barnett, 1986; Radin & Goldsmith, 1985). The logical question and next step - "Why?" - has yet to be studied in depth.

The fathers in the current study were again strongly united in their articulation of play as an important method of developing a heightened level of intimacy with their children. The father-child connection or bond of which we speak is multidimensional in nature. The bond these fathers seem to consciously and conscientiously desire to cultivate through their ludic behavior with their children encompasses the following three areas:

- 1) the physical, including sports, games, outdoor and recreational activities;
- 2) the emotional, including hugging, curling up to watch TV or share storytime;
- 3) the social, including trips to the mall, camping with other families, parties.

In all of the above realms of their playful interactions with their children, fathers hoped to demonstrate their commitment to their relationships with their children as well as their enjoyment of them. They played with their offspring in all of these ways and spoke directly to the value of each, some even to the point of elevating play to a spiritual endeavor; this theme will be elaborated upon in the fourth and next section of this chapter.

When these fathers chose to connect with their children through play, their play was often centered around shared activity. In the previous section of this chapter, we found that these fathers were generally much more forward in initiating play than was heretofore demonstrated in the literature. Yet, because of their desire to connect through play, they often followed the cues and clues of their children when their children solicited opportunities for shared play. To these fathers, it seemed to matter less who led the play than that it was happening. In a sense, most of these fathers took no chances - if they felt a playful interaction was important for them to be able to connect, they would lead; otherwise, they were eager for their children to take active roles in pursuing play with them. While it was clear that these eight fathers enjoyed playing with their children, we saw numerous examples in chapter four of fathers using play as an instructive and life-skills endeavor (Steven's soccer-coaching, Arlo's plays with words and his daughter, Jim's teaching of skiing to his boys, and Brion's political consciousness-raising with his girls).

For these fathers, there was usually a priority set in these ludic activities and fathers' own attitudes: the child came first, before the rules, strategies, or specific content. This is perhaps why there was relatively little discussion in the interviews of rule-making and rule-breaking on the part of the children; the specific instructions and regulating structures of various play-forms may well have been less important than their children's

emotional well-being and enjoyment of the activity and time spent together. It seems that, in putting their children first (before the activity, the rules, and the structure of the play-form) most of these fathers were primarily concerned with being sure their children had a good time and a positive play experience, and that this was the highest of priorities in play. This apparently being the case, questions must be raised regarding the possible over-protectiveness of these fathers' approaches to play, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Paul's reading to his children, Mark's imaginative verbal and wrestling games, and Steven's sojourns with his young boy and verbal activities with his daughter are all indications of ways in which these fathers were attuned to their desire to bond with their children through play. Perhaps because of their sensitivity to the give-and-take of relationships in their professional helping capacities, these fathers were able to demonstrate their commitment to a child-centered, relational connection through play by showing their ongoing sensitivity to the specific needs and nuances of each child - and adapting or stopping play to meet these needs. This conscious awareness of children's needs may have seemed to them, in retrospect, a far cry from their own early childhood play experiences - or lack thereof - with their own fathers.

4. Father-Child Play As A Form Of Spirituality

One of the most salient and interesting findings to emerge from this study is how many fathers articulated a spiritual component to their play and their philosophy of play with their children. There is no indication whatsoever from the literature that spirituality, fatherhood, and play have a connection. This linkage was made by five of the fathers in this study on their own. The three psychotherapists in this group of fathers - Jim, Steven, and Mark - were particularly eloquent in raising this theme. As well, the two clergymen - Paul and Jep - spoke of their own play and play with their children in similar spiritual terms. For these five men in particular, it seemed as though the images and realities of play were and continue to be sacrosanct as integral aspects of their lives. They spoke of protecting these times and those individuals with whom they engaged in play; play relationships seem to have held and still hold a healing and therapeutic power that adds depth, value, and meaning to their everyday lives.

What was most fascinating about this theme emerging from the data was how "naturally" it emanated from the fathers' experiences and voices. The acuity of their images of play - both as children and with their own children - may attest to the special place play has in their hearts. For some - Mark, Steven, Paul, and Jep in particular - the sphere of play was both consciousness-raising and transforming.

When transformation and play have been mentioned together, the combination most often refers to the "troubled youth" (generally adolescents) in our society for whom "play" (often in the form of sports) can serve as an initiator of and a catalyst for significant lifelong learning experiences such as team-building, discipline, "practice makes perfect," and setting individual and group goals and objectives. Otherwise, transformation and consciousness are not necessarily terms one associates with games, play, and other ludic activities. However, in many of these fathers' experiences, play has had an impact beyond the here-and-now which may qualify as life-enhancing and even life-changing. One is left to wonder, however, if the fathers in this study may not have missed an essential step in commenting so minimally on the cooperative elements mentioned above, as though they felt a need to protect their children from the hazards involved in conflict resolution when team-building, discipline, and goal-setting inevitably break down.

Several fathers imbued play with what has come to be known in the Jungian worldview as archetypal images and transcendent functions: liberation (Steven and Mark), freedom (Jep and Steven), and karma (Steven). These fathers in particular also utilized the terminology and language of religious and faith-oriented orders in speaking about their play experiences: God, incarnation, sacrament, Mass, contemplation, and communion were all invoked at one point or another in their interviews. For Steven,

the spiritual significance of play. . .is about profoundness both in terms of physical presence as well as other dimensions of being in connectedness. . .and the goals of play are liberation in dealing with God, 'cause that's my concept of what God is about - God is play - and it's about communion in the deepest and brightest senses of that word, and it's about exchanges of energy with other people and with objects, the exchanging of energies in a free-flowing way, connectedness and letting go, transcending fear, breathing deeper, and, in the fullest experience, opening energy. . . .

Another comment fusing play with matters of spirit came from Paul:

I do like to play with contemplation and meditation. . . I think our culture's really off the mound [sic] in terms of even play has to be regimented and clothed and the right garments and it just gets all sucked back into being consumers again. . . .

