THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

The Lived Experience of Anger in Children

by

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

CALGARY, ALBERTA

JUNE, 2000

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation research is to describe children's lived experience of anger within a parent-child interaction. The study, based on an existential-phenomenological approach, is intended to assist parents and professionals to increase their understanding of children's anger and to improve the quality of clinical interventions with children and families. It will also help to stimulate and guide further research on children's anger.

Four boys and four girls, aged between four and five years old, were interviewed. Informal play interviews with the children were conducted prior to the actual research interviews. The research interviews were conversationally based together with an enactment of the anger incidents through play. Parents' described their experiences of anger with their child and their individual understanding of the child's anger in separate interviews. This procedure was used in order to gain an understanding of the interaction involved between the parent and child during anger.

As one child participant was unable to share any angry incidents which had occurred with his parents, the analysis and interpretation of information gathered was based on seven of eight families interviewed. Reflections on each participant's individual experience with anger are presented. As well, an interpretation of the common experience with anger among the child and parent participants was made.

Themes which emerged from the study describing the experience of anger among the children were: a) anger as a mixture of negative feelings (i.e., disappointment, sadness, frustration, powerlessness, and worry), b) anger as a justified response to

roadblocks, and c) compliance. Overall, the child participants described being angry when they felt they had not been heard or were misunderstood by their parents, when their requests were denied, when their voices were insignificant, when their needs were not met, or when there were unreasonable expectations imposed upon them. They tended to believe that their anger was justified and that they must fight for their own rights, acceptance, and autonomy. However, many of the children became compliant when they felt intimidated by the little power they had or when they perceived a need to protect themselves.

Themes relating to the parent participants' experiences with anger were: a) maintaining control, b) frustration, and c) dialoguing toward a resolution of anger. In general, the parent participants were frustrated when they felt out of control in dealing with the child's anger. However, most realized the importance of remaining calm in order to better communicate with the child and to resolve the anger incident.

Implications for clinical practice are discussed. These include items such as clinicians' sensitivity to the complex nature of anger, attention to children's developmental needs, special considerations when working with younger children within a family context, application of systemic orientation and play techniques in therapy, and parent training and support. Limitations arising from the study are identified in relation to conducting phenomenological research with preschool aged children and the particular focus on a parent-child dyad within a family system. As well, suggestions for developing more in-depth, qualitative research on anger and other related issues are provided.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Anyone can become angry – that is easy.

But to be angry with the right person,

to the right degree, at the right time,

for the right purpose, and in the right way

– this is not easy.

Aristotle

<u>The Nichomachean Ethics</u>

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This dissertation research concerns the children's lived experience with anger in a parent-child interaction context. Anger is a common emotion; an emotion that is frequently experienced and reported (Averill, 1982; Dix, 1991; Sharkin, 1996) and yet it remains a "misunderstood" emotion (Tavris, 1989; Modrcin-McCarthy, Pullen, Barnes & Alpert, 1998) and a "misnamed" emotion (Dupont, 1994). Almost a century ago, Hall (cited in Novaco, 1985) first recognized that there were very few studies on anger. Today, researchers still mention the lack of comprehensive information on anger in both children and adult populations (Akande, 1997; Averill, 1982; DeBaryshe & Fryxell, 1998; DiGiuseppe, Tafrate, & Eckhardt, 1994; Eisenberg, Fabes, Nyman, Bernzweig, & Pinuelas, 1994; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1992; Feshbach, Feshbach, Cohen, & Hoffman, 1984; Fischer, 1998; Goodenough, 1931; Modrcin-McCarthy et al., 1998; Kennedy, 1992; Nelson, III, Hart, & Finch, Jr., 1993; Novaco, 1985; Sharkin, 1996; Thomas, 1991).

Throughout the literature review conducted, I became aware of a few significant limitations in the research on anger with children. Many studies about anger in children within the quantitative research method tended to address the issue from an adults' perspective. For instance, the researchers in their quantitative studies interpreted the observational data collected during their field studies (e.g., Eisenberg, Fabes, Nyman, Bernzweig, & Pinuelas, 1994; Karniol & Heiman, 1987; Russell, 1990) according to an adult frame of mind. The understanding or interpretations of the observations may be very different if developed from the child's own perspective, a difference that may be critical to an understanding of children's experiences with anger. Also, it appeared that

the complexity of an individual experience may not be well presented through any coding system.

During the literature review, I also learned that some studies of anger with children which involve a "question-and-answer" format within a formal, authoritarian atmosphere and relationship (e.g., Felleman, Barden, Carlson, Rosenberg, & Masters, 1983; Russell, 1990; Underwood, Coie, & Herbsman, 1992). It seemed likely that children may perceive this as a test and would rationalize their responses without their being aware of doing so. It is essential for researchers to be able to enhance the participants' expression, especially on such a private and subjective experience as anger.

Moreover, there were some other findings that struck me as I came to realize that anger occurs more often within the family than outside the family. Jones and Peacock's (1992) study of self-reported anger in adolescents indicated that children's anger was brought about by mothers (65%), siblings (62%), friends (57%), and teachers (53%). Also, Cummings and El-Sheikh (1991) suspected that some children deal with anger incidents on a daily basis. Dupont (1994) reported that anger toward parents is common among young people, as they tend to perceive their parents as controlling, annoying, and disappointing. Not only is anger a common response to stressors for children within their home settings, anger is also an experience constantly shared by parents in their parenting (Dix, 1991).

There were some methodological concerns discussed in the current literature. In many studies, the selection of participants was exclusively from individuals who had already been identified as being aggressive and delinquent and were from special

education or residential treatment programs (Deffenbacher, Lynch, Oetting & Kemper, 1996; Mayne & Ambrose, 1999) — the extent of the applicability of clinical findings toward the general population is tenuous. The other concern pertains to the generalizability issue within a quantitative research paradigm, which is the transferability of the research findings from adults to the younger population which might not be valid (Nelson III, Hart, & Finch Jr., 1993; Sharkin, 1996). Thus, an effort to study anger with a non-clinical population and a younger population was warranted.

On further reflection of the literature review on anger in children, a number of questions came to mind. For example, How do children perceive or feel about their own anger responses? How does the home setting influence the way children express their anger? How would the interaction or relationship between a parent and child play a role in the children's expression of anger? How could I create a setting that is more conducive to the study of anger in children? Would I be able to tap into the children's core beliefs and feelings about anger which are grounded in their day-to-day living? I was not satisfied with the information gathered in the current literature on anger in children. In particular, I felt that my 'questions' had not been addressed deeply, and many had been overlooked.

From a diverse range of topics within the field of anger in children available for further study, I chose to study the lived experience of anger in children for two primary reasons. First, there was a remarkably limited amount of qualitative research in the context of anger, especially concerning families with preschool-aged children. Thus, this appeared to be a sound tentative research project to undertake. Second, I realized that

anger was a common experience for me as a child and felt I could relate to it in such a way that it would be a meaningful activity to devote myself to. Thus, the research question developed as "What is the lived experience of anger in children within a parent-child interaction context?"

I understood that there were many ways to study the experience of anger in children, and pondered the method that I would feel most comfortable with in relation to my knowledge, skills, and personal style. In order to understand the meaning of anger as perceived by preschool children, I felt it was important for me, as a researcher, to listen attentively to their subjective, lived experiences with anger. Thus, an existential-phenomenological research approach to was chosen conduct the study (Colaizzi, 1978; Osborne, 1990, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989; Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). Existential-phenomenology is primarily concerned with the essential meaning of the phenomenon under study by exploring and understanding what something is really like (Van Manen, 1990) from the "insider" perspective (Osborne, 1994). This research seeks to combine existential phenomenology and the use of play. Play offers an avenue for an existential-phenomenological study of the meanings young children make of their experiences with anger (Anderson & Anderson, 1996; Van Manen, 1984).

The aim of this dissertation research is to increase our understanding of children's experiences with anger based on a first-person perspective, that is, the children's own voices. As well, the understanding developed from this study will assist professionals and parents in improving the quality of clinical service available for children and to strengthen the parent-child interaction during anger situations in a positive direction

respectively. As a clinician, the practicability issue is of most interest to me. It is my view

that it is important to bridge the gap between the research results in psychological

research and their implications for clinical practice.

It is my hope that the initiative in conducting this research will enlighten and

attract interest and support from other researchers and practitioners to conduct further

quality research which will expand and develop a better understanding of children's

anger.

The dissertation is organized in the following manner: Chapter One, Introduction

describes the background information related to the research on anger and outlines the

rationale for the study. Chapter Two details the literature review pertaining to anger.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology used in the study. Chapter Four outlines the

seven case studies relating to the lived experience with anger in children within a parent-

child interaction context and discusses the themes drawn from the case studies. Chapter

Five, the concluding chapter, is an in-depth discussion of the research findings within a

broader context, including and connecting with the research process findings from other

studies, implications for clinical practice and treatment, future research, and limitations

encountered in the study.

Chapter Two, the literature review begins with a discussion of the

conceptualization of anger. An overview of the multiple perspectives of anger is

presented. I then focus on introducing different ways to understand children's

experiences with anger. As the research question concerns the children's experience of

anger within a parent-child interaction context, the literature reviewed relates to the

family socialization of anger, particularly the parents' responses to children's anger and its impacts on the parent-child interaction during anger and to the overall relationship. Clinical treatments of anger in children are highlighted as well.

In Chapter Three, I share my personal interest in studying anger by revealing my own story of experiences with anger and assumptions about anger. Another important section in the methods chapter refers to the documentation of the "trail" developed over time in the process of conducting this study – that is, how the decisions were reached to develop the final research question, the method used, and the approach employed to implement the study. Furthermore, the compatibility between existential-phenomenology, the use of play in phenomenological research, and the systemic approach to counselling in clinical work is discussed. Ethical issues involved in conducting this research are discussed at the end of Chapter Three.

In Chapter Four begins with an overview of the seven individual families interviewed including background information on each family, the interview process, and my reflections of the experience with anger of the child and his or her parents. From the interviews with the participants, common themes were extracted relating to the experiences with anger in the children and in the parents separately.

Chapter Five provides a detailed discussion of the findings of the present study particularly in relation to the current literature. The parents' perspectives of the child's experience with anger, as it is connected to their responses toward their child during an angry situation is also discussed. Included are suggestions for future research in the area of children's lived experience with anger in a parent-child interaction context,

implications for counselling practice and intervention strategies, and limitations encountered during the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review is presented in this chapter with two specific personal goals. First, I provide the information selectively as a context to familiarize myself with the current state of research on anger pertaining to children and second, to develop a better appreciation, comprehension, understanding, and reflection of the research findings and their implications.

The research question is: What is the lived experience of anger in children within a parent-child interaction context? The organization of the literature review is as follows: I begin with a general discussion of the anger concept as a multidimensional construct and the different theoretical perspectives on anger. The second section focuses specifically on the children's experience with anger, including the affective, cognitive, physiological, and behavioral components. As my research interest relates to the experience of anger in children within a parent-child interaction context, in the third section, I discuss parents socialization and anger in children – that is, how do children develop the concept of anger through socialization within the family? The fourth section summarizes the clinical treatments of anger.

Anger Conceptualization

Anger: A Multidimensional Construct

What is anger? The current literature contains a number of views regarding anger, depending on the approach of the researcher. Berkowitz (1990) explained that anger consists of multiple components, including affective, cognitive, physiological, and behavioral dimensions. Indeed, Sharkin (1988) pointed out that it is difficult to offer a

"unitary" definition of anger. In current psychological research, anger is commonly viewed as a combination of the above mentioned characteristics, depending on the researcher's theoretical orientation (Averill, 1982; Berkowitz, 1990; Furlong & Smith, 1998; Kennedy, 1992; Lehnert, Overholser, & Spirito, 1994; Novaco, 1985; Sharkin, 1988; Spielberger, Reheiser, & Sydeman, 1995; Thomas, 1993).

Anger: Multiple Perspectives of Anger

Not only is anger a multidimensional construct, there are also multiple perspectives in understanding anger. For the purpose and importance of conceptualizing the nature of anger in this study, I discuss the different perspectives of anger in the following section.

State anger and trait anger. Spielberger, Jacobs, Russell and Crane (1983) developed the various manifestations of anger. State anger is defined as "a psychobiological emotional state or condition, consisting of subjective feelings that may range in intensity from mild irritation or annoyance to intense fury and rage, accompanied by increased muscular tension and arousal of the autonomic nervous system" (p. 168). The intensity of anger experienced by an individual varies from time to time, according to the perception of the unfair treatment by others and the frustration associated with the barriers (Tanzer, Sim, & Spielberger, 1996).

Trait anger is defined "in terms of individual differences in the frequency that anger was experienced over time to frustrating situations with angry feelings" (Spielberger et al., 1983, p.169). It has been found that individuals with high levels of

trait anger experience more frequent and more intense state anger (Spielberger, Krasner & Solomon, 1988).

The difference between the concepts of state anger versus trait anger is that state anger is viewed as an emotional state at a given time and that the intensity of the anger experienced by an individual varies from situation to situation. Trait anger implies that an individual has a disposition to be angry as a personality characteristic and is prone to anger easily.

Spielberger et al. (1988) developed the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory – STAXI – to identify a) the intensity of angry feeling experienced at a certain time; b) individual differences as a personality trait; and c) various forms of anger expression and control: anger-in, anger-out, and anger-control. Overall, studies show support for the state-trait anger concept (Deffenbacher, Oetting, Thwaites, Lynch, Baker, Stark, Thacker, & Eiswerth-Cox, 1996).

Developmental perspective. Essentially, a developmental perspective recognizes that a person has different physical and psychological capabilities during different periods of life (Kassinove & Sukhodolsky, 1995). The expression of anger is identified with infants two months old (Lewis, Alessandrini, & Sullivan, 1990). Izard, Hembree, and Huebner (1987) and Stenberg and Campos (1990) also found that babies between four and seven months of age are capable of expressing their anger to restraints and inoculation. They found that the display of anger in babies increases noticeably between seven and 19 months of age.

Goodenough (1931) indicated that the frequency of anger incidents reaches its climax at age two and gradually decreases as the child grows older. Miller and Sperry (1987) reported that by the age of two and a half, children are capable of expressing their anger through their verbal ability.

Psychodynamic perspective. By the 1920s, Freud had developed his dual-instinct theory (Caprara, 1984; Stuart & Sundeen, 1991). According to this theory, humans are governed by two instincts, Eros and Thanatos, the life instinct and the death instinct respectively. The life instinct includes the sexual instinct which seeks the continuation of life, whereas the death instinct includes the aggressive drive which seeks the destruction of life. Psychoanalysts, including Lorenz (1966) and Bach and Goldberg (1974), accepted Freud's instinct theory along with his concept of catharsis, which described the release of accumulated aggressive energy. Anger was viewed as an instinctual impulse. Unexpressed anger is akin to an hydraulic model in which internal pressure increases and inhibits energy consumption (Smith, 1994). Holding anger back was considered unhealthy and dangerous. These theorists believed that people who chronically suppressed their anger would develop emotional and mental dysfunction (e.g., schizophrenia, depression), physical illnesses (e.g., ulcer, headaches, hypertension), behave cruelly towards others (e.g., child abuse, murder), and display explosions of anger or rage. The psychodynamic perspective recognizes the importance of enhancing the expression of an emotion, such as anger (Greenberg & Sanfran, 1989; Sanfran & Greenberg, 1991).

Behavioral perspective. Within the traditional Skinnerian behavioral paradigm through the learning and conditioning principles, emotions such as anger can be viewed as conditioned responses to environmental stimuli (Skinner, 1953). That is, the behavioral perspective orients toward a connection between the antecedents and consequences of anger (Kassinove & Sukhodolsky, 1995). It is believed that behavior is determined both by the present environment as well as the previous responses to that environment. Therefore, one has to examine current cues from the environment and the conditioning history and relate them to the anger response (Salzinger, 1995).

Cognitive perspective. In this approach, the formation of anger is derived from a cognitive appraisal process (Berkowitz, 1990; Lazarus, 1991a, 1991b; Novaco, 1985; 1995; Rubin, 1986). The belief one has regarding an anger-provoking situation will direct one's responses. Thus, a person may feel mildly irritated or annoyed rather than angry if the provocation is not perceived as warranting an angry reaction or if he or she prefers to control the arousal of anger. In other situations, however, when the provocation is perceived to be negative, the anger may be intensified, with other emotions perhaps occurring concomitantly (e.g., sadness, hurt, and anxiety).

With children, research shows that the ability to process social information plays a significant role in their responses to an angry situation (Crick & Dodge, 1994; 1996; Dodge & Coie, 1987; Dodge, Price, Bachorowski, & Newman, 1990).

Social constructivist perspective. In this approach, anger is understood as an interpersonal emotion occurring within a social context (Averill, 1982, 1983; Tavris, 1989). It is indicated that anger is an experience quite often involved with someone we

know well (21% of reported cases) and someone we love (33% of reported cases) (Averill, 1982). Similarly, Wallbott and Scherer (1986) found that personal relationships were the primary causes of anger incidents. Through socialization, individuals learn about the meanings, norms, and rules that govern the display of anger.

Furthermore, according to the social constructivists, emotions are treated as responses of the whole person rather than as an expression of a separate entity, such as physiological reactions, as a behavior, or as a thought (Averill, 1983). Anger also serves a function in the social system or fulfills a purpose for ourselves, for example, to maintain control within families, or to convey that others may be in the wrong.

When an individual is angry, the responses are regulated by his or her understanding of the rules and norms of anger expression as established by society. One cannot ignore the influence of culture on the experience of anger (Sharkin, 1996; Tanaka-Matsumi, 1995; Tavris, 1989). As individuals are expected to manage anger according to appropriate social rules, there are cross-cultural variations in the conceptualization of anger, especially in anger expression (Frijda & Mesquita, 1994; Hendry, 1986; Matsumoto, 1990; Russell, 1990; Scherer, Wallbott, Matsumoto, & Kudoh, 1988; Tanzer, Sim, & Spielberger, 1996).

Overall, as anger is viewed as a socially constructed experience. The first step to understanding one's anger is to explore and identify how one sees the world, or in other words, the attributes or meanings one attaches to the events that result in the development of anger (Kassinove & Sukhodolsky, 1995).

In this section, anger is first presented as a multidimensional construct characterized by affective, cognitive, behavioral and physiological components. There are also various theoretical perspectives to the study of anger. The following approaches were covered: state-trait anger, developmental, psychodynamic, behavioral, cognitive, and social constructivism. In sum, there is no consensus on a unitary definition of anger. Anger can be conceptualized as one's disposition or proneness to anger (trait anger), as a transitory emotional-physiological reaction (state anger), an instinctual impulse (psychodynamic), a conditioned response to a stimulus (behavioral), a response to a perceived threat or an injustice through cognitive appraisal (cognitive), or an interpersonal emotion (social constructivism). Anger is seen in early stages in infants and people have different psychological and physical abilities for dealing with anger at different stages of life (developmental). It is also recognized that culture plays an important role in shaping the experience and expression of one's anger.

In the next section, different components of anger, pertaining to children's experiences with anger are discussed.

<div align="center">Children's Experiences With Anger</div>

Anger: As Affect

What does it feel like to be angry? In general, the angry effect, the subjective or experiential component of anger may be associated with other feelings (single or in combination), such as anxiety (Rothenberg, 1971), uneasiness, discomfort, resentment, frustration (Stearns, 1972), fear (Danesh, 1977; Kennedy, 1992), tension, annoyance,

irritation, fury, rage (Spielberger, Jacobs, Russell, & Crane, 1983), and distress (Thomas, 1993).

<u>Anger: As Cognition</u>

Beck (1976) emphasized the role of cognition on one's emotions. He believed that an individual's interpretation of an event, that is, the special thoughts and meanings attached to an event, will lead to a specific emotion. Moreover, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) asserted that "cognition is a necessary as well as sufficient condition of an emotion" (p. 247). An emotion will arise depending on the cognitive appraisal of the relationship between an individual and the environment. Berkowitz (1990) echoed the operation of the cognitive process in the formation and regulation of anger. He maintained that a person may feel mildly irritated or annoyed rather than angry if he or she prefers to control the arousal of anger. In other situations, however, when the provocation is perceived as overly negative, the anger may be intensified, with other emotions perhaps occurring concomitantly (e.g., sadness, hurt, and anxiety).

Overall, from a cognitive perspective, people will become angry when they believe they have been treated unfairly, or have been disappointed, threatened, insulted, attacked by others, or perceive their identity is at risk including their fundamental values and a sense of social injustice (Beck, 1976; Lazarus,1991a, 1991b; Novaco, 1985; Rubin, 1986; Thomas, 1993).

What do children believe about their anger? What is the role of cognition in the experience of anger? Research in this area focuses primarily on children's perceptions of the antecedents of anger. Anger in children is often reported to be associated with

siblings, peers, parents and within the family, or with authority figures (Covell & Abramovitch, 1987; Dupont, 1994; Feshbach, Feshbach, Cohen, & Hoffman, 1984; Nelson III, Hart, & Finch, Jr., 1993; Phillips & Whissell, 1986). The perception of the antecedents of anger in children was also reported to be related to certain types of events or actions, for instance, "uncontrollable events, injustice, embarrassment or threat of self-esteem" (Nelson III, et al., 1993, p. 145), "physical attack (e.g., biting, kicking), verbal attack (e.g., teasing, name-calling), rejection (e.g., being ignored, not allowed to play), material intrusion (e.g., taking away or destroying space or toys), and compliance (e.g., asked or forced to do things)" (Fabes & Eisenberg, 1992, p. 119). Furthermore, Carpenter and Halberstadt (1996) reported that some of the events which triggered anger in children, aged between five and seven years, toward their parents were: receiving inadequate attention, punishment, unfair treatment, not getting one's way, and power struggle.

Moreover, Karniol and Heiman (1987) conducted a study with sixth grade students which indicated that children identified different reasons for their anger when interacting with adults compared to their interaction with peers or siblings. For instance, children reported that they will become angry when adults impose behavioral limits on them, ask them to do tasks, be unfair with them, and punish them. However, when interacting with their siblings and peers, children reported that situations which made them angry were bragging, gossiping, yelling, swearing, interfering with one's play/action, or conflicts over ownership of objects. Two common situations leading to anger in their interactions with adults and with other children referred to others' non-

compliance with their own desires and consequences related to their own prior behavior –

for example, if the child did something wrong to offend his or her father and in turn the

child became angry because of the punishment introduced by the father.

Age has been found to be a factor involved in the changing perception of the

antecedents of anger among children as they grow older. Based on reports from mothers,

Goodenough (1931) indicated that the majority of angry outbursts in toddlers take place

during meal times, dressing activities, and playtime. Incidents of anger during the

preschool period mainly involve conflicts with peers about the use of space and

ownership of objects (Fabes & Eisenberg, 1992; Hartup, 1983; Parke & Slaby, 1983).

As age increases, physical threats and pain as sources of anger decrease while

threats to self-esteem become more likely to elicit anger. Also, the perception that

parents represent as a source of anger gradually decreases as age increases (Feshbach et

al., 1984). In a similar vein, Dupont (1994) found that the perception of causes of anger

change with the increase of age, characterized with maturation and life experience. He

reported that young children between seven and ten years old became angry when they

were frustrated (e.g., due to failure in accomplishing something they wanted to do or were

allowed to do) and intimidated (e.g., being hit, pushed) and at about eleven or twelve

years of age, they described that their anger was associated with another person's actions

(e.g., name calling, cheating) and resulted in a more sophisticated description of feelings

such as irritation, annoyance, disgust, contempt, and so on.

Gender difference in the perception of antecedents of anger is discussed by

Karniol and Heiman (1987) in that girls tend to become angry due to the adults' demands

upon them in completing tasks, while boys will attribute their anger more in relation to disagreement about ownership of objects with peers. Dupont (1994) similarly reported that young females tend to perceive threats to relationships as a cause of anger whereas males' anger was associated more with possessions, situations, or performance.

Another area that has been explored in the cognitive aspect of children's experience with anger refers to the understanding of anger when compared to the understanding of other emotions. It was found that understanding anger in children (meaning recognition of angry facial expressions and labeling of angry emotions) becomes more accurate as age increases (Bortolitti, D'Elia, & Whissell, 1993; Camras & Allison, 1985; Denham & Couchoud, 1990; Michalson & Lewis, 1985).

In sum, much of the research in children's cognitive experiences of anger reflects the important role interpretation plays in the anger experience. Most children attribute their anger primarily towards their families and peers. They also maintain different perceptions of the antecedents of anger during their interaction with adults versus their interaction with peers. Characteristics like age and gender were found to be related to perceptions of the antecedents of anger. Moreover, the older the children became, the better they understood their anger.

Anger: As a Verbal/Behavioral Response

Anger can be inferred from various forms of behavior and cannot be defined by a single behavior. For instance, anger involves an individual's actions to punish others (Aristotle, Plutarch, & Seneca, cited in Schimmel, 1979), to communicate one's distress (Rothenberg, 1971), to correct others' wrongdoings and maintain social conduct (Averill,

1982), and to warn, intimidate, or attack others (Kennedy, 1992). It is argued that individuals could express anger without showing aggression and harming others. Aggression is only one form of behavior in reaction to anger, and not all anger results in aggression (Averill, 1982; Dodge, 1991; Furlong & Smith, 1998; Kassinove, 1995; Lemerise & Dodge, 1993; Olweus, 1994; Rothenberg, 1971; Thomas, 1993). As Taylor (1988) points out, "we can be angry and not aggress" (p. 149). Interestingly, Novaco (1995) examined the mutual, bi-directional relationship between anger and aggression. He claimed that "aggressive behavior can produce anger reduction by cathartic effects, but it can also be speculated that anger can be intensified by aggression when such behavior has not yet reduced the provocation" (p. 334).

When do children first become capable of expressing anger? From a developmental viewpoint, Izard, Hembree, and Huebner (1987) and Stenberg and Campos (1990) found that even babies, at about four to seven months, are capable of expressing anger in response to restraints and inoculation. Miller and Sperry (1987) indicated that, by two and a half years of age, children have developed the ability to verbally express their anger.

How do children express their anger? What are their styles like? Anger expression in children can be best described in these four styles: "anger-in," "anger-out," "anger-control," and "anger-distraction" (Hagglund et al., 1994). The first component, anger in, refers to directing anger towards oneself. The second component, anger-out, refers to displaying anger outwardly with hostility and aggressiveness. The third component, anger control, reveals one's awareness of anger regulation, and the fourth

component, anger distraction, involves the application of coping mechanisms in response to angry feelings.

What are some of the angry responses in children? Anger can be inferred from various forms of responses, without one form being more important than another (Goodenough, 1931). Studies of the expression of anger in children indicate that children demonstrate a wide range of behavior (both verbal and non-verbal) when angered, including: crying, screaming, kicking, hitting, biting, pushing away, throwing objects, raising their fist, head banging, rocking, frowning, pouting, staring, gritting teeth, whimpering, refusing to cooperate, withdrawing by covering their ears, stamping feet, slipping out of the room, and so on (Goodenough, 1931; Miller & Sperry, 1987; Radke-Yarrow & Kochanska, 1990).

Moreover, research in children's expression of anger further indicated that the form of anger expression changes as age increases. Indirect behavioral expression (i.e., not directed at a source), such as screaming, kicking, or holding breath will decrease as the child gets older whereas goal-oriented retaliative behavior will increase, for instance, hitting, biting, and throwing objects (Goodenough, 1931). Also, more verbal forms of anger expression due to the gradual development of verbal capacity and mastery of language in children is noticed, for example, blaming, making accusations, and embarrassment, are found in older children (Feshbach et al., 1984; Raya, 1986). Even with the expression of anger in drawing, Kaplan (1998) found that her older participants (20 and 40 age group) tended to present with more complicated, abstract, or symbolic drawings (e.g., chaos, storms) than her younger participants (11 years old) who remained

at a concrete level of presentation (e.g., angry faces). She argued that the anger themes in drawings is a function of sophistication and maturity rather than the intensity of anger.

Children's reactions to angry situations also vary according to their perceived status toward another person (Karniol & Heiman, 1987). In the case of anger involving an adult, it was found that children will tend to comply, persuade, and become resentful or bitter. Conversely, children will respond to peer-provoked anger through yelling, swearing, physical aggression, retaliation, and seeking adult assistance. Similarly, Underwood, Coie, and Herbsman (1992) also found that children tend to hide their anger toward their teachers who are perceived as authority figures but will openly express their anger toward their peers. It thus implies that anger expression in children can be inhibited by their perceived status of the provoker during an angry incident, which will in turn alter the intensity of the anger experience.

Moreover, researchers have studied the role of gender differences in anger expression in children. It was found that boys tended to respond by venting their anger (e.g., temper tantrum, sulking, yelling, stomping feet) while girls would defend themselves in a non-aggressive manner (Fabes & Eisenberg, 1992; Brody & Hall, 1993), or express anger inwardly (Jacobs, Phelps, & Rohrs, 1989). Karniol and Heiman (1987) and Underwood, Coie, and Herbsman (1992) also concurred that, in general, girls tended to be more inhibited than boys when expressing anger. Similar observations were reported by Dupont (1994) in that females tended to express their disappointment verbally — that is, fussing or talking back to their parents during anger more frequently whereas males expressed their anger in the form of contempt toward their parents. Also,

Dupont identified that even though younger females may get into a fight when they are in conflict with their peers, the nature of fights are more verbal than physical. Even dealing with hypothetical situations of conflicts, it was found that preschool aged girls verbally expressed more anger than boys (Zahn-Waxler, Cole, Richardson & Friedman, 1994). Butaine and Costenbader (1997) indicated that current research tends to support the notion that boys are more likely than girls to respond with aggression when they are angry.

However, there were inconsistent findings presented in the literature regarding the role of gender in the emotion of anger. Using a self-reported anger questionnaire, Buntaine and Costenbader (1997) found no significant differences between elementary school-aged girls and boys regarding the amounts of anger they indicated relating to some hypothetical situations. Hagglund et al., (1994) noted that there was no difference between male children and female children in their expression of anger. The inconsistent findings in styles of anger expression between boys and girls could be the result of the different characteristics of the subjects involved. In the Hagglund et al. study, about 50% of the participants were diagnosed with a physical illness (arthritis or diabetes). Thus, the factor of health status (that is, being healthy versus ill) could contribute to the difference in research findings regarding anger expression in children across genders.

From a research perspective, however, very little attention has been paid to the actual experience with anger between boys and girls (Buntaine & Costenbader, 1997). Kopper and Epperson (1996) stressed the notion of examining gender role identity rather than the gender per se in the expression of anger. Also, it is cautioned that the research

results have to be examined critically, due to the concern of "image management" (Buntaine and Costenbader, 1997) or "social desirability" (Bartz, Blume, & Rose, 1996) among participants in reporting their perceptions and responses to any anger measurements or self-reported anger questionnaires. Perhaps, there could be some discrepancies between reported information and actual behavior in reality. Sharkin (1996) concluded that more research is needed in this area as the findings based on gender and gender role characteristics are still not conclusive at this point.

To summarize, children express their anger in many different ways — verbal, non-verbal, direct or indirect. It was found that they tend to display their anger through goal-oriented behavior as they continue to grow. In addition, the expression of anger in children is related to their perception of the status of the provoker in an angry situation. That is, they tend to be more passive in responding to adult provokers (high-status) and more active toward peer provokers (low-status). However, the issue of gender differences in the children's expression of anger remains controversial.

<u>Anger: As Physiological Responses</u>

During a state of anger, the presence of physiological reactions is demonstrated by characteristics such as increased heart rate, respiration, blood pressure, and tightened muscles which are caused by the secretion of adrenalin and noradrenalin (Deffenbacher et al., 1996; Gentry, Chesney, Gary, Hall, & Harburg, 1982; Siegman, Anderson, & Berger, 1990; Spielberger, Johnson, Russell, Crane, Jacobs & Worden, 1985; Thomas, 1993).

On the other hand, Schachter (1964) and Buck (1983) maintained that physiological responses are neither necessary nor sufficient for emotional experience.

Similarly, studies on emotions in individuals with spinal cord injuries suggested that autonomic reactions are not necessary to behavior but they contribute to emotional experience, depending on how they are interpreted (Chwalisz, Diener, & Gallagher, 1988). Levenson (1988) claimed that the impacts of physiological changes on one's "phenomenological experience of emotion" (p. 39) remains debatable. Russell and Fehr (1994) concluded that it is still unclear whether the physiological responses are necessary conditions for anger or if they are simply associated with anger.

Despite the controversial position relating to the significance of the physiological responses during anger, what are the physiological reactions when children experience anger? El-Sheikh, Cummings, and Goetsch (1989) found that children's heart rate increased in response to adults' anger. Moreover, comparing the response to anger and disgust among preschoolers, Shrott, Bush, McCabe, Gottman, and Katz (1994) noted that children's heart rates increased significantly more with anger than with disgust.

Overall, the present literature review indicates that there is scant information concerning the physiological component in the experience of anger, particularly in younger children.

In summary, this section has outlined the different components of children's experiences with anger, including its affective, cognitive, verbal, behavioral, and physiological components. In the anger literature, it is implied that the role of one's cognitive appraisal plays an important part in an individual's experience with anger. Anger, a multidimensional construct, is generally experienced as a unpleasant, uneasy feeling, and is associated with other emotions, such as anxiety, frustration, fear, distress,

irritation, and so forth. Children become angry when they believe they have been treated unfairly, or are disappointed, threatened, insulted, and hurt by others. Overall, children's understanding of anger and their expression of anger appears to be related to age, gender, and their perceived status of the other person in an angry situation.

Socialization and Anger in Children

Family Socialization

Family is "the first school for emotional learning" (Goleman, 1995, p. 189). It is a place where we learn about feelings, for instance, how others respond to our feelings, how we feel towards ourselves, and how we think and feel about our own feelings as well as other people's feelings. Within a family, parents are considered significant figures in influencing children's development and emotional socialization (Burrowes & Halberstadt, 1987; Debaryshe & Fryxell, 1998; Halberstadt, 1986; Lemrise & Dodge,1993). Based on their "tri-partite model of parental socialization," Parke, Ornstein, Rieser, and Zahn-Waxler argued that parents carry three main roles in their child-caring practices, namely, being an "interactive partner, direct instructor and provider of opportunities" (cited in Parker & Buriel, 1998, p. 467). They explained that parents not only influence their children through close interaction, they also teach or guide them regarding values, norms, beliefs, rules, and so on. Moreover, parents function as coordinator: they organize contacts and activities outside the home. It is emphasized that the influences from parents are especially essential at an early age when children are dependent on them for nurturance and support (Parke & Buriel, 1998).

Indeed, the influence from our interactions with parents also has profound impacts

on children's emotional well-being and development (Goleman, 1995). It was identified

that children become more empathic and able to exercise self-control when their mothers

are empathic toward them in their interactions (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Murphy, 1996;

Eisenberg & McNally, 1993). On the other hand, it was reported that children will

remain physiologically aroused, reactive, activated, disturbed, and anxious even though

their external behavior was under control when their parents strongly discourage them

from expressing their negative emotions (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Murphy, 1996). Other

positive outcomes were identified in children with better social perspective skills, peer

communication, and relationship when the discussions between parents and children were

non-directive and reflective. That is, the parents were able to acknowledge children's

feelings and discuss with the children possible causes related to the emotions experienced

and associated consequences of their actions. (Burleson, Delia, & Applegate, 1995;

Sarrni, Mumme, & Campos, 1997). It was found that the frequency of discussion about

emotion at an age as young as three would be associated with the sensitivity of the child

to others' emotions at a later age of six years old (Dunn, Brown, & Beardsall, 1991).

Cassidy and Berlin (1994) found that toddlers and preschoolers appeared to better

regulate their own emotions when their parents were able to accept their negative

emotions with support and comfort. Similarly, Gottman (Gottman & DeClaire, 1997)

indicated that parents can be "emotional coaches" in response to children's negative

emotions. Parents, as emotional coaches, will accept the children's negative emotions

empathically, help them understand the acceptable and unacceptable limits on their behavior, and discuss problem-solving strategies.

Moreover, emotional coaching was found to be connected with better physical health, school performance, social skills and peer relationship, and self-image, especially showing quicker recovery toward distress and less vulnerability to irritation and arousability (Gottman & DeClaire, 1997).

Other styles of parental responses to children's negative emotions, as identified by Gottman (Gottman and DeClaire, 1997, p. 50) included "disapproving, dismissing, and laissez-faire." Parents tend to be disapproving by being critical and punitive toward their children. Parents who orient themselves toward a dismissing parenting style will believe that negative emotions are dangerous and reflect weaknesses in parents and therefore they will easily minimize the children's negative emotions and try to distract their children. A laissez faire parenting style implies that the parents will recognize and accept the children's negative emotions but they do not know how to guide the children to deal with their negative emotions.

In sum, parents play an important role in helping children understand and regulate their emotions through discourse and discussion. Parental emotional coaching is particularly instrumental in helping children recognize and identify negative emotions and develop strategies on how to deal with their emotional states.

Socialization of Anger Within the Family

How do children acquire the concept of anger through socialization within their families? The following discussion specifically concerns the parental role and the

parents' responses to children's anger as part of the process of helping children understand anger.

Model of socialization of anger. A model of socialization of anger was proposed by Miller and Sperry (1987) to illustrate how caregivers (mothers) shape their young children, aged between 18 and 25 months, in the process of understanding anger. They identified three mutually overlapping areas: caregivers' life experiences and understanding of anger; their personal values, beliefs, and child rearing goals; and parent-child interaction during anger. Their research suggests that the ways that mother and child interact during an episode of anger is closely associated with the mother's life experiences and understanding of anger, as well as with her personal beliefs, values, and child-rearing goals with respect to anger. Moreover, experience in actual management of angry incidents in everyday living will further provide the mother an opportunity to reflect on her belief systems and child-rearing practices in relation to the issue of anger.

Another model of anger socialization was proposed by Tomkins (1991, p. 220): the model of "rewarding and punitive socialization of anger." Rewarding socialization of anger refers to the effort made by a parent to attenuate his or her child's anger. For instance, the parent will acknowledge and accept the child's anger, will encourage the child to verbalize the anger rather than to express the anger in a hurtful manner, and will discuss with the child the source of the anger and appropriate ways of expressing it. When the parent expresses his or her anger pertaining to the child's misbehavior, he or she will explain to the child the reasons for being angry, will discuss with the child a possible alternative behavior, and will reassure the child concerning his or her parental

love for the child. Moreover, the parent will teach the child to be empathic towards others' anger and understand the pain or hurt that may be involved in the experience of anger. Equally important, the parent will encourage the child to defend himself or herself against attack from others.

