

UNDERSTANDING THE INFLUENCES OF PARENTING A CHILD WITH
OPPOSITIONAL DEFIANT DISORDER ON THE MARITAL RELATIONSHIP: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

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Liberty University Doctoral Student

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Abstract

Using a phenomenological framework this qualitative study explored the experience of parenting a child with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) and its influence on the marital relationship. Eight intact married couples with children previously diagnosed with ODD were interviewed to assess each couple's communication, non-sexual and sexual intimacy, conflict management, conflict avoidance, parenting disagreement related conflict, religious faith and practice, and social/recreational activities as it related to parenting an ODD child. The results of the study confirmed that the couples perceived several negative effects which included disagreement over parenting, being critical of or blaming spouse for parenting difficulties, increased stress levels, disruption of religious faith or practice, poor communication, reduction of sexual and nonsexual intimacy, restricted social activity, and increased levels of resentment. The couple's identified three positive effects that included being forced to "be on the same page," being better parents for the other children in the home, and strengthening of religious faith.

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife Elizabeth. She has been a constant source of love, acceptance, and encouragement in my life, no matter what journey I have chosen to undertake. She has worked tirelessly to support our family, affording me the luxury of pursuing my education. Nothing in my life that is, could be, without her. I would literally be a ship lost at sea without her abiding presence being my true north, my guiding star.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction of the Problem

As a licensed professional counselor that specializes in working with adolescents, I regularly deal with teenagers with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD). My clinical work has given me a unique position to see how this disorder creates havoc in the home. This disorder influences a teen's relationship with parents, siblings, teachers, and most authority figures the teen encounters. But one of the major impacts I witness in my practice is the influence of this disorder on the marriage relationship of the teen's parents.

This study explored the lived experience of parenting an ODD child and to understand the influences on the marital relationship of the parents. Much of the existent literature had focused on the parent's actions having a negative influence on the life of a child, but few studies had examined the opposite, namely, how the child's aberrant behavior may influence the marital relationship of the parents. Although other research (Ben-David & Lavee, 1996; Benzies, Harrison, & Magill-Evans, 2004; Morokoff & Gilliland, 1993) has focused upon the negative effects of life stresses on a marriage relationship, this study investigated the essence of parenting an ODD child and revealed the influences, both positive or negative, on the marriage relationship.

Statement of the Problem

Buehler and Gerard (2002) reported that ample research supports the contention that poor marital relationships have an adverse influence on a child's behavior. They

noted that poor marital relationships are associated with a greater use of harsh discipline and lower levels of parental involvement in the lives of their children, which in turn leads to more maladaptive behavior by children. Buehler and Gerard contended that absent fathers, depressed mothers, marital conflict, dysfunctional parenting, and peer and community influence correlate with conduct problems in children. There has been scant research, however, on the possible influences of parenting an oppositional child on the parent's marital relationship. Rudestam and Newton (2001) maintained that the research literature defines the context and purpose of any new study. The identified scarcity of comparable data in the literature therefore demonstrated a lack of research attempting to understand this aspect of the parent-teen interaction and a need to conduct new research studies in the field.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of parenting children with ODD while exploring influences of these experiences on the marital relationship. This perspective represented a departure from the body of related literature. Whereas most related studies examined the downward effects of the parent's marital relationship on the behavior of their children, this study explored the upward influence of the child's negative behaviors on the marital relationship.

Significance of the Study

The resulting data will be useful in several ways. The information gleaned from this study will be beneficial to professional counselors, pastors, and others who engage in

marriage and family therapy. When presented with the family of an oppositional child, the therapist can preemptively intervene in the marriage with information pertaining to known relationship issues. Such intervention could help preclude possible marriage difficulties in the future, thus helping to stabilize the entire family structure. Due to the paucity of research concerning this aspect of the parent–oppositional child relationship, this study adds new information to the body of knowledge in marriage and family research. This study also adds specifically to the study of ODD by seeking to understand each family’s experience with the disorder. Hill (1984) maintained that the researcher many times may also come to understand that what he or she has discovered both as a counselor and a person is more significant than the possible contribution to the field of study. Thus, this study was meant to assist me in my desire to help adolescents and their families through the psychotherapeutic process.

Assumptions Contained in the Study

When conducting a qualitative research study, several assumptions must be considered. Caelli, Ray, and Mill (2003) noted that the research choices made during any qualitative study are characterized by a set of assumptions, preconceptions, and beliefs. There were several assumptions contained in this study. The first assumption was that the diagnosis of ODD was correct in the children of the participating couples. This assumption was based on a diagnosis provided by a professional counselor licensed by the State of Texas who worked with the child and his or her parents.