Jep, a practicing Episcopal priest, stated that,

moments of play are. . . in a religious way the incarnation of play. . . like the equivalent of a priest saying Mass, and those moments are the sacraments of play

One is tempted to infer that because of the idiosyncratic language involved, when these fathers speak in this manner and recall many of their specific images of play, they see play as an experience spanning many dualities: the sacred and the mundane, structured and spontaneous, attitude and action, attachment and separation, the physical and the ethereal. Play,

for many of them, is both a physical and mental opportunity to bring together various aspects of themselves; sometimes these elements stand in direct contradiction to one another -playing with the head (rationally) versus with the heart (irrationally) is but one context.

The literature has nothing to say on this theme at this point in time. This fact that this theme arose from these interviews may be due to one or more of the following variables:

Possible positives for this sampling include the following:

- 1) This particular sampling of fathers has a greater or more developed leaning or voice on this topic than the general population of fathers;
- 2) The helping, healing, and supportive roles and nature of their professional activities leads these men to make these kinds of connections in many aspects of their lives;
- 3) The high level of safety and trust they may have felt in the interview sessions enabled them to "open up" thoughts and feelings heretofore generally guarded by males in this culture and society.

The absence of this theme in the literature may be due to the following:

- 1) The general population of "fathers-at-large" studied to this point in time may not have been attuned to this particular arena and therefore could not articulate or reflect it in a spoken format;
- 2) Methodological approaches have not asked or probed or otherwise allowed for this area to be broached;

- 3) Such a connection between fathers, fathering, and play may simply not have existed per se at the time of past studies.

The "higher consciousness" of the spirit that several of these fathers allude to regarding how they play with their children may be seen as support for and corroboration of the three other new findings in this section of the fifth chapter. Taken as a whole, these four "new findings" may begin to suggest a larger "meta-finding": for these fathers, playing with their children represents, both on practical and symbolic levels, a movement toward wholeness and greater self-actualization for both parties. Perhaps due to these fathers' attempts to link play with spirituality, these men are almost compelled to experience joy and togetherness with their bodies, minds, spirits, and children - an incarnation of their inner and outer selves renewed on a daily basis.

D. General Conclusions And Summary

In exploring their own play histories, both developmentally and thematically, these eight fathers supported many aspects of the literature, and new findings were uncovered. These new themes included both internal and personal variables such as the spiritual element of play and external and interpersonal considerations such as play as a form of connection and bonding, the shift from competitive to collaborative and cooperative play,

movement toward more father-initiated play, and greater emphasis on gentle rather than rough-and-tumble play.

Taken individually and collectively, the men in this study suggest new ways of viewing play as a significant component of fathering. Through the recall of their early and more recent play experiences - both as children and with their own children - they have been able to develop a comprehensive understanding around what it means to play and to be played with. As the interview process evolved, fathers had the opportunity to look at their own lives through a new lens. Perhaps for the first time, they viewed play as a component that permeated their work, their family life, and their relationships with their children.

These fathers struggled to define play and its impact on their lives and relationships with their children. For all of them, this was the first opportunity to consciously consider the role of play in their lives and the implications of being a lifelong player. In so doing, it became clear that playing with their children helps them to form a strong bond with them, assists them in integrating the physical, social, and spiritual aspects of themselves, and supports their ability to take risks as parents and become fuller, more creative, and more imaginative fathers, men, and human beings.

It is apparent that all eight of them want more of the processes and products that playing with their children bring them.

Several of the findings in this study seem to indicate a shift insofar as these fathers are moving toward some new ways of engaging in ludic behavior (cooperative, mutually initiated, gentler) and away from more conventional forms of male-generated or focused play (competitive, controlling, rough). We've seen numerous instances in Chapter Four where individual fathers recalled play-times with their children when they were aware of playing in ways different from how they played as they themselves were growing up. The "new findings" themselves, as explored earlier in this chapter, seem to indicate more of a shift in the larger and more conventional mode of parenting than a clearly defined and fully decisive change in the way they play with their children. It's not that these fathers refuse to compete or play "contact sports" with their offspring; it's more that they are cautious and hesitant in how far they'll go with these modes of ludic interaction. Thus, we see more of a shift in process, one that they continue to fine-tune, redefine, and monitor as they and their children grow older.

Csikszentmihalyi's notion of "flow" is also something that the fathers appear to grapple with concerning play with their children. While many spoke of play as an attitude as well as a behavior, they struggled with how to better create an "appropriate" attitude given the at-times competing variables of work, personal energy, their own projects, and further professional development. An interesting contrast and paradox appears in many of their discussions about play and "flow": they enjoy the spontaneity

and mutual initiation of play (elements of flow) with their children, yet they must overcome a host of emotional obstacles (letting go of control and the competing interests mentioned above) to enter Csikszentmihalyi's "flow channel".

Many of the findings in this study could conceivably be attributed to the sample: a small group of highly educated men in the helping professions, for whom interpersonal interaction is an integral part of their existence. Given the highly social and dynamic aspect of their careers - and, to a certain extent, their families - it is perhaps not a surprise that they value the fluid and interactive nature of play as an element in their individual lifestyles and, in particular, in their relationships with their children. These fathers seem to emphasize the making of meaning and depth of relationships with their clients, wives, and children. That "play" held such a wide range of significance in terms of the ways it touched these fathers' lives may be indicative of the role that it has in their developing relationships with their children. Whether this is part of mainstream thinking on behalf of a wider sampling of fathers is worthy of further research; these and other related questions will serve as the focus of the next, and final, chapter.

CHAPTER VI

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As a field of study, play has come a long way from its infancy period of fun and games shunted aside as "other activities" in school and on weekends with the family. Jean Piaget helped the field of play to move toward legitimacy and maturity with his systematic studies of conservation, accommodation, and assimilation. More recently, Ashley Montagu has coined the term "neoteny" for the systematic study of human evolution and development through play. Neoteny, according to Webster's Dictionary (1976, p. 953-954) is defined as: (1) "the retention of juvenile characteristics in the adult" and (2) "the development of adult features in the juvenile." There is thus an evolutionary thrust toward an understanding of how we retain and maintain certain behaviors and attitudes as we age. Piaget emphasizes the role of play in early childhood while Montagu, in his recent work, focuses his attention on play as an evolutionary feature throughout the lifespan.