In contrast, punitive socialization of anger emphasizes the child's suppression of anger. The child is denied the opportunity to openly express anger and is taught to cope with anger according to his or her parent's rules. Otherwise, the parent will withdraw his or her love for the child. Thus, the child's anger is perceived as a reflection of disobedience towards the parent and that must be prohibited. Furthermore, it is believed that a parent will respond to a child's anger by exercising authority over the child, for instance, by insulting the child, threatening to hurt and or hurting the child, making the child cry, or ignoring the child's need for attention and love. Similarly, in the event of dealing with peers' anger, the child is expected to fight back by exercising power over others.

The impacts of rewarding versus punitive parental socialization of anger on children's understanding of anger are found to be dramatically different (Tomkins, 1991). Children growing up in a supportive (rewarding) milieu will not feel ashamed or fearful after expressing anger. They will continue to experience love and respect towards themselves and in their relationship with others. On the other hand, children who are socialized punitively will tend to respond with anger, fear, irritability, and guilt. They will be inclined to impose their own anger on others whom they consider to be weaker than themselves. Overall, rewarding socialization occurs when the caregiver helps the

child to maximize positive affect and minimize negative affect, whereas punitive

socialization, on the contrary, involves caregiver's strengthening of children's negative

affect.

Other researchers also discussed parents' responses to children's anger. That

information is presented below.

Parents' response to children's anger. Parents' responses to children's anger have

been discussed in the literature. Goodenough (1931) found that middle-class mothers in

her study would resort to coaxing, ignoring, using physical restraints, and deflecting

younger children's attention when the child displayed angry outbursts. Eisenberg and

Fabes (1994) reported that children would tend to escape in an angry situation when their

mothers responded with punitive or minimization reactions. Conversely, when provided

with maternal comforts during an angry situation, children would be likely to discuss with

their mothers their feelings of anger.

Other researchers also investigated how anger, as an emotion, influences parent-

child interaction. It is noted that when parents are angry, they use raised voices and

argument, and they are not likely to provide support and encouragement to children

(Miller & Eisenberg, 1988), but become more commanding and punitive (Patterson,

1982). Also, angry parents have a tendency to make negative judgements toward their

children (Dix, Reinhold, & Zambarano, 1990). It is common for mothers to comment on

their own anger experiences and to express their fears of losing control and hurting their

children. Such an anxious feeling over the ability to manage the child was found to be

related to factors such as marital conflicts, lack of social support, housework, financial

difficulty, worry about children, and, most of all, fatigue and moodiness during the menstrual period (Frude & Goss, 1979). Dix (1991) also identified that mothers who are in an angry mood tend to believe that they need to be tougher towards their children.

Parents who respond to children's difficult behavior with anger also appear to affect children's behavior. Crockenberg (1985) observed that toddlers who were treated by their mothers with anger seem to become more non-compliant, more persistent in expression of anger, and show less understanding towards others' distress. Nevertheless, Lemerise and Dodge (1993), argued that this relationship could be bi-directional. The display of parent's anger may influence children's behavior, which in turn may also redirect the parent's response. Therefore, they suggested that it is best to conceptualize the child's recognition, expression, and regulation of anger as a result of the transaction between parent and child. In this vein, Radke-Yarrow and Kochanska (1990) pointed out that the frequency of expressing anger is similar among family members. People living in an angry home environment may be less likely to show empathic understanding toward one another. Instead of viewing anger as a child's characteristic, they specified that anger in children should be examined from an interactional perspective between the child and his or her environment.

Furthermore, parents' responses to children's anger was found to be different between boys and girls. As the child developed, mothers tend to ignore girls' anger but appeared to pay attention to boys' anger. Mothers placed stronger demands on girls to stop being angry (Radke-Yarrow & Kochanska, 1990). Furthermore, Fivush (1989, 1991) found that mothers tended to discuss anger with sons longer than with daughters.

Retaliation is accepted by mothers as an appropriate response to anger with sons but not

with daughters. In contrast, girls were encouraged to deal with anger by rebuilding the

relationship with others. Radke-Yarrow and Kochanska (1990) suggested that this

pattern may be due to societal stereotypes and different standards regarding male vs.

female expression of anger.

Overall, parents' responses to children's anger vary from showing support to the

child's anger, intensifying the child's anger, to suppressing the child's anger. Children

learn about anger by observing their parents' response to their anger and through their

interaction with parents in angry situations children learn about meanings and social and

moral values in relation to anger. Moreover, parents appear to respond to boys' and girls'

anger in different ways.

<div align="center">Clinical Treatments of Anger in Children</div>

The goal of intervention is to help children manage anger but not to exclude anger

as part of our life (Deffenbacher, 1994). In the literature, it shows that anger can be

effectively modified with different interventions within the cognitive and cognitive-

behavioral orientation. The different interventions include: applied relaxation

(Deffenbacher, Demm, & Brandon, 1986; Deffenbacher & Stark, 1992; Hazaleus &

Deffenbacher, 1986), cognitive restructuring (Achmon, Granek, Golomb, & Hart, 1989;

Deffenbacher, Story, Brandon, Hogg, & Hazaleus, 1988; Hazaleus & Deffenbacher,

1986), combined cognitive-relaxation coping skills training (Deffenbacher, Lynch,

Oetting, & Kemper, 1996; Deffenbacher, McNamara, Stark, & Sabadell, 1990a;

Deffenbacher, Story, Brandon, Hogg, & Hazaleus, 1988; Deffenbacher, Story, Stark,

Hogg, & Brandon, 1987; Deffenbacher, Thwaites, Wallace, & Oetting, 1994), social and

communication skills training (Deffenbacher et al., 1996; Deffenbacher et al., 1987,

1994), and anger-focused process-oriented group therapy (Deffenbacher et al., 1990b).

The major strategies are outlined below.

Applied Relaxation Coping Skills (or Arousal Management Training)

When individuals become aroused physiologically during anger, there is an

increase of heart rate, breathing, skin temperature, and muscle tension (Novaco, 1979). It

is found that such physiological arousal during anger could influence the children's

cognitive ability and responses to the situation. Lochman, White, and Wayland (1991)

reported that aggressive children tend to have difficulty identifying the affect they

experience when they are in an angry situation.

The relaxation activities could include deep breathing (breathing-cued relaxation),

relaxation without tension exercises, slowly repeating a calm word (cue-controlled

relaxation), and visualizing something pleasant that generates relaxation

(relaxation/pleasant imagery – Deffenbacher, 1994; Feindler, 1995; Feindler, Marriot, &

Ivata, 1984; Feindler, Ecton, Dubey, & Kingsley, 1986; Feindler & Guttman, 1994). It is

believed that children would be able to regain a sense of calmness and control over

impulsive tendencies and thereby be able to develop some other alternative perspectives

in managing a situation.

Self-instruction, for instance, "stop," "think calmly," or "problem-solve" is

encouraged to be integrated into the process of relaxing oneself (Deffenbacher et al.,

1996).

Feindler (1995) cautioned that though the relaxation techniques were found to be effective with adults in anger management, there has been very little research documenting the effectiveness of using relaxation techniques among children.

Cognitive Restructuring

Cognitive appraisal plays a significant role in one's experience of anger. It was found that children who have angry outbursts also appear to have difficulties interpreting social cues and intentionality of others' responses as well as showing a focus only on their self-interest and needs (Feindler, 1991; Lochman & Lenhart,1993).

Deffenbacher (1994) discussed different cognitive processes that possibly contribute to the formation of anger within oneself. These cognitive errors include: "misestimating probabilities, demanding and coercive thinking, catastrophization, overgeneralization, categorical and inflammatory thinking, dichotomous thinking, misattribution and mind reading" (p. 259).

In anger management training, the technique of cognitive structuring aims to help people better understand their perceptions and thoughts of the anger incidents, to acknowledge that these in turn could affect their feelings and actions, and to shift their attributions and attitudes as a means of managing their anger (Deffenbacher, 1994; Feindler, 1991; Reeder, 1991).

Behavioral and Social Skills Training

Anger becomes intensified quickly when people have difficulty dealing with frustration and conflicts. In the case of children and adolescents, skills training include areas such as assertiveness, communication, problem solving, cooperation, responsibility,

empathy, self-control, and other social skills (Feindler, 1995; Feindler & Guttman, 1994;

Larson, 1994; Lochman & Lenhart, 1993; Morrison & Sandowicz, 1994)

Family Involvement

Kazdin (1987) warned that individual skills training alone is not sufficient to

maintain a positive outcome from the treatment. It has been indicated that family

involvement is an important element for intervention. For instance, Kazdin, Siegel, and

Bass (1992) found that the combination of problem solving skills and parent-management

training was more effective than either treatment alone with antisocial boys. In addition,

Lochman and Lenhart (1993) found that parenting practices, marital discord, using anger

as a means of control, and poor problem solving and communication skills within a

family are some critical areas that need to be addressed during intervention.

Moreover, from a family socialization perspective, DeBaryshe and Fryxell (1998)

indicated that mental health counselors need to understand the influence of family

socialization on children's understanding of anger (and other emotions) as well as their

response to their own anger and to others' emotions. Also, each family has its own

practice and expectations of emotional expression. Therefore, it is essential to involve

children and parents together in any intervention. DeBaryshe and Fryxell also proposed

teaching parents parenting strategies such as understanding the child's emotions, conflict

resolution, and emotional coaching.

In sum, the contemporary treatment of anger is based on the belief that there are

multiple factors including biological influences, family relationships, peer influences and

peer skills, cultural, social, and economic variables involved in the development of anger

(Furlong & Smith, 1998; Smith, Furlong, Bates & Laughlin, 1998). It is important that in an anger management program children learn about how they react and could regulate their physiological responses in an angry situation, their ways of processing social information, and some behavioral strategies to manage their anger.

Summary

There is no unitary definition of anger. In general, anger, is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct, including affective, cognitive, behavioral, and physiological components. Also, there are multiple perspectives of anger, depending on the theoretical orientations of the researcher. Each orientation emphasizes a different focus on the understanding of anger. In short, anger can be viewed as a disposition within a person (trait anger), as a temporary response to the event (state anger), as an instinctual impulse (psychodynamic), as a conditioned response to a stimulus (behavioral), as a response based on a cognitive appraisal of a threatening situation or being treated unfairly (cognitive), and as an interpersonal emotion governed by social norms and practices (social constructivist).

Anger in children is generally experienced as a unpleasant, uneasy feeling, and is associated with other emotions. Children become angry when they perceive that they have been treated unfairly, threatened, insulted, and so forth. Anger expression can be seen early in infancy. The frequency of anger increases and reaches its climax at two and gradually decreases as the children grow older. Anger expression styles in children are commonly referred to as anger-in, anger-out, anger-control, and anger-distraction. Overall, children's understanding of anger and their expression of anger appears to be

related to age and their perceived status of the other person. The issue of gender differences in anger expression remains controversial.

Models of family socialization and anger socialization within the family were presented to explain how caretakers shape their children's understanding and experience of anger. Parent responses to children's anger vary from showing support, intensifying the children's anger, to suppressing the child's anger. Moreover, the parents' responses during anger are known to be associated with the child's gender.

As to the issue of anger treatment with children, the interventions in general are based on the cognitive/behavioral orientation. However, family involvement is strongly recommended.

This chapter provides some essential background information regarding anger in children. A fundamental issue is that the definition of anger remains controversial. It is significant to study anger from different perspectives, including the cognitive, affective, behavioral, physiological, and social systems. Moreover, it behooves us to recognize that the anger experience can vary from individual to individual, from time to time, and from situation to situation.

The current research on anger with children is often examined from an adult's perspective, that is, from a third person perspective rather than from a first person perspective; or through a formal question-and-answer interview format. In addition, it often involves participants who have been engaged in a treatment process. Based on the literature reviewed, the largest gap appears to refer to the understanding of the anger experience in children within a holistic framework. That is, the experience of anger,

including its cognitive, affective, physical, behavioural, and interactive perspectives. Also a minimal amount of research was found on anger within non-clinical, preschool aged children and anger within a family context. As well, the literature regarding the "phenomenological" experience of anger in children is scant. The following chapter focuses on the existential-phenomenological approach and why it was chosen as a method of inquiry for this research.

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

This chapter is an exploration of the development of my research interest in anger

and a discussion of the research method utilized. I begin with a discussion of my

personal experiences and assumptions about anger, followed by the decision-making

process concerning the research question, research method, and approach. Through this

discussion, I hope the reader will be able to follow and better understand the processes

that evolved throughout my 'journey.' A presentation of the process of inquiry which

includes information about the participants, research interviews, data transcription,

interpretation, and analysis as well as rigor issues is included in the third section. The

chapter ends with a discussion of ethical issues pertaining to qualitative research.

My Interest in Studying Anger

From a variety of interesting topics, I chose anger as a theme for my doctoral

dissertation. I wondered why I was involved in studying the phenomenon of anger. What

would I want to gain from studying anger? It was difficult to exactly pinpoint where my

interest in studying anger came from. Let me start by reflecting on my personal

experiences with the emotion of anger.

<u>My Own Story of Experiences with Anger</u>

Anger, like happiness or sadness, was one of the many emotions common in my

family. As a young child, I recalled that my temper was under control most of the time.

However, I would become annoyed, irritated, or anger easily when my needs or wants

were unfulfilled. I had difficulty dealing with my emotions when I was not allowed to

have my own way. It appeared that my expression of anger varied from situation to

situation and from person to person. My anger was displayed through verbal attacks, bargaining, confrontation, sulking, crying, complaining, slamming doors, ignoring others, to a complete withdrawal into my inner world, and so on. I recall that my family used to tease me about my angry responses and I detected a common interaction pattern was that the more my family teased me, the more angry I became, and vice-versa. As a result, my anger increased as I felt I was being trivialized and humiliated – this left me feeling awkward, discounted, and sad and I wondered if I was an important member of the family. My anger would often last from a few minutes to a few hours. As a child, I usually did not make the first move to deal with the anger issue. I knew I did not want to be angry but at the same time I did not know what I could do to come to a resolution. I expected my family would come to rescue me and I would make an effort to stop being angry, although it was not easy, when family members came to comfort me, compromise with me, or talk with me. There were times I experienced the power of anger when I realized that I could gain the complete attention of my family members when I was angry.

Assumptions About Anger

On further reflection, I realized that the experience of dealing with my own anger during childhood had impacted upon me in several ways. I realized my beliefs about anger began in those earlier years. First and foremost, I believed that anger is common in everyday living and soon learned that anger can be expressed overtly and covertly While I did not like the unpleasant, ugly feelings and the tension associated with anger, I accepted the fact that anger was inevitable in our lives but also always wanted it to disappear as soon as possible. It is my belief that we have to take responsibility for

dealing with our own anger. Over time, I came to realize that anger, as a form of energy within a person, could prompt an individual to take protective action to avoid being treated unfairly by others. Overall, I experienced more anger with my family members than with non-family members and I rarely became angry with my peers or my teachers. Perhaps it was a matter of feeling safer expressing anger within the family unit.

In addition to the examination of my personal assumptions about anger based on childhood experiences, I also reflected on my views about anger in the context of my clinical experience working with children and families over a number of years. In my day to day work, I have come to realize that anger is a very common concern expressed by parents. The parents I work with have often emphasized the importance for their child to learn to control emotions such as anger. Also, many parents expressed a feeling of helplessness when they cannot manage their child's anger. Most parents do not like their child to be angry, as if implying that anger is a bad thing. I have noticed that anger is experienced by both genders but in general, there are gender differences in the expression of anger. Young females tend to express their anger through verbal fights with their parents whereas young males will demonstrate their anger through physical aggressive behavior. Often I have found that anger presented by the child is not necessarily the primary issue and that there are multiple problems underlying the issue of anger. Frequently I will question whether anger is the only issue. For instance, is it the way one deals with anger that leads to the problem? Or, is the expression of anger a call for help? Anger is displayed in different forms according to distinct cultures of anger practiced within each family. I am not convinced that venting is a sufficient way to deal with

anger. My own approach tends toward trying to help people identify the context in which anger occurs, and to examine one's beliefs, feelings, and actions in relation to the anger.

I believe that my personal experiences with anger as a child prompted me to select anger as a topic for my dissertation. To some degree, I find the study of anger is something that is real for me as I am able to relate to it not only from a personal perspective, but also through various situations in dealing with anger in my clinical practice.

Researcher Preparation

Coming to the Question

The process of selecting anger as an area of study for the dissertation research did not come easily when searching for and defining a research question. I encountered a great deal of difficulty during the process and felt overwhelmed and frustrated with the information I read about anger in general. I remembered asking myself how much I should know about this subject? It appeared to me that the more I read, the more difficult it was to come up with a research question. I then turned my attention to myself instead of focusing on the anger literature and I began to question what aspects of the anger issue would be more meaningful to study from a personal perspective. During this process, I listened to my own voice, my doubts, and reflected on my personal experiences with anger which I believe in turn enhanced my ability to make a meaningful decision. The research question for my dissertation research became clearer to me. Indeed, it was due to the influence of my personal experiences in dealing with anger within my own family that I decided to study children's anger within a parent-child interaction context. The research

question developed as: "What is the lived experience of anger in children within a parent-child interaction context?"

Choosing a Method and Approach

Why a qualitative research method? I felt that using the qualitative research method would enable me to discover, describe, and understand children's experiences with anger and how the meanings of their experiences are generated in ways a quantitative approach would not allow (Osborne, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989; Stiles, 1993). Moreover, the qualitative research method allowed me to understand the participants' perspectives contextually (Hayes, 1997; Krahn, Hohn, & Klime, 1995). The appreciation of the researcher's use of Self (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) was another factor that led me to believe the choice of the qualitative method would be most appropriate. I recognized that my personal experiences, my views on anger, and my personal characteristics (e.g., race, gender, theoretical orientation) could have an impact on how I conducted the research. For instance, I might highlight what was interesting and important according to my subjective views which in turn were related to my personal characteristics. I determined that researchers using a qualitative research do not approach a study neutrally (Bodgan & Biklen, 1992). Therefore, I acknowledged that my Self influenced not only my research question, but the approach, interpretation, and the ultimate outcome of this research. As a researcher, I needed to be self-reflective, attentive, and mindful of the many factors involved in the realm of human experience (Gale, 1993). I could not take things for granted and considered nothing to be trivial.

<u>Why an existential-phenomenological approach?</u> Within the realm of qualitative research methods, I understood that there were many approaches to consider. I agreed with Denzin and Lincoln (1994) that no single approach is better than another in all cases. Each approach offers a perspective and orientation that addresses a particular aspect or question. I was interested in describing and understanding the meaning of the anger experience in children. Also, the approach used in my study was based primarily upon the nature of the research question (What is the lived experience of anger in children in a parent-child interaction context?), and on the skills and resources available to me (Janesick, 1994; Morse, 1994). Thus, an existential-phenomenological approach was chosen (Benner, 1985; Bergum, 1989; Valle, King, & Halling, 1989).

Phenomenology is viewed as a "philosophical approach to the understanding of the world and a way of gathering information about it" (Lemon & Taylor, 1997, p. 229). Phenomenological philosophy, based on the work of the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1913/1931, cited in Osborne, 1994), is about a science of consciousness. Phenomenology maintains that the construction of knowledge should be based in our everyday lived experiences and enables us to make sense of the world (Fischer, 1998). It is also concerned with the descriptions of the essential structures as they present themselves to consciousness (Owen, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989; Van Manen, 1990). Husserl maintained that the fundamental structure of consciousness is intentional as human activities are oriented toward a specific direction (Spiegelberg, 1982). The issue of intentionality also reveals the concept of interconnectedness between human beings and the world (Van Manen, 1990). A phenomenon then is about how the world appears

to individuals (Spinelli, 1996). Phenomenological research, is a process to explore conscious experience, that is, the human inner world directly (Osborne, 1994). It is about the study of the lived experience (Van Manen, 1990), an exploration to examine human experience as experienced (Colaizzi, 1978) or as a remembered experience (Oiler, 1982).

Husserlian phenomenology, as a pure phenomenology, focuses on the contents of the experience in which one could access the pure immanent experiences without being influenced by one's preconceptions – that is, to the things themselves (Bergum, 1989). On the other hand, existential phenomenology, is concerned with the ontological issue – the existence of the whole person, rather than just the consciousness (Osborne, 1990). The notion of being-in-the-world brought forth by Martin Heidegger, Husserl's assistant, argued that there is an on-going, continuous, co-constituted relationship between the person's existence and the surrounding world(s) (von Eckartsberg, 1998). Heidegger was interested in exploring "what is the nature (Being) of this being? What lets this being be what it is?" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 184). He believed that the understanding of the total being – the experience of being, is only possible when there is a conscious reflection placed within the context of a being-in-the-world (Spinelli, 1996). Such a reflection is interpretive in nature: the hermeneutics of existence. The hermeneutic inquiry, or hermeneutic circle, is a process characterized by an open-ended nature with no beginning or end point, a continuously spiraling effort and also, interpretations are acknowledged from different perspectives that would continue to shed new insights on the experiences being described (von Eckartsberg, 1998). We could increase our sensitivity, awareness, and understanding of the other's experience through "empathic dwelling" (Churchill,

Lowery, McNally, & Rao, 1998, p. 65) – that is, listening attentively, actively, patiently, and openly to what is being said. Moreover, as a result of the effort of listening to the nuances of the speech and dwelling upon the experience described with immense intensity and interest, we could become immersed or absorbed in the world of the other, as though we were a part of the habitants of their world. Thus, the meanings which emerge (as one conceptualized) are grounded within the experience studied. There will be a shared understanding between two people, a state described by Gadamer (1975) as a "fusion of horizons." The interpretation, discussion, and understanding is in the form of a circle of communication and interaction between the researcher and the participants. It is believed that people actively interpret and make meaning of their experiences through language (Van Manen, 1990). Understanding is thus linguistic, dialogical, and intersubjective (von Eckartsberg, 1998). The task of the existential-phenomenological researcher is to illuminate the connections between the lived world and the human experience (Van Manen, 1990). The researcher must articulate the meanings and still be able to maintain the integrity, complexity, and dynamics involved in the phenomenon (von Eckartsberg, 1998).

Moreover, Heidegger believed that it is not possible to achieve a pure description of the meaning of the things through bracketing or reduction as Husserl claimed and which existential-hermeneutic-phenomenological researchers recognize. There is no such thing as knowing without presuppositions (Ashworth, 1996; Osborne, 1990; von Eckartsberg, 1998). Within an interpretive paradigm, the existence of a natural objective researcher does not exist and instead, the perspective nature and biographic-historical

involvement of the researcher is acknowledged. (Walker, 1996). After all, interpretation takes place within linguistic, historical, political, and social constraints that could facilitate or limit our understanding (Chessick, 1990; Schwandt, 1994).

In order to understand the phenomenon in question in a meaningful way, existential-phenomenologists assert that it is important to interpret meanings beyond the data, as a pure description cannot fully reveal meanings, nor is such a venture even possible (Osborne, 1994). In order to capture a rich, thick description of the participants' experiences, I felt that I needed to go through repeated reflections until an essence which reveals the commonalties among the many diversities of a phenomenon was formed (Valle & King, 1978). However, I understood that existential-phenomenologists recognize that it is not always possible to seek a general universal structure of a psychological phenomenon which is shared by all human beings (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). One major factor contributing to this belief is the role of cultural differences in constituting individual experience (Klein & Westcott, 1994). Thus, I realized the importance of keeping in place those culturally-specific aspects of experience during the interpretation process. Moreover, in this study, I was not interested in identifying cause-and-effect relationships or providing predictions based on the findings. I understand that while quantitative researchers strive for statistical generalizability based on the research results, phenomenological researchers aim for empathic generalizability, which is achieved only when readers can relate to the experience described in the interpretation – a process based on empathic understanding rather than using statistical application (Osborne, 1990). It is important to keep in mind that the understanding

derived from a qualitative study may be transferred to another similar context but its unique meanings as drawn from the original study remain intact (Leininger, 1994).

On reflection, I realized there are many similarities between existential phenomenology and the skills I have in my own humanistic and systemic approach to counselling. Thus, it made sense that in addition to the use of an existential-phenomenological research approach, I apply a humanistic systemic approach to the interview process.

First, the approaches both address the fundamental issue of the meaning of experiences. Second, similar attitudes are required for phenomenological researchers and counsellors, such as caring, warmth, active listening, openness, intuition, sensitivity, empathic understanding, ethical responsibility, positive regard, and genuine respect toward participants or clients (Osborne, 1990, 1994).

Also, in both existential-phenomenology and systemic counselling, the relationship between the researcher/participant and counsellor/client is based on the belief that the two parties are interrelated (Osborne, 1990, 1994; Tomm, 1985; Valle, King & Halling, 1989). Existential phenomenologists assert co-constitutionality between human beings and the world. Similarly, from a systems perspective, people do not live in isolation from each other (Campbell, Draper, & Crutchley, 1991). We are constantly influenced by others and, simultaneously, we influence other people. That is, the researcher/counsellor is part of the participant/client's experience, and likewise, the participant/client is part of the researcher/counsellor's experience (Osborne, 1990, 1994).

Furthermore, I agree with the existential-phenomenological researchers position

that presuppostionless knowing is impossible. One cannot deny or undo one's

preconceptions or fore-understanding of a phenomenon (Osborne, 1990, 1994). Instead,

existential-phenomenological researchers pursue their goals through phenomenological

bracketing, that is, to suspend and examine carefully, thoroughly, explicitly, and

continuously their own assumptions, beliefs, knowledge, and expectations about the

phenomenon under study (Asworth, 1996; Colaizzi, 1978; Owen, 1994; Valle & King,

1978, von Eckartsberg, 1998). Likewise, counsellors will constantly question and reflect

on how their personal values and judgment may have been imposed upon their clients

(Cormier & Cormier, 1991). Professional counsellors recognize that it is impossible to be

absolutely value-free within a counselling context (Cormier & Cormier, 1991). I

understand that both existential phenomenological researchers and systemic-oriented

counsellors accept and hold themselves accountable for the probability of influence on

their participants or clients rather than assuming that they can put aside biases completely.

Thus, the use of Self becomes obvious and crucial for both existential-phenomenological

researchers and systemic-oriented counsellors in the research/counselling process.

Use of play in the phenomenological research. The compatibility between the

concepts of existential phenomenology and my counselling approach also permits the

effective use of play to conduct this existential-phenomenological research.

Primarily, play is a natural medium through which children communicate with

others. It provides a safe context in which children feel free to explore, experience,

identify, and express their feelings, fantasies, wishes, worries, and hopes (Bettleheim,

1987; Gil, 1991, 1994). The play process also allows children to reflect on their feelings, to reframe their ideas, and to practice new ways of behaving (Axline, 1969; Landreth, 1991). Similarly, Oaklander (1988) referred to play as a window to our children's world.

In a research setting, play is a medium by which researchers can relate to children's behavior, attend to and listen to the nuances in their speech and gesture, and understand the context in which play occurs (Anderson & Anderson, 1996; Deatrick & Faux, 1991). Graue and Walsh (1995) also argued for the necessity of studying children in context. Researchers should think of children as "living in specific experiences and with specific life situations" (p. 140).

As it is strongly emphasized in existential phenomenology that the person and his or her world are co-constituted (Osborne, 1994; Valle, King, & Halling, 1989), using play in conducting existential phenomenological research can allow a researcher to witness the connection between the play (representing the child's world) and the child participant (Anderson & Anderson, 1996; Van Manen, 1984).

Viewing children as partners in research has been strongly espoused by Parse (cited in Baumann, 1996). He found that although children may be limited in their speech ability, he believed that children have the ability to make their own decisions, and can contribute in the research process by talking about their feelings, thoughts, and imaginations in their own ways, that is, through the use of arts, play, and stories. Furthermore, he cautioned that the process in which children make sense of their experiences is constantly changing and evolving as they continue to develop and have new experiences.

Moreover, it is in the play process that children discover and play out meanings that reflect their own understanding and representation of life experiences (Landreth, 1991; Oaklander, 1990; Rubin, Fein, & Vandenberg, 1983). Because of the "as-if" characteristic of pretend play, children become flexible, playful, and able to mimic real life situations and to explore new opportunities and possibilities (Axline, 1969).

In sum, there is a congruency between the principles of existential-phenomenological research and my humanistic, systemic counselling orientation in clinical practice. Also, play offers an avenue for existential-phenomenological study of the meanings young children make of their experiences with anger.

Pilot Study

Description of pilot study. A pilot study was conducted in the summer of 1996. I borrowed the idea of conducting a pilot study, which is a common practice within the quantitative research method. The objective of the pilot study was to identify a viable procedure in conducting phenomenological research with preschool children as there was scant information available in the literature. In addition, I intended to explore a better or a more unique way to interview the child participants which could help to address the research question, that is, the lived experience of anger in children.

Six children, three boys and three girls, participated in the pilot study. Their ages were between four and five years old. The participation of parents was also obtained. The participants, who were restricted to a non-clinical population (not involved in counselling during the interview period), were recruited from friends and colleagues.

There were three different research procedures employed in the pilot study. Each method was used with two participants only. I randomly assigned each method to one boy and one girl.

For method one, after the completion of the informal play session (a fun play time) with the child alone for about 45 minutes to an hour, I arranged two videotaped observation sessions at the child's home, each lasting for about an hour. The child and his or her parents were encouraged to conduct their usual routines and activities during the videotaping. During the two subsequent interviews (each lasting for approximately an hour), the child and myself watched the videotapes together. After watching the tapes, I asked the child to identify any angry incidents between him or her and the parents. I then played back those identified segments. Immediately after each segment, I discussed with the child the experience in relation to the angry episodes. Play activities were used to facilitate the discussion. I then interviewed the child's parents separately (approximately one hour each) to discuss their own experience of anger with the child. Information generated from the parent interviews helped me to better understand the experience of anger in the child within a parent-child interaction perspective.

For method two, after the completion of the informal play session, I arranged a half an hour interview with the child's father and another half an hour interview with the child's mother to recall any angry incidents with the child during the past three weeks. I then used this information to facilitate the child's sharing of her or his experience of anger during the two subsequent interviews, each lasting for an hour. Play activities were involved to facilitate the child's expression. At the end of the study, an interview of

approximately one hour was arranged with the child's father and the mother. The parents were asked to share more of their anger experiences with their child. Information generated from the parent interview helped me to better understand the experience of anger in the child within a parent-child interaction perspective.

For method three, following the informal play session, the child and myself had a pretend play session to enact a hypothetical angry episode. The scenario was about a child being angry at his parents because they refused to buy him a chocolate bar during their grocery shopping. This activity intended to facilitate the child's sharing with me his or her personal experiences of anger in the interviews to follow. Play activities were involved during the interviews to facilitate the child's expression.

Reflection: What did I learn from the pilot study? The experiences gathered from the pilot studies provided me with some idea as to how I could improve my skills in interviewing and how I could refine the procedures in the research process.

I learned that the informal play session allowed the child and I to become acquainted with each other. It was extremely significant and worthwhile. In particular, it assisted me to become familiar with the child's preferred mode of playing (e.g., drawing, puppets and the like), the child's favorite toys, degree of playfulness and spontaneity within the child, the child's need to talk versus play, and the child's emotional attachment to the toys collected within and outside the family. The informal play session also offered an opportunity to develop trust and rapport between the child and myself.

Reflecting on my skills, I realized on some occasions I tended to follow my own agenda in getting certain information instead of being attentive to the participants'

expression, and subsequently I got lost in the conversation. I also detected that I asked

leading questions with the intent of verifying my presuppositions regarding anger. I

became cognizant of the importance of being more sensitive to the intricate dynamics

between the participants and myself during the interview, especially how I might have led

the participant in their responses. I realized that I could have been mindful of asking

more open-ended questions and asking for clarification when needed.

After considering the three different procedures, it became much clearer how I

would proceed with the research interviews. I examined the pros and cons of each

method. To reiterate, my goal of conducting the pilot study was to identify the best ways

to facilitate preschool aged children participating actively in the phenomenological

interview process.

I found the use of videotaping (method one) was intrusive even though the

participants were carrying on their usual routines at home while I was videotaping. The

play back of the video tapes was not well received by the child participants. They became

more involved in watching the videos than reflecting on their anger experience. In one

family, the videotaping session was not informative as no anger incidents took place

while I was in their home. Overall, it was quite time consuming to conduct the

videotaping and it also caused inconveniences to the participant family. Thus I decided

on the basis of these experiences not to use videotaping as part of the interview activities.

In method two, I found it helpful to have the background information provided by

the parents. I was able to use the information in initiating a discussion with the child,

especially when the child indicated he or she had no idea or recollection of incident with

anger. However, there were a fair number of interviews involved in method two which became impractical for both the family schedule and my own schedule. Therefore, I chose to reduce the number of interviews with the parents and to discuss the anger incident within one interview. The topics for discussion with the parents were then streamlined to include sharing with me (a) their perception of the child's anger, (b) their experience of anger in relation to the child's anger, and (c) the parents' relationship with the child.

As for method three, I found the child participants were able to enact the hypothetical anger incident. However, they seemed to have difficulty sharing with me their personal experience with anger after the enactment. The enactment of the hypothetical anger incident did not seem to make it easier for the child to open up to their personal experience with anger during the subsequent interviews. I determined that it may be easier for the child participants to share with me their personal experience with anger if the anger incidents had actually occurred in their everyday living. Also, I expected that when they had the opportunity to enact the real anger incident, they would become more connected experientially and thus it might be easier for them to talk about the experience of anger.

Overall, it was a positive experience conducting the pilot study, especially the amount of trust and acceptance that I received from the parents. It gave me more confidence to continue with the research.

The Process of Inquiry

<u>Participants</u>

The focus of the study concerned preschoolers' experience with anger within a parent-child interaction context. The child participants, males and females, aged between four and five years of age, were drawn from a non-clinical population, that is, the participants were not attending therapy during the course of the research interviews. The child's father and mother were also involved in the research process. The parents' age, on average, was estimated to be in their mid-thirties. All the fathers that I interviewed worked full time except for two, engaged in graduate studies. For the mothers group, there was a diverse pattern in that some worked full time, some worked part time, and some stayed home full time to care for the children.

The research participants were recruited through referrals from friends and colleagues. I initiated a telephone conversation with the potential participants to introduce myself, explain the purpose and the process of the study, and the possible benefits and risks of participating in the study (see Appendix A, Cover Letter). As it was not my intent to gain a representative sample of Canadian cultural diversity, I did not inquire as to the ethnic background of the participants. However, as I was interested in exploring the role of gender in anger experience, I hoped that I could have a fairly good representation of participation from both genders, and coincidentally, I was able to interview four girls and four boys in the study. I did not reject any potential child participant based on gender.

Altogether, I interviewed eight families between July, 1997 and June, 1998. The

sequence of the interview was as follows: Generally, I attempted to complete all the

interviews and analysis with one family before initiating interviews with another family.

However, due to availability and scheduling of the participants and myself, in certain

situations, some interviews were scheduled with more than one family within the same

period of time. The profile of each family can be found in family description section

outlined in Chapter Four. In qualitative research there is no established consensus for

estimating the number of participants required in a study (Morse, 1994). The point of

saturation, refers to a state during data collection where no new information is obtained

(Leininger, 1994; Morse, 1994). Following this guideline, I stopped recruiting

participants after I completed my interviews with eight families and realized that the

interview data appeared to be redundant and had reached the saturation point.

The Interview Process

All of the research interviews were audio-taped and conducted at the participants'

homes. The idea of interviewing participants in the home was based on the belief that

children are more adept at expressing themselves in a familiar setting (home) than when

interviewed by a stranger (researcher) in a new place (Deatrick & Faux, 1991; Garbarino

& Stott, 1992). An informal play interview, averaging about one hour, was conducted

with each child prior to the research interviews at the home. In this play session, the child

was encouraged to choose the activities that he or she was interested in (e.g., drawings,

puppet playing, storytelling). This informal meeting allowed the child and I to become

acquainted with each other. Most importantly, I found the informal play session was a

medium for the child and myself to establish a relationship, which is a fundamental

element in conducting a phenomenological study with children (Anderson & Anderson,

1996; Deatrick & Faux, 1991).

After the completion of the informal play interview, I arranged an interview

(approximately one to one and half hours) with the child's parents separately to ask them

to recall any angry incidents that they each had with the child. I did not follow a

predefined order of questions in my discussion with the parents but proceeded with the

intent of exploring the following areas: (a) their understanding of their child's views of

anger, (b) the child's reactions to parental anger, (c) their responses to their child's anger,

(d) their views on anger, and (e) the quality and nature of their relationship with their

child.

Following the parent interviews, I had two research play interviews with each

child. During the interviews, I asked the child to recall two angry incidents, one in his or

her interaction with the father and another one with the mother. In some instances, the

children could not identify their angry experiences with the parents. At this point, I

briefly described the angry incidents mentioned by the parents and invited the child to use

them for pretend play – an enactment of angry episodes. Under those circumstances, I

introduced very brief information about the angry scenario in order to encourage the child

to feel free to focus on their own perception and perspective on the experience with

anger. Similarly, when the children's descriptions of the angry episodes were different

from the parents' versions, I encouraged the child to enact their own experience through

play. Some children chose to use drawings in the play interview.

In my interviews with the children, I did not have a set of preestablished questions. I did have some thoughts about the areas of the anger experience that I intended to explore with the children, including the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of their anger experience. Most of the time I tried to let the child lead and then responded with simple, concrete words, making the most of any opportunities for further discussion.

On reflection, my experiences with the interviews were interactive in nature – a person to person (interpersonal) contact. The interviews conducted were dialogue based, coupled with enactment of anger incidents through play. Pollio, Henley, and Thompson (1997) regarded the existential-phenomenological interview as a "path toward for understanding the life-world of a participant" (p. 33).

The questions I asked during the interview emerged freely as we proceeded with our conversation. I found that the interview did not follow a question and answer format. Kvale (1983) indicated the understanding of phenomenon not only from what was said by the participants, but also how it was said. Keeping in mind this notion of sensitivity as to how the messages were conveyed enabled me to become more attentive to the nuances that I experienced in the interview. My approach in the interview was based on a mutually respectful, committed dialogue between myself and the research participants (Pollio et al., 1997). Such an active engagement between us led me to believe that there was a mutual influence between us, on a cognitive and an emotional level. It related to Osborne's (1990) description of the re-spiraling effect which occurs when the dialogue continues back and forth between the researcher and the participant. In my experience,

the interaction in the interview was similar to the activity of two people playing on a see-saw. A mutual effort was generated to create a dynamic interaction between us. The meanings of the dialogue unfolded as we spoke to each other.