Similarly, the systematic study of fathers and the process of fatherhood is something that has evolved in the past quarter-century. Father-research is also still very much in an active growth phase, as the recent multitude of popular books and scholarly studies has demonstrated. It is indeed curious to note that the research on fathering falls into two lifespan categories: (1) father-infant studies, and (2) father-adult children

studies (focusing mostly on the male-male relationship). There is currently a large gap in the literature on father-child relationships spanning toddlerhood through late adolescence. There is little in the research to date that focuses on play as an integral factor in the father-child relationship. This study was an effort to bridge this gap, as it focused on children of school-age, from five to thirteen years of age.

This sixth and final chapter will focus on two particular themes:

1. the limitations of this study for use and reference for future research, and
2. the implications of this study for future research

Clearly, the current study raises many questions and considerations meriting further exploration. Given the size and specificity of the sample, it is difficult to ascertain from the findings whether there is much that can either be replicated or validated at this point. This particular sample of eight fathers has been referred to throughout the study as a possible - if not probable - cause of some of the findings generated through the interview process. In fact, this group of eight fathers was chosen specifically because they held certain values which served as determinants and independent variables through which to select them as participants and thus to analyze their words and images. Such criteria were their unusually high level (relative to the full U.S. male population) of educational attainment and status, their chosen career as helping professionals, their healthy middle-to-

upper-middle class standing, their intact, relatively functional and stable family, and their aptitude for and interest in retrospective introspection. Relative to the at-large population of U.S. fathers, this small sample represents a group intentionally biased in its professed adherence to particular values, careers, and lifestyle choices. This last fact both poses limitations on this study and suggests implications for future research on fathers and play with their school-aged children.

A. Limitations Of This Study

Because most helping professionals (especially those in mid-to-mature career development) are used to both thinking and speaking within a framework of dialogue and a question/response format, they fare well in an interview setting where a premium is placed on the verbal articulation of feelings, images, memories, and connections across any two or all three of these components. Their interactions with their colleagues, superiors, and clients demand this of them on a daily basis. Thus, whether it comes naturally to them or not, these fathers have indeed developed a skill and familiarity with this format of interaction and interchange. These aptitudes are especially advantageous in an interview setting for a study of this sort. Precisely because of this ability to articulate, the intensive qualitative interview procedure may not be easily generalizable to a broader population of fathers in a "salad-bowl" society such as ours in the U.S. in the last five

years of the twentieth century. The instrument itself may well need to be more finely tuned, with a wider array of possibilities for fathers who either are not used to, or do not prefer, this particular format.

Beyond the specific interview process as a tool to get at the meaning fathers make regarding play in their relationships with their children, certain criteria for selecting the participants need to be rethought before attempting to ask the questions asked in this study of a more diverse group of participants. These concerns may be subdivided into two categories:

1. criteria related to the fathers themselves, as individuals, and
2. criteria related to the fathers' current family

What follows is a list of questions which must be asked before embarking on a larger-scale study which intends to be more inclusive of the diversity of fathers as a cohort group.

1. Criteria Related To The Fathers Themselves, As Individuals

1. What kinds of fathers are good meaning-makers? Implicit in this study is the notion that, in a one-to-one interview setting where dialogue is the preferred mode of communication, the best meaning-makers are those most versed in the art of verbal give-and-take, and that those able to do so have earned advanced degrees in their field. This may not necessarily be the case.
2. How important is it to limit the fathers' age range from 40 to 60 as was done in this study? Perhaps it is the case that younger fathers have notions of their own which challenge certain current assumptions and findings regarding fathers and play, which in turn may cause the redirection of further study on this subject. Possible differences due to fathers' age may have to do with extent of fathers' commitment to their work

and the balance of time spent working and playing, definitions of play, play style (rough-and-tumble versus tender), competitive versus collaborative play, and whether younger fathers or their children initiate play more often.

3. Does a study related to fathers and play with their children need to focus exclusively on fathers in the helping professions in order to provide insight into the ways they play and their play with their children? It is clearly within the realm of possibility that all fathers - regardless of professional and/or economic circumstance - are able to provide useful information concerning their play experiences, both with and without their offspring. The extent and depth of insight provided by fathers working in other fields may certainly be measured against or compared with the current groups of fathers and the data and findings generated in this study.
4. Why is it necessary to specify that fathers be in mid-to-mature career development as opposed to beginning their careers? At the outset of the current study, it was hypothesized that if fathers were indeed in the mid-stages of their careers (defined in this study as at least five years in a given line or field of work), they would have more stable incomes and family lifestyles which would enable them to reflect more deeply on their choices and decisions around time spent with their children and their priorities for family time. It may be the case that fathers just embarking on their professional or job development and training may have more - or less - time, attention, and energy to offer their children vis a vis play, or that fathers in some fields (a family business or farming, for example) may have a lot of stability early on their work-lives.

2. Criteria Relating To The Fathers' Current Family

The following criteria were developed at the outset of this study in order for fathers to be included as participants:

A father must be:

1. currently married;
2. sharing a home on a full-time basis with his current wife;

3. living in the same home as his wife and at least one school-aged child, aged five to thirteen years;
4. the biological father to at least the one child in (3) above.

While each criterion was judged as necessary but not sufficient for fathers' entry into this study, a larger-scale study might be better off to include fathers who do not meet all four of the above as a categorical cluster.

Indeed, one might go so far as to state that the majority of male parents in this country at the current time do not meet all four of these criteria, given various sociological factors such as the divorce rate, employment away from home for a given time period, custody arrangements, and other familial considerations.

A brief review of each criterion might be helpful in further defining considerations necessary for broader research in this area.

1. How does a father's marital status influence the way he sees play or plays with his children? A comparative study of fathers with differing marital status - single, separated, divorced, widowed, engaged, with a partner of the same sex, or married - might conceivably yield some interesting findings. It is also possible that this variable is not a significant one at all, and that fathers' play with their children is largely or entirely independent of their relational situation with an "intimate other." This consideration might well be worth exploring in a larger-scale study.
2. Assuming that question (1) above does not yield significant data, then the fact that fathers are currently residing in the same home as their wives may also not be directly relevant or pertinent to a study of fathers and their play with their children. On the other hand, fathers who live with their wives on a part-time or occasional basis may indeed play in different ways based on their interest, availability, and other priorities. Thus, the father/mother (or husband/wife) living arrangement

may or may not yield significant results, but is nonetheless worth some attention.