The research interviews also included three individual feedback sessions with the child and his or her parents. I shared and clarified with the participants my understanding and interpretation of their anger experience, which I gathered from the research interviews. It seemed that the participants enjoyed the feedback sessions and it appeared that they felt they had been understood. During these feedback sessions, the participants sometimes provided further clarification about their expressions, but I found these additions were not significantly different from what they had shared with me in the previous interviews. Indeed it was a positive feeling knowing that I understood my participants.

In sum, the interviews I conducted with the participants were more of a conversational style. I realized our conversation unfolded as we proceeded in the interview. My relationship with the participants was characterized by feelings of mutual acceptance, trust, respect, and understanding. More details of the individual interview process is discussed within each family description and analysis outlined in Chapter Four.

The Process of Interpretation

In this existential-phenomenological research, the data are the descriptions of experiences with anger provided by the participants through personal interviews. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and participants were given pseudonyms in order to protect their identity. Some of the interviews were transcribed by a professional who had

no knowledge of the personal information about the research participants. I then proof-read the transcripts to ensure accuracy.

The interpretation of data was based on seven of eight families interviewed. This was because one of the child participants was unable to recall or share any angry incidents with his parents. Instead he discussed his experience of anger toward his teacher, who apparently was reported to treat him unreasonably harshly at school.

In existential phenomenological research the challenge of interpretive work is to understand and to provide a full description of the meaning of the lived experiences as they are related rather than to give explanatory accounts, or to predict and generalize outcomes from the data (Pollio et al., 1997; Ray, 1990; Walker, 1996). In order to achieve a good understanding of the interview data presented in the form of interview transcripts, I recalled the importance of engaging in an active, critical, reflective analysis. I acknowledged that in existential-phenomenology, an interpretive understanding is transposed through the perspective of the interpreter (Pollio et al., 1997). Therefore, I was mindful of my personal experiences with anger and its possible impacts on my analysis and interpretation. Moreover, I realized the possibility of a blind spot in that I could not identify all the presuppositions or biases that I might have (Osborne, 1994; Pollio et al., 1997).

An existential-phenomenological researcher strives for the insider's perspectives and its essential meanings in a lived experience (Walker, 1996). I learned that it is essential to go beyond the surface level to penetrate to the heart of matters as the meanings are formed in multi-layers (Lemon & Taylor, 1997; Osborne, 1994; Walker,

1996; Van Manen, 1990). The process of meaning-making is indeed complicated. As such, Osborne (1994) suggested using a more structured approach of data analysis, especially for a novice phenomenological researcher.

I applied Osborne's ideas of the "within analysis" with an individual participant and an "across analysis" with the seven families I interviewed. Specifically, I reflected on each of the parents' individual experiences with anger and then on each individual child's experience. After that, an interpretation of the common experience shared amongst the children and the parents was made (across analysis).

I chose to follow the procedures outlined by Colaizzi (1978) on conducting thematic analysis, which included:

1. Becoming familiar with the transcripts,

2. Extracting significant statements that describe the phenomenon of interest,

3. Reflecting on the meanings of the significant statements identified,

4. Grouping the meanings of the significant statements into themes of related meanings while referring to the transcripts for internal validation, and

5. Describing the phenomenon based on the themes formulated.

Following the steps outlined by Colaizzi (1978), for the "within family" analysis, I began by reading the transcripts 'between the lines' to develop a general idea or feeling for the participants' descriptions. I then proceeded to extract and identify some significant phrases or statements from the transcripts which describe the experience with anger. I continued to reflect on the meanings of those identified statements.

Van Manen (1990) explained that the process of explicating meaning in a phenomenological research is an intense practice of mindfulness – paying close attention to and to be thoughtful of the meanings of life. In this meaning-making process, I used my intuition, creativity, and imagination to understand and interpret the hidden meanings of the expressions provided by the participants, and at the same time being faithful to the actual descriptions and connecting with them as much as possible (Colaizzi, 1978; Ray, 1990). Lemon and Taylor (1997) asserted that the "process of intuiting involves the application of art rather than objectivity" (p. 232). As a researcher, I used my sensitivity to feel what the experience of anger was like in the participants' world. In the process of interpretation, I paid close attention to how the messages were delivered by the participants (e.g., gestures, intonation) in the interviews which helped to clarify the meanings of the statements (Lemon & Taylor, 1997). Also, I reread the transcripts several times in order to maximize my understanding of the explicit and implicit meanings conveyed in their expression. I realized that I needed to go back and forth between the transcripts and my own interpretation. I continually asked myself: What are they really saying? What were the experiences they were going through? What is essential to the experience of being angry?

Themes which are common to the participants appeared to emerge by studying carefully the formulated meanings of those identified significant statements of the individual participants. Again, I referred back to the original transcripts to validate the appropriateness of themes. I asked myself what is a theme? I learned that a theme is "the

form of capturing the phenomenon, the openness to something, the means to get at the notion" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 87).

Through continued reflection on the relationships amongst the themes, I gradually came to conceptualize a deeper understanding and interpretation of the experience with anger.

Rigor Issues

Qualitative researchers (e.g., Leininger, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Osborne, 1990) indicate that it is inappropriate to address the issues of reliability and validity in qualitative research in the same way as in quantitative research. Sandelowski (1986) indicated that, in qualitative studies, the subjectivity of the participants and researchers is valued and therefore attempts to achieve objectivity are not a concern as they are for the quantitative researchers. Similarly, Osborne (1990) explained that the description of a phenomenon in qualitative studies does not depend on empirical or objective verification, as it focuses on subjective meanings rather than facts. The purpose of qualitative research is to understand the human experience rather than arguing for a universally acceptable answer (Packer & Addison, 1989). Therefore, it is impossible in a qualitative study to search for a single description or account from the findings that will be acceptable to all individuals.

According to Sandelowski (1986), the rigor issue in qualitative studies can be examined via the criteria of "auditability" and "credibility" of data. Auditability means that "any reader or another researcher can follow the progression of events in the study and understand their logic " (p. 30). Following Sandelowski's concept, I addressed the

auditability in a number of ways. First, I demonstrated a commitment by being honest and open about the research preparation and process. I did this by providing a paper or audit trail in the report so that readers could follow the description of the sequence of the study and also be able to understand the logic involved in the decisions made. Also, I identified my interest in studying anger, my personal experience with anger, and my personal and professional assumptions about the anger phenomenon. I explained the purpose of this study, then outlined the preparation and the process of inquiry – the participants, the interview process, and the process of analysis and interpretation. Furthermore, I used excerpts from the transcripts to illustrate and support my analysis. The analysis was presented in plain language and organized as clearly and coherently as possible in order to allow readers to understand how I arrived at a particular interpretation.

Sandelowski (1986) maintained that a "qualitative study is credible when it presents such a faithful description of a human experience that the people having that experience would immediately recognize it from those descriptions or interpretations as their own" (p. 30). Credibility in this study was achieved by following Sandelowski's idea – I shared the interpretations drawn from the transcripts with the participants, to see if my interpretations fit with their experiences to ensure a faithful description (Sandelowki, 1986). Further, the many interviews conducted with the child and parent participants from each family allowed me time to establish a strong rapport through conversation, and in turn, helped to enhance the credibility of data (Sandelowski, 1986). It is expected that a good phenomenological description also illuminates the experience of

anger lived by other people (not just the research participants). That is, there is something that the reader can agree with and feel that their own experiences with anger resonated with (Osborne, 1990).

As well, I saw myself as the instrument in the research process and the ways in which I conducted my research were unique (Osborne, 1990). It made sense to me that the findings would lose distinct meaning when applied to other settings as each qualitative study is about a particular situation. That is, a researcher works with a certain participant in a particular context (Sandelowski , 1993).

As for the rigor issue pertaining to qualitative research with children, researchers in particular are required to conduct serious reflection on their attitudes and views about studying children. There is a common perception that children are considered immature, underdeveloped, and less important than adults (Waksler, 1986). As a researcher, I came to understand that it was necessary to take the children's ideas seriously. I needed to show respect and trust for their knowledge of their own world and their ability to share their feelings and ideas.

In the literature of qualitative research with children, Deatrick and Faux (1991) specifically identified that situational (e.g., physical setting), personal (e.g., boredom, fatigue, emotional reactions), and administrative factors could have some effects on children's responses during interviews. Therefore, when I conducted the interviews with the child participants, it was in a quiet and private place in order to reduce distractions as much as possible. I used my sensitivity and judgment to determine the length of the interview, especially when I perceived the child was showing signs of fatigue or boredom.

Moreover it was important for me, as a researcher, to understand and recognize that children can change the constructions of meanings from time to time as new experiences continue to develop as the research process unfolds (Sandelowski, 1993).

Also, Hatch (1990) pointed out that due to the power and superior status ascribed to adults in society, it is difficult for children to present their ideas openly as they often think that they are expected to listen and follow. The child may be preoccupied with the need to present the correct answer when questioned by an adult and may feel that his or her ideas are not important or respected. I also realized the child participants may feel intimidated as they might associate me with an authority figure. Another possible challenge of researching with children, cited by Hatch was that their ideas tend to be scattered and for children it is difficult to "step aside" and reflect on their own experiences. For that reason, I took the time to become acquainted with the child participant and to establish a relationship within their home environment prior to the formal interviews. I understood how important the effects of a good rapport and trust with participants is in enhancing the rigor of the research (Dreher, 1994; Leininger, 1994). Also, the incorporation of play techniques enabled the child to become more at ease and spontaneous when participating in the interviews.

Overall, the considerations and modifications that I made in relationship with the child participants, in interview process with children, in the perspective of studying children in context, in the reflection on views about studying children, and the consideration of the rigor issue enabled me to be more reflective and mindful when conducting the current study.

Ethical Issues

In order to ensure the implementation of ethical standards when conducting this research, the follow measures were applied:

Confidentiality

Pseudonyms were used in the written materials to protect participants' identities. The data were discussed in a professional and confidential way with supervisors. The tapes and transcripts were locked in a secure cabinet. The tapes will be erased after the completion of the dissertation, while the transcripts will be retained as they may be used for presentations or publications in the future.

Informed Consent

I first initiated a telephone conversation with the potential participant family (usually the mother) to introduce myself, explain the purpose, process, and possible benefits and risks involved as a participant in the dissertation research. A verbal consent was given some time later by the participant after she had discussed and obtained consents from her spouse and her child. I reviewed the Cover Letter and the written consent with the participants when I met at their homes (see Appendices A & B).

Both of the child's parents signed two consent forms and were given one copy for their own reference. I kept one copy of the signed consent form for my records. The implications of providing consent were discussed in the consent form, including an understanding about procedures during the interviews, the right of the participants to withdraw from the study at any time or at the request of the researcher, to obtain a referral for assistance to deal with distress if necessary during the research process, as well as

confidentiality issues (see Appendix B).

CHAPTER FOUR: EXISTENTIAL-PHENOMENOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

This chapter describes my understanding and interpretation of the lived experience with anger in children in a parent-child interaction context. To begin, I provide a description of the seven individual families interviewed and my reflections of the individual experience with anger in both the parents and the child. At the end of each family case study, I discuss the interaction dynamics between the parents and child during anger. A table follows each family description to outline the reflections of the individual parent and child experience with anger as well as a diagrammatic presentation of the interaction dynamics between the parent and child.

After presenting the portraits of the seven families, I continue with my reflections on the common themes of the parents' experience with anger. The common themes which emerged from the interviews with the parents (mothers and fathers) were issues about maintaining control, feeling frustrated, and dialoging toward a resolution of anger. I also reflect on the common themes of the experience with anger in children drawn from the interview data. The emergent themes expressed by the children were issues of anger as a mixture of negative feelings (disappointment, sadness, frustration, powerlessness, and worries), anger as a justified response to roadblocks, and compliance. Throughout my reflections on the experience with anger in children and parents, I orient myself to the parent-child interaction perspective. In Chapter five, I discuss the emergent themes in detail and relate them to the literature reviewed.

Family Case Study One

<u>Family Interviewed</u>

Ted is the second child of Kate and Jerome. His mother, Kate, stays home to care

for the family and his father, Jerome, manages a store full time. It is estimated that the

parents are both in their mid-thirties. Ted, five years old at the time of the first interview,

has one older sister, about ten years old, and a younger sister, approximately three years

old. He attends kindergarten five mornings a week.

<u>The Interview Process With the Family</u>

I conducted a total of nine interviews with this family. On my first visit, I

conducted an interview with the mother, Kate, followed by an informal play interview

with Ted. On a second visit, I interviewed the father, Jerome. The research play

interviews with Ted were carried out on three separate occasions. Finally, I conducted

three individual feedback sessions with Ted and his parents separately to share my

understanding and interpretation of the previous interviews. All the interviews were

conducted in the living room of the family home. There were no interviews conducted

with the two other children in this family.

<u>Interview With Mother – Kate</u>

The first interview with Kate, was conducted in the living room which was Kate's

choice. During the interview there were no major interruptions and only a few minor

ones by the children.

Throughout the one and a half-hour interview, Kate was active, open, and candid

in sharing her experiences of anger with me. Kate appeared to be mindful of her own

angry responses and their effects on her children. Even though our discussion centered around the interaction between Ted and his mother in angry situations, Kate also relayed her experiences in dealing with her other children. During the conversation, she shared with me some of the things she had learned about childcare when she worked as a day care worker for five years.

Reflections – Mother's Experience With Anger

During the interview, I understood that there was anger between Ted and his mother when she tried to discipline him. Kate described a time when she and Ted were angry with each other. The scenario was that Ted was bothering his older sister. When Kate intervened, Ted exhibited a temper tantrum, lying on the floor, screaming and kicking.

> He was bothering his sister. Sophie [sister] told him to stop. He kept doing it. Finally I had to step in ... I wanted to stop it before it got too far. So I stepped in. He didn't listen ... first I told him okay you're going into your room. He just laid on the floor and he wouldn't do anything ... so I had to pick him up and I had to take him into the room. He screamed and kicked and just made a big fuss. He was very mad.

Desire for child to express his feelings verbally. Kate said that she would like Ted be more verbally expressive of his feelings. She felt that Ted did not express of his feelings very well, especially when compared with his older sister. An example she gave compared her interaction with the two children:

I was much more able to communicate with her [oldest daughter] ... I don't find

myself doing that with Ted. May be he doesn't communicate with me either. He

is not at that point yet that he can communicate .... I would very often go over and

hug him – something like that .... I usually say I am sorry if I lose my temper.

She felt that because Ted is not vocal she has to approach him directly to find out

whether he is angry.

He doesn't express his anger very well besides just screaming. That's how he

expresses his anger. He is not very expressive of his feelings even when he is

upset at something. He has a hard time expressing to me. He will be upset and I

ask him what's wrong. He can't explain to me why he is upset .... sometimes he

can squeeze out a few drops of tears .... I sometimes ask him if he is mad until he

agrees or disagrees with me. Hopefully or eventually he would be more verbal

about it and tell me that he is angry. Probably it will come in time.

Being in control compared with a loss of control. Kate reflected on her responses

to her children during angry situations. She realized that there were times when she was

able to deal with her anger, but at other times she was not. She recognized that she yelled

too much and the impact that had on the children. "I yelled too much ... I don't need to

yell at them .... They get scared. I think they get scared when I raise my voice."

Moreover, Kate's feeling of being in control of a situation appeared to be contingent upon

her physical strength and her overall feelings.

Sometimes I feel I am in control and other times I don't .... if I am really tired or if

I am up with the kids the night before or stay up late, or they get up early in the

morning, then I have less control over my anger. If I am not feeling good, I have less control. It seems my temper is right there all the time ... whereas other times I am okay controlling it. I can feel when anger starts and I can stop it before it gets out of control.

In summary, Kate found that Ted had a tendency to keep his feelings inside. She stated that she would feel easier handling an angry situation if Ted could be more expressive of his feelings and if there was better communication between them. At this point, she accepted the fact that Ted was not as verbal or transparent as his older sister. Kate hoped that in time Ted would be more verbally expressive and that she and Ted could establish stronger verbal communication when dealing with incidents of anger. Once Kate recognized that Ted was a quiet child, she tried to resort to more physical expressions to communicate with Ted, such as hugging. She did not want to push Ted into talking.

Not only was Kate sensitive to Ted's unique personality characteristics, she was also aware that her yelling had a negative impact on her children. She perceived that her loss of control when dealing with anger situations might be due to low energy levels and her feeling in general.

Interview With Father – Jerome

The interview was conducted in the living room, at Jerome's suggestion. There were no interruptions throughout the interview. He appeared to be friendly, casual, and interested in our discussion of anger and the almost two hour interview went quite smoothly. Jerome was initially apprehensive when he could not recall an incident of

anger with Ted. Nevertheless, after taking time to pause and reflect, he was very fluent in

sharing his experiences. Jerome seemed to be observant of Ted's responses when angry

and of the changes Ted displayed during anger outbursts as he continued to grow. Also,

he was sensitive to his own responses during incidents of anger. Jerome occasionally

discussed his experiences of anger relating to his other children. Overall, it was quite

easy to engage Jerome in conversation.

Reflections – Father's Experience With Anger

Jerome described an incident that had occurred some time ago. He had taken Ted

to a museum show and Ted became impatient. Ted displayed his impatience by pouting,

fidgeting, and whispering. Jerome felt that Ted became upset when he was required to sit

at the show longer than he had expected to.

> We went to a pipe band performance .... He was a little bit impatient. He was mad
>
> at me for making him sit a little longer than what he wanted to. He showed his
>
> lack of interest. Just sort of looking around and fidgeting. He kept bugging ...
>
> except that he did not raise his voice ... he pouted a little bit.

Another scenario that Jerome described related to discipline. Ted had become

angry with him when he was confined to his room.

> When he gets angry at us ... definitely during the discipline stuff .... He usually
>
> ends up in his room for not listening .... Picking him up and taking him to his
>
> room and putting him on his bed whatever. He would yell and cry.

Anger – Tangle between parent and child. Jerome seemed to believe that children

often react with anger toward their parents when they perceive that their parents are angry

with them. Upon reflection, Jerome recognized that he also had a tendency to respond with anger to Ted. He was aware that they were both angry with each other for similar reasons in the museum incident which he had related – that they each felt their ideas were not being accepted by the other.

> Usually when you are expressing your anger, your children will respond in anger as well. I think this is pretty normal .... I don't know if they do that to defuse your anger .... I think he is sort of trying to find out how determined we are about staying in the museum .... I was angry with him too. He is angry at me and I am angry at him .... We both have steam to burn off .... I guess anger is when you feel the children are ignoring you and Ted is rather good at that .... When we were arguing, he would be a lot angrier if I could not see things his way .... Pretty much the same thing ... I just want him to agree with me. We struggle for the same goal.

Anger and guilt: Internal tangle within the parent. Jerome shared with me his feeling of guilt relating to his experience with anger. He wondered if he might have made a mistake by taking Ted to the show, especially when he thought beforehand that Ted might be bored.

> I felt a little bit guilty... because before we went, I knew he was going to get bored and restless. We warned him that it was going to happen but he wanted to go anyway. I wanted to take him too. It's something we knew was going to happen and it happened .... The guilt was sort of coming from whether I did the right thing by taking him there the first place. I suppose that was my decision too. That sort of reasons where my guilt came from. I knew he would get bored.

Perhaps the feeling of guilt that Jerome expressed had somehow intensified his feeling of anger.

Good to see the child growing to be more verbally presentable. Even though Jerome was angry with Ted, he did not ignore or minimize the positive changes he found in the ways Ted dealt with his anger. He had noticed that Ted seemed to be able to deal with his anger through verbal expression a little more as he grew older.

> Now he has more ways to express himself. I guess it is getting a little bit more refined. He doesn't seem to have the sort of out of control angry reaction – angry fists or hitting something anymore .... When he was little, he got very angry and would clench his fists .... I guess he is using more reason than when he was little. He is getting better at explaining his position as his speech skills get better .... He usually wants you to know what he is angry about .... I guess his reasoning is becoming more valid and he sort of doesn't argue with things that used to be a big deal .... It is still a pretty egocentric reasoning sort of thing.

Although Jerome felt Ted's reasoning might be "egocentric," he was pleased with Ted's improvement in his ability to verbally express himself as he developed.

Gender difference: A puzzle. Jerome seemed to feel that the difference in expressions of anger between girls and boys was due to the individual differences in the child rather than to gender.

> I haven't noticed a lot of differences between the male and the female. I suppose I only have Ted to compare with the girls. The two girls express their anger quite differently. The two girls are widely different in the way that they express their

anger too. I couldn't really draw the line – is this the male expression or the female expression.

When Jerome reflected on his own responses to his son and to his daughters, he also realized he was tougher with Ted than with the girls. "I am harder on Ted than I am on the girls. The only reason is because I am a male and he is a boy." From Jerome's narrative, it seemed that the reason he made the connection between being tougher on Ted than on his daughters was because he and Ted are both males. This relates to his personal experience with his own parents and the way he and his sisters were disciplined.

I was more likely to be disciplined by my dad and he was also the final authority .... I just felt that there were times that when my sisters would get into trouble my mother usually disciplined them and whereas it is usually my father who disciplined me.

Overall, Jerome felt that he and Ted engaged in an interaction when they both struggled for the same goal – to be heard and accepted by the other. He saw the child's angry displays as a response to his own anger, and vice versa. Anger appeared to be contagious, flowing between the father and the son. At the same time, he seemed to accept Ted's behavior during anger and understand where the anger came from. He was aware of how he had played a role in the incident of anger. It appeared that he tended to be thinking of communication in a more reciprocal direction rather than a linear fashion.

Jerome also noticed that Ted had become more verbal when presenting his ideas during anger instead of using physical expression as he did when he was younger. He felt

his reasoning tended to be "egocentric" at this stage. Nevertheless, he seemed to be relieved noting Ted applied verbal expression when dealing with anger.

Anger and gender seemed to be a foggy area. In this case, Jerome realized that he might be somewhat different dealing with Ted than with his two daughters during incidents of anger. That difference is related to the way he was brought up in his own family. He stated that it was his father, a male figure, who handled most of the discipline with him. And yet, Jerome tended to believe that when children express their anger, it is due to individual differences and not related to gender per se.

Interview With Child – Ted

Informal play interview. During the first informal play interview in the living room of the family home, it took quite some time for Ted to feel at ease playing with me. I had brought along a variety of toys including legos, animal figurines, and stuffed animals. He showed some interest in the toys and played with the toys gently. His verbal responses tended to be brief although he did share with me some of his experiences relating to his school, friends, and relatives. Toward the end of the play interview, I explained to Ted about the visits I had with other families discussing issues about anger and related my plans for the upcoming visits with him and his family. He replied quietly with an 'okay' response. This interview lasted about an hour without interruption.

Three research play interviews. The three following interviews were also conducted in the living room of the family home, at Ted's request. In the first research play interview, I began by telling Ted about the meetings I had with his parents. The warm up period continued with some drawing activities and playing with the feeling

cards and puppets. Ted seemed to be quite withdrawn and preoccupied and had a red mark on his face. I later learned from Ted's mother that the child had visited his doctor prior to my visit concerning the mark on his face which was itchy and uncomfortable.

During the interview, Ted did not seem to be very interested and excited. He usually indicated "I don't know" when I chatted casually with him. Toward the latter part of the interview, Ted shared with me some of his sad feelings when he had been asked by his parents to go to his room. He seemed to express very little concerning his own angry responses.

The second research interview began with a warm up period playing with toys. Ted chose to spend the time playing with puppets. After a short time I used the puppets to stage an animal fight with Ted to ease into a discussion about feelings of anger within him. However, Ted responded with "I don't know" on numerous occasions. This seemed to imply that he did not recognize his own feelings of anger – it is possible that he was not interested in participating. At the end of the second research interview, I decided to arrange another additional visit to continue with the research process.

The third interview began with Ted and I playing informally. He seemed to be slightly more chatty this time. We had a discussion about recognizing anger in his father. While the "I don't know" responses were common throughout the interview, Ted seemed to be expressing sadness when we talked about his experiences with anger.

All three research interviews lasted about an hour without interruption.

Reflections – Child's Experience With Anger

In my interviews with Ted, he was not able to identify any specific incidents of anger between him and his parents. Nevertheless, I relayed to Ted the anger incidents that I had learned about from my interviews with his parents. From conversations with Ted, I came to have some understanding of his experiences of anger.

Child seems unable to express his anger verbally. According to Ted, anger appeared to be an unusual experience. "I wasn't mad at my mommy. I was never mad at my mom." Not only did Ted claim that he did not feel any anger toward his mother, he did not know what an angry face looked like. Perhaps Ted chose not to show his angry feelings.

Interviewer: Maybe you can show me what your mad face looks like?

Ted: I don't know what a mad face looks like.

Interviewer: Do you think it's okay to tell your daddy if you're angry?

Ted: I don't know.

Interviewer: What would happen if he [father] knows that you feel angry with him?

Ted: I don't know. I never do that. I never told him.

Interviewer: What about mom? Would you tell mom?

Ted: No.

Feeling sad about parents' anger. I continued to chat with Ted about his responses after he was sent to his room by his parents when he misbehaved. Apparently, he seemed

to recognize his sadness as well as the anger in his parents. It appeared that Ted might have some idea what anger is about after all.

Interviewer:	Remember the times that your parents asked you to go to your room?
Ted:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	So what did you do in the room?
Ted:	I cried.
Interviewer:	Were you feeling sad?
Ted:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	What were you sad about?
Ted:	My mom was angry about me.
Interviewer:	Do you understand why she was angry?
Ted:	No. I wish my mom would not be angry at me.
Interviewer:	Do you think your dad was angry when he picked you up and brought you into the room?
Ted:	Yeah, I guess he was angry. I know he was angry. I don't know how I know he's angry.
Interviewer:	Did you want him to stop being angry or it's okay that he's angry?
Ted:	It's okay that he's angry.

In summary, the concept of anger appeared to be vague in Ted's mind. It might be related to the ability to articulate of his feelings of anger. There is a possibility that he may think that anger is not allowed or accepted within his family and therefore he is quite

cautious and careful about revealing his own expressions of anger. Perhaps he worried about how his parents would react toward him when he expressed his anger.

Furthermore, Ted did not like his parents to be angry with him, especially his mother. He did not feel good when his mother directed her anger at him. In response to his parents' anger, Ted expressed a strong feeling of sadness through crying. He stated that "it's okay for his parents to be angry," however, he chose not to express his own feelings toward his parents. It is possible that he felt helpless in response to his parents' anger and thus resorted to crying, which Ted might perceive as a safe or acceptable way in which to express his feelings.

Interaction Between Parents and Child

Among many other emotions, anger appeared to be an unfamiliar, strange, and uncommon emotion for Ted. He seemed to be able to identify anger in his parents even though he might not know how to describe it in words or to understand how he recognized the anger in them. According to Ted's own report, he seldom, if ever, was angry with his parents. Rather, the feeling that Ted identified was a feeling of sadness when disciplined by his parents. It seems he turned the anger into sadness, which he expressed through his crying.

On the contrary, Ted's parents both felt Ted's anger, most evident during his temper tantrums. Also, both parents felt that Ted should continue to learn to be more verbally expressive of his angry feelings. It appeared that his father seemed to notice more improvement in his verbal ability to express himself, although that reasoning was

termed "egocentric." As Kate tended to compare Ted with his older sister, a more communicative child, she stated that Ted was much quieter about expressing his feelings.

Both parents were sensitive to the inter-personal dynamics involved in anger incidents. For instance, Jerome stated that the anger response between Ted and himself was a result of the mutual influence of anger upon each other. According to Jerome's description, it appeared to me that his anger was expressed through arguing whereas Ted's anger was through the display of temper tantrums, such as pouting, fidgeting, yelling, and crying. The interaction pattern between Jerome and Ted during anger was that the more arguing Jerome did, the more Ted displayed a temper tantrum and vice-versa. Jerome was also attentive to the inner-dynamics of his experiences with anger, that is, the relationship between his own anger and his guilt. Kate was aware of the impact of her yelling when she was angry. Based on Kate's description, it seemed to me that the more she yelled, the more Ted cried or screamed, and vice-versa. When comparing the difference between Kate's expectations and Jerome's expectations of their son's responses during a situation of anger, it appeared that Kate expected Ted to show more verbal expression of his feelings of anger, while Jerome wanted Ted to explain what he was angry about. That is, the mother seemed to be more interested in having the child express his feelings verbally, while the father wanted the child to verbalize the reason why he was angry.

When considering an alternative way of dealing with anger, Kate tended to believe that the more effort she put in keeping herself calm, the more likely Ted might express his feelings. Along the same vein, Jerome realized that the more he could

acknowledge Ted's efforts to express or explain his viewpoints, the more likely it was for Ted to express himself. After all, both parents believed that it would be easier for Ted and for them to deal with anger if Ted became more skillful and able to verbalize his emotions.

Table 1.

Reflections of Participants' Experiences With Anger

Mother – Kate	Father – Jerome	Child – Ted
Wishes child could be more verbally expressive of his feelings.	Experiences anger as a tangle between parent and child.	Chooses not to show any angry feelings (or is unable to express his anger verbally).
Strives to be "in control" versus "loss of control."	Experiences guilt and anger within himself. Experiences that it is "good to see child growing more verbally presentable." Puzzle over gender.	Feels sad about parents' anger toward him.

Table 2.

Participants' Reported Interaction During Anger*

Mother – Kate

Child:		Mother:
Keeps feelings to himself.	← →	Yelling.

Father – Jerome

Child:		Father:
Pouting, fidgeting, whispering,	← →	Arguing.
yelling, crying.		

Child – Ted

Child:	← →	Parents:
Crying.		Take child into his room.

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*Note: indicates a recursive, reciprocal interaction between the parent and the child (e.g.,

the more the child cries, the more the mother yells at the child, and so on).

Table 3.

Preferred Patterns of Interaction During Anger

Mother – Kate		
Child:	← →	Mother:
Expresses feelings.		Keeps herself calm, talks to child.
Father – Jerome		
Child:	← →	Father:
Explains and shares his views.		Acknowledges child's efforts to share views, talks to child.
Child – Ted		
No Comment.		

Family Case Study Two

Family Interviewed

Stacey is the eldest daughter of Roxanne and Damien. Her mother, Roxanne, and father, Damien, are both estimated to be in their mid-thirties. Roxanne holds a part-time secretarial position. Damien is a geophysicist working in the oil and gas industry. Stacey

is five years, ten months old at the time of the first interview. Her younger sister is about two years old. Stacey goes to kindergarten every day and stays home with her mother the rest of the time.

The Interview Process With the Family

I first conducted an interview with the mother, Roxanne, followed by an informal play interview with Stacey. I proceeded with an interview with the father, Damien, during my second visit. The two research play interviews with Stacey were conducted on separate afternoons. The last visit to the family was to conduct individual feedback sessions with Stacey and her parents, separately.

Interview With Mother – Roxanne

This interview lasted about an hour and a half. There were a few short interruptions at the beginning of the interview but no major interruptions. The interview was conducted at the kitchen table, as suggested by Roxanne.

At the beginning of my interview with Roxanne, she seemed to have difficulty recalling an anger incident. After taking some time to think, Roxanne's thoughts and recollections flowed freely.

Roxanne was friendly and soft spoken during the interview. Although her responses in general tended to be brief, she was very direct responding to the questions and comments. The conversation was relaxed but focused and informative. She took time to include in her observations the differences between herself and Damien toward Stacey, and this made the discussion more interesting and intriguing.

Reflections – Mother's Experience with Anger

Roxanne identified situations that had created anger between herself and Stacey. These were usually related to Stacey's non-cooperation. For instance, Stacey would refuse to pick up the garbage, to brush her teeth, or to do her homework. "She may refuse to like just pick up the garbage ... go brush her teeth. Sometimes getting her to do her homework is a big thing."

Difficulty in controlling anger. Roxanne believes people have no control over their anger. "It's an emotion that you can't really control." Moreover, she worried that she might not be able to express her true feelings while in a state of anger.

At that moment you are so mad or angry that you can't really control it and you just say anything that comes out .... I mean sometimes if you're just absolutely furious or whatever, you might scream harder or do something you don't really mean. You'll say things that you don't really mean, just to be kind of more spiteful ... or get back at the other person.

From her narrative, Roxanne seemed to question whether a person could contain their anger in such a way that one would simply express the angry feelings without hurting others.

Feeling blamed and hurt. During the state of anger, Roxanne experienced a sense of injustice when Stacey would blame her without reason. "She tends to blame ... like even if it's not your fault or if she can't do something by herself .... That's not really a reason to be mad."

Moreover, Roxanne expressed a hurt feeling when Stacey stated "I hate you" during a fit of anger. "Like she says I hate you ... that's a strong word or that's not very nice ... I get a little bit hurt."

Comparison between father and mother's reactions to child during anger. Roxanne compared her reactions with her husband's reactions toward the child when Stacey was in an angry mood. She stated that her husband was less patient, allowed less verbal discussion with Stacey, and was quicker to take action. On the other hand, she viewed herself as being more tolerant of Stacey and trying to enter into conversation more often, even though she might shout at Stacey more than Damien does:

> Like he may be quicker to send her to her room .... He would just say, well, I told you to do this, you're not going to listen, so go to your room. Whereas you know I might go on and on a little bit more ... probably shout at her more than my husband would, and then send her to her room.

A variety of expressions in child. Roxanne was fairly observant of Stacey's responses during anger. She reported that Stacey showed a wide range of responses, including: stomping into her room, acting quiet, crying, slamming the door, complaining, yelling, blaming, throwing things, or seeking support from her father.

> Sometimes she'll just leave and go to her room, or I'll send her to her room .... Sometimes she'll just not say anything .... sometimes she ... stomps her feet and goes to her room ... sometimes she slams the door or sometimes she just closes it and she'll just play in there .... Sometimes she'll cry ... sometimes she'll say it's not her fault ... she'll blame it on me or somebody else. I might say I'm sorry and

this is the reason why I got mad or whatever. She accepts or .... whatever ....

Sometimes she'll just say ... you didn't have to keep harping on that point ... or

you didn't have to do that or whatever .... Sometimes she'll say mommy, I hate

you ... sometimes she'll just kind of scream back ... sometimes she just crosses her

arms ... stomps her feet ... throw[s] things ... she doesn't normally keep it bottled

inside or anything. If she's mad at me she'll go to her dad. Sometimes she might

listen to me a little bit more, or if she's angry she might first come to me before

going to my husband.

A need to cool down. During an angry situation, Roxanne experienced the

benefits to herself and her child when taking some time to calm down. "I gave her a few

minutes sometimes just to think about what she did .... Just let her think about it for a bit

or just both of us try to settle down .... Let me cool down a bit."

To summarize, Roxanne stated her difficulty in containing her own anger, but also

realized that it was not impossible to do so. She was aware of her own need to take time

to cool off and found that it was helpful for herself and her child to remain calm. She

also encouraged her child to express her anger through talking. She seemed to have some

understanding of what triggered the child's anger. Roxanne did not like her child to

become angry with her with no apparent reason and she also felt hurt when the child told

her she hated her when angry. However, this statement did not seem bring on Roxanne's

anger – while it was a challenge, it was one she seemed to handle well.

Not only was Roxanne aware of her own responses to her child in an angry situation, she also recognized that she seemed to have more patience with Stacey than her husband did when angry with the child.

Interview With Father – Damien

As suggested by Damien, we met in the TV room downstairs as the children were playing loudly upstairs. There was no interruption throughout the one and a half hour long interview. During the interview, Damien was very open and sincere in sharing with me his experience with anger relating to Stacey, and toward others. I found Damien to be patient, thorough, and self-assured in his expression.

Reflections – Father's Experience With Anger

Damien discussed with me a number of anger incidents that he encountered with Stacey. In Damien's view, Stacey's anger was related to her perception that he could not fulfill her own wishes and expectations. His anger toward Stacey was in response to Stacey's anger during their interaction. An incident Damien recalled was while he was busy with work.

> I'm busy on the computer typing a letter... or I'm finishing reading an article, sort
> of halfway finished doing something and she's demanding attention immediately.
> I ignore her for a little while to finish off what I'm doing. Then she's mad at me –
> 'you don't even talk to me.' Of course I do, it's just at this particular
> moment I'm not talking to her.

Moreover, Damien recalled Stacey was once frustrated when tobogganing.

She got a little frustrated with the tobogganing hill not working very well because there was no snow on it and so she couldn't go very fast. She got very upset and she sort of threw the toboggan to the side and stomped onto the ground.

Feeling upset and blamed. Damien was concerned about how anger impacted himself and his child. "It hurts her feelings and then afterwards I'm upset because I've hurt her feelings. I don't like to do that." He also noticed that Stacey had a tendency to blame him for making her angry and expected him to solve the problem.

Since I was the one out there tobogganing it must have been my fault .... She needs something to direct her anger at and by default I get it when I'm just with her. 'Fix it' – you are the dad, you've got to be able to fix the hill, in that particular case ... she's expecting sort of like ... you brought me here. If anybody can fix it, it's got to be me. She was expecting certain things and I couldn't live up to the expectations.

Child's anger stems from frustration and disappointment. Damien had some ideas which explained Stacey's anger. He recognized that Stacey became angry when things did not go her way. "Anger would occur when something isn't going her way." Also, he stated that it was the frustration within Stacey that she turned into anger. "It starts as frustration and leads very quickly to anger .... I see she's obviously frustrated and that leads to anger .... Possibly disappointment because she was looking forward to going tobogganing and it didn't work."

<u>Child wants attention from parents.</u> Damien felt that Stacey expected him to fix the problem and also depended on him for emotional support.

It's her way of telling me that she wants my attention .... Well, she actually wants my consoling. She wants somebody to make her feel better. No doubt about that. Well because by her reaction I can tell that she wants somebody to come to her and make it better. That's why she sits down in the snow – she knows it's gonna get you to come, so she wants you there.

Moreover, Damien noticed that another way Stacey sought attention was to approach her mother when she received a negative answer from him. "Well, she always goes to Roxanne when I say no. She goes to her to see if she can anyway. Unfortunately, Roxanne often capitulates .... That's something she and I are working on."

<u>Desire to know more about child's anger.</u> Even though Damien felt that Stacey's anger stems from her frustration and disappointment, he found that it was important to understand for sure what made his child angry. He would approach Stacey directly for clarification.