3. Whether the children who become the focus of the study live at home with their father and/or mother may need to be broadened beyond the present limits of this study, which used a full-time home-based relationship between father, mother, and (school-aged) child. The question of who initiates play may become a central question surrounding this criterion. In addition, considerations of sibling rivalry, parent and child attention span, and cooperative versus competitive play may be worthy of continued emphasis if in fact the children in question live out of the father's home for part or all of the time.
4. The centrality of the biological connection of father to child may or may not be significant to the way the two play together. It is conceivable that a father who has adopted a child or serves as a foster-care parent may have a closer and more meaningful - and even playful - relationship than a father who is the biological parent to his child. In other words, the power of the relationship may not derive from the genes. Involving fathers who are not the genetic male parents to their children in a study such as this may suggest that the way they play together may have little to do with the biological connection. However, this subject was not a topic or theme which was offered in these interviews, nor was it picked up on by the participants themselves, since, in this study, it was not an active issue given the participant sample. With a greater diversity of biological and non-biological fathers, a look at this consideration might yield interesting information regarding commitment, cooperation, and intimacy focusing on father-child play.

B. Implications Of This Study For Future Research

Based on the interview data generated (which is the focus of chapter four of this study) and the analysis of this data (chapter five), there are several questions which appear to be appropriate for future studies of fathers and their play with their school-aged children. What follows is a list of

these queries. Subsequent to this list, each question will be elaborated upon in more depth.

Given that several of the findings outlined in chapter five - including the shift away from competitive and toward collaborative play, the shift toward more mutually-initiated play, the connection linking spirituality and play, and a more comprehensive definition of what constitutes play - several questions about fathers, the process of fathering, and the integration of play in fathers' lives now present themselves:

1. Do these "preliminary" findings indicate that there is a broader-based shift going on within our society and culture with regard to what fathers are prioritizing in their lives and with their children and families?
2. Precisely what is it that is drawing some fathers to play in these new ways with their children?
3. Are the children or their fathers losing out on anything significant because of the shifts outlined above and in more detail in chapter five?
4. Do some of these new findings - or those contradicting already established ones - indicate that fathers may be over-compensating in their play with their children in conscious and unconscious ways?
5. What are the opinions, reactions, and feelings of children regarding the ways in which their fathers play with them?
6. How might fathers change in their attitudes toward and behavior during play as a result of participation in this type of research study?

Each of these questions should, of course, be broken down even further for effective research to be undertaken. However, this level of work is best left

for future researchers to frame for themselves. Nevertheless, each question may be important insofar as findings will offer a larger and also more refined picture of what "fathers and play with their children" is all about.

We have already seen how, as a group and as individuals, these eight fathers have veered from some of the previously established limits and findings about father-child play to new levels. One is left to ponder whether these shifts are isolated, given the sample and subject area, or if they are indeed part of a larger transition that late-twentieth century U.S. fathers are undergoing. In other words, are the findings generated in this study part of a larger trend toward a new paradigm of fathering, or are they merely intriguing anomalies based more on happenstance? Would these findings be replicated among other groups of fathers, or must they remain within the confines of a small and somewhat atypical sample?

With respect to the challenges to the research we have seen from this father-sample, another question begging further consideration is, "Why are fathers drawn to play in these new ways with their children?" No doubt there are both internal/psychological and external/sociological concerns attached to this and related sub-questions, and these, too, should become the province of future researchers and studies. Now that we have a glimpse into the "what" and the "how" of new ways fathers have of playing with their children, the micro-to-macro context of "why" becomes all-important in order to develop a better understanding than we now have of the reasons and

causes for the changes in play-style uncovered through this study. As much as possible, it becomes necessary to specify precisely what it is that is drawing fathers to play in these new ways with their children.

Questions three and four on the above list are very much connected, but also need to be listed separately because the third question seeks to respond to whether fathers are "under-doing" things by "limiting" their ludic activities with their children, while the fourth query attempts to discern whether fathers are "over-doing" something (namely, the practice of compensation through possible over-protection). Let's take each of these in the order listed on page nine of this chapter.

By focusing their play energy so specifically and consciously away from areas like competition and rough-and-tumble play, the thought arises that perhaps these fathers - and their children - are losing out on some valuable elements and lessons that may be taught and learned through play.

In their very conscious - and conscientious - efforts to teach cooperative values and meaning through play, these fathers may be limiting the opportunity for their children to struggle with some of life's more valuable lessons, such as:

1. how to lose, and how to do so gracefully;
2. how to negotiate conflict and develop strategies in competitive situations;
3. in losing, how to build up personal qualities such as self-esteem, perseverance, persistence, and a positive attitude;

4. how to make thoughtful and tender physical contact with others - both peers and adults - through the "safe practice" of rough-and-tumble play;
5. how to protect themselves from bullies;
6. how to respond to crises;
7. how to stand up to peer and other forms of pressure to think or act in certain ways;
8. how to assert themselves when they a different way to say or do something.

Through further research, it may be possible to get at these sub-questions as listed above by interviewing both fathers and their children, and also through observational research which focuses on father-child play and children's play with their peers.

Pursuant to the above question, one is led to wonder if indeed these fathers may be unconsciously compensating for their own past history of being hurt or shamed through play by over-protecting their children from experiencing some of the same "growing pains" and obstacles they may have faced in their own childhoods. A father who, as a youngster, constantly lost one-on-one games with his father (or mother, sibling, or peer for that matter) may either consciously or unconsciously screen out these same difficult experiences and situations for his child(ren) by limiting the possibility or extent to which one of his offspring would face them. The psychological principle of compensation addresses this concern; it is a natural and human response to experiencing past hurt that we attempt to

refrain from further hurting ourselves, to protect our children from being hurt, and to avoid seeing them get hurt in our midst. Further research on this issue may get at the "why" behind fathers' preferences for certain kinds of play and avoidance of other ludic behaviors, both with and without their children.

Another area for further research based on this study may be to involve children themselves in future studies. What are their opinions, reactions, and feelings regarding the ways in which their fathers play with them? How do these responses correlate with fathers' own words? It is curious that there are very few studies which involve the voices and images of children as regards play with their fathers. With the baseline sampling of narrative information and opinion found in this study, it may be possible to involve children in a similar study which attempts to both isolate differences and correlate concurrent views. If indeed there exists a cause-and-effect relationship between the father's will and the child's interest, are these children aware of this, and do they see it in the same light as their fathers? Further, what are the implications of the differences or similarities for the father-child relationship and for the larger family?

Finally, one must wonder whether after three hours of intensive interviewing in a one-to-one situation the questions and responses themselves might have had an influence or impact upon these fathers, their relationships with their children, and their behaviors and attitudes toward

play in their lives and with their children. How might fathers change in their actions and attitudes as a consequence of their participation in this type of research study? A post-test or follow-up interview six months, a year, or more after the initial study might prove most helpful in discerning if there are indeed any long-term effects of the initial interview process. These eight fathers, in particular, seem to have the requisite insight and meaning-making capacity to reflect in a meta-cognitive manner about the impact of the interviews on their play with their children. The follow-up methodology itself might in itself be ground-breaking as this has not been done to date, and fathers' responses would certainly yield some intriguing data for this reason. Visiting new territory makes for a most interesting adventure.

In the immortal words of Antoine de Saint Exupery (1943), "it is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye. . . ."

Play is both a visible and invisible force in the lives of fathers and their children; what they share with one another through their play is a matter of heart. Holbrook Jackson (1957) sums it up best:

When we are full of life, when each sense overflows with vitality, then we become prodigal, we scatter ourselves broadcast, we take chances, we risk great odds, love, laugh, dance, write poems, paint pictures, romp with children; in short, we play. It is only the impotent who do not play. The people who play are creators. . . .

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PERMISSION FORM

16 Preston Road #1
Somerville, MA 02143

March 30, 1994

Mr. I.M.A. Father
Number and Street
Town, State, and Zip
U.S.A.

Dear :

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a participant in my doctoral dissertation research entitled "Fathers' Conceptions of Play with Their School-Aged Children". As you know, I have been a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst since the Fall of 1991 and am now beginning my research for the dissertation.

As we have discussed over the telephone, my study calls for me to interview approximately six to eight fathers, and you have been selected as one of the participants. Each father will be interviewed twice for approximately 75 minutes, with about two weeks between each interview. As you know, I am pleased to travel to a convenient location where we may proceed in an uninterrupted manner for the duration of the interview. With your written permission, I would like to audiotape each interview. I will have permission and consent forms available for you to consider at the beginning of our first interview. I would also like to assure you at this point that any and all material that you choose to share with me on and off the record will remain confidential, and you will have the additional option of reading your transcribed interviews prior to my use of them for my analytical research.

The following information pertains specifically to the interview we have recently agreed to regarding date, time, and place. Please contact me at (617) 776-1441 if you should have any questions or concerns prior to our meeting. I thank you again for your willingness to support and contribute to my doctoral research.

INTERVIEW #: _____

DATE: _____ TIME: _____

LOCATION: _____

I very much look forward to our interviews together and hope that they will be quite informative and beneficial.

Sincerely,

Daniel Yalowitz

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

16 Preston Road
Somerville, MA 02143

Dear

I am a doctoral student in the Human Development Program in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. I have completed my coursework and recently passed my Comprehensive Examination. I am now undertaking my doctoral dissertation research. The tentative title of my study is "Fathers' Conceptions of Play in Their Relationships with Their Elementary-Aged Children". I am in the process of recruiting and selecting participants for this study.

For the dissertation, I will be interviewing between six and eight fathers who have at least one child living at home who is roughly of elementary/junior high school age (aged 5-13). Each father will be interviewed twice, for approximately 60 minutes each time. I am pleased to make home visits, or would be happy to arrange an interview session anywhere that is convenient for you.

Participants will be asked to reflect upon their play experiences from their early childhood through the present. Upon inclusion as a participant in this study, I will ask you to sign a Consent Form and a Participant Options Form to indicate your desire to become a participant. I am hopeful that all participants will allow me to audiotape the interviews so that I may have them professionally transcribed, which will aid immeasurably in the data analysis phase of my work. Both sets of interviews will be held during the Spring of 1994.

If you are interested in participating, I would appreciate your filling out the simple one-page form which I've enclosed, and return it to me at the address above. I will then contact you by phone to ask a few more questions and to respond to any questions or concerns you have, and possibly to arrange our first interview. In the meantime, if you have any questions please call me (day or night) at 617-776-1441. I do hope you'll be interested in taking part in this study. I thank you in advance for considering this opportunity. I look forward to hearing from you and receiving the enclosed data form in the next couple of weeks.

Sincerely,

Daniel Yalowitz

enc.

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

"Fathers' Conceptions of Play in Their Relationships with Their School-Aged Children"

I.

I, Daniel Cantor Yalowitz, am a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Massachusetts, in Amherst, Massachusetts. My doctoral program and coursework has been in the field of Human Development.

My most recent emphasis, which has now become the focus of my doctoral dissertation study, has to do with the way fathers conceptualize play with their elementary-school aged children. I have, for a long time, been quite interested in male development, and the particular gender/socialization/growth dilemmas that males in our society face in the last decade of the twentieth century. At the same time, I have been developing and facilitating playshops around the U.S. and abroad which have as their focus the ways in which communities can be built and interpersonal communication, problem-solving, and creativity may be enhanced through non-sexist, non-competitive play.

This research study is an effort to integrate my interests in play and in men by focusing on the ways fathers conceive of their play with their school-aged children. I will take a "lifespan/developmental" approach and endeavor to support and understand the ways in which and through which fathers make meaning of their experiences, attitudes, and understanding of the role, impact, and influence that play has had both on them as children growing up and, in turn, the ways in which they play with their own children.