Well, first is to figure out why she's mad. Is there something I've done? If she comes up and says, 'I'm mad at you for some other reason' and I don't know why, well, I will ask her what I've done. For sure I'd want to have her explain to me why.

Damien seemed to be solution-oriented in that he wanted to fix the anger Stacey felt. "Well, I don't want her to be mad at me, for sure. I would like to know why and find a remedy."

Importance of dialoguing with the child. Damien did not believe in the use of physical force to solve the anger problem. Instead, he placed a high value on dialoguing.

> I'm much more a person that likes to talk things through .... I loathe to hit
> anybody. I am a very physical guy. I played rugby, football .... There's no need to
> belittle people and to hit people. There are better ways of solving problems .... But
> I think dialogue is a much better way.

It appeared that Damien wanted Stacey to talk about her anger.

> I'd like to see her explain herself a little more rather than just act out her
> frustration. I'd much prefer her to discuss it .... Well, that's what we do is we sit
> down with her and we talk .... She should explain her problems and use words to
> explain what the problem is. And just don't throw things and don't be physical
> about things because people get hurt, things got broken, and it doesn't solve
> anything anyway.

A challenge to remain calm. Damien struggled to remain calm and to explain his own viewpoints to Stacey. "Well, I sit her down and explain to her that's not a proper response to have. I understand she's frustrated." However, it seemed that Damien himself became frustrated or impatient and would stop conversing with her when he found his message to Stacey was not well received.

> Oh yeah I explained to her why this isn't working and how this isn't the proper
> behavior. But if she keeps getting mad, there's no more point in explaining it
> anymore, I just pick her up and bring her in and say, 'okay, that's it' .... Yeah,

there's a point to where I just pick her up and take her in and say, 'okay, you sit

here and think about this now.'

Damien found that talking became difficult, if not impossible, when his child

would not settle down. Subsequently, Damien will call for a time out.

At a point when she's yelling and screaming and there's just no way settling her

down .... That's when we remove her from the situation and put her in her room

by herself, door closed, so she can calm herself down and when she's ready to talk

then we do.

Child shows better anger management as she grows older. Damien noticed

differences in how Stacey managed her anger as she continued to mature. He perceived a

sense of inner-control developing within Stacey.

She has started going to her room by herself a little bit more when she's

frustrated. She's learned to remove herself from the situation ... so that she can

deal with this in her own mind and calm herself down. She's absolutely more

conscious about how to deal with it, I'm sure.

Differences between boys and girls in the expression of anger. Damien seemed to

believe that there would be some differences between boys and girls when expressing

their anger although he was not sure what might cause the differences.

The boys just seem to be more physical about whatever they are doing ... like

throwing, hitting, kicking feet, lashing out – that kind of stuff, whereas the girls

will be much more sedate .... I don't know if there's any physiological reasons

cause I don't know a lot about physiology, but they certainly are different. Yeah,

by the time they become adults, it's hard to differentiate the socialized aspects versus the physical aspects.

No difference in dealing with boy's anger versus girl's anger. Although Damien has two girls and has no experience in raising a son, he believed that he would deal with the child's anger in the same manner regardless of the child's gender. "It wouldn't be any different .... At least, I mean that would be the first step .... I don't expect them to be different. I would hope they're not."

Anger is an impulsive emotion. Damien feels his own anger arise when he feels out of control. "Anger to me is when the emotions are running high and you're really feeling like you're losing control of the situation." He recognizes what his responses are like when angry. "When I'm angry I would be more likely to be impulsive, which is sort of a lack of control. Doing impulsive things is something I haven't thought too much about it." However, he claimed that it is unusual for him to be angry. "I rarely get angry, like really angry."

To summarize, Damien appeared to be quite sensitive of his own anger as well as his child's experience of anger. He felt that anger could lead a person to irrational, impulsive thinking. He especially disliked expressing one's anger through the use of physical force.

Damien was also conscientious about examining whether his actions were causing any anger in his child. He felt that his child tended to blame him for causing her disappointment, frustration, and anger. Although Damien felt it was unreasonable for the child to blame him, he felt responsible for fixing the problem in order to stop the child's

anger. His desire to find a remedy might be related to his role as a father and to his feelings of hurt when seeing the child angry.

Damien's approach toward managing anger incidents with his child appeared to be a rational one. He placed a high value on conversation concerning the anger experience. He would prefer to see the child talking about the anger rather than acting out the anger. While Damien recognized that he was seldom angry, he seemed to feel capable or in control enough to deal with his child's anger. Damien found it difficult at times to talk to his child when he noticed the child was not in a 'talking' mood and he realized that it was necessary to allow some cooling off time. He believed that there could be a limit to the use of dialogue, especially when the child is not ready for conversation. It appeared that Damien made an effort to exemplify to his child how anger can be managed by taking an active role in initiating conversation with the child.

Damien reiterated his belief that there are gender differences in expression of anger, nevertheless, he indicated that he would deal with a boy's anger and a girl's anger in a similar fashion.

Interview With Child – Stacey

Informal play interview. Stacey and I played on the kitchen floor, which was her choice. This interview lasted for about an hour without interruption.

In this informal play interview, Stacey presented herself as a very expressive, outgoing, and energetic young child. She took an active role in leading the play time, and was particularly excited and interested in playing with a fabric doll house – one of many toys that I showed her.

Stacey seemed to be fond of games and introduced me to the 'Domino' game. From her systematic and eloquent explanation of the rules and procedures I understood that she was an expert in this game. Overall, we had fun sitting on the kitchen floor playing with each other. I outlined the purpose of the visit and the upcoming visits and she seemed to accept my explanation.

Research play interviews. The two interviews, which lasted for about an hour, were conducted in the kitchen, which was Stacey's choice.

As Stacey and I had established a good rapport during the previous informal play interview, I did not feel the need to start the research interview with a 'fun play.' Instead, I began by reiterating the purpose of the visit and then proceeded by inviting Stacey to share with me some of her experiences with anger. Stacey was quite forthcoming in expressing herself. Overall, Stacey expressed anger toward her parents when she felt her requests were denied or her expectations were unfulfilled.

With a little encouragement, Stacey used puppets to play out the anger incidents that she had with her parents. In addition, Stacey made some drawings of an angry face. Overall, I was impressed with Stacey's willingness to verbalize her anger experience. She actively participated in the interviews, and at times she talked about her favorite TV program and her play activities on the backyard.

Reflections – Child's Experience With Anger

Stacey related her anger when her requests were denied by her parents and her expectations unmet. "Well, when she [mother] doesn't listen to me and stuff, then I get

mad." Also, Stacey responded, "When I don't get what I want him to get for me [I will get mad]."

<u>Feelings of neglect, sadness, disappointment, worry, and a sense of unfairness.</u>

The anger experienced by Stacey was related primarily to a feeling that she was being ignored by her parents. "She doesn't listen to me and stuff, then I get mad .... When I said please again for something to eat, she didn't do anything." Also, Stacey worried about the possibility of being grounded by her mother when her mother was angry, "Cause I'm afraid she will ground me or smack me. She never smacked me before, nobody has."

The anger Stacey experienced was also characterized by feelings of sadness, disappointment, and a sense of injustice.

Apparently, her sadness arose when her father denied her requests or when her mother yelled and screamed at her when angry.

Interviewer: How did you feel when your daddy said no to you?

Stacey: Sad.

Interviewer: What do you feel when she [mother] yells and screams?

Stacey: I feel sad. I don't like her yelling or screaming cause they're so mean when yelling. This is not fair.

She became disappointed when she realized her requests were denied.

Interviewer: What kind of things did your daddy do to make you mad?

Stacey: He won't get what I want him to get and I have to say the magic word.

Interviewer: What's the magic word?

Stacey: Please ... my daddy wants me to say it.

Interviewer: You won't get what you want from him and that would make you

                mad?

Stacey: Yeah.

Knowing what anger is about. Anger is an emotion which Stacey seemed to be

able to identify and describe, from her own experience. She appeared to have some

understanding of how anger looks like in herself and in other people. For instance,

Stacey recognized her own anger 'look.'

Interviewer: What would you look like when you were angry?

Stacey: My mouth will be angry. I would have black eyes and I would

                have a black nose. I was crying very loud.

Stacey also described her physical reactions, "I stomp up to my room. I slam the

door. I just cry on my bed."

It appeared that Stacey would express her anger outwardly through her actions,

her voice, and her facial expression.

Stacey was also able to identify her mother's anger. She recalled what she heard

from her mother. "You never phone me when you go to your friend's house and you

haven't listened to me about eating your vegetables that were left on the table cold." She

appeared quite confident that she knew when her mother was angry by listening to her

tone of voice. " I check her voice and I know what she sounds like."

Moreover, Stacey seemed to recognize the effects of her mother's anger on her, saying that it "makes me mad and grumpy." She stated that she would prefer not to be angry but be happy.

Interviewer: Do you like to be angry?

Stacey: No.

Interviewer: Why is it that you don't like to be angry?

Stacey: I don't know.

Interviewer: You don't know. Would you want to be feeling happy or would you want to be mad? What would you prefer?

Stacey: Happy.

Stacey was also aware of comparing the intensity of anger between herself and her parents.

Interviewer: If anger is like a ball, who has the biggest ball? Mommy, Daddy, or Stacey?

Stacey: Daddy.

Interviewer: And who has the second biggest ball? Mommy? Stacey?

Stacey: Mommy.

Fighting back. When Stacey and her parents were involved in anger incidents, she seemed to apply her physical and her verbal powers to protest against her parents. She recalled hitting her mother a few times. "I'll hit her arm." Also, Stacey stated "I hate you" but emphasized that "it's not real."

When responding to her father during anger, Stacey described what sounded like a verbal 'tug-a-war.'

Stacey: I wanted to go to the Wave Pool.

Interviewer: Oh, and what did he say?

Stacey: No.

Interviewer: And what did Stacey say?

Stacey: Yes.

Interviewer: And what did daddy say?

Stacey: No.

Nevertheless, Stacey soon gave up when she found herself not be able to convince her father.

Interviewer: Then what happened after you said yes and daddy said no?

Stacey: I phoned my friend.

Interviewer: What did you phone your friend for?

Stacey: To play together.

It was noted that Stacey appeared to respond differently to her mother and her father during anger. She showed her anger toward her mother through both physical action and a verbal attack, while taking a verbally aggressive attitude toward her father. Her opinions regarding being angry with her father, were compared to her mother.

Interviewer: Do you think it's okay to be mad at your dad?

Stacey: Nope.

She was more tentative in her response when she was asked if she can be mad at her mother.

Interviewer: Is it okay for you to be mad at your mom?

Stacey: No, I don't know.

Time out from anger. Stacey seemed to have some ideas and strategies about how she could distract herself when angry. "I stomp up to my room .... I could play or read a book or just lay down a few minutes until my mom or my dad comes." Stacey would stay in her room and expected her parents to come into her room and talk with her.

Interviewer: Say you are in the room – would your mom knock on your door?

Stacey: She would, I would sit down on her lap. She would lift me up on her lap.

Interviewer: Well, then okay, you're sitting right there and what would you say? What would you tell your mom?

Stacey: I would say sorry that what I did.

Interviewer: Yeah, and what would your mom say?

Stacey: Sorry.

Interviewer: Do you want her to do something with you?

Stacey: No.

Interviewer: Just sitting?

Stacey: Yeah.

Similarly, Stacey would apologize to her father.

Stacey:	Well, my daddy would come up. I would sit on his lap. Then I say sorry.
Interviewer:	How would you say that?
Stacey:	Yell it, sorry. We looked at each other. My daddy let me go out.

Apparently, Stacey welcomed the company and comfort of her parents after an incident involving anger. She seemed to be able to calm down enough to express her apology to her parents and to put closure to the anger incident.

Stacey demonstrated a sensitivity to her own anger. She found herself becoming angry when she felt she was not being heard or was being ignored by her parents. Also, she experienced anger when her requests were rejected by her parents. The experience of anger in Stacey comprised feelings of sadness, disappointment, and fear as well as a sense of injustice. She was also cognizant of her physical reactions during the state of anger.

She seemed to understand very well what could make her mother angry, which was generally failing to fulfill her mother's expectations. Her sensitivity also included her recognition of the negative impact of her mother's anger on her. She perceived that her father had the "biggest" anger when compared to her mother's anger or her own.

Cognitively, Stacey maintained that it is acceptable to be mad at her parents. Nevertheless, Stacey tended to be more aggressive toward her mother in expressing her anger, whereas anger with her father consisted of a brief verbal fight. Perhaps Stacey perceived she had less power or bargaining ability with her father than with her mother. When she was left alone in her room after arguing with her parents, Stacey exercised her own choice by doing what she might feel like doing, such as playing, reading, or laying

down for some quiet time. The process of making an apology for Stacey appeared to be a ritual to end any anger incident.

Overall, Stacey seemed to find that anger can be a unpleasant experience and thus she wished her parents would not be angry with her. Simply put, to be a child is to be happy.

<u>Interaction Between Parents and Child.</u>

According to Stacey's description, anger is an unpleasant experience, accompanied by feelings of sadness, being ignored, disappointment, worry, and a sense of unfairness. She was certainly able to detect the anger in her parents and compare the intensity of anger in each person.

Like other children dealing with anger, Stacey tended to protest against the way she was treated by parents. However, she showed different reactions with her father than with her mother. She seemed to be more direct and physical in expressing her anger with her mother (i.e., hitting, saying 'I hate you') whereas she tended to be more verbal with her father. She seemed to describe her interaction with her father in such a way that they would both argue back and forth with each other during anger. On the other hand, Stacey perceived that she might hit her mother or state "I hate you" while her mother yelled at her when they were angry at each other.

Roxanne was able to catch herself the times when she lost control by shouting at her child when the child displayed a temper tantrum through stomping, crying, blaming her, throwing things, and so on. Damien, on the other hand, appeared to have a tendency lose his patience in talking with the child when she refused to listen, or directly yelled at

him. Both parents seemed to realize that these reciprocal interaction patterns during anger were ineffective.

At other times, both Roxanne and Damien appeared able to control their own anger. They were consistent in applying the practice of time out with Stacey and also encouraging Stacey to express herself – this strategy appeared to be positive and workable when dealing with anger among family members. They also seemed to be empathic toward Stacey when it came to her experience with anger. It occurred to me that Damien believed that the more understanding he developed regarding his child's anger and the more consoling he was able to offer the child, the more expressive his child could be and vice-versa. He also stated that he and Roxanne were working on supporting each other when dealing with Stacey.

Overall, both Roxanne and Damien seemed to feel a sense of control and were not overwhelmed by the child's anger. Similarly, it appeared that Stacey was able to manage her negative feelings under the guidance and support of her parents. Her anger was short-lived.

Table 4.

Reflections of Participants' Experiences With Anger

Mother – Roxanne	Father – Damien	Child - Stacey
- has difficulty in controlling her own anger	- feels upset and blamed by child	- expresses feelings of neglect, sadness, disappointment, worry, and a sense of unfairness
- experiences being blamed by child and feels hurt	- reflects that child's anger stems from frustration and disappointment	
- notes different reactions from mother and father toward child's anger	- realizes child wants attention from parents	- understands what anger is about
		- fights back
- recognizes a need to cool down (for mother and child)	- wants to know more about child's anger	- takes time out from anger
	- realizes importance of dialoging with child	
	- finds it a challenge to remain calm	
	- sees that child is showing better anger management as she grows older	
	- finds differences between boys and girls in their expression of anger	
	- displays no difference in dealing with boy's versus girl's anger situations	
	- believes anger is an impulsive emotion	

Table 5.

Participants' Reported Interaction During Anger*

Mother – Roxanne

Child:	← →	Mother:
Stomping, crying blaming, complaining, throwing things.		Shouting.
Taking time off to settle down.		Cooling off.

Father – Damien

Child:	← →	Father:
Blaming, yelling, screaming, not listening.		Losing patience (stops talking, puts child into room).
Expresses feelings and ideas.		Dialoging, consoling.

Child – Stacey

Child:	← →	Mother:
Hitting mother's arm, stating "I hate you."		Yelling, screaming.
Apologizing.		Apologizing.

Child:	← →	Father:
Arguing.		Arguing.
Apologizing.		Sitting close with the child.

*Note: indicates a recursive, reciprocal interaction between the parent and the child (e.g., the more the child cries, the more the mother yells at the child, and so on).

Table 6.

Preferred Patterns of Interaction During Anger

Mother – Roxanne		
Child:	← →	Mother:
Takes time off to settle down.		Cools off.

Father – Damien		
Child:	← →	Father:
Expresses feelings, ideas.		Consoling, dialoguing to better understand child's anger.

Child - Stacey		
Child:	← →	Mother:
Apologizes to mother.		Sits close together with the child.
Child:	← →	Father:
Apologizes to father.		Sits close together with the child.

Family Case Study Three

Family Interviewed

Tim, is the only son of Sally and Sean. Both Sally and Sean work full time –

Sally works in administration and Sean is in the construction business. It is estimated that

the parents are in their mid-forties. Tim was aged five years and ten months at the time of

the first interview. He goes to kindergarten four mornings a week and attends day care in

the afternoons where his parents pick him up after work in the early evening. Tim's

maternal grandmother usually looks after him on Fridays.

The Interview Process With the Family

The first interview was conducted with Sally one evening. I then interviewed

Sean on the second visit. An informal play session was conducted with Tim on another

afternoon followed by two research play interviews with him on two separate occasions.

Finally, there was a feedback meeting with Tim and his parents separately to share the

findings from our previous interviews.

Interview With Mother – Sally

My interview with Sally took place in the kitchen which was her choice. The

interview lasted about an hour and a half without interruption. Sally presented herself as

a calm and fun-loving person. She did not show any emotional distress while she shared

with me her experiences of anger. Occasionally she laughed gently when she realized

that her child's behavior appeared to be silly and as she achieved some insight into our

topic of discussion.

Reflections – Mother's Experience With Anger

Sally described incidents when she was angry with Tim for he refusing to eat his vegetables and when Tim would not listen to her when asked to do chores.

We have fights at meal time because Tim doesn't like to eat vegetables for his dinner. Um, we fight when Tim doesn't listen .... When I ask him to do something he will choose to ignore me ... like Tim has chores that he's responsible for around the house.

Anger is not prevalent in child. Sally recognized that Tim does not anger easily, and seemed to imply that anger is not a big issue with him.

He is actually a pretty good natured child. It does take a lot to get him irritated – with the exception of when he is asked to brush his teeth and eat his vegetables. He has a pretty easy going disposition so most things don't really bother him much or unless he is tired or sick.

Remaining in control. Sally appeared to take a calm and rational approach toward the emotion of anger. She believed a good way to keep anger under control is to learn to express it verbally. Otherwise, she felt that people may look foolish when they are being controlled by their own anger.

Generally not many things irritate me. It takes a fair chunk to get me irritated. People should be in control of their emotions .... You just have to state your feelings. To do more than that is to lose control which I see is a bad thing ... you can either learn to have a temper tantrum or you can learn to control it so that anger doesn't take over you and make you look like an idiot.

Moreover, Sally emphasized adopting a positive approach that involved talking it through in order to remain calm. She expected Tim to be able to verbalize his anger in words. She liked to discuss an anger incident with the child in a calm manner and hoped that doing this would lead to resolution.

> He should be able to explain things a little bit better instead of screaming .... We don't tolerate it here and if he were to choose to do something like that [screaming] he has to go to his room because we don't want to hear that ... he knows that if you are going to be angry you better be able to share what it is .... Generally when we send him into his room, what we do is we will go into his room and we will sit with him and we will talk about what happens. When that can be done in a rational and calm way, the anger will be over.

Teasing: Antidote to name calling. Sally was laughing when she related the fact that Tim would call her names when he was angry. However, Sally seemed to have her own teasing strategy in response to Tim's name calling.

> He will call me an idiot for whatever his reason. He wants it to be a put down definitely. He says it in a louder tone than normal talking. He knows that name calling is not a good thing. He is angry. So when he asks me to help him to do something or whatever then I will say that I am an idiot and I can't do that ... I figure one day he will think about it [mother laughing].

Moreover, Sally expected Tim to apologize for his name calling. "If you call somebody a name, you need to apologize right here, right now, or you go away until you can behave properly. 'He will say I am sorry. You are not an idiot.'"

Appreciates support from child's Father. Sally noticed that the stress she experienced at work would sometimes influence the way she handles Tim's anger. Under these circumstances Sally liked to have Tim's father involved so that she would not become too harsh with the child. Apparently, Sally tries to be fair to Tim and wanted to control her own anger or frustration so that it did not misguide her interaction with him.

Like on a long, hard day of work, and when you ask him to do a chore, he chooses not to because he is busy watching TV. Then it will piss me off .... The only thing that will happen is that I will insist stronger than I normally will ... Sean usually supports me and generally acknowledges all these things ... so it's kind of like if it has been too rough or ugly, then the other one will take over so that we don't want Tim to bear the brunt of things, say when one of us has a crabby day of work.

In sum, Sally appeared to maintain a rational approach to anger. She would like to keep anger under control. In response to Tim's anger, Sally would try to use humor to tease him or she would discuss things with him calmly in order to resolve the anger issue. She expected Tim to be able to verbalize his anger, as she does. She is also quite sensitive to her own anger and frustration. She seeks support from Tim's father when she finds her emotions may misguide her in her interactions with Tim. Overall, Sally does not see anger as being a big issue between Tim and herself. She also appreciates Tim for being a good child and perceives him as generally having a high tolerance for irritation.

Interview With Father – Sean

I had my one and a half hour interview with Sean in the kitchen at his suggestion. The interview went smoothly without interruption. One thing that impressed me

throughout the interview with Sean was his consistency in focusing on Tim's positive behavior and qualities. He emphasized that "anger incidents with Tim do not happen very often." In sharing his experiences of anger Sean also related his personal experience when dealing with his own family members concerning issues of anger. He presented as a gentle, passionate father who loves his child dearly and cherishes the father-and-son bonding he has established with Tim.

Reflections – Father's Experience With Anger

Sean stated that it was uncommon to see anger occur between Tim and himself, except perhaps when Tim refused to brush his teeth.

Actually to be totally honest, it doesn't happen very often being angry with Tim. Sometimes he doesn't want to do things when you ask him to do, so that presents an anger situation and sometimes I yell and get mad at him .... We have anger incidents, like when he does not brush his teeth.

Remain in control. Sean remained composed even when Tim made negative comments about not liking his father any more during an angry situation. He remained calm by not allowing himself to be drawn into arguing about those negative comments, but instead would reassure Tim of his love for him. "I just say I don't care if you don't like me ... I also say to him that I love him very much. Afterwards he will say 'I am sorry.'"

Furthermore, Sean believed that there was no value in yelling at Tim. "Yelling doesn't get anything accomplished." Instead, Sean showed confidence in himself when he could handle an angry situation in creative ways.

I pinched him on the back of his arm and I said to him here came Mr. Crab – just

gave him a little pinch. Then he would do it. Recently he just said 'oh dad you

got to pinch me' ... I do little thing like that just to get his attention rather than

yelling and screaming as it doesn't do any good.

He received feedback from Tim that he liked the little 'Mr. Crab trick.'

Apologize to child when necessary. Sean indicated that he did not like to yell at

Tim. However, he recalled there were times that he had yelled at Tim which resulted in

Tim crying.

He gets a little afraid if I yell ... I yell loud enough so he cries ... I try to think why

he is angry. Is he angry because I am overreacting? Is he angry because he is

punished? It doesn't make me feel good when he is crying. What happens then is

that basically I let my guard down and hug him and apologize for yelling. We will

just sit down and talk about why I am angry.

He seemed to regret yelling at Tim and chose to apologize for his action.

Taking time out. Sean himself seemed to appreciate and realize the benefit of

taking time out as soon as he caught himself yelling.

I have told Tim that if I get too angry just tell me to go for a time out. It's the

same thing that we do to him if he gets too carried away and shows a temper

tantrum ... He has told me to take time out when I get angry at him and started

yelling at him. It helps as I stop and think that it's stupid. Okay, I step back and

come back with a different perspective on the whole situation.

He shared a scenario in which he sensed that Tim was initially very reluctant to take a time out but later was receptive to the time out treatment.

> I said to him that you're going to stay in the bedroom to think about what you did. I had to actually hold the door so he couldn't get out from the room. He tried to come out. Basically I said 'look you will not come out from the bedroom and you stay in there and think about what you did and why you are in there.' He stayed in there for 20 minutes to half an hour ... I went in there and sat down with him and asked him if he knew why he was sent to the room. He said yes because he did not eat his supper and he wasn't listening. So he knew exactly why he was sent there. I told him that we didn't want to punish him by putting him into his room. But if he did not listen, this was what was going to happen. I said to him that we loved him. He understood totally. He said okay.

<u>Be tougher on boys.</u> When asked about his approach toward boys' anger versus girl's, Sean responded that he felt he might respond to the boys and girls in a different manner. His position appeared to be related to his personal experiences within his own family.

> I am sure if it was a girl I wouldn't be physical with her ... I just don't believe to be physical with girls. I don't know even if you have to be physical to girls. From what I gather, it's easier to deal with girls than with boys .... With my parents, they never dealt with girls physically. My sisters would never be dealt with physically.

<u>Feels great to have support from spouse.</u> Sean appreciated the fact that Sally backed him up when Tim tried to approach her when he was angry or disappointed with Sean's response.

> Tim would tell his mother that his dad made me do this and that. Basically Sally and I back each other up for the most part. She will just ask Tim what he had done and tells him he deserves the treatment from me. Then Sally will step away from the whole situation and then I would follow through what I need to do. I will try to do the same thing for her. We have to back each other up. If we don't back each other up, he is going to be back and forth between the two of us and then we would just get nowhere.

To summarize, Sean showed different responses in angry situations. He seemed to be playful with Tim by using the "Mr. Crab" trick. At other times he might raise his voice or choose to ignore Tim's negative comments. Sean did not believe in yelling and was willing to apologize to Tim when he slipped into yelling. Moreover, he appreciated the support he had from Sally so that Tim was not be able to play one parent against the other.

When dealing with his own anger, Sean found that taking time out was helpful. The time out seemed to enable Sean to be more reflective on the anger situation and develop other strategies to deal with the problem.

Overall, it seemed that Sean did not experience much difficulty in dealing with Tim's behavior during anger. Tim might develop a sense of respect toward Sean based

on the demonstrated responsibility and accountability shown during his father's occasional yelling episodes.

<u>Interview With Child – Tim</u>

<u>Informal play interview.</u> Tim appeared quite easy, friendly, and quick to warm up to me in this informal play session. He chose his bedroom as our 'play' room. I showed an interest and curiosity in Tim's collection of toys, which included puppets, stuffed animals, spiderman and batman figurines, balls, cars, domestic animals, kitchen utensils, play guns, and comic books. It felt like being in a wonderful toyland. "I see you have many toys. Which one is your favorite toy?" Tim became very excited and talked about his toys in detail and showed me how I could play with his toys. During our play, I noticed that Tim had a good sense of humor and imagination. For example, while 'pretending' to cook, Tim said: "I knew I was a good cook, everyone said that." In the process of play with Tim, I had the opportunity to get to know some aspects of his personal life, such as his relatives, friends, and schooling.

Toward the end of the hour, I explained in detail my plan of conducting anger research with him and his family. I used the analogy of my research being similar to my homework when I go to school. Tim was able to relate well to my explanation and demonstrated a good understanding by his comment: "studying anger is part of your homework."

Overall, Tim and I established a good rapport in one informal play session. Tim was playful and spontaneous, and we were completely immersed in the world of play for about an hour.

Research play interviews. The two research play interviews were about an hour long. As in the previous informal play session, Tim invited me to use his bedroom as our interview room.

At the beginning of the first research interview, I was impressed by the fact that Tim recalled his understanding that my visits with him were part of my homework in studying anger. After a short warm up time with fun play, I asked Tim if he could share with me the last time he felt mad at his mother. Tim responded quickly with an "I don't know" response. He also indicated that generally he did not hear other people talking about feeling mad. I then asked Tim to draw angry faces which I thought might be a safer and easier way for him to share his experience of anger. Indeed, Tim expressed his angry look in the drawing using grinding teeth and bulging eyes. He also stated that "sometimes people do bad things when they are angry." I brought up the anger incident that I learned about from Tim's mother and invited Tim to use puppets to play out the angry scenarios. While our play activities appeared to be helpful to engage in some brief discussion of Tim's experience of anger, he was easily distracted to other more fun kinds of play. Overall, there was no outside interruption throughout the hour long play interview.

My second research play interview began with a longer warm up period and I noted that Tim appeared to be more in a playful mood than he was in the previous interview. His responses tended to be short, such as "I kind of forgot," "I can't remember," or "I don't know." I shared with Tim what I learned about the anger incident from his father and it helped our discussion somewhat. He then agreed that he was angry

with his mother when his mother asked him to eat vegetables during dinner. He was also angry with his father when he had been told to brush his teeth at bed time.

<u>Reflections – Child's Experience With Anger</u>

Tim acknowledged being angry when he had been asked by his mother to eat vegetables during dinner and when he was asked by his father to brush his teeth.

<u>Feel like hitting.</u> I discussed with Tim his angry responses. Tim indicated he felt a tendency to hit his parents when he was angry and did not know what else he might do.

Interviewer: What do you feel like doing when you are angry?

Tim: To hit my mom and dad ...

Interviewer: What else would you like to do with them?

Tim: I don't know.

<u>Do what my mom says</u>. Tim indicated that he felt like hitting his parents when he was angry. However, his aggressive tendency was under control. Also, he did not verbalize his feelings to his parents.

Tim [pretending to be his mother]:

                If you are not eating the vegetables, I am going to take you to the room (Said in a loud tone).

Interviewer: What do you do?

Tim: I have to go.

Interviewer: I am wondering if Tim feels sad leaving mom and dad in the living room and going to the room by himself?

Tim: I don't know.

Interviewer: Do you think your mom is mad when you are not eating the

                              vegetables?

Tim: She sometimes gets mad.

Interviewer: I wonder do you feel scared when your mom is mad at you?

Tim: No, I don't feel scared.

Interviewer: Would you ever say something like 'I'm mad at you' to your dad or

                              mom?

Tim: I don't think I would.

Playing in the room. After Tim was sent into the room by his mother, he focused his energy on play.

Interviewer: Did your mom tell you to go to play or was it you that wanted to

                              play?

Tim: I wanted to play.

Interviewer: What do you imagine would happen when your mom came in and

                              played with you?

Tim: I will be happy.

Interviewer: When you are happy, then what would happen to your anger?

Tim: I will be happy.

Interviewer: Would you want your mom to say anything to you too?

Tim: I don't know.

Interviewer: You just want her to play with you, that's all?

Tim: Yeah.

Tim seemed to find play helpful in dealing with anger.

Fighting back against Father. Tim perceived that he had no choice but to follow his mother's order to go into his room without any attempt to fight back. On the other hand, when Tim was asked by his father to go into his room, he tried to resist the order by engaging in a power struggle.

Interviewer: What did your daddy say?

Tim [pretended to be his father]:

Go to your room.

Interviewer: And what would Tim say?

Tim: I would say no, no, no.

Interviewer: What does daddy say?

Tim: Yes, yes, yes.

Overall, Tim did not share with me much detail of his experience of anger with his parents. He seemed to recognize his own anger and his desire to hit his parents but he appeared to keep his angry feelings to himself. Both of his parents would send him to his room for a time out during an angry situation. However, in response to his parents' instructions, he seemed to be more compliant toward his mother and resistant toward his father. Tim often used play activities to distract himself from feeling angry.

Interaction Between Parents and Child

According to the family members interviewed, anger did not seem to be a big concern between Tim and his parents. Both parents indicated that while anger incidents did occur within the family they did not feel they were out of their control.

It appeared to me that both Sally and Sean would like to remain calm in their own approach to dealing with anger. Sally had a stronger focus on calmness in dealing with anger, maintaining a belief that people can look foolish when their anger is more in control than they are.

Furthermore, both Sally and Sean wanted to be a role model for Tim to learn to be calm. For example, Sally focused on talking and using humor to a degree in response to Tim's name calling. Sean was conscious of giving himself a time-out when he yelled at Tim. It is also interesting to note the effects of Tim's crying on Sean. He would then be softer by becoming more open, affectionate, and apologetic toward Tim. Like Sally, Sean would also become quite playful, such as using "Mr. Crab" trick to seek Tim's cooperation.

Overall, both parents appeared to have a good relationship with their child. Tim did not seem to be bothered by any of his anger experiences with his parents. He felt his aggressive tendency toward his parents was under control. Tim did not initiate much conversation with his parents during anger and he did recognize his need to comply with his parents although he would initially put up a protest. He perceived playing as a way of becoming happy.

Table 7.

Reflections of Participants' Experiences With Anger

Mother – Sally	Father – Sean	Child - Tim
Finds anger is not prevalent in child.	Feels it is important to remain in control.	Feels like hitting when angry.
Feels it is important to remain in control.	Apologizes to child when necessary.	Will do what mother says.
Teasing: an antidote to name calling by child.	Takes time out during incidents of anger.	Plays in room as a distraction from anger.
Appreciates support from father in dealing with child's anger.	Will be tougher on boys.	Fights back against father.
	Feels great to have support from child's mother.	

Table 8.

Participants' Reported Interaction During Anger*

	Mother – Sally	
Child:	← →	Mother:
Name calling.		Teasing.

	Father – Sean	
Child:	← →	Father:
Crying.		Yelling.
Invites father to tease him.		Teases using "Mr. Crab" trick.

Child – Tim

Child:	← →	Mother:
Feels like hitting.		Orders child to eat vegetables.
Complies with Mother's order.		Sends child to room.

Child:	← →	Father:
Arguing.		Sends child to room.

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*Note: indicates a recursive, reciprocal interaction between the parent and the child (e.g., the more the child cries, the more the mother yells at the child, and so on)

Table 9.

Preferred Patterns of Interaction During Anger

Mother – Sally

Child:	← →	Mother:
Verbalizes angry feelings.		Talking it through.

Father – Sean

Child:	← →	Father:
Talking, hugging.		Talking.

Child - Tim

Child:	← →	Mother:
To feel happy by playing.		Plays with the child.
Child:	← →	Father:
To feel happy by playing.		Plays with the child.

Family Case Study Four

Family Interviewed

Sherry, is the oldest daughter of Heidi and Jack. Heidi and Jack are both estimated to be in their mid-thirties. Heidi works as a part-time human resource supervisor and Jack is a full time mechanic. Sherry was five years and seven months at the first interview. She has a younger sister who is about three years of age. She is looked after by her mother when she is not working, or by a babysitter when both her parents are at work. Sherry also goes to kindergarten four mornings a week.

The Interview Process With the Family

All the interviews with Sherry, Heidi, and Jack were conducted at their home. On one morning I first interviewed Heidi followed by an informal play session with Sherry. On the second visit to this family, I conducted an interview with Jack and a separate research play interview with Sherry during the evening. The second research play interview with Sherry occurred during another visit one early afternoon. After I had

finished my transcription and analysis, I went back two times to conduct three separate

feedback sessions with each individual participant.

Interview With Mother – Heidi

My individual interview with Heidi was conducted at the kitchen dinner table,

based on her preference. There were no major interruptions throughout the interview.

Our almost two hour discussion were quite informal and conversational. I did not

follow a standard set of questions during the interviews. Heidi was very relaxed, open,

insightful, and focused during our discussion. In addition to the discussion of anger

incidents, other issues were brought up during our discussion included the parent-child

relationship, love, parenting, work, and personal experiences of growing up. As a result, I

was able to better understand her viewpoints more comprehensively.

Reflections – Mother's Experience with Anger

Heidi reported that Sherry became angry with her when she tried to intervene in

conflict between Sherry and her younger sister and when on one occasion she was not

allowed to have friends visit her. Heidi indicated that in general, the anger between

herself and Sherry arose from daily activities, such as getting ready for bed or getting

dressed.

> When she is angry with me, it is generally that she cannot watch TV any more, or
> she must go to bed, or brush her teeth, or get dressed, those types of day to day
> things.

<u>Stop, think, and talk.</u> Heidi was quite open and candid about her interactions with

Sherry during anger. She seemed to appreciate Sherry's feedback and that its effect was

to make her pause for reflection and then share her thoughts and feelings with Sherry.

When she [Sherry] says that [mommy hurts my feelings], it always gives me a

start, because I think is that really worth hurting your child's feelings just for them

to get dressed. It gives me an opportunity to think about it too .... She is very open

when I hurt her feelings. It can be emotions of anger, sadness, frustration .... It's

good when she will say that ['Mommy hurts my feelings'] to me when I am short

tempered ... A lot of times she will say that it's my anger she is angry with ... it

will make me stop. She often says that my anger is probably matching hers when

we are butting heads. So then it is a good point to stop, talk about how I hurt her

feelings, what I need to do, why I am asking. It is sort of an explanation and a

pause. Generally it ends with a hug and then we can try to be calm again. More

often than not when I start to talk about my anger it will defuse the situation.

While Heidi stopped and reflected on the anger incident, she also came to realize

the importance of making an apology.

It just breaks my heart. To me, it is just devastating ... I don't want to hurt her

feelings ... I am genuinely saying sorry that I hurt your feelings regardless of

whether I am right or wrong ... I usually start with me apologizing which usually

leads to her saying 'I am sorry, I didn't listen' or whatever.

Heidi was sensitive to Sherry's feelings even when she herself was angry. She

also seemed to maintain a positive attitude instead of reacting negatively (e.g., yelling

back) to Sherry's expression of anger. By listening to Sherry intently, Heidi conveyed the message to her that it's okay to let her know that she was angry and that she cared deeply for her emotional well-being.

Putting a closure to the anger incident. Heidi emphasized the importance of actively talking about the issues involved in any anger incident. She believed that such a process would lead to a resolution, closure, and facilitate moving on. Moreover, it served as a process of confirmation of love between herself and Sherry.

> Just to talk it through ... it is almost like a lesson, it is something to be found in everything. What's the positive – let's hug, let's say that it is gone now, almost a permission to say that none of us is angry, everything is okay and lets get back to normal sort of discussion .... Let's be happy now. Let's do something. Let's come out of the room. Let's all work together and have some fun. It's like end of the scene. It's over ... I still love you and you still love me .... I don't like to carry it over and so I insist it's all done ... no repercussion and it's all done. Unless there is some sort of punishment but at this stage usually there isn't.

Sherry took a lead in putting an end to the anger incident. I imagine that it was reassuring for Sherry to know that the love between herself and her mother remained strong despite some conflict.