My doctoral dissertation committee has approved my proposal for this study, entitled, "Fathers' Conceptions of Play in Their Relationships with Their School-Aged Children".

II.

You are being asked to be a participant in this study. I will conduct two 75-minute in-depth interviews with you. The first interview will center around the ways in which play has impacted on and influenced your life experiences and development to this point in time. The second interview will focus on how you see play with your child(ren) who are currently of school-age (five to thirteen years of age).

Each interview will be held in a location of your choosing which provides you with privacy and is mindful of your own physical and emotional comforts and needs. I will endeavor to find dates and times which are convenient for you and will enable you to attend to the overall theme and focus of each interview. I will be cognizant of helping to select appropriate locations, times, and circumstances which will keep interruptions and distractions to a minimal and hopefully non-existent level.

While each of the two interview sessions will have an overall theme and focus, it is my specific intent and purpose to provide you with latitude and flexibility to respond to my queries in an open-ended fashion. The questions will provide a guide and stimulus to enable you to comment spontaneously and freely as well as reflectively and without pressure. The methodology of this study allows you to share your personal experiences as to how you conceive of play in your life and in your relationships with your child(ren).

III.

Each of the interviews will be audiotaped, with your verbal and written permission. These tapes will then be professionally transcribed. In all written materials and oral presentations in which I may draw on materials from your interviews, you will have the option [please refer to "Participant Option Form"] to choose your own "code name" (or nick name), or have me select one for you, or allow me to use your given or legal name. This choice will be yours to make and can be changed at any point up until the data analysis and interpretation phases of the study, which will begin approximately two weeks after the second and final interview. In addition, I will refer to any family members by their role or position in your family (e.g., "wife", "spouse", "significant other", "oldest boy" "second daughter" etc.).

IV.

While consenting at this time to participate in these interviews, if at any time you become uncomfortable with the nature, content, scope, or proceedings of the study or interviewing, you will be able to: (1) discuss your specific concern(s) with me if you so choose, either on or off the record, or (2) resign as a participant in the study. As you are one of eight fathers who have been selected to partake in the interviewing process, it is sincerely hoped that you will be able to continue through to the completion of the interviewing process.

V.

Furthermore, while having consented to participate in the interview process, you will have the option [please refer to "Participant Options Form"] to review the transcripts of your interviews. You may withdraw your consent to have specific excerpts from your interviews in any printed materials or oral presentations, or choose from any of the other options available to you regarding the utilization of your interviews. You will have the opportunity to edit, or make comments or suggestions on the transcript. Your feedback will be due to me no later than seven (7) days following your receipt of the photocopied transcript(s) if you wish for me to consider any modifications prior to the data analysis and interpretation phases of this study.

VI.

In signing this form you are agreeing to the use of the materials from your interviews as indicated in IV and V above. If I were to want to use the materials from your interviews in any ways not consistent with what is stated in IV or V above, I would contact you to get your additional written consent.

VII.

This research study is being done for educational reasons only; no other use or dissemination is intended or implied. There is no financial gain to any party through this project, nor will any of its contents be loaned, lent, distributed, or otherwise bartered with other individuals and/or parties. In signing this form, you are also assuring me that you will make no financial claims on me for the use of the material in your interviews.

VIII.

Your freely offered signature below indicates your interest in participating in this study according to the details outlined and specified above. A photocopy of this agreement will be made available and given or mailed to you prior to the second interview for your perusal and records.

IX.

Finally, in signing this form you are thus stating that no medical treatment will be required by you from the University of Massachusetts should any physical injury result from your participation in these interviews.

X.

Your cooperation in and support of this endeavor is greatly appreciated, and it is my genuine hope that you will gain additional insights and understanding about yourself relative to the topic and related considerations involved in this research study.

I, _____, have read the above statement and agree to participate as an interviewee in this study under the conditions stated above.

Signature of Participant

Date of Signature

Signature of Interviewer

Date of Signature

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT OPTIONS FORM

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION RESEARCH STUDY ON FATHER-CHILD PLAY PARTICIPANT OPTIONS FORM

Participant's Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Note to All Participants:

As you have now agreed to serve as a willing participant in the dissertation research study of Daniel Cantor Yalowitz entitled, "Fathers' Conceptions of Play in Their Relationships with Their Elementary-Aged Children", you will have certain options to choose from regarding the use of interview data generated in your interviews with Daniel. Please initial those options which you choose. If at any time you decide you add or change these options, please speak with Daniel and he will ask you to initial a new Participant Options Form. Thank you for your consideration of what follows.

I USE OF AUDIOTAPING

_____ I approve of the use of audiotape equipment during my interviews for the exclusive purposes of professional transcription.

_____ I do not approve and will not authorize the use of audiotape equipment at any time during my interviews.

II CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

_____ I would prefer to have the following "code name" or nickname used instead of my given name: _____.

_____ I will endorse the interviewer's use of a "code name" or nickname which he selects instead of my given name.

_____ I wish to be notified at the time this alternate name is selected to represent me.

_____ I waive my desire for notification of this alternate name.

_____ I approve the use of my given name for transcription and data and data analysis.

III AUDIOTAPE STORAGE

_____ I approve of the interview's storage of my interview tapes in his home for archival purposes only. I understand that my interview tapes will not be shared orally or in any other way with anyone other than the dissertation committee and the professional transcriber.

_____ I request that the interviewer destroy my interview tapes immediately following his use of them specifically and exclusively for this research study.

_____ I request that the interviewer give me my interview tapes following his use of them specifically and exclusively for this research study.

IV REVIEW OF INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

_____ I request that the interviewer mail me a photocopy of my interview transcripts so that I may peruse and otherwise review them prior to his use of them for data analysis and interpretation purposes. I understand that I will have one week from the day of receipt to review and suggest any comments, additions, deletions, or edits as I deem appropriate. For my feedback of my interview transcripts to be included in the data analysis and interpretation, I agree to send my comments and the photocopied interview transcript back to the interviewer within seven (7) days of receipt of same. If my comments and the photocopied transcript are not returned to the interviewer within said time period, I understand that he will work with the original transcription for his research.

_____ I waive the right to a photocopy of my interview transcripts.

Signature of Participant

Signature of Interviewer

Name of Participant (print)

Name of Interviewer(print)

sv:disspart.opt

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW INFORMATION FORM

FATHERS AND CHILD-PLAY DISSERTATION RESEARCH STUDY

Father's Name: _____ Age: _____

Names, Gender, & Ages of Child(ren): _____

Date of [First] [Second] Interview: _____

Start and End Time: _____

OK to audiotape? _____ Want copy of transcript to OK? _____

Location: _____

Phone Number in case of need: _____

Directions to interview site: _____

Additional information: _____

Note: Participants wishing to review typewritten transcription of their interview(s) will have one week to do so, and must return their comments to me within seven days of receipt of their transcript.

APPENDIX F: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FATHERS AND CHILD-PLAY STUDY

*** Please return this form by _____ to: Daniel Yalowitz,
16 Preston Road, Somerville, MA. 02143. Thank you in advance! ***

Your Name: _____ Age: _____ D.O.B.: _____

Current Address: _____

Home Phone: (_____) _____ OK to call when? _____

Work Phone: (_____) _____ OK to call when? _____

Occupation: _____ # of Years: _____

Current Employer/Work Site: _____

Title/Role: _____

Current employment: (check): ___Part-time ___Fulltime ___Other (_____)

How paid: (check): ___Hourly ___Salaried ___Other (_____)

Currently work (check): ___At home ___Outside home ___Both ___Neither

Highest level of formal education (degree & date): _____

Marital Status: _____ Years in current relationship: _____

Gender & ages of children from this relationship: _____

Gender & ages of children from previous relationships: _____

Which children are currently living with you fulltime and for how long
have they been living with you? _____

Any period of time interrupting your living with your children? When _____

Describe current community of residence: _____

Describe own childhood community of residence: _____

Who currently resides with you fulltime? _____

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this form in its entirety! **

APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW ONE PROTOCOL

FATHERS' CONCEPTIONS OF PLAY IN THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR ELEMENTARY-AGED CHILDREN

First Interview Questions

PART I

*** DANIEL'S INTRO: THIS IS A FIRST ROUND INTERVIEW WITH ONE OF THE PARTICIPANTS IN MY DOCTORAL DISSERTATION STUDY ENTITLED, "FATHERS' CONCEPTIONS OF PLAY IN THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR ELEMENTARY-AGED CHILDREN. TODAY'S DATE IS: _____ AND THIS INTERVIEW IS TAKING PLACE AT: _____.

- [1] As we begin, please identify yourself by stating:
 - ** your full name
 - ** your age
 - ** the names, gender, and ages of all your children

- [2] Please also state the following:
 - ** your highest formal educational degree and field
 - ** your line of work and your title/rank/position
 - ** where you currently live and with whom

- [3] Please acknowledge whether you have read, understood, agreed to, and signed all the necessary paperwork and forms regarding your consent and approval for the interviewing process we are about to undertake.

- [4] Do you have any questions or concerns about the process at this point?

PART II

- [5] Can you describe your family of origin as it was composed when you were growing up? Who did you live with and where?

- [6] Can you describe you present family as it currently exists? Who lives with you at home?

- [7] Please describe your current employment and how you earn your income - where you work, your role, some of its key elements, and about how much time per week you put in, both at the site and at home?

- [8] Related to your home and work time, please describe what work your wife is currently engaged in, and the number of hours she spends working away from and at home?

PART III

- [9] Recall yourself as a young child, perhaps your early elementary school years. What kinds of images and memories do you have of yourself:
- (a) playing at home with your family?
 - (b) playing outside your home with peers and friends?
 - (c) playing in and during school?
- [10] As a young child still, what particularly fond memories do you have of playing? Describe how you liked to play the most. Who was there, what were you doing, what did it feel like?
- [11] On the other side of your early childhood play experiences, what did you like least about playing? What feelings or emotions did you attach to these least favorite play experiences, and why did you dislike them?
- [12] To what extent were your parents involved with you in play? How did they play with you, what they like to do, what did they not like to do with you regarding play as you were growing up?
- [13] Can you describe if there were any differences between how you played with girls and female adults as compared to the way you played with boys and male adults as a young child?
- [14] How would you characterize yourself as a "child-player"? In other words, what role or roles did you typically play when you engaged in playful experiences with family, friends, and schoolmates?
- [15] As a child, do you recall what activities "competed" for your time, energy, and attention? How big a part of these was play as you were growing up? Did these proportions or percentages change over time as you grew older? If so, in what ways?
- [16] When you look back on your early childhood play experiences, what are some words that come to your mind to describe play?
-

PART IV

- [17] How and did your way of playing change as you grew from childhood through adolescence and into adulthood? What has remained a constant for you regarding play and what has changed over time?
- [18] Let's revisit the "proportions and percentages" question once again. Given how you described your time division as a child, describe how your time allocation changed over time, say, from age 6 to 16 to 26 to the present?

- [19] Can you describe a playful experience in your life that stands out to you now if you recall yourself at these ages:
(a) 16 (b) 26 (c) within the past year?
- [20] Looking at yourself as an adult male today, what kinds of play do you particularly like to engage in? What kinds of play do you especially dislike?
- [21] What kinds of feelings, emotions, and reactions do you have when you play in your life as a male adult?
- [22] How would you characterize yourself as an "adult player"? In other words, what role or roles do you typically play when you are engaged in playful experiences with family, friends, and colleagues or coworkers?
- [23] What impact or influence does playing have in your life at this time?

**** FINI ****

APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW TWO PROTOCOL

FATHERS' CONCEPTIONS OF PLAY IN THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR ELEMENTARY-AGED CHILDREN

Second Interview Questions

PART I

*** DANIEL'S INTRO: THIS IS A SECOND ROUND INTERVIEW WITH ONE OF THE PARTICIPANTS IN MY DOCTORAL DISSERTATION STUDY ENTITLED "FATHERS' CONCEPTIONS OF PLAY IN THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR ELEMENTARY-AGED CHILDREN". TODAY'S DATE IS: _____ AND THIS INTERVIEW IS TAKING PLACE AT:_____.