Gender difference in responding to anger: More talking with girls, less with boys. Heidi felt that she might use a less verbal approach with a male child during anger. "I think probably would be less talking of how the emotions are involved and how it makes

each other feel. More is just a closure without discussing things." This view appeared to be related to her perception of male expression in general.

> That men are less in tune with the emotions. Not that they are totally out of touch but the need to express their feelings are not there. That's probably a stereotype toward men. It is very easy for me to verbalize my emotions whereas it is not an easy thing for my husband to do. He would probably be angry even before he realizes that he's getting angry.

In Heidi's view, males seem to be less inclined to verbally express their feelings and therefore she believed that she would take a different approach when interacting with a male child during an anger incident.

Giving a warning sign of frustration. Heidi recognized her own sense of frustration during anger. Apparently, she expressed her frustration through a warning signal to Sherry when she began feeling angry.

> It takes a little bit for us to get frustrated but when she keeps coming back for negotiation .... With me it ties to a lot of frustration and I am getting angry with her. I will tell her that 'you are starting to make me mad,' or 'I am starting to feel very angry.' I think I do quite a bit as far as to sort of giving her a hint that I am getting really frustrated and I am getting angry. You don't want me to get angry please do what I'm asking – sort of trying to verbalize my anger a bit.

Child's anger is about sadness, hurt, and a sense of injustice. Heidi noticed that the anger in Sherry was closely connected with her feelings of sadness and hurt. "She

doesn't really ever say that she is angry as I recall. She equates being sad and hurt when she is angry. To her, anger is a form of sadness."

Furthermore, Heidi believed that Sherry's anger was related to her perception that she was being treated unfairly.

She thought I was being unfair to her by turning off the TV and told her that she couldn't watch TV if she was going to push her sister ... she sees injustice in all of that. She gets very frustrated and angry at me for that .... There have been some situations where she goes for 20 minutes or half an hour into her room and does not want to talk or refuses to talk. I may go in every five minutes to see if she is ready and she will say 'no' and so we will just leave her there. She thus takes a while in some cases depending on her level of frustration.

Heidi indicated that Sherry would reveal her sense of injustice and her feelings of hurt and sadness through some physical actions.

She will show by her body that she doesn't think it's fair that she is mad. She will stomp her way or slam the door. Or when she is in her room – throwing her pyjamas ... that is just her way of dealing with it because she knows she can't yell at me. She has to go by the rules so that's the way she can show me that she is angry without really getting into trouble.

Heidi was also able to detect Sherry's "hidden temper." She recognized that Sherry felt restrained when she was not allowed to yell, but that she put in extra effort into presenting her anger in an acceptable manner. According to Heidi, Sherry appeared to prefer being alone in her bedroom to deal with her anger.

Overall, Heidi's experience with anger seemed to be associated with a feeling of frustration. She took a positive and rational approach to dealing with the anger between Sherry and herself. By pausing to think and talk things over, Sherry seemed to strive to establish a sense of control and resolution over the anger issue. She did not intend to respond to Sherry's anger with anger. It appeared that Heidi was sensitive to Sherry's feelings and her needs when she was angry. Heidi also seemed to be quite patient with Sherry. She understood why Sherry behaved the way she did during anger and as a result was able to leave her some space to cool down. She would also talk to Sherry if the child chose to do so. Apparently, Heidi was touched by Sherry's emotional expression and generally took the lead to apologize to Sherry. Her main focus seemed to be working together with Sherry toward some resolution or closure of the anger incident.

Interview With Father – Jack

I interviewed Jack in the kitchen, as suggested by him. The interview lasted for about two hours one evening without much interruption.

During the interview, I found that Jack's descriptions were well grounded by the fact that he described many specific incidents based on his personal experiences instead of simply referring to some general phenomenon. At times he also included his experiences in relating to his younger child. Jack compared himself to his spouse when dealing with anger issues. He was enthused about the dissertation research. In particular, Jack openly expressed how much he enjoyed our conversation. He was excited when the conversation enabled him to reflect on the anger issue from a new and different perspective. For instance, Jack began to question the impacts of his approach to

anger issues on Sherry's development of self-esteem. Indeed, I also recalled feeling very positive and energized after my interview with Jack.

Reflections – Father's Experience With Anger

Jack recognized that the anger he experienced with Sherry was generally due to a difference in ideas as well as when Sherry would refuse to cooperate or comply with him. Apparently, Jack developed a strong sense of anger when Sherry deliberately approached her mother to seek a different response once she had already been given a answer by him.

> Usually the conflict arises when she would like to do something and that dad would rather she didn't, or dad would like her to do something and she refuses to do it .... If she wants to go to her friends ... she will ask me. When she doesn't particularly like my answer, she will go to mom .... Mom might give her a different answer. So then out door she goes ... that angers me and I don't particularly like her trying to get a different answer from somebody else.

Okay to be angry. Jack appeared to accept anger as a common and normal experience among people. What concerned him was not anger per se but instead how people dealt with anger.

> I think anger itself is okay. I think it is the way you deal with it that dictates whether it is a good thing or a bad thing. I mean it is fine to be angry. Everybody is going to get mad whether you like it or not. It's how you deal with it ... but anger in itself is fine. I mean everyone has the right to be mad. I mean we all get mad at each other because we are a family. Some days are good and some days are bad and people then get mad at each other.

<u>Being grouchy and unfriendly when angry.</u> Jack recognized his own difficulties when dealing with anger. He recognized his tendency to become impatient with people and thus he felt it would be better for him to be alone when angry.

I can generally tell when I am angry. I know when I am angry ... I get very abrupt. You do it now or it's too late, type of thing .... I still have a great difficulty in dealing with my own anger ... I stomp around. I walk past others. I don't care if you are talking to me or not. You are going to leave me alone. I am mad .... When dad is in a bad mood or angry then better not talk to me ... I mean give me 10 minutes, just let me cool down. Things will be better.

Not only was Jack aware of his behavior during anger, he was also sensitive to the impacts of his angry expressions on Sherry. He was concerned that Sherry might feel sad, fearful, and withdraw from him.

I will say that they distance themselves from me .... She is not going to engage in the conversation with me ... I would imagine she feels sad. Dad is mad, angry, upset about some thing. They must feel sad that dad is so upset ... it might create more shyness.

<u>Sending child to her room.</u> Jack would send Sherry into her room when they were angry with each other. He seemed to expect Sherry be able to sort out her sadness and stop being angry during her time alone in the room.

My voice goes up a little bit more, and if at that point there is no action, I take her to the room ... you should be in your room, and chances are you are not going to get a story or you are not listening to a tape or whatever it is .... She knows she

spends her time in her room and that is her punishment. And if she wants to cry

she can cry for three days. She can't come out of the room until she gets a smile

on. I don't expect her to come out in a joyful mood but you better be able to deal

with what you have there.

Even though Jack sent Sherry into her room when they were angry with each

other, he was mindful of the importance of talking with her. "Heidi and I will go and talk

to her, and explain to her, make sure she understands why she has been sent to the room."

Feeling awful when child expresses her anger. Jack appeared to feel hurt, sad,

rejected, and had a hard time accepting Sherry's comment that she was mad at him. He

wished that Sherry would appreciate his parenting efforts.

Both kids have actually told me that they were mad. It very much turns you inside

out .... I feel sadness too. I am not angry that she is mad at me .... you feel bad

that your kids are not hanging all over you .... I am a good parent and I want my

kid to like me.

Learning to be more expressive. Jack shared with me his learning experience of

growing up in an environment in which people displayed their anger with one another

through the use of physical force.

I was not going to follow the way I was brought up .... They were very abrupt all

the time .... I grew up with plates flying and stuff crashing all around the house.

That is not a good environment. Kids don't need to see that .... I am trying to

converse with them [children] a little more. If the toys are flying across the room,

I will send her into her room. Heidi might sit down and talk to her first where I

will send to her room first and then go and talk to her or talk to her when she comes out .... I will say I am more the action type. That's probably due to my background.

Jack realized the different approach he and Heidi had in dealing with the child's anger, and was working on being more vocal with his children.

Gender difference in handling children's anger: Tougher toward boys. Jack expressed his preference to have girls over boys. Without knowing the probable reasons, Jack felt he would be tougher on boys.

I would say that I would be a poor father to a boy .... To me girls are fragile .... I think my tolerance level would be far less with a boy. I don't know why. I think I would be far more strict with a boy and I am glad we have girls. I really am.

Overall, Jack accepted anger as a natural human emotion. He apparently felt that it is an individual's right to be angry. His main concern was how people deal with anger and he was sensitive to his own feelings, thoughts, and behavior during an angry situation. He felt upset when Sherry expressed her anger toward him, as he perceived that as a sign of rejection from Sherry. Also, he described himself as being grouchy and unfriendly during anger. His reflection on his upbringing within his own family appeared to enable him to make a conscious choice to be more empathic, perceptive, and not to become physical with his own children during anger. In general, he felt that he could be more gentle with girls. He was aware that Heidi tended to have more discussion with Sherry during anger, while he was more likely to keep a distance from Sherry by sending

her into her room. He understood the possible negative impacts of his style – 'action first, talk later' when dealing with Sherry during anger.

Interview With Child – Sherry

Informal play interview. I first asked Sherry where and with what she would like to play. She chose her bedroom as our interview room. She was quite open and gentle in indicating to me that she did not have a particular toy preference – "It doesn't matter." I encouraged Sherry to check out my toy bag. She quickly became more at ease and active in exploring the toys. She was interested in a variety of toys and while she was playing with the toys, we chatted about different topics ranging from school, Christmas celebrations, friends, family and relatives, to her favorite toys. Sherry also showed me her huge collection of toys, drawings, and pictures. She became more relaxed and chatty as time passed. I felt that Sherry participated in the conversation and experienced that she was a spontaneous and animated child. For instance, she would smell the markers and pretend to speak like a lion in our play. Moreover, Sherry presented herself with great confidence when she did her drawings, giving herself compliments regarding the drawings she made. In the middle of our play interview, I shared with Sherry how I came to know her parents as well as the purpose and process of the research interviews. She did not seem to show any concern or unease about the research.

Overall, the informal play interview went well. There was no interruption at all throughout the one hour play session. Her mother was working in the house while Sherry and I were playing. I was able to establish a good rapport with Sherry and felt that she was a very gentle, easy-going, and expressive child.

Research play interviews. Overall, I found it was quite easy to get the interviews started. Sherry chose to use her bedroom for conducting our research play interviews. In the first research play interview, I reiterated my plan and invited Sherry to share with me some of her anger experiences with her mother. I was very impressed with Sherry's openness and enthusiasm in telling me about her experience with anger. I suggested using puppets to do a pretend play in order to enact the anger incident she described. Sherry was very cooperative and became quite involved in the characters (herself and her mother) she enacted. She was descriptive in her account of her angry look, bodily response, feelings, and verbal expressions when angry.

Some time after the first research play interview took place, I went back to see Sherry for the second interview. We moved quickly into the research interview when I realized Sherry's comfort with the process. She was very receptive to my suggestion to draw an angry face. Sherry was actively involved in our drawing and pretend play activities and her responses revealed that she was quite observant of and sensitive to others' emotions. There was no interruption throughout the almost an hour and a half long interview.

Reflections – Child's Experience With Anger

The anger incidents identified by Sherry included one occasion when she was angry because she was asked by her mother to have breakfast but did not want to do so. Another time she did not want to comply with her father's request for her to put her pyjamas on.

<u>Feeling sad and scared.</u> Sherry appeared to be angry that her parents imposed their ideas on her. "I got mad at my mom when I had breakfast but I didn't want to .... I got mad at my dad when I didn't want to get my pyjamas on .... I didn't want to." Moreover, Sherry expressed a feeling of sadness within her anger.

Interviewer:	What does it feel like when you are mad at your mom?
Sherry:	Really sad.
Interviewer:	You just mentioned you were feeling sad. Can you tell me more about that?
Sherry:	When I was sad, I went to my room to cry. I had to go to my room because that's what I was supposed to do when I was sad.
Interviewer:	That's what you were supposed to do. Who told you that?
Sherry:	My mom and my dad.. When I am angry, I am sad, I look like this [Child made a sad face].

While Sherry experienced her anger with a feeling of sadness, she found herself being afraid of her mother's anger.

Sherry:	My mom made me scared.
Interviewer:	What were you scared of?
Sherry:	When my mom really, really got mad at me.
Interviewer:	What did you think would happen when your mom was really, really mad at you?
Sherry:	She would get mad at me. She would get mad at other people in the house.

Interviewer: What would happen if she was mad at you and she was also mad at

other people?

Sherry: They would get mad at her too.

It appeared that Sherry worried that her mother's anger might create anger in other

people. Thus, she had a tendency to hold back and to later apologize to her mother.

I do want to tell her that I'm angry, but I can't, cause I get mad. She doesn't like

me being mad .... I want to talk to her about something when I was mad I

would say 'I am sorry Mommy.'

Showing anger in the bedroom. Sherry indicated that she learned from her parents

that she could only express her anger as long as she stayed in a private place. "Within the

room it is okay to be angry ... she [mother] would say you shouldn't be mad at me like

when you were in the kitchen, just in your bedroom."

Sherry appeared to make use of her time well while she was in her room. She

immersed herself in playing in her room, which seemed to become a sanctuary for her.

Interviewer: What do you do in your room?

Sherry: I play stuff and do stuff.

Interviewer: Like what? What do you play with?

Sherry: I color.

Interviewer: Did you stay in the room for quite a while?

Sherry: A long time.

Interviewer: What does it feel like when you have a chance to play with toys?

Sherry: I feel a little better.

Interviewer: What is it about playing with toys that made you feel a little better?

Sherry: Because I could play and make a big mess in my room and then I

               knew I could clean it up, so I cleaned it up when I was done.

Overall, it appeared that Sherry was sad and fearful when experiencing anger with

her parents. She gave a more detailed account of her fears in relation to her mother's

anger. Her pointed observations of the ripple effects of her mother's anger on other

family members appeared to have led her to wonder if anger was contagious and

dangerous. She tried to be nice and apologetic with her mother during anger. Although

she was struggling with the dilemma of either complying with her parents' demands or

being more explicit with her anger, she tended to comply with her parents' expectations

in that she would express her anger in private (e.g., her bedroom). From Sherry's

perspective, playing in her room appeared to be an effective way to distract herself from

anger.

Interaction Pattern Between Parents and Child

Both Heidi and Jack were sensitive of their own feelings and their actions in

dealing with Sherry during the state of anger. For instance, Heidi noted primarily a sense

of frustration while Jack described himself as being impatient and abrupt when angry.

Both found their child's expression of anger to be hurtful due to their own need for

acceptance by Sherry. They were also aware of Sherry's feelings of sadness, hurt, and

fear as well as her sense of injustice that is associated with her anger. Indeed, both

parents tried to deal with anger in a positive manner. This was demonstrated by Heidi's

"stop, think, and talk" method and Jack's cooling off or distancing by sending Sherry into

her room. Jack had begun to wonder about the effectiveness of his approach of "action first, talking later." He seemed to prefer developing more dialogue with Sherry instead and also trying to become more patient. Moreover, Heidi took an active approach in apologizing to Sherry when she felt she had hurt her feelings. She also learned from her child that they were both "butting heads" when angry. It's interesting to note that both parents felt it was likely easier dealing with girls rather than boys' anger.

As for Sherry herself, she appeared to be feeling sad and intimidated by her parents' anger and as a result she had a tendency to apologize and comply with them. Her other approaches to dealing with her anger with parents include crying and playing in her own room.

Table 10.

Reflections of Participants' Experiences With Anger

Mother – Heidi	Father – Jack	Child - Sherry
Stop, think, and talk.	Okay to be angry.	Feels sad and scared when angry.
Prefers putting a closure to anger incident.	Sends child to her room when angry.	Shows anger in her bedroom.
Expects that she would talk to girls more than boys concerning incidents of anger.	Feels awful when child expresses her anger.	
	Is learning to be more expressive.	
Feels child's anger is about sadness, hurt, and a sense of injustice.	Would be tougher on boys when handling incidents of anger.	

Table 11.

Participants' Reported Interaction During Anger*

Mother – Heidi

Child:	← →	Mother:
Slamming doors, throwing things, crying.		"Butting heads" with child.
Stop, listening, thinking, and talking, apologizing, hugging.		Hugging, apologizing.

Father – Jack

Child:	← →	Father:
Crying.		Stomping, sending child to her room.
Talking.		Talking.

Child – Sherry

Child:	← →	Mother:
Crying.		Becoming angry with other family members.

Child:	← →	Father:
Crying.		Sending child to her room.

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*Note: indicates a recursive, reciprocal interaction between the parent and the child (e.g., the more the child cries, the more the mother yells at the child, and so on)

Table 12.

Preferred Patterns of Interaction During Anger

Mother – Heidi

Child:	← →	Mother:
Talking.		Talking, listening, hugging, apologizing.

Father – Jack

Child:	← →	Father:
Talking.		Talking.

Child - Sherry

Child:	← →	Mother:
Talking, playing.		Talking.
Child:	← →	Father:
Talking, playing.		Talking.

Family Case Study Five

Family Interviewed

Hazel is the youngest child of Georgina and Daniel. Hazel's mother, Georgina, is a part-time nurse estimated to be in her mid-thirties. Hazel's father, Daniel, also estimated to be in his mid-thirties is a full time graduate student. Hazel was four years and ten months old at the time of the first interview. She has an older sister and an older

brother (approximately aged ten years and seven years respectively). She attends play-school and is home with her mother the rest of the time.

The Interview Process With the Family

Five individual interviews were conducted followed by three individual feedback sessions. On my first visit with this family, I had an informal play interview with Hazel, followed by an interview with the father, Daniel. On the following three separate visits, I had an individual interview with the mother, Georgina and two play interviews with Hazel. Moreover, I conducted three separate feedback sessions with the parents and the child to share my understanding and interpretation of the interviews previously conducted. All research interviews were conducted at the participant's home.

Interview With Mother – Georgina

The interview was conducted in the living room, chosen by Georgina. There was no interruption throughout the one and a half hour long interview one morning. My interaction with Georgina was quite casual and cordial, followed by a conversation with no pre-established format. It was easy talking with Georgina and my experience was that she was cooperative, relaxed, down-to-earth, open, and enthusiastic in dialoguing about her experience of anger with Hazel. It appeared to me that by her candid expression, she did not experience difficulty or uneasiness when she reflected on her personal experience. She seemed to accept my role as a researcher conducting research interviews in her home. Overall, I was warmly received by Georgina .

Reflections – Mother's Experience With Anger

Georgina described some scenarios in which Hazel was angry with her, and they were angry with each other. The situations included a time when Hazel was given a bath, another when the TV was being turned off, and also a situation when it was time for Hazel to go to bed while the other siblings stayed up.

> It's an ongoing thing and she still gets angry that she has to be washed. She doesn't want to be washed .... She didn't want to listen when I say it's time to turn off the TV .... She didn't think it's fair that she has to go to bed and the others stay up.

A strong feeling of frustration associated with child's compliance. Georgina was angry when her expectations for Hazel were unfulfilled which subsequently caused inconveniences and difficulties in completing her housework. Her anger were presented in the form of frustration, disappointment, and annoyance.

> Sometimes I get angry when she is asked to pick up some toys and she doesn't do it .... I know she can do it. I think it is a reasonable expectation that she can pick up her toys or pick up her markers when she is finished with them.

Also Georgina expressed frustration with Hazel when she refused to be bathed. Her feeling of frustration became amplified when she recognized the constraints on her as a result of Hazel's lack of cooperation.

> I am continuing to get resistance and it's very time consuming and I have a lots of things that I need to do .... There is other pressure on me to accomplish .... She is

getting angry and upset, and it takes a lot more time than if we just bathe her and get it done ... so that is the frustration.

Georgina felt that if the child could show more cooperation and consideration then things would be easier and more convenient in her life.

Remaining in control. Georgina appeared to have some ideas and strategies to help herself remain in control. One natural strategy resulted from having developed an understanding of the child's expectations for her when in a state of anger. "I think she would prefer me to stay calm. She doesn't get upset if I remain calm."

Georgina recognized the reciprocal interaction between herself and Hazel. "If I get frustrated, she gets frustrated." She was aware that when she could execute a calm parenting role, it was easier to deal with and diffuse the anger between herself and her child.

If I can keep from being upset and angry, whatever, then the whole situation can be defused much more easily. If I remain calm, I am less apt to be hasty washing her bum .... I probably wash her bum more calmly. So she accepts that better and she will calm down faster.

It appeared to me that Georgina understood very well how her calmness could affect Hazel's mood and reactions. She seemed to feel it important for Hazel to perceive that her mother could handle an anger situation without losing control.

Another strategy that Georgina found beneficial in helping herself remain in control was when she remained positive in her thinking. "Accept the fact that she was

mad and that she is going to get over it .... The biggest thing is just to stay outside of it and realize it's their anger rather than getting involved in it."

Moreover, Georgina was sensitive to and acknowledged her child's needs during an angry situation. She interpreted Hazel's anger to be related to her need to be independent and to feel in control. "Well I think that she just wants to be a big girl .... She feels that she is fairly independent with most of the things she does. She doesn't want me to do a lot of things for her.

Georgina also interpreted Hazel's anger as her need to protest against oppression. "That she said that she doesn't need to be washed and mom said that she does. So she is not able to assert herself that way because I am insisting on something rather than doing what she wants."

It seemed that Georgina recognized the inherent power differential in the parent-child relationship and questioned it enough to result in her being better able to remain in control.

While Georgina recognized the importance of remaining in control, she realized that there were times she failed to do so. Georgina admitted that she had smacked Hazel in response to her own anger. "I have smacked Hazel a few times. She isn't punished ... I am not being angry to punish her. It's a reaction on my part." Georgina perceived that her anger was a natural response (almost a reflex action) on her part without the premeditated intent of punishing Hazel.

Her ability to remain in control was contingent upon a number of factors, including work demands, time, and her mood.

I am the one who needs to be in control and I am not always. And again it depends on how I wake up, how I feel in the morning when I get up, what else is going on in our lives, if I have any other concerns, if things are bothering me or if I am having a lot of other demands put on me at the same time when I am trying to deal with the situation. All these things impact on how I react in one situation. You know if things are relatively calm here and you know it is just a normal day then it will go better.

Georgina's preference was to resolve her anger by encouraging herself to remain calm using the different strategies mentioned.

No gender difference in handling child's anger. Georgina did not believe she treated Hazel's anger differently because she was a girl. "No, I don't think so. I really don't. I think in this family pretty much treats them [the children] the same. We don't see them as boys or girls. They are individuals."

Overall, I found that Georgina's experience of her own anger in relation to Hazel appeared to be primarily characterized by a feeling of frustration. The intensity of her frustration seemed to be influenced by a number of factors, such as the domestic workload, time factor, and her mood. She hoped that Hazel would be more cooperative with her in running daily routines.

Georgina was quite sensitive and reflective to her own responses and her child's needs during an angry situation. While Georgina seemed to believe that she had the right to be angry when her child failed to fulfill her expectations, she questioned herself about being too intrusive, demanding, or overbearing on the child. She also wondered if Hazel

felt helpless when she complied with her. Perhaps Georgina wondered if she had been too harsh with the child. Georgina made attempts to give Hazel some space in dealing with her own anger. Of course, there were exceptions and Georgina admitted there were times she smacked Hazel. Overall, she believed her efforts in remaining calm carried some potential calming effects for her child. She related Hazel's anger to her needs in the context of child development, and also believed there were no gender differences in how she treated her children's anger.

Interview With Father – Daniel

The interview was conducted in the living room, in accordance with Daniels' preference. There was no interruption during the hour and a half morning interview.

Daniel was quite relaxed and open during discussion about his experience of anger with Hazel. Moreover, he seemed to have a good sense of humor and was very willing to give numerous examples to illustrate his viewpoints which facilitated my understanding of his experience with anger.

Reflections – Father's Experience With Anger

In conversation with Daniel he described an anger incident. I understood that he was once angry with Hazel when she refused to cooperate by eating her breakfast and subsequently made him late for an appointment.

The other day I got angry. I had an appointment and the kids were not getting themselves ready to go to school. I shouted at Hazel ... she was not eating her breakfast .... I was not able to keep my appointment.

Struggle and tangle. It appears that in the anger incident described by Daniel he felt upset, frustrated, out of control, interfered with, and restrained. Daniel experienced negative feelings while in a state of anger. "I was upset and frustrated and banging the cupboard doors .... I guess part of the frustration came from feeling that I should be able to control the situation."

Furthermore, Daniel experienced that the anger between Hazel and himself worsened and the intensity of anger escalated as they both insisted to be listened to by shouting back and forth at each other during the interaction between himself and Hazel.

Say Hazel is doing something and I pick her up and take her to her room. She is crying at that time and it is getting louder – right in my ear – that can lead to an intensely escalated cycle between both of us. I get angrier and shout and she gets louder crying. Yeah, it can be escalated to the point of hysteria.

It appears to me that Daniel recognized he was feeling awkward and uncomfortable when he and Hazel were engaging in an argument. Daniel also admitted that he felt uncomfortable when ignored by his child.

She often sings a little song to herself. When she is doing that, she will do it louder. She will ignore me. She is very good at ignoring me and my wife .... I know that on some level I take it as a personal affront and that's when I get angry. I realize that it is a silly thing to think of it as a personal affront. I think she is not interested in doing whatever she needs to do. She tends to listen better when we will pay a little bit more attention to her.

It seems that Daniel felt hurt and disrespected when Hazel withdrew herself from talking to him.

In summary, Daniel experienced a mixture of negative feelings in association with anger, including frustration, upset, interference, restraint, a sense of being out of control, awkwardness, discomfort, irritation, and resentment.

Anger outbursts: Relationship killer. Daniel's experience with anger was described as extremely unpleasant and he also believed anger to be destructive in nature. Daniel perceived anger could destroy a relationship. He also believed there could be some negative consequences created in Hazel as a result of his anger.

> I don't think it [anger] has any positive value at all – no positive value. It does harm to our relationship. It does harm in that she doesn't trust me as much afterwards and it takes work to overcome that distrust. When you get angry with somebody you are telling them that you have a negative view of them as a person. And they take that view into themselves and they make it part of themselves, and they resent you for forcing it on them. And it doesn't help the person who's angry either to have that – that negative view of the world, because you know, if you tell people that they're evil that's the kind of world that you're creating around you.

Daniel further challenged the use of anger when dealing with a problem. He recognized his ability to make proper judgments was reduced when he was angry.

> I think that anger didn't lead to any kind of resolution .... My ability to perceive under those circumstances is completely different than if I am not angry. If I am not angry ... then I can see a bit of humor in seeing Hazel say she is mad – also,

that can be sort of interesting to watch her trying to articulate her feelings like a grown up person.

Daniel seemed to understand how his anger clouded his perception.

It is something like that: anger leads to blindness. Anger is partly connected to all kinds of irrational self-justification: for example, I deserve to be angry, I have been hard done by, people aren't treating me right. All I can see at the moment is somebody who is deliberately antagonistic and hostile toward me. What makes the anger escalated is that I see it as a personal affront to me. Later on if I am able to think about it ... I can see that it doesn't have to do with me at all. It has to do with how she is feeling about herself in that situation

Overall, Daniel challenged the functions and values of anger. He believed anger could be a barrier between people and thus had some negative effects on human relationships. He also believed that anger could damage an individual's perception and understanding of a problem and thus reduce one's ability to effectively deal with a problem.

Remaining in control and calm. Reflecting on his personal experience in dealing with anger, Daniel described the positive experience of remaining in control by walking away from his child instead of reacting to her angry responses during an anger incident. He seemed to be very proud of himself for remaining in control.

The other day I noticed that Hazel had forgotten about juice .... I forget exactly what it was. But what it had suggested to me was to just to walk away from it, and I did. And five minutes later after she finished screaming, I mean, she didn't

immediately stop screaming. It sort of increased and then decreased. And she came out and she was able to talk to us again and then we were able to solve the problem. That's very satisfying to do it that way.

Furthermore, Daniel recalled another incident in which he was able to remain calm. He was willing to give Hazel the time and space she needed to deal with her anger. She had done something and she was sent to her room. She had become very angry. I had said that I wanted her to come to talk to with me about that. She had shouted at me. So I left it at that and a short time later – about half an hour – she came to me and explained to me her side of the situation.

Understanding that child's anger is associated with a sense of injustice. Daniel recognized that Hazel was experiencing a sense of injustice during anger. "She wasn't entirely happy, her expression was that of somebody who had been wronged. She seemed to be expressing the fact that she thought she had been treated unfairly."

Building a positive relationship is an antidote to anger. Daniel believed that it is possible to reduce anger problems by developing a strong bonding with the child. He emphasized the importance of strengthening the parent-child relationship on a daily basis, thus building a strong foundation that is instrumental in dealing with anger when it arises.

I think that the more I interact with her in such a way as to hear her, the less anger she has. When I am busy it can be very easy just sort of be the father role. I come home to cook, just ask functional questions and tell her to do the things that need to be done, and just sort of function as doing the things that parents are supposed to do. That doesn't create the kind of intimacy that makes it easy to communicate

with her when she does get angry or when I am upset about something. It works better if I can take the time to actually play with her and hear her and respond to her.

In sum, underlying his experience of anger, Daniel carried a mixture of negative feelings: frustration, disappointment, upset, feeling interfered with, irritation, restraint, and feeling out of control. His level of anger appeared to become intensified when he was tired.

Daniel was being acutely sensitive to the intricate dynamics between his child's and his own response during anger. He recognized how anger could distort his perception and analysis of a situation, as well as damage the relationship with the child. He tried to remain calm in an angry situation. Moreover, Daniel appeared to be sensitive to the child's experience of anger and be respectful of his child's needs. Efforts to maintain close communication with the child on a regular basis are instrumental in establishing a strong relationship, which in turn serves well when dealing with situations involving anger.

Interviews With Child – Hazel

Informal play interview. When I arrived on the first afternoon, Hazel and her siblings were quite excited knowing I brought some toys along with me. At their request, I spent some time playing with the three children. They appeared to be impressed with the variety of toys. The toys that I had brought with me included some stuffed animals and puppets, a fabric-made doll house, animal toy figures, dinosaur figures, feeling cards, plastic toy fruits, modeling clay, plasticines, markers, and crafts paper. Their comments

and inquires echoed strong curiosity: "Lots of puppets!" "Did you make these all?" "What is that for?" "What's that little microphone doing?" After the children played with my toys for about 15 minutes, Hazel's father asked me if I would like to play with Hazel alone. After stating that I would very much like to play with Hazel individually, Daniel asked Hazel's siblings to leave the living room. Both followed their father's direction easily.

Hazel and I continued our play in the living room. She appeared to be at ease even though she was alone with me without the company of her siblings. Her mother was working in the kitchen and her father was working in his room during our play. I encouraged Hazel to choose the toys that interested her. She seemed to be particularly interested in playing with the animal figures. In the play, she used the animal figures to create different animal families. For instance, she identified "Look, there's a family of white cows, a family of black cows ... baby pig, momma pig, daddy pig." Hazel also invited me to join her play and I was happy to follow her lead. The child showed animation, playfulness, spontaneity, and openness in play. She acted as though she had been introduced to a toy wonderland — filled with joy, fun, and magic. Overall, her interest and her attention in the informal play interview remained strong throughout the almost one hour of play. On reflection, our first informal play session provided an opportunity to get to know each other and provided an excellent opportunity to develop some understanding of how Hazel expressed herself and related to me through the use of toys. The relationship established in the first interview facilitated good communication in the second and the third interviews.

<u>Research play interviews.</u> I conducted two play interviews with Hazel on two separate afternoons, each lasting for about an hour and a half. I asked Hazel if she had any preference regarding the place for interview. She chose to have our play sessions in the living room. At the beginning of the first play interview, I asked Hazel if she knew the purpose of my visit. Hazel stated her understanding that I was there to play with her. I decided to follow Hazel's agenda of playing for a little while as a way of forming a relationship between us. I first showed Hazel some feeling cards hoping that it would give us the opportunity to relate to the topic of anger. She appeared to be interested in checking the feeling cards. However, when I later asked Hazel if she could draw me a "mad face," she declined. I then explained to Hazel that I wanted to learn about anger and to understand what it was like for her to be angry. Hazel appeared not to be interested in listening to my statement. Instead, she expressed her interest in playing with the doll house and I followed her lead because I did not feel it appropriate at that point to redirect her interest. I noticed that Hazel was quite imaginative and creative and enjoyed the play – it was about a birthday party in the doll house. I followed her lead in this activity for some time. At one point, I felt we had already spent quite some time (almost half an hour) in the warm up and so I did interrupt Hazel's play and asked her what kinds of things made her angry with her mother. I also indicated to Hazel that I had a conversation with her parents regarding their anger experiences with her. I invited Hazel to share with me what made her angry with her mother. Surprisingly, Hazel answered the question directly without hesitation. She indicated that she became angry with her mother when she was asked to clean up her room. I then initiated a pretend play

(still using the toy house as props) to invite Hazel to enact the anger incident between her mother and herself. Hazel appeared to be focused in this particular pretend play scenario.

The second play interview seemed to go well. Hazel appeared to enjoy the face painting activity during the warm up period. She was cooperative and responded readily to my suggestion that she draw me a "mad face." With this activity, I again had the opportunity to ask Hazel questions related to her anger experience. Her responses in general tended to be more direct, clear, and easy for me to follow and understand than those in the earlier meeting. Of course, she was distracted at times toward "fun play." Hazel and I did an enactment of her anger experience with her father while she played with the modeling clay. As in the previous interviews, I continued to find myself impressed with Hazel's animation, expressiveness and playfulness during the second interview.

Reflections – Child's Experience with Anger

Hazel shared two anger experiences with me: one, a situation where she did not want to clean up her room when asked by her mother, and when her father did not allow her to listen to her story tapes.

Interviewer:	Today it is your turn to tell me what you get mad about, say with your mom?
Hazel:	Clean up my room.
Interviewer:	I am curious what made you mad at your dad?
Hazel:	When he doesn't let me listen to a story tape.

"Feeling very, very, very mad." Hazel experienced strong negative emotions when she was angry. Hazel was once angry with her father because he did not allow her to listen to a story tape. She clearly described her anger experience as similar to an explosion, "It would feel like bursting ... I feel very, very, very mad." It appeared that Hazel felt her anger was so intense that she might not be able to contain the anger or keep it under control.

In addition, her explosive anger experience was related to her feeling of discomfort with the intensity of the loud voice of her father which he expressed in the anger incident. "He would say this No. It hurt my ears."

"It's not fair." In her interaction with her mother, Hazel experienced a sense of injustice and loss of freedom when she perceived that her mother imposed a demand on her to clean up her room.

Hazel:	I get mad, it's not fair.
Interviewer:	What do you mean not fair?
Hazel:	It's my own business.
Interviewer:	Um, it's your own business, what does that mean?

[Child shifted conversation in another direction]

In this incident, It appeared that Hazel felt restrained and annoyed and she did not want her mother to interfere with her own ideas. It seemed important for Hazel to make her own decisions. Her refusal to comply with the request of cleaning up her room was emphasized clearly through her response to her mother: "Clean it up yourself .... Don't

ask me to clean up the room again." Hazel's expression echoed her mother's impression that was imposed upon her.

Fighting back. How did Hazel, in the state of anger, respond to her mother's request? I attempted to get an understanding of Hazel's expression when she was angry. I showed Hazel some feeling cards (different faces depicting different emotions) in the play interview and asked her what kinds of words came out of her mouth when she was angry. I realized that she conveyed her resentment through verbal statements. She would fight back against her mother through name-calling.

Interviewer: What kinds of words came out from your mouth?

Hazel: 'No,' 'stupid,' and 'mean.'

Hazel also indicated her belief that her mother did not hear the name-calling. She believed that even if her mother did hear the name-calling she would not be in any trouble.

Interviewer: Do you think it's okay to tell mom that she is mean?

Hazel: Yeah.

Interviewer: What would she do when she heard you saying no, stupid, and mean?

Hazel: Nothing.

Interviewer: She wouldn't say anything?

Hazel: No.

Interviewer: Do you think that she heard you saying that?

Hazel: No.

Interviewer: How loud would you say these words?

Hazel: Stupid [said in a whisper].

Interviewer: So, that was not loud. Would you look at her when you said those words?

Hazel: No. I turned my back.

Interviewer: I am wondering how come you would turn your back when you said those words?

Hazel: I don't know.

In her conversation with me, Hazel implied she had no great concern regarding the consequences of her name-calling. She believed that it would be okay for her to be angry and to express her anger through non-cooperation and name-calling. However, I feel Hazel's name calling (in a quiet tone) with her back turned away from her mother appeared be a passive aggressive tactic. Also, her quiet tone and turning away from her mother appeared that she was being cautious in expressing her anger. Perhaps she wanted to protect herself and not get into trouble but remain loyal to her feeling that her mother was wrong in asking her to clean up her room. It would be interesting to discover how much of this interaction reveals Hazel's perception of the differential power inherent in the parent-child relationship and if she really had no concern about the name-calling.

Hazel's desire to fight back was also revealed in her response to her father in an anger incident. In the play interview, I asked Hazel to describe her responses to her father when she was angry. I learned from her that she kept asking her father's permission to listen to her story tape, and they argued back and forth with a "yes-no" response.

Interviewer: What did you do when your daddy didn't let you listen to the story

tape? What would you say to him?

Hazel: Can I please {said with a begging tone of voice] listen to the story

tape?

Interviewer: And what would he say?

Hazel: No [said with a loud and firm tone].

Interviewer: So after your daddy says 'No' to you what would you do?

Hazel: I would say yes [said with a loud and firm tone].

Interviewer: And he would say?

Hazel: No.

Interviewer: What would you say then?

Hazel: Yes.

Interviewer: Then he would say?

Hazel: No.

Interviewer: So it's like a yes-no, yes-no, yes-no like that?

Hazel: Yes-no, yes-no.

Interviewer: How long will it go on?

Hazel: About an hour.

Interviewer: Is it long or short for you?

Hazel: Long.

When Hazel was angry with her father, she appeared to be quite direct in opposing him. Her persistence was apparent in that she would not give up arguing even though she perceived she and her father argued for a long time.

Being good. Hazel preferred that none of her other family members know about the anger incident with her father, and she tried to keep it a secret. She also did not want any help from her family members in dealing with the conflict with her father.

Interviewer: So Hazel when you hear your daddy says no to you, would you talk about it with your brother, sister, and mommy?

Hazel: No.

Interviewer: You wouldn't say anything.

Hazel: I would say nothing about it.

Interviewer: You mean you just keep it to yourself. For how long?

Hazel: About a week.

Interviewer: What is it like for you to keep it to yourself for a week?

Hazel: I like it.

Interviewer: What do you like about it?

Hazel: So my sister and my brother know that I am not bad.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Hazel: I don't know.

Interviewer: When your daddy says No, would you want your brother and sister to help you?

Hazel: No.

Interviewer: What about mommy?

Hazel: No.

It appeared that Hazel felt a need to maintain a good reputation for herself within

the family. Perhaps this desire reflected her perception or worry that being angry or

arguing with her father would be considered as bad or unacceptable within the family. It

might be that Hazel struggled with her need for independence and struggled with the

possibility of being perceived as being "bad" by her siblings by arguing with her father.

Hazel might find it important to assert her independence or maintain her sense of pride by

protesting against her father on her own.

Overall, in the anger incidents she had with her parents, Hazel described a mixture

of negative feelings. She was disappointed when her requests were denied and felt

interfered with, annoyed, and possibly felt a loss of her own voice with the demand

imposed upon her. She became frustrated when her needs were not met and experienced

a feeling of being misunderstood when her parents did not approve of her requests. She

felt ignored when she was not heard and was overwhelmed by the intensity of anger she

experienced and was afraid of the urge to explode and not be able to control her anger.

Moreover, Hazel strongly believed in her right to be angry and to fight back. Her

demonstration of anger demonstrated to her parents her impressions that she did not like

the way she was treated, that they were wrong, that she should be treated the way she

wanted to be, and that they were causing her inconvenience. Her anger thus appeared in

the form of protecting or preserving her own interests, a defense against some perceived

rejection of her own ideas, and a need for autonomy in her growing up years. She seemed

to respond to her father and to her mother in a different manner. She would argue with her father (a more confrontational style) while she would refuse to cooperate with her mother and to call her names quietly (a more passive aggressive style).

Interaction Pattern Between Parents and Child

Upon reflection, I detected that neither Hazel, Georgina, or Daniel liked to be in an angry mood. The feelings associated with the anger incidents that each member experienced were negative. They felt upset, frustrated, uncomfortable, tense, irritable, feared loss of control, awkwardness, interfered with, and restrained. The emotions associated with the anger experience between parents and children are very similar, despite age differences and the differences of the nature of power inherent in the parent-child relationship.

Among the different negative feelings related to their experience of anger, the fear of losing control was shared by Hazel, Georgina, and Daniel.

It was evident Georgina and Daniel had a similar attitude to working toward a resolution of anger. They were aware of the importance that as parents, the responsibility lay with them to remain in control in an angry situation involving their children. They aimed to defuse the intensity of anger in the middle of an angry incident. Moreover, they both seemed to be cognizant of Hazel's needs, especially understanding that her anger was related to her sense of injustice and her feeling of not being heard. Although Georgina and Daniel shared some core beliefs about remaining in control, they each had a slightly different approach. Specifically, Daniel described his story of success in "walking away" from Hazel at the point when they were no longer engaging in a

conversation with each other. Thus, he was able to remain a sense of control of the situation as well as for his own emotional state.

In Georgina's case, her primary strategy in taming the anger was by reminding herself of the importance of remaining calm as it would have a calming effect on the child. As well, she accepted the child's anger and believed that the anger would be short lived.

In Hazel's case, her focus on fear of losing control was that she was afraid her anger would explode and would be not able to manage her emotions and her actions. Her strategies in fighting for a sense of control were more direct and confrontational with her father (a "yes-no" argument) whereas she used an indirect, quiet manner toward her mother (turning away from her mother with name-calling). Perhaps, an important underlying message from Hazel related to the issue of control in that she felt she had the right to be angry because she felt ignored or not heard.

Table 13.

Reflections of Participants' Experiences With Anger

Mother – Georgina	Father – Daniel	Child – Hazel
Feels frustrated.	Struggle and tangle: feeling frustrated, upset, out of control, interfered with and restrained.	Feels 'very, very, very, mad.'
Tries to remain in control.		
Feels there are no gender differences in handling a child's anger.	Believes anger outbursts are relationship killers.	Feels her treatment by her parents "is not fair."
		Fights back.
	Tries to remain in control and keep calm.	Tries to 'be good' (to not incur parents' anger).
	Thinks child's anger is associated with a sense of injustice.	
	Is trying to build a positive relationship as an antidote against anger.	

Table 14.

Participants' Reported Interaction During Anger*

	Mother – Georgina	
Child:	← →	Mother:
Fighting back.		Demanding cooperation, smacking.
Calming down.		Understanding child's needs, positive thinking, leaving space for child.

Father – Daniel

Child:	← →	Father:
Shouting.		Shouting.
Listening.		Paying attention.
Stops screaming gradually.		Walking away.

Child – Hazel

Child:	← →	Mother:
Name calling.		Putting demands on child.
Child:	← →	Father:
Arguing, fear of losing control.		Disapproving

*Note: indicates a recursive, reciprocal interaction between the parent and the child (e.g., the more the child cries, the more the mother yells at the child, and so on)

Table 15.

Preferred Patterns of Interaction During Anger

Mother – Georgina

Child:	← →	Mother:
Calms down.		Keeps herself calm.

Father – Daniel

Child:	← →	Father:
Talking.		Relationship building (i.e., playing with child, listening).

Child – Sherry

Child:	← →	Mother:
Making her own decisions.		Listening.
Child:	← →	Father:
Making her own decisions.		Listening.

Family Case Study Six

<u>Family Interviewed</u>

Ken is the oldest child in his family. His mother, Karen, and his father, Larry, are estimated to be in their early thirties. Larry is a full time graduate student while Karen is a housewife. Ken is aged fours years, five months old at the time of the first interview. He has a baby sister estimated to be a few months old. Every morning Ken attends a play school and he stays home in the afternoons

<u>The Interview Process With the Family</u>

Altogether I conducted eight interviews with this family. I interviewed the mother, Karen, and child (Ken) separately during my first visit to the home. On the

second visit, I had a morning interview with the father, Larry, followed by two more

individual interviews with Ken on separate visits. There were three feedback sessions

conducted individually with Ken and his parents.

Interview With Mother – Karen

Karen chose to meet with me for the interview in the living room. The interview

lasted for about an hour and a half, without much interruption. Throughout the interview,

Karen was quite relaxed and calm. She articulated her ideas well and provided ample

examples in her explanation. She seemed to have a good sense of humor. Overall, Karen

was friendly, and kind toward me, and patient with the interview process.

Reflections – Mother's Experience With Anger

Karen had no difficulty recalling incidents of anger incident with Ken. She

reported being angry with Ken when he refused to wash his hands after his meals.

He finished breakfast .... Because he often touched the food he was supposed to

go to the sink to wash his hands. He said 'no, no.' He wouldn't come to the sink.

He was shouting at me. There was some hitting too [mother laughed]. He hit me

because he was mad.

Remaining in control. Karen felt a need to take some action in order to keep the

angry situation under control, especially as she was under time pressures. First and

foremost, she realized she needed to calm down.

When there is a time constraint, then the tension gets higher, because we are

trying to get him cleaned up .... I had to focus on keeping myself cooled down as

much as I could. I tried to calm him down.

However, Karen indicated that it would not be easy to be able to calm down in every situation. She believed that the amount of workload played an important role in her way of dealing with an issue of anger. "It just depends on what I have to do at the time. If I do not need to do things immediately then I guess I just sit down to calm down." Apparently, she would seem to be less concerned about completing a task if she was not under the pressure of her workload.

Second, Karen found that she needed to assess the child's emotional state. She seemed to believe that it would be impossible to talk with the child when he was in an angry mood. According to Karen, the only alternative for her to remain in control at that point was to leave the child alone.

We actually carried him up to his room. I said to him that you are not behaving well and you are too frustrated, so you need to sit there quietly. He refused to go to his room and so I had to pick him up and take him to his room. He did stay in his room. He had the isolation for a little while. When he gets hysterical, it doesn't matter how much you are talking, he doesn't hear it anymore. He only knows what he is feeling. He has to be alone by himself to calm down .... Talking to him doesn't work once he reaches shouting. He is wrapped up in his emotions. We do the explaining after he calms down.

To be in control all the times would be impossible. Karen realized at times she might fail to handle the anger incidents in a mature way, for example, by shouting at Ken. She expected that she could be a role model for Ken – somebody who can be calm and discuss the matter. Nevertheless, Karen perceived that she could improve by learning

from the mistakes she made. She appeared to remain hopeful with a positive attitude within herself.

> I wish I were better at calming him down, but once I am in a frustrated state ... I might shove him, not like being abusive, but I start to behave like a four year old. I start shouting and things like that, and it's not helpful. Like I should be showing him how to deal with anger. I should be a better model, like being calmer and negotiating .... There's always hope for the future. May be I'll learn something from this and I'll try better next time .... Let's use this as a learning experience. We don't have to keep repeating mistakes, so there's always hope.

Another positive attitude that Karen maintains in relation to being in control is her belief in the importance of confronting anger. Karen feels that it is unhealthy for an individual to bottle up one's anger for a long time. She believes that there is a need to express and confront anger when it happens.

> You just can't focus so much on your anger .... It's like you are not going out there experiencing the good things in life. If you're just focused on your anger, that's bad. You know, if you keep it in instead of getting it over with and out in the air .... It has an effect on your physical health. I mean long term anger over an incident is not good .... Some things happen and you will get angry but get it out and deal with it and let it go. Long term anger is bad.

Overall, Karen seemed to feeling some tension during angry situations with Ken. She found that Ken's lack of cooperation caused her inconvenience and made her rushed, which added to her own sense of frustration and lack of control over the situation.

Karen presented with a positive approach to anger. It is important for her to confront the issue of anger issue instead of ignoring it. She also seemed to expect that she could be a role model, someone who can remain calm and in control when dealing with Ken's anger. She prefers to be able to discuss issues with Ken after he cools down. She was mindful of the mistakes she made when she shouted at Ken, and indicated a desire to learn from it. After all, Karen acknowledged that she does not have all the answers when it comes to anger.

<u>Interview With Father – Larry</u>

My interview with Larry took place in the living room, as suggested by Larry. We had no interruption throughout the almost an hour and a half long interview. Larry was very open when sharing his anger experiences with me. Our discussions were in a conversational style, and I did not follow a set of pre-established questions. He was quite thorough in his descriptions of the anger incidents and of the interaction involved in the process. Larry also included some of his experiences in dealing with their second child when discussing parenting issues. Overall, I was particularly struck with Larry's calm demeanor.

<u>Reflections – Father's Experience With Anger</u>

Larry indicated that he was angry when Ken refused to cooperate. Examples included: a time when Ken refused to come home for dinner because he preferred to continue playing outside, when he refused to eat, or when Ken was too noisy in the living room and as a result Larry was unable to fall asleep.

At night I am awake – I can't sleep, so the following day I am very, very restless. I can't sleep and so I get up early. By this hour, like eleven o'clock in the morning, I am so tired that I want to go to sleep. I can't sleep because Ken is very active and making noise. I tell him to be quiet. That's when we start arguing.

Parent should be in control. Larry seemed to expect the child to listen to him. For instance, when Ken refused to eat, "Something is not tasty, he says 'I don't like it and I won't eat it.' Sometimes I start forcing him to eat." In addition, when Ken refused to come back home for dinner, Larry became angry and expected Ken to comply with him. "If he doesn't want to come in I just carry him inside. He knows that he can't run away and I can carry him back to the home. He doesn't have much resistance from me."

In those incidents, Larry apparently felt inconvenienced and annoyed. He seemed to expect Ken to be more cooperative, compliant, and pleasant. Moreover, Larry's expression appeared to imply that he was in charge and in control as he had the power and the ability to "make" Ken follow his ideas.

His position to be in control in anger incidents further extends to the idea of "team control." Larry noticed that Ken seemed comply with him more than with his mother. Often, Larry would step in and try to teach Ken to be more attentive to his mother. "He refuses more from his mother ... He is playing outside. Karen asks him to come back for supper .... I go outside and ask him to listen to his mother – mother is telling you this."

On the other hand, Larry seemed to appreciate Karen's involvement in handling Ken when he and Ken were angry with each other. Also, Larry felt that the support from Karen would help Ken feel safer when Larry had trouble with him. He felt that Ken

would need another parent there to protect him from the fear of having additional

conflicts and for emotional support.

When I am mad and try to control Ken, he may feel somehow unprotected,

especially when he is alone. I think he finds it easier with two parents here. So if

he was mad at one parent he found protection from another parent .... He has one

side to support him and that makes him feel better. He is protected and therefore

there is no fear.

In sum, Larry's anger was associated with feelings of being interfered with and

annoyed. He perceived that Ken showed more compliance with him than with his mother

in angry situations. Moreover, Larry believed that Ken might need protection from Karen

when he and Ken were angry with each other, or vice versa. It appeared that Larry hoped

that the presence of the other parent in an angry situation would provide the child

immediate emotional support.

<u>Interviews With Child – Ken</u>

<u>Informal play interview.</u> In my one hour informal play interview with Ken, he

initially appeared quite shy and maintained a distance from me. He sat on the sofa while I

was sitting on the floor in the living room. It was Ken's decision that we play in the

living room. After I introduced myself by name to Ken, I encouraged him to check out

the toy bag I brought along with me. I was pleased to notice that Ken appeared excited

and curious about the different kinds of toys. I encouraged Ken to choose the toys that he

would like to play with. He readily pretended to eat the plastic toy fruits, such as

bananas, strawberries, pears, lemons, and grapes. He sounded very excited and enthused

with his expression: "I am going to eat this pear, eat this orange, eat this lemon, eat this grape." He also drew some pictures of the toy fruits with which he played.

While Ken and I were playing in the living room, Karen seemed to be curious about our activities and so joined us in the play for some time. She asked Ken about his drawings, "What happened to the black banana? ... What is that? [mother pointed to the beach picture] ... Why is it green?" I noticed that on some occasions Ken tended to respond with very brief answers, for example "yeah," "no." Ken continued to respond well to my encouragement for him to play with the toys he was interested in. He played with legos and army toys. I observed that Ken invited Karen to join his play. "He's going to shoot mama." Karen appeared somewhat alert and asked Ken about this. "Why do you do that?" Ken responded with "I don't know why." It was interesting to note that Ken continued to play with his army toys despite an apparent lack of interest shown by Karen. He said, "I am going to shoot the other guys."

After a while, I asked Karen if I could be alone with Ken to continue our interview. Karen accepted my suggestion easily. Ken seemed to become more animated and spontaneous and spoke in a stronger tone of voice. He approached me again as if I was his playmate, " Dinosaurs eat your toes ... I eat all of you."

I ended the informal play session with Ken by explaining to him the purpose of the upcoming visits which were about understanding what it is like to be "mad" at his parents. Ken did not appear too concerned about this.

<u>Research play interviews.</u> I first spent some time playing with Ken at the beginning of both research play interviews in order to help him feel more at ease with the process and myself.

During the initial warm up period in the first afternoon research play interview, Ken was quite interactive with me. He showed me the animal toy families that he put together: "That is a daddy pig, these are kid pigs ... This is a mommy cow, a dad cow, and a kid cow." After some informal play activities with Ken, I showed him some feeling cards in order to gradually move into the discussion of his anger experience. We also engaged in some pretend play activities to enact the anger incidents he had with his parents. In this way, I was slowly able to engage Ken in this part of the process. He seemed to prefer to relay his anger experience through play rather than through direct conversation with me.

In the second research play interview with Ken, I had a shorter warm up play period compared with the previous one. Ken and I engaged in some pretend play activities to enact the anger incidents that were described by his parents in my interviews with them. Similar to the experience of the first research play interview, I found that Ken occasionally became distracted and returned to casual play for fun – as if taking a break from the discussion about anger. Overall, he seemed to be a gentle happy child with a good sense of imagination and playfulness.

<u>Reflections – Child's Experience With Anger</u>

Ken identified that he had been angry with his mother when she did not allow him to eat a banana with the skin on. "I am eating a banana but my mommy said that I can't

eat the skin but I say I want to." As for his anger experience with his father, Ken was not able to identify a specific angry incident. However, in the process of sharing with Ken what I understood from my interview with his father, he did acknowledge that he was angry when father asked to go home for supper after playing in the courtyard for some time.

> Interviewer: He told me sometimes you are mad when he asks you to come home for supper after you have been playing outside some time.
>
> Ken: Yeah.

Fighting back with a "NO." Ken acknowledged his own anger when his mother would not permit him to eat the banana without peeling the skin. He did not like hearing his mother saying "No" to him and felt restrained or interfered with in this incident.

> Interviewer: Does it make you mad when she said you can't?
>
> Ken: Yeah.
>
> Interviewer: Would you wish your mother would say yes to you so that you can eat the skin if you want to?
>
> Ken: Yeah.
>
> Interviewer: Would you want her to let you do whatever you want to?
>
> Ken: Yeah.
>
> Interviewer: Sounds like she is saying No to you and it made you mad.
>
> Ken: Yeah.

I shared with Ken that I had learned from my interview with his mother – that he would tend to respond with "NO" to his mother during an angry situation.

Interviewer: I heard from your mommy that when Ken was mad he would say No, No, No all the time.

Ken: Yeah.

Interviewer: I asked myself why Ken didn't want to wash his hands. I wondered. Can you help me to understand why you didn't want to wash your hands.

Ken: I just didn't.

Interviewer: You just didn't want to wash your hands. Was Ken feeling mad?

Ken: Yeah.

Interviewer: What was Ken mad about?

Ken: Myself.

Interviewer: You were mad at yourself. Help me here, why was it that you were mad at yourself?

Ken: I don't want to.

Interviewer: What does that mean?

Ken: I don't want to.

Interviewer: You don't want to wash your hands.

Ken: Yeah.

Interviewer: So Ken didn't want to wash his hands but his mommy really wanted him to wash his hands.

Ken: Yeah.

Interviewer: I am wondering what kinds of words came out from Ken's mouth when he didn't want to wash his hands?

Ken: I don't know what I said.

Interviewer: I wondered did Ken say No, No, No.

Ken: Yeah.

Interviewer: I am wondering would Ken scream at his mom when he said No, No, No?

Ken: I did.

Interviewer: Was it okay to be screaming?

Ken: No.

Interviewer: What did Ken really want to say?

Ken: I don't know.

Interviewer: I am wondering, did Ken let his mother know that he was mad?

Ken: No.

Similarly, Ken also had a tendency to reply with a "No'" answer to his father.

Interviewer: What would you say to your dad when he asked you to come home for supper?

Ken: No, no .... [in a loud voice].

Interviewer: I heard you saying No many times.

Ken: Yeah.

Interviewer: I don't understand what your No means?

Ken: No, I don't want supper.

It looked like Ken was quite persistent in firmly maintaining his own stance by a strong "No" answer to both of his parents. It appeared that Ken seemed to have a stronger desire of fighting back against his mother in an angry situation. Perhaps it was because his mother's anger did not have as much impact upon him and he was not scared of his mother's anger.

Interviewer: Do you think your mommy's mad face is different from your daddy's mad face?

Ken: Yeah, scared me more.

Interviewer: Whose mad face scared you more?

Ken: Daddy's face.

Interviewer: What about your mommy's mad face? Does it scare you?

Ken: No.

Interviewer: Mommy's mad face doesn't scare you.

Ken: No.

Interviewer: How come?

Ken: I don't care.

Interviewer: You mean you don't care if your mommy is mad?

Ken: Yeah.

According to Ken's descriptions, there seemed to be no major difference in his response to his mother and his father in an angry situation. Ken acknowledged that he screamed with a "No" to both his parents. Usually, Ken would scream with a "No" which implied his resistance to the requests imposed on him by his parents. He seemed

to justify his anger with by an attitude of "I don't want to." Perhaps Ken was basically

struggling with the feeling that he was not allowed to make his own decisions and it thus

triggered an anger response. It was interesting to note that at the same time, Ken himself

had a hard time accepting his mother saying "No" to him. However, Ken perceived that

his father's anger scared him more than his mother's anger did. He even reported that he

was not much concerned with his mother's anger. It would be interesting to know what it

was about his father's anger that came across as more fearful and intimating to Ken.

Interaction Between Parents and Child

The issue of control appears to be quite evident between Ken and his parents.

The meaning of control can be examined from these three important elements: protection,

power, and protest. I noticed that the parents and child had different ways of expressing

the need to control an angry situation.

For Karen, the issue of control appeared to center around her need for defusing the

angry situation. She seemed to be more preoccupied with the ways to approach Ken

when they were angry with each other. She was quite rational and solution focused in

finding ways to reduce the anger between Ken and herself. She made an effort to

facilitate the child dealing with anger by giving Ken some 'time out' in order for him to

calm down before initiating any discussion with him. Moreover, she realized she needed

to keep her own emotion (anger) under control, that is, to aim for in being control of

herself. Nevertheless, Karen recognized that at times her frustration lowered her ability

to handle an angry situation effectively. She would then lose her patience and ability to

approach the child in a calm and rational way. Overall, her sense of striving to be in control is oriented toward protection and harmony.

Concerning Larry's idea of a parent being in control, I found that he may perceive himself in a role of a leader who has more power than his child, or perhaps even more than Karen. Larry felt frustrated and annoyed when Ken refused to comply with him. He appeared to emphasize he was able to exert control over Ken because he is in command. He perceived that he has some power in that Ken was obliged to listen to him and to follow his instructions. My impression was that in Larry's views, being in control is about exercising his power as a father to enable the child to deal with the angry situation.

During an angry situation, Ken appeared to have a strong non-compliant attitude with his parents. He fought for his desire to do whatever he wanted by insisting with a "No" or an "I don't want to" response to his parents' demands. These expressions reveal Ken's ways of struggling, bargaining, and fighting for his share of having some control over the situation. It seems to be a form of protest in demonstrating his own voice and ideas. Between his father's anger and his mother's, Ken seemed to feel more intimated by his father's angry expression and perhaps as a result he showed a greater tendency to comply with him. This was also true from the father's perspective.

Table 16.

Reflections of Participants' Experiences With Anger

Mother – Karen	Father – Larry	Child – Ken
Remains in control.	Feels parent should be in control.	Fighting back with a "No."

Table 17.

Participants' Reported Interaction During Anger*

Mother – Karen

Child:	← →	Mother:
Shouting gradually decreasing.		Keeping herself calm, leaving child alone.
Shouting.		Shouting.

Father – Larry

Child:	← →	Father:
Refuses to comply.		Exerts control over child (carries him inside).

Child – Ken

Child:	← →	Mother:
Screaming with a "No."		Putting demands on child.
Child:	← →	Father:
Screaming with a "No."		Putting demands on child.

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*Note: indicates a recursive, reciprocal interaction between the parent and the child (e.g., the more the child cries, the more the mother yells at the child, and so on)

Table 18.

Preferred Patterns of Interaction During Anger

Mother — Karen		
Child:	← →	Mother:
Cooperating.		Explaining after child cools down.
Father — Larry		
Child:	← →	Father:
Listening.		Parents work together to provide child support.
Child — Ken		
Child:	← →	Mother:
Making own decisions.		Listening.
Child:	← →	Father:
Making own decisions.		Listening.

Family Case Study Seven

Family Interviewed

Alice is the third child of Kerry and Serge. Alice's mother, Kerry, who is estimated to be in her late thirties, stays home full-time. She provides home schooling for her two older children. Serge, Alice's father, is estimated to be in his early forties. He works as a

full-time computer analyst. Alice was aged four years, six months at the time of the first interview. She is the only daughter in her family. She has two older brothers, estimated to be about ten and eight years old respectively and a younger baby brother of approximately ten months.

The Interview Process With the Family

I began the interview process by interviewing Kerry one afternoon, followed by an informal play interview with Alice. I interviewed Serge during my second visit to the family. The two research play interviews were conducted with Alice on two mornings. The final contact with the family involved three feedback sessions with Alice and her parents separately. My interviews with Alice took place in a play corner while the interviews with her parents were conducted in the dining room, according to their individual choices.

Interview With Mother – Kerry

There were a few breaks during the interview when Kerry attended to her children. This interview lasted for close to two hours. Kerry presented herself as a soft-spoken and calm person. During our conversation, she often reflected on her expectations for her children. She described her efforts to be empathic toward Alice, especially when Alice was angry with her. She was also quite open to sharing her own experience of anger when she was a young child.

Reflections – Mother's Experience With Anger

Kerry indicated that she and Alice were both angry with each other when Alice did not do what she was supposed to and thus she lost the privilege of her bedtime stories.

After supper every night the children are supposed to go straight upstairs, put on their

pyjamas and sit down and read until I come up and read to them. Often she goes upstairs and forgets to put her pyjamas on ... so she goes to bed without stories because she doesn't do what she's told.

Feeling frustrated, disappointed, and irritated. When Kerry found that Alice had failed to fulfil her expectations, she experienced a strong feeling of frustration, disappointment, and irritation. She was tired of constantly reminding Alice and her brothers of what they were expected to do. When her patience seemed wear thin, Kerry would withdraw the story telling privilege from the child. "They needed to be reminded 50,000 times .... Every once in a while I get fed up and sick of it .... I say to her that you didn't do as I said so you go to bed without books."

Be more empathic and supportive. Kerry did attempt to explore and understand Alice's angry feeling. She came to realize there were a number of reasons that possibly led to the anger in Alice.

She is angry because she is punished. You know I warn her that if I come upstairs and if you haven't done what I told you, then you will be in trouble .... She feels very hard done by .... She's angry because someone has prevented her from doing whatever she wants to do, or told her that she's not old enough to do something .... She feels that it's somebody's fault and she wants somebody to pay for it ... a desire for revenge. She feels somebody has wronged her and she wants to get back at them .... She wants me to say that it's my fault and say sorry.

During the interview Kerry explained that she understood that Alice disliked punishment and her frustration at not being allowed to do the things she would like to do.

She also recognized that Alice needed to blame somebody else for her anger and that she felt her mother had betrayed her by not being fair with her .

> Not treated the way she wanted to be .... I think children want to have their parents behind them all the time. When they don't have the parents' approval, they feel that it's their parents' fault. I am not there for her. I am not giving her support ..... She thinks that I should always see things her way. That I will side with her against her brothers because she is a girl and I am a girl.

She believed that Alice expected her to be on her side because they are both females.

> Furthermore, Kerry tried to understand what it was like for Alice to be the only daughter in the family and to assess what Alice needed from her.

> Sometimes I think I am a little bit more sympathetic with Alice because she is the only girl. I think sometimes she has a rough time with her brothers. The brothers are close and they always stay together. I do home schooling with the boys and they don't go to school. There is no girl in the neighborhood so I try to be more understanding toward her .... Try to be patient and hear her out, give her a chance to say what she needs to say.

Therefore, Kerry empathized with Alice's apparent need for comfort when she was in an angry mood.

> She doesn't want me to be mean to her .... Well because I am her mother and if something is wrong, then I have to fix it. When she's hurt, she's sad, she's angry ... she wants me to make her feel better .... She is waiting for me to solve the problems .... If I could make the effort just sort of make up with her and if I just say, be good

and give her a hug and say I just want you be a good girl and stuff, then she's usually very relieved.

It appeared that Kerry realized there is a defined gender dependence from Alice based on a female bonding in the context of a mother-and-daughter relationship. She also understood that Alice depended on her for protection, nurturance, and assurance. Kerry tried to understand Alice's needs in relation to her developmental stage.

It's possibly an age thing that she's trying to be more independent. I can relax now and the negative behavior just come in phases and they could go out of phases. There's just no sense in getting all worked up .... I think she will change again because it was the same when Alan [Alice's older brother] was very little. Alan reached about four and started protest non-stop for a long period of time. I'm sure she will change when she once again feels protected.

Coming to this realization seemed to give Kerry a sense of relief, hope, and optimism that she did not have to be panic or react negatively to the situation.

On some occasions, when Kerry caught herself being impatient with Alice, she would try to be as tolerant and understanding as possible towards Alice.

Sometimes I may be irritated with her, other times I try to hear her out .... She cries hard. I can't understand what she is saying during the first minute. She will be crying so hard, then I usually sit with her and calm her down. We talk about it and sort it out whose fault it is.

Overall, Kerry expressed her desire to understand the reasons why Alice may be angry and to provide her with as much support as possible. She seemed to be willing to listen to her and to try and work out their conflicts.

Difficulty to control sulking. Kerry uses her personal experience to try to understand and interpret her child's anger. "My family just ignored me. I kept thinking if I kept sulking, finally someone would notice." Based on her personal experience with sulking, Kerry seemed to understand the difficulty in controlling one's sulking, especially among children. "It's very hard to stop sulking ... because you're trying to get everyone's attention. And if you stop but without getting attention, you're admitting defeat." It appeared that as a young child, Kerry viewed sulking as a tactic to increase her own power.

Experiences comfort from child. Kerry noticed that Alice became concerned and distressed when she was angry.

> She gets panicky when she doesn't want me to be angry and doesn't want to be in trouble ... Sometimes I'm just plain mad and other times I am in tears ... When I'm just practically in tears because she frustrated me so much, then she will come and put her arms around me or whatever.

Kerry seemed to accept the compassion Alice offered to her when she was angry. Furthermore, there seemed to be reciprocal comfort shared between Kerry and Alice when dealing with anger. Perhaps they both feel that their bonding has become stronger as a result of the support they offer to each other during anger.

In summary, Kerry seemed to find the experience of anger to be negative, including the feelings of frustration, irritation, and disappointment. In addition to the recognition of

the negative feelings involved in the state of anger, Kerry was aware of her own struggle to deal with her child's behavior. She made an effort to be calm and to be understanding toward Alice when they were angry with each other. She indicated that she felt the child was crying for help during anger experiences — for physical affection, comfort, acceptance, and support. She was also sensitive to the unique gender relationship between herself and Alice compared to her relationship with her other male children.

Her approach in dealing with the child's response during anger seemed to be related to her own experiences as a parent and as a child herself. As a mother of four children, Kerry realized Alice's need for independence which she perceived as an important factor underlying her anger. Kerry also felt confident and hopeful that her child's immature beliefs and responses during a state of anger could be developmental characteristics which may gradually disappear as she matured. Moreover, Kerry's personal experience with her own parents seemed to enable her to be more understanding toward her child's behavior during the state of anger and possibly to handle the child's response during anger with less distress.

In general, Kerry seemed to feel that she was in control when handling Alice's anger response. She indicated an understanding of what the child needed from her. She was quite accepting of the child's anger response despite experiencing her own internal struggle at times. Overall, Kerry's description of anger appeared to be an unpleasant experience for both the mother and the child.

Interview With Father — Serge

We talked in the dining room at Serge's suggestion. The interview, uninterrupted, lasted for about an hour and a half one early evening after Serge returned home from work.

Serge was quite open and shared in detail his views about anger. Throughout the conversation, he tended to compare adults' anger to children's anger. He also seemed to be interested in discussing anger as a power issue between adults and children.

<u>Reflections – Father's Experience With Anger</u>

Serge shared with me a scenario in which "she [Alice] was sulking for some reason. I started teasing her and tickling her. I noticed that she was leaning further back. I wondered why she leaned back. Well, she hit me in the back – that's anger."

<u>Not making a big deal about Alice's anger.</u> Serge seemed to take into consideration that Alice is a young child and thus he should neither be upset or intimidated by her anger. He also felt that he was being unjust when he was angry with Alice because as an adult, he should know better!

You know it's just a child, it's not really a big thing. If another adult is angry at you, you don't know what might happen. But with a child, you just remain calm and deal with the situation because it's only a child .... I feel a little bit unjustified because I am an adult and she is just a child. You can't really let it get out of hand ... It's not potentially threatening as it would be with another adult.

<u>"Cute" anger versus "stubborn" anger.</u> Serge responded to his child's anger in different ways, depending on whether he considered the anger to be "cuteness" or "stubbornness." Serge found Alice being stubborn when she could not have her own way. "She's a stubborn little creature ... she got very stiff looking, narrowing her eyes slightly, she had an uncommunicative look and generally looked very angry and stubborn." He might warn Alice to stop sulking but if she continued Serge would put her into her room or would

smack her. "If she is sulking, I will say stop sulking or you will get smacked or I will put you into your room."

Other times Serge described Alice's anger as "cute." "But since she is a girl, that's cute." This might imply Serge interpreted anger in the context of gender.

Anger is about power. Serge believed that the primary purpose of anger is to draw attention from others. "I guess anger makes you act in a fashion which is not particularly rational but at the same time it is possible to make everybody else aware that they just can't dismiss you." Specifically, he found Alice was quite persistent in trying to get what she wanted by showing her anger.

> Alice knows that I am bigger than her and I am the boss. She has to do what I say but at the same time if she gets angry, then at least to some extent she doesn't always have to put up with what I say. I guess she's hoping that if she's angry enough that will convince everybody else to modify their behavior to give her what she wants ....
> Stay angry if she gets any result.

Moreover, Serge felt Alice uses anger as a tool for revenge. He found that Alice had a strong desire to fight back when she was in an angry mood.

> She is concerned with what she can do about that, make everybody aware of it. She doesn't say to herself that I am angry. She is strictly saying how can I get everybody to do what I want? How can I get everybody to realize I am angry. I think she is hoping to get even with whoever may make her angry .... When Alice is angry, she is mostly trying to punish everybody that makes her angry.

Serge seemed to feel that Alice recognized the power difference between her father and herself. For instance, he described Alice would be more cautious in expressing her anger to him when he compared her reactions toward her brothers.

Whereas with me she knows that she will have to be a little bit more careful because if she hits me and becomes too rude to me, she will get hit back .... She has to act differently because she has to be reasonably good – unless she gets angry enough, then she doesn't care any more. I don't think that happens very often .... I guess she may be more restrained when she gets angry with us.

In sum, as an adult, Serge perceived that he should not be taken back by Alice's anger in that she is only a child. He believed that it is not difficult for an adult to handle a child's anger. He also seemed to imply there is the power differential between an adult and a child. He would expect the child to see him as the "boss" and thus she should comply with him. He further emphasized that he would not tolerate disobedience from Alice. The use of smacking from Serge might seem to be an indicator telling Alice that he is in charge.

Serge perceived Alice's anger to be a sign of immaturity, stubbornness, and egocentricity. He believed that if Alice was frustrated in not getting what she desired she would expect others to change and comply with her. Moreover, he believed Alice had a desire to punish others by showing how angry she could be and making sure other people would come to know her anger. Serge further interpreted that Alice used anger as a means to prove to him her existence and to demand attention from him. Her anger was also perceived as a power to influence him and to manipulate him with the hope that he would change his mind and comply with her wishes.

It appeared that Serge did not accept Alice's anger most of the time except when he interpreted her anger presented as being "cute." It seemed his perception of anger, at times, related to the child's gender and his own interpretation of the situation. Moreover, there was not much communication of the experience of emotions in an angry situation between Serge and Alice. It would be interesting to explore the process involved in the pattern of aggressive tendencies shown between smacking from Serge and hitting from Alice.

Interview With Child – Alice

Informal play interview. In my first informal afternoon play interview with Alice, she initially appeared quiet and shy. However, when Alice began to show me her toys, she quickly became more at ease. She often took the lead to direct the play activities and invited me to play with her. She chose to play in her personal play area, which is a corner of the dining room. She had a play kitchen center and some other toys, including stuffed animals, dolls, puzzles, legos, crayons, and paper. In the play process, I followed her lead throughout almost a whole hour of play time. Alice appeared to enjoy the pretend play activities, especially the one relating to food and cooking. We did not have any interruption from the other family members.

Toward the end of the play session, I explained to Alice my plan of talking with her parents and her some other time about their experiences with anger. She seemed to accept the plan. Overall, I enjoyed the play time with Alice. She appeared to be quite expressive, active, imaginative, and friendly as well as able to maintain her interest and her attention in the play activities.

Research play interviews. At the beginning of the first session, Alice invited me to join her playing with blocks. This time I showed my toy bag to Alice and invited her to do some drawing. At one point, I asked Alice if she could draw her angry look. Then I gradually eased into a discussion of Alice's experience of anger through the use of some pretend play activities. I found Alice quite animated, cooperative, and very involved in the process.

The warm-up period in the second play research interview, was shorter than the previous one. After I reiterated the purpose of the visit, I was able to direct Alice's attention almost immediately to a pretend play of an anger scenario with her father.

Overall, I found Alice quite focused in the play scenarios and felt that the interviews went quite smoothly. All of our play interview meetings took place in Alice's play area, a corner of the dining room, and each interview lasted for about an hour and a half without interruption.

Reflections – Child's Experience With Anger

Alice shared with me her anger toward her mother when she lost her storytime, "I was mad because you [mother] would not come to read me a book" and when she was sent to her room for what she considered to be without reason she stated, "I have done nothing wrong, why do I need to go to the room?" Also, Alice indicated that she did not like to be teased by her father when she was in an angry mode. "I was mad at him because he hit me.... I don't want him to throw me up in the air .... I don't want him to pull my hair."

Being unfair. In the pretend play scenario, Alice was quite open in revealing her thoughts relating to the anger incident. She explained why she was angry at her mother.

When I had already got my pyjamas on, you [mother] wouldn't read me a book ....

I didn't do anything ... I just stood there asking you if you could read me a book.

Another incident that Alice encountered with her mother also revealed her resentment of being treated unfairly. She indicated being blamed for a wrong reason. "I was not bothering Peter and she said get away from Peter or something. It's not okay for her to do that because I was not doing anything wrong."

Feeling left out. Alice seemed to feel disappointed with her mother. She did not understand why her mother ignored her.

I saw you [Mother] doing nothing and you [Mother] won't read me a book even though I ask you [Mother] .... I did tell you that I was mad because you [Mother] didn't even come though it wasn't late .... You [Mother] didn't come to read me a book even though I told you [Mother] in a nice voice.

It appeared that Alice felt that she had behaved properly but still her mother did not pay attention to her. She probably felt her voice was not heard nor acknowledged and that she was rejected by her mother.

Fighting back or not. Apparently, Alice felt annoyed with the ways she was treated by her father. She was angry when she was hit by her father. I told him if he smacked me again, he would get a spanking on his bum." It appeared to be important for Alice to express her voice to her father.

On the other hand, Alice seemed to realize it's better for her to comply with her mother. She found her mother's anger overpowering.

There is no way that I can beat my mom if she's mad .... I couldn't fight with my mom cause she would smack me hard. If she told me to go to the room, I will go to my room. I don't want to get smacked again.