- [1] Please state your name, your age, and your profession.
 - [2] Is there anything you've thought about or wanted to say regarding any of the things that came up in our first interview?
 - [3] Reflecting back on our first interview, when you look at your previous solitary and interpersonal play experiences, is there any one particular element or theme that unites them? In what way or ways are they similar?
-

PART II - Work and Play

- [4] In what way(s) does your work life affect your ability to play and your interest in playing with your children?
 - [5] What do you think each of your children would say to this question? What have your children said to you on this subject?
 - [6] Based on your response to these last few questions, are there ways you can see changing your relationship to work and to play with your children?
-

PART III - Family and Play

- [7] What are some family play experiences that stand out to you with your spouse and your child(ren)?
- [8] In what way(s) is your play consistent or unique with each member of your family?
- [9] Describe the way you played as an elementary-aged child and the way your own elementary-aged children play. In what way(s) are they similar, and how are they different?

- [10] In what way(s) do you engage in play with your elementary-aged children?
 - [11] In what way(s) do you sense your spouse engaging in play with your elementary-aged children?
 - [12] In your mind, what - if any - are the differences in approach, style, and content between the way your wife plays with your children and the way you play with your children?
 - [13] When did these differences first begin to manifest? To what do you attribute these differences?
 - [14] How do you feel about the way your family plays together?
 - [15] What changes would you like to see or make in terms of family play experiences? Would you personally need to do to implement your suggestions?
-

PART IV - Fathering and Play

- [16] What words or images would you use to describe the way(s) in which you play with your elementary-aged child(ren)?
 - [17] Have you had the opportunity to observe and/or experience other fathers engaged in play with their children?

[If "yes"]: From what you have seen or experienced in this regard, what differences and similarities exist between you and other fathers engaged in play with their children?
 - [18] How does the way(s) in which you play with your child(ren) compare with the way(s) your own father played with you?
 - [19] What do you think is responsible for these differences?
 - [20] As a father, in terms of your play with your elementary-aged child(ren), what is the approximate percentage or proportion of time you:
(a) lead or initiate
(b) follow
(c) mutually collaborate on the kinds of play you engage in with them?
 - [21] If this percentage breakdown changes or has changed, what do you think is responsible for the changes in initiating/following/collaborating in play experiences with your child(ren)?
-

PART V - Summary and Conclusion

- [22] When you think about play in your life today, how would you define it?
- [23] What - to you - are the goals of play? What are your goals in playing?
- [24] Does play have any limits or limitations for you?
- [25] What values are espoused in your life through your play?
- [26] In your mind, what are some of the lessons and values you believe your child(ren) has/have learned from you with regard to play in their own lives?
- [27] Looking back on our two interviews, what would you say is the most striking thing you've shared?
- [28] What - if anything - do you feel you have learned from these interviewing experiences?
- [29] What is "the missing question" for you in all of what we have discussed? Please ask it and respond to it as your final statement.

**** FINI ****

APPENDIX I: TRANSCRIPTION INFORMATION
LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

16 Preston Road #1
Somerville, MA 02143

June, 1994

Dear

Enclosed please find the transcript of our second interview regarding my dissertation topic, "Play and Fathering". I am pleased to be able to send this off to you as per your earlier written request.

Please feel free to make any changes, additions, or deletions as you see fit based on both your recall of our interviews and your current thoughts and reflections on the questions. My one request, however, is that, if you plan to make any modifications in the text of the interview as shown on the transcription, you would please get the complete and revised transcript (with your initialed changes) to me no later than seven days after you receive this in the mail. Otherwise, it will make my coding, inputting of additional data, and data analysis a tricky and sticky proposition.

I'd like to close by thanking you again for your help and support in getting this project off the ground. I found our interviews to be particularly useful to me on both personal and professional levels, and look forward to further and more informal discussions with you in the future.

I'll look forward to hearing from you and possibly receiving your revised transcript within the next ten days or so -- enjoy the reading!!

Sincerely,

Daniel Yalowitz

enc.

APPENDIX J: PARTICIPANT
PERSONAL PROFILE LETTER AND FORM

16 Preston Road
Somerville, MA 02143

19 October 1994

Greetings of the Season to you! It seems hard to believe that it's been nearly six months now since our interviews on Fathering and Play (remember them?) Well, I'm pleased to report that, at this point, I have completed drafts of five of the six chapters for my doctoral dissertation - a feat for me, especially over those desultory summer months and now that I'm back to work (more than) full time!

I have recently been asked by members of my dissertation committee to collect more demographic and biographical information on each of my participants for this research. I have decided that the simplest method of obtaining this information from you is to put it in questionnaire format. To this end, I have included the questionnaire and a stamped, self-addressed envelope for your convenience. My sense is that this form should not take more than fifteen minutes to complete and get into the mail to me.

As time is of the essence (I'm hoping to defend in mid-December), I would appreciate your efforts to get this back to me by Monday, October 31st. Let me take a moment now to thank you in advance for your continued support toward my ultimate goals - meaningful research and a doctorate!

I hope all is well with you and your family and wish you the very best for a happy and healthy fall and final few months of 1994!

Sincerely,

Daniel Yalowitz

enc.

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION BIOGRAPHIC PROFILE: FATHERING AND PLAY

Your Name: _____ DOB: _____

Wife's Name: _____ DOB: _____

Your highest earned degree: _____ Wife's highest earned degree: _____

Your line of employment/work: _____

Your wife's line of employment/work: _____

Child(ren)'s Names, gender, ages: _____

Type of community you currently live in: _____

Type of community you grew up in (ex: rural/urban/suburban/etc) (in your early childhood): _____

Type of community you grew up in (during your adolescence): _____

Names, gender, and ages of all your siblings: _____

Extent and type of employment of your **father** while you were growing up:

Extent and type of employment of your **mother** while you were growing up:

How would you describe your family's socioeconomic class status when you were a young child? _____

How and did this change as you grew into adolescence and adulthood?

How would you describe your family's current socioeconomic status?

Again, my special thanks and appreciation to you for completing this and mailing it back to me in the enclosed envelope as soon as possible!

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