Alice appeared to be feeling intimidated and fearful of her mother. Even though Alice followed what she was told to do by her mother, she maintained a strong belief that it was wrong for her mother to send her to the room when she thought she had done nothing wrong.

Furthermore, Alice seemed to know that she could prevent her mother becoming angry by avoiding saying certain things.

Well sometimes I don't tell her because she's going to get kind of mad .... I can't tell her that – that does not hurt. She would smack me more until it did hurt. When she had smacked me somewhere like on the head, I wouldn't say that – that didn't hurt ... she would get mad.

I seem to find Alice to be quite resilient in dealing with the anger incidents. It is no doubt that she was more direct with her father in claiming her own voice whereas she seemed to comply with her mother. Nevertheless, her compliance became a form of self- protection and it revealed how much effort she put in to bring herself out from trouble.

Okay to be angry. Alice seemed to understand and accept that it's okay for her parents to be angry if she did something bad. Alice accepted the consequences in which her behavior might trigger her mother to be angry "that it's okay mommy's mad at us because we've been bad at those times."

Moreover, Alice wished her mother would assure her that it's okay for her to be "mad."

Interviewer: What do you wish your mom would do when you are mad?

Alice: Just say that it's okay that you're mad

Apparently, the approval from her mother might strengthen her belief that she has a right to be angry.

A need for playing. Alice indicated that she would like her parents to leave her alone when she was angry. "I just want them to leave me alone. Play with something." It appeared to me that play might help Alice to be distracted from her anger and other negative feelings.

To summarize, Alice had an understanding of what was triggering her own anger as well as her parents' anger. However, she seemed to have difficulty understanding and accepting why her mother couldn't follow her requests. She indicated she tried to be nice but still had no success in getting what she wanted from her mother. Her anger was accompanied by feelings of resentment, disappointment, rejection and a strong sense of injustice.

Apparently, there was not much conversation regarding the experience of anger per se between Alice and her parents, especially with her father. Instead, she reported her parents would usually ask her to go to her room when they were angry or would resort to smacking. I wonder what Alice might possibly learn about anger as a result of such reactions from her parents when they were being angry.

As for her own anger responses, Alice appeared quite intimidated by her mother smacking her. She seemed to be cautious and resilient in finding ways to protect herself from getting into trouble. She would comply with her mother. However, she maintained a

firm belief that her mother was wrong when sending her into her room when she did nothing wrong. Cognitively, she accepted that her mother could be angry at her if she behaved badly. I wonder if she might have a easier time expressing her feelings of anger when her parents were not angry. At present Alice would have a difficult time expressing herself especially if her parents were angry and demanding that she go to her room. She might perceive her parents as having more power due to their physical size and the ascribed power in society of being a parent (an authoritative figure).

Confirmation or acknowledgment from her parents regarding her right to be angry appeared to be important for Alice in dealing with the expression of anger. I imagine the need for dependence on adults' approval is part of the process of development in children. Alice also found it important to have some quiet or alone time to play by herself in order to deal with her anger.

Interaction Between Parents and Child

Based on my understanding of the interaction patterns between Alice and her parents, I seemed to feel that they all have negative experiences with anger. Perhaps an analogy of the angry monster would be appropriate.

What does the angry monster do to Alice? According to Alice's personal experience, she appeared to find herself intimidated by her parents' response in an angry situation. She suppressed her anger. Internally, she took a stance resisting her parents' dominating practice, such as sending her into her room or smacking her. Through her expression of her experience of anger, I learned from Alice that she recognized the power that her parents had over her. It appeared that this caused a fear in Alice and discouraged Alice from further

revealing her feelings, especially toward her mother. She was cautious in finding ways to protect herself from getting into trouble. She wished her parents could approve of her anger and leave her alone to play as a means to process her anger.

There appeared to be a discrepancy between the descriptions given by Alice regarding her experience of her mother's responses during anger and the self-descriptions provided by her mother, Kerry. Alice seemed to portray her mother being tough in relating to her in an angry situation. On the other hand, Kerry herself described her empathic understanding toward Alice and her need for affection, comfort, and independence. She was able to accept Alice's "egocentric, immature" angry response as being typical at her current developmental level.

Moreover, Kerry expressed her negative experience associated with anger- or the amgry monster. She felt "frustrated, disappointed, and irritated" in dealing with anger between Alice and herself.

The issue of power revealed in Alice's experience of anger came up in her father's expression of his experience of anger. Serge apparently expected Alice to respect him as the boss-in-charge within the family. He seemed to view Alice as using her anger as a means to manipulate or to influence others to change their ideas. He also felt Alice intended to punish or to take revenge upon others who had wronged her. Overall, Serge appeared to view child's anger in a negative context. Probably he experienced that the angry monster tried to challenge or take away his power as a father. I imagined that Serge would find the angry monster as an enemy, totally dangerous, dishonest, manipulative, distrusting, and unacceptable.

Table 19.

Reflections of Participants' Experiences With Anger

Mother – Kerry	Father – Serge	Child – Alice
Feels frustrated, disappointed, and irritated.	Not making a big deal over child's anger.	Feels treatment is "unfair."
		Feels left out.
Tries to be more empathetic and supportive toward child.	"Cute" anger versus "stubborn" anger.	Fighting back or not.
	Feels anger is about power.	Okay for parents to be
Has difficulty controlling child's sulking.		angry.
		Feels a need for play.
Experiences comfort from child when angry.		

Table 20.

Participants' Reported Interaction During Anger*

	Mother – Kerry	
Child:	← →	Mother:
Sulking to demand attention.		Withdrawing child's privilege.
Talking.		Understanding child's needs in relation to her developmental stage.
Talking.		Listening.

Father – Serge

Child: ⬅   ➡   Father:

Sulking to protest.   Warning child to comply.

Hitting (for attention).   Smacking.

Child – Alice

Child: ⬅   ➡   Mother:

Making requests.   Ignoring child.

Complying.   Ordering.

Child: ⬅   ➡   Father:

Smacking.   Hitting.

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*Note: indicates a recursive, reciprocal interaction between the parent and the child (e.g., the more the child cries, the more the mother yells at the child, and so on)

Table 21.

Preferred Patterns of Interaction During Anger

Mother – Kerry

Child: ←   →   Mother:

Talking.   Understanding child's
                                            needs in relation to
                                            her developmental stage.

                                            Listening.

                                            Talking.

Father – Serge

Child: ←   →   Father:

Complying.   Giving instructions.

Child – Alice

Child: ←   →   Mother:

Calming down by playing.   Leaving her alone.

Child: ←   →   Father:

Calming down by playing.   Leaving her alone.

Common Themes in the Parents' Experiences with Anger

<u>Maintaining Control</u>

The majority of parents felt it was important to keep angry situations under control. During the interviews, the parents discussed with me how they dealt with the issue of control, and some of the strategies they used. The parents believed that in order to be able to control the situation, they must first be in control of themselves.

<u>Pause for reflection.</u> This process required the parents to actively listen to the child. For instance, Heidi indicated she took her child's feedback to heart.

When she [Sherry] says that [mommy hurts my feelings], it always gives me a start, because I think is that really worth hurting your child's feelings just for them to get dressed. It gives me an opportunity to think about it too .... A lot of times she will say that it's my anger that makes her angry ... it will make me stop .... She often says that my anger is probably matching hers when we are butting heads. So then it is a good point to stop.

The "stop and think" process enabled Heidi to regroup so that she knew what she had to do to deal with. This process seemed to allow Heidi to calm down. This issue of remaining calm was echoed by other parents.

<u>Remaining calm.</u> Similarly, Georgina realized the importance of remaining calm in order to achieve a sense of control. "If I remain calm, I am less apt to be hasty washing her bum .... I probably wash her bum more calmly. So she accepts that better and she will calm down faster."

She seemed to realize that her child would expect her to be calm during an angry situation. "I think she would prefer me to stay calm. She doesn't get upset if I remain calm." The understanding of reciprocal interaction between herself and the child probably directed Georgina to take an active role in demonstrating to Heidi how calmness can be attained in an angry situation.

Karen also discussed the importance of maintaining calmness. Like Georgina and Heidi, Karen expected herself to be calm – to be a role model for her son, Ken. She realized the negative impact on Ken if she was not calm.

I wish I were better at calming him down, but once I am in a frustrated state ... I might shove him, not like being abusive, but I start to behave like a four year old. I start shouting and things like that, and it's not helpful. Like I should be showing him how to deal with anger. I should be a better model, like being calmer and negotiating.

Along with the other mothers interviewed, Roxanne also had a routine of taking some time to calm down. "Just let her think about it for a bit or just both of us try to settle down .... Let me cool down a bit."

Sean shared with me how he maintained calmness by not reacting to his child's negative comments about him. Instead, he confirmed to his child that he loved him very much. "I just say I don't care if you don't like me ... I also say to him I love him very much. Afterwards he will say I am sorry." Moreover, Sean did not believe that yelling was a means of maintaining control. "He gets a little afraid if I yell ... I yell loud enough

so he cries ... I try to think why he is angry. Is he angry because I am overreacting? Is he

angry because he is punished?"

His sensitivity toward his child appeared to enhance his understanding of the

child's emotional state and needs.

Serge maintained the attitude of "not making a big deal out of the child's anger,"

that is, people should not be intimated by a child's anger. Perhaps he perceived that it is

not fair for him to be angry with his child, since he is an adult, and, as such, he should act

in a more mature and wise way.

> You know it's just a child, it's not really a big thing. If another adult is angry at
>
> you, you don't know what might happen. But with a child, you just remain calm
>
> and deal with the situation because it's only a child .... I feel a little bit unjustified
>
> because I am an adult and she is just a child.
>
> Communicating. Sally supported the importance of remaining calm. She

believed that a good way to keep anger under control is through verbal expression.

"People should be in control of their emotions .... You just have to say your feelings. To

do more than that is to lose control, which I see as a bad thing."

Heidi also indicated the significance of talking about the anger issues with the

child. She believed that the process of conversing with the child would lead to a

resolution and a "moving on." Also, this process allowed an opportunity to express love

between herself and the child. "Just to talk it through ... almost a permission to say that

none of us is angry, everything is okay and lets get back to a normal sort of discussion ...

Let's be happy now."

While talking with the child appeared to be a common practice among the parents, Karen pointed out that, in her experience, talking with the child under certain circumstances may not always be possible. She felt that when the child became "hysterical," talking was impossible.

> When he gets hysterical, it doesn't matter how much you are talking, he doesn't hear it anymore. He only knows what he is feeling. He has to be alone by himself to calm down .... Talking to him doesn't work once he reaches shouting. He is wrapped up in his emotions. We do the explaining after he calms down.

Although the majority of parents found it important to remain in control, they realized there are certain limitations which present a challenge — Is it possible to be in control all the time? This issue is discussed in the following section.

Acknowledging not having absolute control. Some of the factors that could possibly impose difficulties for the mothers to exercise perfect control were: time, workload, mother's own physical strength, and general feeling.

Karen stated that the workload she had impacted on her way of dealing with anger. "It just depends on what I have to do at the time. If I do not need to do things immediately then I guess I could just sit down to calm down."

Georgina was able to relate to the pressure pertaining to the work demands, time, and her mood and how that affected her responses during anger.

> I am the one who needs to be in control and I am not always. And again it depends on how I wake up, how I feel in the morning when I get up, what else is going on in our lives, if I have any other concerns, if things are bothering me or if

I am having a lot of demands put on me at the same time that I am trying to deal with the situation. All these things impact on how I react in one situation. You know if things are relatively calm here and you know it is just a normal day then it will go better.

She also recognized that she was not always successful at being in control of herself. She reported that she had smacked her child a few times. "I have smacked Hazel a few times ... It's a reaction on my part."

Kate recognized she might not be able to maintain calmness in every angry incident. She recalled there were times she yelled too much. "I yelled too much ... I don't need to yell at them ... I think they get scared when I raised my voice." She indicated that her feeling of being in control was dependent on her physical strength and her overall feelings.

Sometimes I feel I am in control and other times I don't .... If I am really tired or if I am up with the kids the night before or stay up late, or they got up early in the morning, then I have less control over my anger. If I am not feeling good, I have less control. It seems my temper is right there all the time ... whereas other times I am okay controlling it.

The feeling of difficulty of control over anger was also experienced by Roxanne. In her view, "It's [anger] an emotion that you can't really control."

At that moment you are so mad or angry that you can't really control it and you just say anything that comes out ... I mean sometimes if you're just absolutely furious or whatever, you might scream harder or do something you don't really

mean. You'll say things that you don't really mean, just to be kind of more spiteful or get back at the other person.

In sum, most mothers recognized the importance of maintaining control over themselves in an angry situation. Success in being in control was a way to bring forth calmness. Stop, listen, think, reflect, and talk were considered to be some effective steps to achieve a sense of calmness and understanding between the parent and child in an angry situation. The degree to which they could maintain control would depend on some other external factors, such as time, workload, personal factors such as physical strength and mood in general.

Some fathers also found it challenging to remain in control. Damien recognized that anger is an impulsive emotion characterized by a feeling of lack of control. "Anger to me is when the emotions are running high and you're really feeling like losing control of the situation." He gave an account of the difficulties involved in remaining calm. When he realized his messages were not well received by the child his patience ran out, frustration appeared, and he would stop talking with her. At that time he decided to take a time-out from the anger situation.

Oh yeah, I explained to her why this isn't working and how this isn't the proper behavior. But if she keeps getting mad, there's no more point in explaining it anymore, I just pick her up and bring her in and say, 'okay, that's it' .... Yeah, there's a point to where I just pick her up and take her in and say, 'okay, you sit here and think about this now.'

Daniel also recognized the times when he was not under control. For instance, when he was upset to the point that he took his frustration out by banging the cupboard doors. "I was upset and frustrated and banging cupboard doors."

Daniel appreciated the positive values of taking time-out. He experienced the triumph in walking away from the situation instead of reacting to his child's negative responses.

The other day I noticed that Hazel had forgotten about juice .... I forget exactly what it was. But what it had suggested to me – just to walk away from it, and I did. And five minutes later after she finished screaming, I mean, she didn't immediately stop screaming. It sort of increased and then decreased. And she came out and she was able to talk to us again and then we were able to solve the problem. That's very satisfying to do it that way.

During another occasion, he also gave his child the time and space she needed to deal with her anger.

She had done something that she got to be sent to her room for. She had become very angry. I had said that I wanted her to come to talk to me about that. She had shouted at me. So I left it at that and short time later about half an hour she came to me and explained to me her side of the situation.

Like the mothers group, the fathers recognized the significance of maintaining control. In general they would talk with the child about the anger incident but, when they felt the dialogue had failed, they would stop the conversation process.

<u>Feeling Frustrated</u>

There is a wide range of emotions associated with the experience of anger in parents. These emotions range from the feelings of guilt, upset, blame, hurt, vulnerability, grouchiness, and feeling awful, inconvenienced, or annoyed. However, there seemed to be an intense feeling of frustration shared amongst parents pertaining to their experiences with anger.

The feeling of frustration appeared to be shared among the parents. In Georgina's case, it arose when Hazel would not comply with her directions. The lack of cooperation from Hazel subsequently caused inconveniences and difficulties for her in completing her housework.

Sometimes I get angry when she is asked to pick up some toys and she doesn't do it ... I know she can do it. I think it is a reasonable expectation that she can pick up her toys or pick up her markers when she is finished with them.

Georgina's sense of frustration became more intense when she was under pressure.

I am continuing to get resistance and it's very time consuming and I have a lot of things that I need to do .... There is other pressure on me to accomplish .... she is getting angry and upset – it takes a lot more time than if we just bathe her and get it done ... so that is the frustration.

Similar to Georgina's feeling of frustration, Kerry was frustrated when her child failed to fulfill her expectations. Specifically, she disliked reminding Alice what she was expected to do. Kerry tended to lose her patience when she was feeling frustrated and

subsequently withdrew privileges from the child. "Every once in a while I get fed up and sick of it ... I say to her that you didn't do as I said so you go to bed without books."

Heidi felt frustrated when her child kept negotiating with her but she seemed to be able to catch her feeling of frustration when it first began.

It takes a little bit for us to get frustrated when she keeps coming back negotiating .... With me ties to a lot of frustration as I am getting angry with her. I will tell her that you are starting to make me mad, or I am starting to feel very angry. I think I do quite a bit as far as sort of giving a hint that I am getting really frustrated and I am getting angry. You don't want me to get angry please do what I'm asking and sort of trying to verbalize my anger a bit. More often than not when I start to talk about my anger it will just defuse the situation.

The feeling of frustration and inconvenience was also shared by a father. Daniel was very cognizant of his feelings when he and his child were angry with each other. "I guess part of the frustration came from feeling that I should be able to control the situation."

Overall, the feeling of frustration appeared to be more evident in the mother's experience with anger. The frustration of the parents seemed to stem from the failure to achieve what they each desired because of a lack of cooperation from their child. Also, the frustration is connected with a sense of helplessness, as Daniel indicated when he thought that he should be able to handle the situation. Similarly, the mothers also felt frustrated when they were unable to have full control over a situation, especially when

they were faced with other challenges, such as the time pressures and heavy household workloads.

<u>Dialoguing: Resolution of Anger</u>

The majority of parents interviewed spoke about the importance of discussing the anger incident and the experiences involved with their child.

Heidi emphasized the talking process with her child when dealing with an anger incident. She seemed to value the function of talking to help defuse the angry situation. Furthermore, the discussion allowed some learning to take place before bringing the incident to a closure.

> Talk about how do I hurt her feelings, what I need to do, why I am asking. It is sort of an explanation and a pause. Generally it ends with a hug and then we can try to be calm again. More often than not when I start to talk about my anger it will defuse the situation.

Kerry worked in a similar way as Heidi when dealing with her child during an angry incident. A discussion about the anger incident enabled Kerry and her child to sort out who was responsible for bringing the incident to the point of anger. "I usually sit with her and calm her down. We talk about it and sort it out whose fault it is."

Roxanne presented her approach of talking with her child concerning an incident of anger. She even compared her approach with that of her husband as she realized that she tended to be more tolerant of her child and had more conversations with her, even though she might shout at her as well.

He [father] would just say, well, I told you to do this, you're not going to listen, go
to your room .... Whereas you know I might go on and on a little bit more ...
probably shout at her more than my husband would.

There were various intensities of parent-child discussions from case to case. For
instance, Sally seemed to use humor quite often as a means to approach her child. She
seemed to believe her teasing worked well if her child resorted to name-calling when in
an angry mood.

He will call me an idiot for whatever his reason. He wants it to be a put down
definitely. He says it in a louder tone than normal talking. He knows that name
calling is not a good thing. He is angry. So when he asks me to help him to do
something or whatever then I will say that I am an idiot and I can't do that ... I
figure one day he will think about it [mother laughing].

An expectation that Sally had for her child when it came to name-calling was to
apologize. Nevertheless, the return teasing from Sally helped the child become more
receptive to making an apology. "If you call somebody a name, you will need to
apologize right here right now or you will go away .... He will say 'I am sorry. You are
not an idiot.'"

The importance of talking when dealing with anger was supported by another
parent, Kate, who wished that her child could be more expressive of his feelings during
anger. She noticed that at this stage her child was not verbally communicative and she
would usually approach him with hugging to facilitate some communication with him.

"He is not at that point yet he can communicate .... I would very often go over and hug him."

While the majority of mothers in the study stated that, in their view, it was important to discuss the anger incident with the child, this idea was also expressed by most of the fathers.

Damien emphasized the significance of dialoguing with the child to resolve the anger problem instead of using physical force. He expected his child to be able to express and discuss her feelings with him and disliked it when the child would act out her frustration in a physical manner.

> I'm much a person that likes to talk through .... I loathe to hit anybody .... There are better ways of solving problems. But I think dialogue is a much better way .... A little more explaining herself rather than just acting out her frustration, I'd much prefer her to discuss it .... Well, that's what we do is sit down with her and we talk.

Daniel is another father who put a great deal of emphasis on the value of dialoguing with his child. He perceived anger could damage a relationship. "I don't think it [anger] has any positive value at all, no positive value." He felt that a strong parent-child relationship based on good communication could even reduce a problem with anger. "I think that the more I interact with her in such a way as to hear her, the less anger she has .... It works better if I can take the time to actually play with her and hear her and respond to her."

Jack also realized his responsibility in initiating conversation with his child. "Heidi and I will go and talk to her, and explain to her, make sure she understands why she has been sent to the room." He seemed to make a conscious choice that he would not be physical with his child when dealing with anger. "I grew up with plates flying and stuff crashing all around the house. This is not a good environment. Kids don't need to see that."

Sean described his experience of talking with his child when he saw him crying about an anger incident. Apparently, Sean was quite reflective and sensitive to his child's responses during anger and this prompted him to initiate conversation with him by apologizing, talking, and hugging. "It doesn't make me feel good when he is crying. What happens then is that basically I let my guard down and hug him and apologize for yelling. We will just sit down and talk about why I am angry."

Jerome was pleased that his child had become more verbal as he became older although he found his child's reasoning still tended to be "egocentric."

Now he has more ways to express himself .... He is getting better at explaining his position as his speech skills gets better .... He usually wants you to know what he is angry about. I guess his reasoning is still pretty egocentric.

Overall, the parents' expressed their view that discussion with the child is an important process when dealing with incidents of anger. They seemed to feel that talking allowed an entry point for both the parent and the child sort out their individual thoughts and feelings relating to the anger incident. It also seemed to serve as a closure and facilitate moving on.

The parents found it challenging to deal with their own anger as well as the angry situation at the same time. They experienced varying degrees of frustration, which was primarily associated with the fears of becoming out of control of their own behavior as well as losing control over the angry situation. The parents had some ideas about how they could maintain calmness to communicate with their children and aim to resolve any conflicts involved during an anger incident. Yet, the parents realized that on some occasions it was impossible to have absolute control over the anger incident.

<div align="center">Common Themes in the Children's Experiences with Anger</div>

In this section, I examine the common experience with anger amongst the child participants interviewed. My primary interest is in the description and understanding of the lived experience of anger in children. A description and discussion of emerging themes that best illustrate the essential features of the common experience of anger is presented below.

<u>Anger as a Mixture of Negative Feelings</u>

During our discussions, the children talked about experiencing a number of feelings when angry.

<u>Disappointment</u>. Disappointment was one of the common features in the children's experiences with anger. For example, Hazel wished that her father would allow her to listen to the story tape:

Interviewer: "What would you wish your father say to you when you want to listen to the story tape?"

Hazel: "Say yes."

Alice expressed her feelings of disappointment with her mother when she approached her to read a story: "you [Mother] didn't come even though I want you .... You [Mother] didn't come to read me a book even though I told you in a nice voice."

Unlike Hazel and Alice, it is interesting to note that Sherry expressed her disappointment toward herself instead of her parents: "I got sort of disappointed that I was mad." She seemed to be ashamed of herself for being angry.

The feeling of disappointment expressed is connected to a lack of immediate gratification which children have difficulty dealing with. Also, the feeling of being let down by the parent(s) may be connected with a feeling of being discounted, as though one's wishes, desires, and hopes were unimportant.

Sadness. The feeling of sadness appeared to be a typical emotion expressed by the children when describing their experiences with anger.

When I enquired about how Stacey felt when her father said no to her request, she responded: "Sad."

Sherry expressed a feeling of sadness when she was angry with her mother. "Really sad when I am angry."

Ted at first indicated that he was never mad at his mother but then recalled a time when he did experience anger toward her. He recognized that there was a feeling of sadness within himself. "Feeling sad ... my mom was angry at me."

Frustration. Frustration is a feeling of being blocked or restrained. The children did not verbalize the frustration they experienced directly. Instead, they used phrases like "I don't want to," or "I don't like it" to express their feelings of frustration.

Alice reported feeling annoyed with her father when he continued pulling her hair. "I don't really like to be mad at you. I just don't like the way you are acting to me. I just want you to do something else."

Ken felt that his wishes were being denied when his mother did not allow him to eat the peel of the banana:

Interviewer: "Would you want her to let you eat whatever you want to eat?"

Ken: "Yeah."

Hazel felt imposed upon when her mother asked her to clean up the room.

Hazel: "I get mad, it's not fair."

Interviewer: "What do you mean not fair?"

Hazel: "It's my own business."

When Tim's mother asked him to eat the vegetables, he felt annoyed and disliked being bothered by her. He summed it up in a few words:"Getting on my nerves."

It appeared that there are different levels of frustration, ranging from mild frustration, annoyance, to disgust. The children seemed to think that other people were making their life miserable and they felt threatened when their individual autonomy was at risk.

Powerlessness. Underlying the feeling of anger, was a hidden feeling of being powerless. For instance, Hazel indicated that she felt her anger was so intense it possibly would explode and that she might not be able to manage the anger: "It would feel like bursting ... I feel very, very, very mad." Apparently, Hazel felt that it was beyond her ability to confront and to control the angry monster within.

Alice felt intimidated and fearful of her mother. Possibly she felt disempowered as a result of her perception that her mother's anger was overpowering. "There is no way I can beat my mom if she's mad ... I couldn't fight with my mom cause she would smack me hard."

Similarly, Ted seemed to believe that he had no power to fight against his parents or to refuse cooperate with them. He recalled his experience of being physically "carried" by his parents into his room in an anger incident.

Interviewer: When your dad wanted you to go to the room but you didn't want to, did you continue to stay in the living room?

Ted: Well, they carried me into the room.

Interviewer: I see. They – do you mean your dad or your mom?

Ted: Both.

These children indicated that they felt oppressed and pushed. As well, they had to accept the external forces imposed upon them.

Worries. Because of their feeling of powerlessness, some children felt overwhelmed when dealing with anger, which was manifested in their worries.

Sherry: My mom made me scared.

Interviewer: What were you scared of?

Sherry: When my mom really, really got mad at me.

Interviewer: What did you think would happen when your mom was really, really mad at you?

Sherry: She would get mad at me. She would get mad at other people in the house.

Interviewer: What would happen if she was mad at you and she was also mad at other people?

Sherry: They would get mad at her too.

Sherry worried that other family members would then become angry with each other if her mother became very angry. She felt ashamed and responsible for causing anger within her family. She was also concerned that anger would damage family relationships.

Stacey worried that she would be grounded by her mother when she was angry, "Cause I'm afraid she will ground me or smack me." She was unsure how her mother would treat her when she was angry. It appeared to me that this worry in Stacey could possibly affect the quality of her relationship with her mother.

Hazel appeared to worry about her reputation if her siblings found out she and her father were angry with each other. She preferred to keep the conflicts with her father between her father and herself. Her explanation was that "So my sister and my brother know that I am not bad." Hazel's desire to maintain a good reputation with her siblings revealed her fear of being labeled a 'bad' child. Apparently, she might also feel awkward and embarrassed. She worried about her self image as a result of the anger incidents she had with her father.

In summary, most children had difficulty dealing with their anger and their parents' anger. Their experience of anger was represented by a mixture of feelings. They

were disappointed that they were not heard, as if they were stuck between two thick brick walls. They felt rejected when their requests were denied. They were frustrated when their viewpoints were not shared by their parents and they were not understood. They felt powerless that their voices appeared to be insignificant, and were sad that their needs were not recognized. They felt annoyed and restrained when their freedom was lost because of what they perceived to be unreasonable expectations imposed upon them. They worried about the negative impacts of anger on their self-image and on family relationships.

Anger: A Justified Response to Roadblocks

The majority of the child participants acknowledged their experience with anger toward their parents. They perceived the demands from the parents to be unreasonable, inappropriate, restraining, and caused them inconveniences in their everyday living. Moreover, they felt that their parents should grant their requests, which they felt they were entitled to receive. They struggled to protect their sense of self-worth and dignity.

The "roadblocks" described by the children during anger incidents were:

Loss of privilege.

Alice: "When I had already got my pyjamas on, you [mother] still wouldn't read me a book."

Demand cooperation.

Ted [pretending to be his mother]:

"If you don't eat the vegetables, I am going to take you off the chair and make you go [to the room]."

Unfair treatment.

Stacey: "I don't like her yelling or screaming cause they're so mean when

yelling. This is not fair."

Loss of personal choice.

Ken: "I am eating a banana but my mommy said that I can't eat the skin

but I say I want to."

Against one's desires.

Sherry: "I got mad at my mom when I had to have breakfast but I didn't

want to [have breakfast]."

Because of the entitlements the children felt were their rights were not granted,

they became angry and found it important to fight back to preserve their rights. Their

goals generally were to remove the roadblocks which prevented getting what they desired

from their parents, and to have their voices heard. The implied messages were, for

example: 'you can't do this to me,' 'you caused me pain, inconvenience,' 'you are wrong

and you, as parent should have known better,' and 'I deserve better treatment.'

As such their anger outbursts arose immediately in the form of protest to the

parents. Their anger was primarily displayed through verbal fights which were described

in the form of a 'yes-no screaming/argument,' 'name-calling,' 'negative verbal attack,'

and 'warning.'

For instance, Tim claimed that he tended to refuse when his father sent him into

the room during an anger incident: "I always say No, No, No." Similarly, Hazel engaged

in such a "yes-no-tug-of-war" with her father when she was not allowed to listen to a

story tape. "I would say yes ... he would say no ... I would say yes." As for the interaction with her mother during anger, Hazel indicated that she would yell at her mother with a "No," and uttered "stupid, mean" with her back facing her mother when she was asked to clean up her room. Instead of calling her mother a name, Stacey would make a verbal negative comment to her mother when she was angry: "I hate you." Alice appeared to be quite direct in warning her father during the anger incident. "Stop that, or I'll beat you up."

Compliance

In some cases, the desire of pulling back the protest was exhibited when some children felt intimidated and powerlessness, as demonstrated in the following scenarios:

> Alice: "If she [mother] told me to go to the room, I will go to my room. I don't
>
> want to get smacked again."

In Sherry's case, she believed that it is better not to talk back to her mother when she was angry. "Being nice to her ... don't talk back to her." She also tended to hold back her anger and apologize to her mother. "I would say I am sorry."

Similarly, Stacey indicated that she would apologize to her parents. "Well, my dad would come up [to my room]. I would sit on his lap. I would say sorry." Ted was compliant with his mother after he was sent into his room. He indicated: "When my mom comes in and asks me not to do it again, I said I won't do it anymore." Although Tim stated that he felt like hitting his parents when he was angry, when his mother took him into his room, he seemed to indicate that he had no other choice but to do what his was told: "I have to go."

It appeared that the children perceived that their power was limited and that it would be impossible to push any further to have their demands met. Apparently, their compliance served a dual purpose – self-protection and protection of others. That is, they did not like to cause more trouble, which in turn, caused more pain within themselves and others.

During the anger incidents, most children were sent into their room by their parents for a time-out. Overall, the children complied with this request readily.

Alice: I just want them to leave me alone. Play with something.

Tim: I wanted to play ... I will be happy.

Stacey: I phoned my friend ... to play together.

Sherry: I play stuff and do stuff, I color .... Go to the room and play and then just come out when you are happy ... because I could play and make a big mess in my room.

Those children implied that to be a child is to play. Accordingly, play can become an excellent medium for them to process their feelings, worries, and fears.

To summarize, based on the children's self-descriptions, it appeared that anger is often a response to a "roadblock." The children's anger arose when their requests were denied, when their needs were not met, when unreasonable demands were placed upon them, when someone wronged them without reason, when their wishes were not granted, when their voices were not acknowledged, and so on. These realizations led to the formation of an internal belief in most of the children that they had the right to be angry – that is, their anger was justified.

The response to the roadblock can be seen through their emotional experience. Children experience different emotions when angry, including disappointment, sadness, frustration, powerlessness, and worry. Most preschool aged children in this study would convey their anger through verbal fights, including a "yes-no" argument, name-calling, verbal attack with negative statements, and warning of attacking the parents. The anger response ultimately reflected their sense of obstruction, chaos, disturbance, perturbation, and disruption in their world when they perceive their life was not in order.

Compliance was also commonly seen with this age group during anger incidents. The children seemed to have an idea when they had to give up their own desires and follow their parents' instructions. They appeared to be aware of the little power they had when compared to their parents'. They experienced a sense of intimidation by their parents and a need for self-protection, as well as protection of others in some cases. It was found that the children would choose to comply with their parents under those circumstances. Some children chose to apologize to their parents for their actions and further indicated that they would stop misbehaving.

The children seemed to find it easier to comply with the parents' instruction of going into their room for a time-out. It seems that play is a natural activity in children's lives. Play can provide children with the opportunity to play-out and process their feelings.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

In this final chapter, I revisit and discuss the findings drawn from the reflections chapter as they relate to the literature. I also discuss the implications for counselling interventions with children and families based on what I have learned from the study. Finally, I identify the limitations of the study and discuss the implications for future research in the field of children's anger and other related areas.

Children's Experiences of Anger

In order to structure the discussion of the children's lived experience of anger, the themes that emerged from this study have been organized within the following framework: a) anger as a common experience, b) the emotional experience of anger, c) the cognitive experience of anger, d) expressions of anger, and e) resolution of anger.

Anger as a Common Experience

In the present study, all the children interviewed (except for one child) acknowledged or shared with me their experience with anger toward their parents. After considering the descriptions of anger in the literature, this pattern was not surprising. First, anger has been identified as a common phenomenon in everyday living. Adults report being angry anywhere from several times a day to several times a week (Averill, 1983). With respect to anger in children, Cummings and El-Sheikh (1991) contended that children are, at times, exposed to adults' angry interactions at home and it is probable that some children deal with anger incidents on a daily basis. Jones and Peacock's (1992) study of self-reported anger in adolescents suggested that their anger was primarily related to family members rather than non-family members such as friends and teachers.

Furthermore, anger toward parents is seen as a common phenomenon among young people, as they often find their parents to be controlling, annoying, and disappointing (Dupont, 1994).

Second, from a developmental viewpoint, it has been documented that infants between four and seven months old are capable of demonstrating anger through facial flushing, tears, and vocalization in response to restraints and inoculation (Izard, Hembree, & Huebner, 1987; Stenberg & Campos, 1990). At the age of two and a half years, the children participating in Miller and Sperry's (1987) study of anger and aggression were found to be able to communicate anger through facial expressions and gestures, vocalization, retaliation, and so on, and even demonstrate some understanding of the rules for justifying their anger. The ability to recognize angry facial expressions and to label anger becomes increasingly accurate as the child's age increases (Bortolitti, D'Elia & Whissell, 1993; Camras & Allison, 1985; Denham & Couchoud, 1990; Michalson & Lewis, 1985).

Thus, the observation from the present study that feelings of anger toward parents was a familiar experience for the children is indeed consistent with other research findings in the literature.

Emotional Experience of Anger

What does it feel like for a young child to be angry with his or her parents? In this study, anger was commonly experienced by the child participants as a mixture of negative feelings, including disappointment, powerlessness, worry, sadness, and frustration.

<u>Disappointment</u>. While no research was identified in relation to the discussion between anger and disappointment, the most common feeling in connection with the child participants' experience with anger was found to be disappointment. The children expressed disappointment when their requests were denied. Also, they felt let down when it seemed that their ideas were not considered important. The feeling of disappointment experienced by the child participants appeared to relate to their need to be recognized and accepted as individuals, for others to listen empathically and respectfully to their ideas, and that they might exert some influence or impact on others. Moreover, it relates to the feeling of personal worthiness in that they want to feel that there is a place for them in the world and that they deserve attention from others.

<u>Powerlessness.</u> The feeling of powerlessness revealed by the child participants seemed to stem from their perception of unfair treatment or unreasonable demands placed upon them, the resentment they felt when they were misunderstood, blamed, or ignored, and their loss of autonomy in making their own decisions. The expression of powerlessness appeared to be somewhat similar to the feeling of helplessness discussed by Leifer (1999). He defined the feeling of helplessness as "the perceived inability to satisfy one's desires" (p. 345). In many cases, he noticed that people, regardless of their age, tend to repress a feeling of helplessness when angry and overcompensate by striving for a sense of power and control, which was described by Leifer as "pseudo-power" (p. 345). Some of the child participants' responses during this study supported the concept of pseudo-power. For instance, under such circumstances, the children tended to feel that they had the ability to enter into a fight with the parent or win a battle. They persisted in

a yes-no argument, refused to cooperate, pretended not to hear the parent, or struck the parent when angry. Leifer further explained that the feeling of helplessness leads to a feeling of vulnerability, which in turn gives rise to a sense of threat within the individual. It therefore makes sense that anger would often be experienced as a negative feeling.

Moreover, within a family context and based on an Adlerian approach, Sherman and Dinkmeyer (1987) maintained that conflicts arise when power is used inappropriately, as a form of control in the communication between a parent and child. They indicated that when both a parent and child enter into a power contest, the child could be inclined to use his power to fight against the parent by refusing to cooperate. The child may feel that by complying with the parents requests, he or she would lose personal power. On a similar vein, Dreikurs and Soltz (1990) emphasized that it is ineffective for parents to force a "power-drunk" child with parental power (p. 61). It is noted that the more the child experiences the fear of losing personal power, the stronger the desire for using power to avoid feeling a loss of personal power, and it might come to a point where the child habitually acts like a bully to regain a sense of satisfaction. It was found that most children in this study did fight back during anger incidents with their parents through different mannerisms, such as talking back, ignoring the parents, persisting in an argument, refusing to cooperate, and so on.

The issue of power differential between an adult and child has been discussed relatively briefly in the literature. Children tend to suppress their anger when feeling intimidated by an authority figure, such as a teacher (Underwood, Coie & Herbsman, 1992). Children also have a strong tendency to comply with adults during incidents of

anger (Karniol & Heiman, 1987). From the experiences of conducting this study and my clinical work with children and families, I would expect that the physical size difference between an adult and child and the power differential ascribed in society between adults and children could easily make a child feel small and intimidated.

Worry. Some children in the study described feelings of powerlessness and worry closely connected with the experience of anger. Considering the developmental stage of the children interviewed, it seems sensible that they would feel intimidated by their parents and worry about damage to their reputation within the family or about the punishment they might receive if they did not comply. It was found that preschool aged children could make some simple inferences regarding other people's intentions, thoughts, and feelings (Garbarino & Stott, 1992) based on their personal experiences in dealing with their own emotions and their observations of emotions in others (Harris & Saarni, 1989; Smiley & Huttenlocher, 1989). For example, one girl appeared to reflect on the ripple effects of her anger within the family. She expressed her concern that the family relationships would be damaged as a result of her anger. Also, a boy was cautious about revealing his anger and worried that his parents would become angry with him in turn. These responses suggest that it is important not to overlook the complexity involved in the cognitive and emotional capacity of a child to understand their own emotions as well as those of others, even a child as young as a preschooler.

Sadness. Another common feeling expressed by the children in the study was sadness. Some recognized that they felt sad when they were angry but were not able to elaborate on the nature of the sadness. Some children described feeling more sad than

angry during the anger incidents. It would be worthwhile exploring whether these children felt it was more acceptable to express feelings of sadness rather than anger within their family units.

The feeling of sadness which arises during anger incidents was also noted in other studies and it is believed that there is a close connection between anger and sadness. For instance, infants were found to respond to pain and separation with expressions of sadness and anger (Termine & Izard, 1988). As for the adult population, based on their telephone surveys with 192 adults averaging approximately 30 years old, Scherer and Tannenbaum (1986) found that anger and sadness often occur together as emotional reactions to life events within family or work settings, for instance, breakup in relationships, problematic behavior of a family member (dishonesty, conflict over money etc.), unfair treatment by superiors or co-workers, loss of a job, and so on. In the literature surveyed, it remains unclear how the emotions of sadness and anger are connected with each other and more studies may be necessary to explore the interaction of the emotions of anger and sadness.

Frustration. Closely connected with the experience of anger among the children was the expression of frustration. The degree of frustration expressed varied from situation to situation, ranging from mild frustration, to annoyance, to disgust. The various levels of frustration experienced by the child participants supports Spielberger et al.'s (1983) ideas of angry feelings ranging from mild irritation (frustration) to fury and rage. Stearns (1972) also described frustration as one of the main components of anger in

people of different ages, linked to feelings of uneasiness, discomfort, tension, and resentment.

Frustration may cause anger and can provoke aggression (Berkowitz, 1989, 1990). However, the frustration-aggression relationship was not found to be a strong one in this study and it is understood that not all anger results in aggression in children or adults (Furlong & Smith, 1998; Kassinove, 1995; Mabe, Trieber, & Riley, 1992; Nelson III et al., 1993).

Leifer (1999) also discussed frustration as a source of anger. Regardless of age, people become frustrated when their desires are thwarted and when their sense of self is obstructed. From a Buddhist conceptualization of anger, Leifer commented that people differ in the ability to tolerate frustration. He found that, among other factors, the most significant ones in strengthening one's tolerance toward frustration are self-discipline and patience. In the present study, the frustration experienced by the child participants echoed the notion of obstruction of one's desires and the violation of the sense of self as expressed by Leifer. Moreover, I observed that some of the children in this study appeared to be more skillful than others in managing their frustration, consistent with Leifer's observation that the ability to manage frustration varies from person to person.

With the exception of the notions of disappointment and sadness, the feelings expressed by the child participants in this study were consistent with the views offered by some other authors in the literature. The authors shared similar views of anger (regardless of the age of individuals) as an affective experience characterized by negative feelings including: anxiety (Rothenberg, 1971), uneasiness, discomfort, resentment

(Stearns, 1972), fear (Danesh, 1977), tension, annoyance, irritation, fury, rage

(Spielberger et al., 1983), and distress (Thomas, 1993).

It is worth noting that the topic of children's emotional experiences with anger has

not been a focus of attention within the area of anger in children. I suspect that there two

primary reasons for this phenomenon. First, research on anger in general is scant,

particularly in the area of children's anger. Second, many of the studies on anger research

with children appear to focus on the overtly behavioral expression of anger and the

practical clinical issue of treatments whereas the inner emotional experience involved in

anger has been neglected. I suspect that there might be some significant differences

between the emotional experience of anger for children and adults, but these are only

tentative speculations and would require further exploration.

In summary, the findings from this study reveal there are a number of emotions

associated with the experience of anger. Anger is characterized by feelings such as

disappointment, frustration, sadness, worry, and powerlessness. This implies that when a

child is in the state of anger, there are a number of emotions that the child will need to

process and make sense of. The anger experience may be intensified due to the presence

of a number of emotions occurring concomitantly. It would seem that managing the

emotions involved during anger might not be an easy task for a child, especially coming

to a resolution of the anger and the emotions which are related to anger.

<u>Cognitive Experience of Anger</u>

How did the children in this study make sense of their experiences with anger?

Cognition plays an important part in making sense of one's experience (Beck, 1976;

Berkowitz, 1990; Lazarus, 1991a, 1991b; Novaco, 1985, 1995; Rubin, 1986). That is, the

meanings which one attaches to an event or situation will significantly direct one's

responses.

The children in the study maintained that their angry responses were associated

with the treatment they received from their parents which they perceived to be unfair,

unreasonable, inappropriate, restraining, caused them inconveniences, or not meeting

their expectations. Thus, they came to believe that their resulting anger was justified.

These observations are consistent with the information available in the current

literature about children's anger. Some major antecedents leading to anger in children

include: the perception of receiving unfair treatment, the inability to deal with

uncontrollable events, threats or embarrassment to self-esteem, the blocking of one's

desires, the loss or destruction of personal belongings, receiving inadequate attention, and

the expectation of complying with demands from parents (Carpenter & Halberstadt, 1996;

Fabes & Eisenberg, 1992; Nelson III et al., 1993). Similarly, beliefs that one has been

humiliated, insulted, threatened, treated unfairly, or inconvenienced by others were also

identified as common causes leading to anger in the adult population (Kennedy, 1992;

Lazarus, 1991a, 1991b; Roseman, Spindel, & Jose, 1990; Thomas, 1993).

Upon further reflection, I came to realize that while it was typical that the children

would resent and be afraid of punishment from their parents, their anger was also related

to their idea of personhood. That is, I observed that the anger described by the child

participants in this study was related to their sense of justice, their sense of individuality

and autonomy, as well as to their perception of their relationship with others. For

instance, their sense of individuality was revealed through their need to be listened to and that they have something to offer. Their sense of autonomy was reflected by a feeling of entitlement to make their own decisions, to be in control of a situation, and their ideals about fighting to preserve their own beliefs. Moreover, they were concerned about how their image or reputation would be affected as a result of their expressions of anger.

In the present study, justification played a large part in the children's cognitive experience with anger. Anger served as an inner force to facilitate perseverance to battle against perceived injustices, threats, or challenges and served as a survival tool. The children's view of the adaptive functioning of anger supports Novaco's view of anger:

> In an increasingly bureaucratized world that diminishes the significance of an individual, anger is a psychological fortification for our sense of worth. Anger provides for personal resilience. It is a guardian of our self-esteem, it potentiates our ability to redress grievances, and it can boost determination to overcome obstacles to our unhappiness and aspirations. (1995, p. 321)

From a cognitive perspective, how do children decide to express their emotions? Is it a matter of perceiving anger as a justifiable response and therefore they have no reservations about expressing anger? It was found that some children in the study were hesitant to express their anger for various reasons. In one instance, the child worried about causing her mother to become angry and about the effects her mother's anger could have on other family members; another child worried about her reputation within the family if she expressed her anger openly; and a third child worried about the consequences of displaying her anger outside of her bedroom. These scenarios suggest

that the thoughts about the consequences of the expression of anger could have restrained the children's expressions of anger. This is consistent with Zeman and Garber's (1996) findings that children can be inhibited from expressing their emotions when they recognize that the expression of those emotions may lead to negative consequences. Those expected negative consequences include: "rejection, ridicule, reprimands, losing one's privileges or [being] afraid of hurting other people's feelings by displaying their anger" (p. 965).

On the other hand, Zeman and Garber (1996) also found that the reason children express their anger is related to their expectations of receiving help or support in managing the angry feelings, especially if they feel incapable of controlling intense anger. This implies that the expression of anger can be the interpreted as the child calling for help. In this study, the children conveyed their anger verbally (e.g., yelling, screaming, arguing, complaining, making negative comments toward parents) or behaviorally through different mannerisms (e.g., stomping, kicking, slamming doors, refusing to co-operate). It appeared that the expressions of anger, regardless of the form of expression, showed their expectations that they were in need of some assistance in dealing with the angry situations. Many of the children said that play activities in their own rooms during the time out period demanded by their parents was an effective way to distract themselves from feelings of anger. Also, the children welcomed the comforts provided by their parent(s) once their anger was exhausted. They were able to calm down, apologize to the parent(s), and put a closure to the anger incident.

<u>Expressions of Anger</u>

The expression of angry emotions is not consistent at all times. In the literature on anger, Hagglund et al. (1994) proposed a four factor approach to examining the expression of anger in children: anger-out, anger-in, anger-distraction, and anger-control. I will relate the children's responses to the classifications of anger expression as outlined by Hagglund et al. and discuss those responses in the context of their interaction with their parent(s) during incidents of anger.

<u>Anger-out.</u> Anger-out is "the outward expression of anger and may include aggressive or hostile behavior" (Hagglund et al., 1994, p. 293). Most children in the present study expressed their anger outwardly through a range of behaviors such as crying, screaming, pouting, lack of co-operation, name calling, stamping feet, hitting, and making threats. These behaviors are similar to the observations consistently described by other researchers throughout the past half century (e.g., Goodenough, 1931; Miller & Sperry, 1987; Radke-Yarrow & Kochanska, 1990).

Moreover, I observed that the "anger-out" behaviors were generally not well received by the parents and a negative reciprocal interaction pattern between the parent and child followed. The display of the child's anger often influenced the parent's behavior and, in turn, could also redirect the child's response to an angry incident (Lemerise & Dodge, 1993). Examples observed were: the more the child argued, the stronger the father insisted upon sending child to his or her room; when the child screamed, the mother responded by yelling at the child; when the child hit the mother, the father responded by smacking the child; and when the child cried, the father responded by

stomping. Thus, when children's anger is directed externally in a negative, hurtful, hostile manner, the intensity of the anger response became much stronger and the conflict between the parent and child escalated. The results of this study lend further support to the notion that venting (anger-out) will provoke further anger and frustration rather than relief (Tavris, 1989; Siegman, Anderson & Berger, 1990).

Anger-in. Anger-in refers to "the turning of anger inward toward the self or the suppression of anger" (Hagglund et al., 1994, p. 293). The anger-in pattern was observed when some children were hesitant to express their anger verbally, especially when preoccupied with sadness or blamed themselves for becoming angry with their parents. At other times, the children came to realize that they could no longer insist on having their needs met by protesting and they seemed to unwillingly comply with their parents' requests. Their compliance may have been based upon feelings of intimidation or powerlessness, and the belief that compliance would protect them from further hurt. It is common for children to "silence" their anger when feeling intimidated by an authority figure such as a teacher (Underwood, Coie, & Herbsman, 1992). This is due to the child's perception that it is less socially acceptable to acknowledge anger toward a teacher and also because children feel they are in a powerless position when faced with an authority figure. From the power differential perspective between a parent and child, it would be worthwhile to explore whether compliance in children reinforces the practice of dominance in adults and vice-versa. Furthermore, it was found that children would likely suppress their anger when they were reprimanded by their parents, for instance, when the

child was insulted, threatened with hurt, or ignored. This phenomenon was described by

Tomkins (1991) as a form of punitive socialization of anger.

Moreover, in the literature, it has been documented that when individuals keep

angry feelings within, they may be more likely to suffer health problems such as high

blood pressure, coronary heart disease, arthritis, asthma, eating problems, and so on

(Burrowes, 1992; Gentry, Chesney, Gary, Hall, & Harburg, 1982; Spielberger, Johnson,

Russell, Crane, Jacobs, & Worden, 1985; Thomas, 1993; Verrier & Mittleman, 1996;

Williams & Barefoot, 1988). If some of the children involved in this study used

compliance as a way to suppress their anger, it is possible that they could suffer from

negative health effects, especially if the underlying issues associated with the anger

remain unresolved.

Anger-distraction. Anger-distraction represents "behavioral coping strategies that

allow time for cooling off" (Hagglund et al., 1994, p. 293). Most of the child participants

in the study seemed to use play to distract themselves after incidents of anger. They

reported that they experienced a calming effect through play activities. The therapeutic

functions of self-healing through play have indeed been documented. In general, play

allows children to exercise their creativity, to explore different ideas and meanings, and to

develop better skills in social relationships, self-expression, and problem solving

(Landreth, 1991; Russ, 1995). In particular, Oaklander (1988) found it effective to use

play therapy when working with children's anger. She considered it important to help

children to be "conscious" or "to know" (p . 211) the anger they experience, to get

through the anger and associated feelings of hurt, guilt, shame, and the like, and to find ways to express the anger appropriately.

Anger-control. Anger-control refers to "cognitively modulated and less impulsive behavior that attempts to resolve the anger-eliciting conflict or frustration" (Hagglund et al., 1994, p. 293). In this study, some of the child participants (both boys and girls) indicated that they felt like hitting their parents when angry but they were able to keep such an impulse under control. Their realization of the power differential inherent in a parent-child relationship and the consequences of their actions might have also enabled the children to tame their aggressive tendencies.

In the literature about anger intervention with children, learning self-control techniques was commonly mentioned, as were other skills training such as assertiveness, problem-solving, cooperation, peer relationship, and so on (Feindler, 1995; Lochman & Lenhart, 1993; Morrison & Sandowicz, 1994). Huggins (1995) described a four step program when working with young children to control their anger: First, stop and calm down, think about consequences and alternatives when angry, express anger in non-aggressive words, and learn to feel good again. Relaxation activities, such as deep breathing, cue-controlled relaxation, and visualization were found to be effective in helping children reclaim a feeling of calmness and control over impulsive tendencies and generate alternatives when dealing with anger (Deffenbacher, 1994; Feindler, 1995; Feindler & Guttman, 1994).

Age. Most studies described in the literature of children's anger have engaged children who were elementary school aged or teenagers (e.g., Crick, Bigbee, & Howes,

1996; Kaplan, 1998; Underwood et al., 1992; Zeman & Garber, 1996). It could not be determined whether the small difference in the range of age (between four and five years old) played a significant role in the children's experiences with anger or their subsequent expressions of anger.

"Object versus relationship oriented" anger. The literature also indicates that boys tend to perceive their anger as object-related (such as possession of materials) whereas girls' anger was more relationship oriented (Dupont, 1994; Karnoil & Heiman, 1987). That is, boys might describe their anger as connected to disagreement about ownership of objects or damage and loss of objects, whereas girls tend to attribute their anger to potential threats to a relationship. Older girls tend to display more relational aggressive behavior, that is by isolating a person, ceasing a friendship, or telling lies about a target person (Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996).

In this study, I did not find a significantly different pattern of "object versus relationship" anger existing between the boys and girls' experiences with anger. Girls became angry when their needs were not met, when their requests were denied, or when they found themselves being ignored and not heard. However, some of the girls said that their anger was connected with unsatisfactory communication with their parents during a conflict situation. Also, some of the girls worried that the anger they expressed would damage their reputation within the family and indirectly damage the overall family relationship.

Gender and anger expression. In the literature, the issue of gender differences in anger expression among children remains controversial. Researchers who supported the

notion of a gender difference maintain that girls tend to keep their anger to themselves, or express their anger in nonaggressive ways, whereas boys tend to be less inhibited and resort to more physical actions, such as punching, stomping, or kicking (Brody & Hall, 1993; Dupont, 1994; Fabes & Eisenberg, 1992; Jacobs, Phelps, & Rohrs, 1989; Karniol & Heiman, 1987; Underwood, Coie, & Herbsman, 1992; Zahn-Waxler, Cole, Richardson & Friedman, 1994). Both boys and girls of elementary school age identify physical aggression as the most common response in boys during anger (Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996).

When examining the role of gender in the experience of anger in children, I noted that both the girls and the boys (except for one male) acknowledged experiencing anger toward their parents. There was one girl involved in the study who reported warning her father to stop teasing her or she would hit him back when she was angry. Also, another girl recalled hitting her mother's arm a few times during anger. However, some of the children (boys and girls) expressed uncertainty and hesitation about verbally expressing their anger and tended to keep their anger to themselves. That is, the pattern of boys being more physically aggressive and girls being more inhibited when expressing anger was not supported by this study.

However, I found that the girls studied tended to be more verbally descriptive in their accounts of anger experiences. This appeared to be consistent with the observation by Radke-Yarrow and Kochanska (1990) that young girls are more likely to confide in someone about their angry feelings. Also, it has been suggested that girls expect other people to accept their emotional displays (Zeman & Garber, 1996). It seems, then, that

girls' expectation of others to accept their emotional displays would also encourage them to express their emotions more openly.

When exploring the role of gender in the children's expression of anger, I also found it important to examine the perspective of parents' socialization of anger. That is, how do the parents shape the children's responses to anger in relation to the child's gender? The literature on children's anger described differences in parents' socialization of anger with boys versus girls. For example, it was found that mothers placed stronger demands on girls to stop being angry (Radke-Yarrow & Kochanska, 1990). This pattern was not detected in the present study. Another difference discussed in the literature refers to the mothers' tendency to discuss anger with sons longer than with daughters. That is, they de-emphasized the emotion of anger with their daughters (Fivush, 1989, 1991). However, by comparison, from this study it appeared that the mothers expected and hoped that the child (regardless of the child's gender) would share their emotions associated with the experience with anger.

It is worthwhile mentioning that some parents stated that there were certain expectations that correspond with their own conceptions of genders. For instance, the idea that in general girls are expected to be gentle and that parents do not need to be "physical" with them. Also, the idea that females should be more verbally expressive and therefore the parent was quite verbal with the daughter, or a connection was made between the girl's anger and cuteness. Thus, based on the reports from the parents, it seemed that the perceived expectations of some of the parents regarding the child's

gender might have had an effect on their responses to the child's anger – a self-fulfilling prophecy.

However, it is interesting to note that most parents indicated that they believed they would deal with the child's anger in the same way, without taking the child's gender into consideration. The question arises whether the parents were aware of maintaining a gender stereotype, really did not maintain any gender stereotype, or felt it socially undesirable to express a stereotype? Would such a gender stereotype be related to a connection between girls and sweetness and temper problems with boys?

Tentatively speaking, I suspect that the lack of a pattern of gender difference revealed by this study might be related to the young age of the children. The effects of the parents' socialization of anger may not have been consolidated strongly at such a young age (four and five years old) although the literature mentioned above has suggested that there are differences in parents' socialization of anger with girls versus boys.

Resolution of Anger

During this study, it was observed that under most circumstances both parent and child participants preferred dialoguing with each other when angry as a means of resolving the issue of anger. It is worth noting that some positive interaction patterns occurred during dialogue, for example: the more the child talked, the more the mother listened; or the more the child listened, the more the father came to acknowledge the child's anger. Another example was that the more the child talked, the more it encouraged the mother to talk and apologize; or when the child hugged the father, the more the father talked to the child, and so on.

Moreover, parental involvement seemed to support what Gottman described as parents acting as "emotional coaches" for their children (Gottman & DeClaire, 1997). Some of the parents in the study made attempts to accept the child's anger empathically, helped them to understand the acceptable and unacceptable limits on their behavior, and discussed some strategies for dealing with anger. Similarly, Parke, Ornstein, Rieser, and Zahn-Waxler (cited in Parke & Buriel, 1998) portrayed parents as being "interactive partners" in the process of family socialization. They explained that parents could influence their children's development of values, norms, and beliefs by maintaining a close interaction with them.

Other researchers have also emphasized the importance of reflection and discussion between parents and children, including parents' recognition and acknowledgment of the child's feelings and discussion of the probable causes of the emotions and consequences of their actions (Burleson, Delia, & Applegate, 1995; Sarmi, Mumme, & Campos, 1997). Furthermore, the concepts of "rewarding socialization of anger" seemed to be applicable in this study (Tomkins, 1991). Rewarding socialization of anger refers to the parent's efforts and desires to attenuate the child's anger. The parent will acknowledge and accept the child's anger, will discuss with the child the sources of anger, and the appropriate ways to express it. When the parent expresses his or her anger, he or she will explain it to the child, discuss with the child alternative behaviors, and assure the child of his or her love for the child. Some parents in the study indeed acknowledged their child's anger and invited the child to discuss the anger incident, while at the same time expressing their love for the child.

The positive impacts of dialoguing between parent and child about the experience with anger are echoed in the literature. It was found that children will become calmer and more empathic when parents also display empathy toward them in their interactions (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Murphy, 1996; Eisenberg & McNally, 1993). Also, children are more likely to discuss things with the parent rather than venting their anger when their parent(s) comfort the child and try to help the child feel better (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1994). Furthermore, children show better understanding of emotions when their mothers (or parents) engage in conversations about the causes and consequences of emotions (Denham, Zoller, & Couchoud, 1994). The children's sensitivity to other's emotions at a later stage was found to be associated with the frequency of discussion about emotion at an earlier age (Dunn, Brown, Beardsall, 1991; Dunn, Brown, Slomkowski, Telsa, & Youngblade, 1991).

Implications for Clinical Interventions

Based on what I have learned from the parents and children studied, I examine how the findings from the study could be related to clinical intervention in children's anger and other related areas. What do clinicians need to pay attention to when dealing with anger and anger related issues with children?

Complexity of Anger

The experience of anger in children is a complicated phenomenon. Anger is characterized by a range of emotions, including frustration, disappointment, worry, sadness, and powerlessness. A common question often encountered in clinical practice can be stated as: Is anger a mask? The responses of children in this study indicated that

anger may be either a primary or a secondary emotion. As clinicians, we need to be sensitive to the nature of anger. We must ask ourselves, "What are the emotions involved in the clients' experience with anger." It is important to determine when the expression of anger is covered up by another emotion such as sadness or when sadness may be covered by anger. Clinicians need to help clients identify the core of the emotions and problems they experience in order make effective changes. I like to use the analogy of a person 'peeling an onion' to illustrate the process of going deeper into the clients' experience of anger during therapy.

Moreover, it was found in this study that anger in children is more than just anger. This notion again refers to the complex nature of anger. Some significant messages underlying their anger include their need for respect, understanding, appreciation, and care from others as well as their own needs for independence and autonomy. Clinicians need to be able to reflect critically on the child's experience with anger by putting themselves into the child's position in order to be more empathic and effective in helping the child deal with anger and other related concerns (Landreth, 1991; Oaklander, 1988). Based on my own clinical experience and my experience in conducting this study, I have found that a background knowledge in child psychology, especially in the area of developmental psychology is instrumental in helping to develop a connection with the child and an understanding of the child's world-views. Clinicians should understand that children have the ability and will continue to develop an increasing ability as they grow to make sense of life events, and that they can form their own theories to explain or predict the behavior of others (Dunn, 1991; Flavell, Miller, & Miller, 1993).

Another concept of the complexity of anger identified in this study is that the meanings and experience associated with anger could vary from child to child and from one situation to another. Also, there is no consensus as to the definition of anger nor any diagnostic criteria to assess anger clinically (Kassinove & Sukhodolsky, 1995; Sharkin, 1988) Therefore, it is of great importance for clinicians to explore with children their own interpretations regarding the experience of anger. Some of the questions I find helpful when reflecting on children's experiences of anger are, for instance, "What do I know about the child's anger?" "What is it like for the child to be angry?" "How does the child express his or her anger?" "What does the child really say about anger through his or her expression of anger?" "How does the child manage his or her anger toward parents?" "What are the challenges encountered by the child in his or her experience with anger?" "If the child's anger could be translated into spoken words, what would they be?"

Overall, due to the complex nature of anger demonstrated by this study, clinicians should strive to know and understand the child, be patient, and listen attentively to the child. Also, clinicians need to develop confidence in a child's ability to share their ideas in their own ways despite a difference in cognitive functioning between adults and children. For instance, I found that some child participants were able to sum up their experience with anger succinctly – for example: "it gets on my nerves," "I feel like bursting," or "it's my own business." In my interviews with the child participants, I used play as a forum for inviting the children to share with me their experiences with anger. I found the application of play therapy techniques to be valuable, particularly when working with younger children.

Unique Culture of Anger Within a Family

Some children in this study indicated uncertainty about expressing anger due to their worries about their reputation within the family. Other children even thought anger would only be acceptable when expressed in a private place, that it was impossible to resist the parent (or authority figure), and so on. Thus, by reviewing the children's internalized thoughts about expressing anger within their family, as a clinician, I came to appreciate the value of viewing anger contextually. That is, the children's experience of anger toward their parents is embedded in the interactions amongst the family members. Clinicians need to understand the importance and significance of helping parents and children reveal the intents, thoughts, expectations, feelings, and actions that each attach to the anger incident and its effects upon each other as well as on other family members. Contextual understanding of anger also allows clinicians to avoid making stereotypical assumptions without understanding the unique characteristics of each individual child and of the individual situations with anger. Equally important, clinicians must educate themselves about the possible sources and influences on their clients' families (or society) which may lead to the differences between individuals.

Parent-Child Interaction

The reciprocal, bi-directional influence between parent and child interaction during anger was confirmed by this study. By thinking in a systemic orientation, I was able to identify some circular interaction patterns between parent and child during anger which further increased my understanding of their experience of anger.

I encourage clinicians not to overlook the possible value of a systemic approach to understanding parent-child anger. Through my discussions with parent participants I realized that they were able to relate to the dynamics involved in the circular interaction patterns with their child. They become more self-reflective about their own behavior and also become more mindful of the effects of their responses on the child. Moreover, they tended to be willing and interested in examining other possible appropriate alternatives in interacting with the child. My clinical observation is that when parents take the lead to make changes within themselves and the ways in which they relate to the child, it creates a positive momentum and as a result, the child may be also attempt to make changes.

Helping parent(s) and child maintain a dialogue in resolving anger is an essential area. Parent participants in the study reported positive experiences when using conversation with the child as a means to sort out the problems related to an anger incident. Dialogue facilitated a closeness between parent and child and brought closure to the incident of anger. Furthermore, physical expressions of love, such as hugging, were found to be crucial for parents to show the child love and support regardless of situational conflicts or concerns. A difficulty associated with dialoguing between parent and child is that talking with a child can be a difficult task. During the study, I found that it was not uncommon for the young children to have a quick, one-word reply or response to their parents' requests or suggestions – that response was commonly expressed as "No." At the same time, it appeared that parents had a difficult time dealing with the "No" response. Parents interpretations of "No" seemed to range from disrespect, noncompliance, resistance, withdrawal, stubbornness, or non-cooperation from the child.

It appeared that the "No" response is an over-simplified statement which could carry a number of different meanings. The parent participants in this study advocated the importance of viewing the child's anger within the context of their developmental needs, such as the need to make their own decisions and striving for independence. As clinicians, we should encourage parents to listen to the "No" response and question what "No" means by relating to the child's developmental characteristics and needs. It might be worthwhile to discuss with parents issues relating to the children's principles of justice in the service of their own interests, which was a common phenomenon associated with anger between parent and child in this study. Also, it would be appropriate for clinicians to examine the issue of frustration tolerance experienced by parent and child when angry. From a clinical viewpoint, discussion about the skills related to dealing with one's frustration would be an important aspect in the intervention of anger.

Moreover, clinicians can promote parent-child interaction in therapy. From my clinical practice, it seems that it is not uncommon for children to be left out during a clinical family interview. It is challenging for a clinician to engage an adult and a child to participate in a therapeutic conversation. Play therapy techniques made a significant contribution when interviewing children during this study. It might be worthwhile for clinicians to consider applying family play therapy (based on a family therapy approach and play therapy approach), especially when working with younger children within a family context (Ackerman, 1970; Chasin & White, 1989; Christensen & Thorngren, 2000; Gil, 1994; Keith & Whitaker, 1981; Kobak & Waters, 1984; Rotter & Bush, 2000).

Parenting Support

The parent participants desire for involvement in dealing with their child's anger indicated that they were active agents in the process of raising their children. A number of useful practices identified by the parents involved in this study echo those of the STEP programme – Systematic Training for Effective Parenting – based on Adlerian psychology (Dinkmeyer & McKay,1973; 1990; Sherman & Dinkmeyer, 1987). For instance, some of the STEP ideas concern parents "being firm without being dominating, reflective listening, talking with children but not to children, eliciting cooperation, expressing feelings instead of anger and exploring alternatives together with children" (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1964). The aim of the parent training program is to strengthen the parent-child interaction which is a critical aspect in dealing with anger incidents.

The issue of self-caring was one of the significant reflections shared by the parent participants in this study. Many indicated a responsibility for handling their own frustration and maintaining control over themselves when faced with an angry situation with their child. They also noticed the resulting calming effects of their behavior on the child in de-escalating the intensity of anger and bringing about a gradual resolution. Parents recognized the value of 'cooling down' especially when they did not feel capable of initiating a dialogue with their child without also becoming angry. Many came to recognize that there were times when they had to give up the idea of 'absolute control,' when they realized that control might not always be possible and that the ability to remain in control was reduced when other demands were placed upon them. Thus, clinicians

need to offer support to parents to strengthen their ability to manage their emotional well-being, an important component in the therapeutic process of working with the family.

Limitations

Doing qualitative research with young children of four and five years old is a challenge, particularly given the restricted verbal ability of the children. As phenomenological research relies on the participants sharing their experiences verbally, it was not an easy task to formulate a rich description of the lived experience of anger based on the children's often brief responses during interviews. At times, I questioned my approach in interviewing or the choice of words in my questions. I wondered whether I had given the children enough space to reveal their feelings, if I had asked leading questions or used abstract expressions, or if I had underestimated their verbal ability. On reflection, while the limited verbal ability of younger children can be a limitation in conducting phenomenological research, I found that the use of play made it easier for me to enter into the child's world and to understand the first-person or insider perspective. For instance, the use of drawings, pretend play, puppet play, and so on during my interviews offered an excellent medium for the child participants to share with me their experience of anger in a fun, non-threatening atmosphere. In the interview process, I came to realize that 'play' is the language of the child, as compared to 'words,' the language amongst adults. The positive value of using play in conducting qualitative research with children seems to have been shared by other qualitative researchers as well (e.g., Anderson & Anderson, 1996; Alex & Ritchie, 1992; Haase & Rostad, 1994; Jacobson, 1994; Robinson, 1987; Woodgate & Kristjanson, 1996).

This study concerned the lived experience of anger in children. I came to realize that, as it was a descriptive, exploratory study, on some occasions it was difficult to remain focused when presenting the findings. Furthermore, from a systemic perspective, the parent-child dyad is only one of the many systems within a family unit. There are likely many other valid systems in which anger plays a role, including the sibling sub-system, the parents sub-system, the parents and other siblings sub-system, and so on. As the study focused on the experience of anger within a parent-child interaction context, the information derived from the study is limited and must be considered within this particular context, the qualitative nature of this study.

There is another limitation concerning the selection of participants. As there was not a representative sample of Canadian cultural diversity in the present study, the interpretation of the findings within a cultural context was not possible.

Furthermore, it is important to be cognizant that the themes which emerged from this study were grounded within the time, situation, and characteristics of the participants involved. I expect that no two researchers would come up with exactly the same interpretation of the data. Moreover, as Osborne (1990, p. 87) argued "there is no absolute interpretation of the data .... The best the researcher can do is to argue a particular interpretation as persuasively as possible, supported by references to the data, and leave the final judgement to the reader." The existence of different possible interpretations is also based on the belief that there is no single truth (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

To summarize, the limitations described above include the challenge associated with conducting phenomenological research with younger children involved in qualitative research, the exploratory nature of the study, and the exclusive focus on the parent-child interaction.

Implications for Further Research

I concur with Thomas (1991) that the phenomenological experience of anger has yet to be well explored. A recent survey conducted by DiGiuseppe (1999) revealed that between 1985 and 1997 the number of studies on anger, compared with studies on depression and anxiety, were only about one tenth and one seventh respectively. The first systemic perspective on anger appeared in 1999 by Robins and Novaco (DiGiuseppe, 1999). It is understood that anger occurs more often in the home than in other places (Kassinove, Sukhodolsky, Tsytsarev, & Soloyova, 1997). Therefore, more research is needed in order to expand our understanding of the experience of anger among family members.

Stemming from my experience in conducting this study, it seems that further research is required in a number of areas which have not been well explored. These areas include: children's self-regulation during anger, anger and power or powerlessness, gender and anger in children, and the sadness experienced by children during anger indicents. Furthermore, with respect to the issue of anger within a family context, it would be interesting to conduct a study of the anger experiences of three different generations (e.g., grandparent-parent-child) to better understand the process of socialization of anger within a family. More research in parents' perceptions of their

roles in dealing with children's anger and the culture of anger within a family would also

be instrumental in enabling us to understand better the children's experience of anger

within the family context. Moreover, a longitudinal research study to follow up on the

preschoolers' population with the lived experience of anger would be a fascinating

project.

Participation rates for children from minority ethnic groups is relatively low.

Studies conducted with a more diversified population would help to develop a better

understanding in areas such as the social and cultural aspects of anger as well as

intervention with anger.

Currently, studies of anger are primarily based on quantitative research methods.

There are benefits to using a qualitative approach in understanding children's experience

of anger, for instance, the possibility for the researcher to capture a rich and thick

description of the participants' experience and achieve a deeper understanding of the

phenomenon and how the meanings of experiences are generated. Moreover, the time

commitment in doing qualitative research with children was worthwhile as it allowed me

to establish a strong rapport between myself and the participants. I felt honoured that the

participants treated me with respect and trust. Thus, while it was a lengthy process to

conduct interviews with all the participants, it was also a necessary and fruitful one.

It would be interesting to examine the impacts of the phenomenological interview

process on participants. For instance, to explore whether the participants find the

interview process therapeutic or enhancing to their personal growth. Also, it would be

worthwhile studying the effectiveness of the application of play techniques from play therapy in conducting qualitative research with an even younger population.

Concluding Comments

This research has added to the somewhat scant literature available concerning the lived experience of anger in children in a parent-child interaction context. However, this is an area which could and should be expanded upon. Perhaps the initiative in conducting this research will attract interest and support from other researchers and practitioners to conduct further quality research to help develop a better understanding of children's anger. On a personal note, I believe that anger still carries with it a mystery – that is, anger can be a constructive, functional, adaptive experience, and at the same time, can become a destructive, dysfunctional, nonadaptive phenomenon. After working closely with children, I have come to realize how difficult it may be for children to convey their experience of anger to others, in this case, to their parents and to myself as a researcher. There is still much more that we need to learn about children's anger, particularly in a parent-child interaction context.

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Appendix A

<u>Cover Letter</u>

Address

Dear _____ ,

My name is Chee-Ping Tsai, and I am a doctoral student in the Counselling

Psychology Program, Department of Educational Psychology at the University of

Calgary. I am currently conducting my dissertation research under the supervision of Dr.

Kathy Cairns, as part of the requirements towards a Ph.D. degree. I am writing to

provide information regarding my research project, "The Lived Experience of Anger in

Children" so that you can make an informed decision regarding you and your child's

participation.

The purpose of this dissertation research is to develop a better understanding of

the essence of the experience of anger in children. Specifically, I am interested in

exploring with preschool-aged children their perspectives regarding the nature of anger

and the meaning of anger.

My contacts with you, your spouse/partner, and your child would proceed as

follows:

- I would begin the study by conducting an informal play session (about forty five

  minutes long) with your child at your home.

- I would interview you and your spouse/partner individually two times,

  approximately for an hour each interview, regarding these areas: anger incidents

  that occurred between you and your child during the past three weeks, your

understanding of your child's anger, your child's reaction to parental anger, and your relationship with your child.

- I would schedule two play interview sessions with your child to engage in some pretend play activities and to discuss his/her experiences of dealing with anger, each interview to be approximately one hour in length.

- I will schedule a feedback session with yourself, your spouse/partner, and your child separately to see if my interpretation fits with the experience each of you have and add any significant missing information. The feedback session will last for approximately one and a half hours.

The interviews with you/your child will be audiotaped and will then be transcribed. I will be able to share my analysis of the interviews with you and your child after the interviews are completed. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate/give your permission for your child to participate in the study, both of you are free to withdraw at any time for any reason and without penalty.

The benefit of participation for you and your child includes your contribution to the process of developing a better understanding of the anger experience in children and to the process of helping to improve the methodology of qualitative research in this area. The potential risk may be that you/your child may experience distress or other physical/psychological reactions. If there is any sign of distress observed or known during an interview, I will consult with my supervisors and referrals for professional help will be made readily if deemed necessary.

To ensure confidentiality, the tapes and the transcripts, which will be identified only by a pseudonym, will be kept in a locked cabinet at the researcher's office. The data will be shared with the supervisory committee. The tapes will be erased after the completion of the dissertation. The transcripts will be retained as they may be used for presentations and/or publications in the future.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 220-9200, my supervisor, Dr. Kathy Cairns at 220-5980, the Office of the Chair, Faculty of Education Joint Ethics Committee at 220-5626, or the Office of the Vice-President (Research) at 220-3381. Two copies of the consent form are provided. Please return one signed copy to me and retain the other copy for your records.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Chee-Ping Tsai

Appendix B

<u>Consent Form</u>

I, _____, hereby agree to participate and to have my child, (child's name) participate in the dissertation research project entitled "The Lived Experience of Anger in Children" .

I understand that such consent means that the researcher would proceed with the interviews as follows:

- conduct an informal play audiotaped session (about forty five minutes long) with my child at my home.

- interview myself and my spouse/partner individually two times on tape, approximately an hour for each interview, regarding these areas: anger incidents that occurred between myself and my child during the past three weeks, my understanding of my child's anger, my child's reaction to parental anger, and my relationship with my child.

- schedule two play audiotaped interview sessions with my child to engage in some pretend play activities and to discuss his/her experiences of dealing with anger, each one hour in length.

- schedule an autiotaped feedback session, approximately one and a half hour long, with myself, my spouse/partner, and my child separately to see if her interpretation fits with the experience each of us have and add any significant missing information.

I understand that participation in this study may be terminated at any time by my request or at the request of the researcher. There is no reason to believe that participation in this project and/or withdrawal from this project will adversely affect me in any way.

I understand that in the event that my child or myself experiences distress during the research process, the researcher will discuss the problem with my child and myself (in the case of distress experienced by my child) or with myself (in the case of distress experienced by myself) and will further consult her supervisors. Referrals for assistance will be provided if necessary.

I understand that only the researcher and her supervisory committee will have access to the tapes and the transcripts. This material will be stored in a locked cabinet. The raw data and tapes will be identified by pseudonym only. The tapes will be erased after the completion of the research. The transcripts will be retained as they may be used for presentations and/or publications in the future.

I have been given a copy of this consent form for my records. I understand that if I have any questions, I can contact the researcher at 220-9200, her supervisor, Dr. Kathy Cairns at 220-5980, or the Office of the Chair, Faculty of Education Joint Ethics Committee at 220-5626, or the Office of the Vice-President (Research) at 220-3381.

Name of Parents: _____

Signature of Parents: _____

Name of child: _____

Child's date of birth: _____

Date signed: _____