The second assumption was that any marital difficulties that may have existed were in some way influenced by familial interaction with the oppositional child. It was

not assumed that the marriages were otherwise perfect, but if any problems did exist, they were assumed to be exacerbated in some way by the interaction with the child.

Another assumption is that the participants were honest and straightforward in their answers during the interview. This assumption is the bane of individual psychotherapy. A counselor is limited to the words that come out of a client's mouth and to the assumption that those words represent the honest thoughts and feelings of the client. This study was subject to the same constraint.

Finally, it was assumed that the participating couples would have insight into their inner thoughts and feelings regarding their relationship. A thorough, detailed interview underlaid this supposition. These assumptions were foundational to the study's concept and characterize its purpose. They needed to be acknowledged as the framework through which the study could proceed to completion and produce an outcome.

Definition of Terms

To assist both those who read this study and those couples involved in the study, it is important to operationally define the terms. Significant terms were defined as follows:

Communication: This term was operationally defined as the act of clarifying transactions among family members (Satir & Bitter, 2000).

Companionship: This term was operationally defined as a couple focusing on themselves, spending quality time together, and finding satisfaction in being together in day-to-day moments of life (Beck, 1988).

Conflict: This term was operationally defined as disagreement over a perceived breach of relational rules that include anger and recrimination (Beck, 1988).

Conflict avoidance: This term was operationally defined as how a couple minimizes the importance of a problem and does not confront a conflicting issue in a straightforward manner (Gottman, 1999).

Conflict management: This term was operationally defined as how a couple specifically chooses to find resolution to conflict episodes (Gottman, 1999).

Intimacy: This term was operationally defined as a by-product of a caring, accepting, sensitive, and understanding relationship between two people. Intimacy is comprised of sharing personal thoughts and feelings, discussing everyday information, and close physical contact (Beck, 1988).

Oppositional Defiant Disorder: The definition used in this study was based on the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorder's* (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) definition, which states the following:

A pattern of negativistic, hostile, and defiant behavior lasting at least 6 months, during which four (or more) of the following are present:

- (1) often loses temper
- (2) often argues with adults
- (3) often actively defies or refuses to comply with adult's requests or rules
- (4) often deliberately annoys people
- (5) often blames others for his or her mistakes or misbehavior
- (6) is often touchy or easily annoyed by others
- (7) is often angry and resentful

(8) is often spiteful or vindictive

Satisfaction: This term was operationally defined as the couple's feelings of fulfillment in the relationship, the pleasant experiences that give the couple a baseline for future comparison (Beck, 1988).

Qualitative Limitations of the Study

Within every research study, there are some aspects of the project that limit its ability to be generalized to a larger population. The limitations within a qualitative study are decidedly different from those found in a quantitative study. Patton (2002) held that the phenomenological procedures and methods of qualitative studies often fail to convince skeptical, quantitative researchers that they merit legitimacy. It would be arrogant to assume that simply because the two methods are different that one is seen to be superior to the other. Van Manen (1990) concluded that although phenomenological research is experiential and based on lived experiences, it is not naturally slanted toward empiricism, meaning that phenomenology goes beyond causal scrutiny and is deemed to be holistic. Phenomenology is unable to debate or claim points of view, and it cannot establish that certain behaviors are more valuable than others. Van Manen also acknowledged that phenomenological research does not make irrefutable statements that create functional generalities, legal doctrine, or verification of functionality of people. The overarching purpose of phenomenological research then is not to generalize results to the greater population, but to add to understanding in a certain area of research.

Given this understanding of the nature of phenomenological research, this study had several limitations. The first limitation was that all the participating couples were

Christians. Second, this study was limited in that the cases chosen were from couples who wanted Christian counseling for their child's behavior. This set the couples apart from couples who did not seek help or sought help through secular psychotherapy. Another limitation was that all the participants were from middle-class to upper-middle-class homes. Finally, all eight participating couples were Caucasian. These limitations were due to the unique aspects of the convenience sample used.

Role and Background of the Researcher

The researcher holds a unique position in phenomenological studies. His or her job is to, not only, engage in a series of measures that adhere to the scientific requirements for a controlled, regimented, and methodical study (Moustakas, 1994), but the researcher him or herself is an integrated aspect of the phenomenological research process itself. This type of study puts the researcher inside the lived experiences of people, not only to observe events, but to concurrently pursue the meanings that encompass those events (Stake, 1995). Since by its nature phenomenological research is interpretive, so the researcher's, background, worldview, biases, beliefs, and life experience play a significant role in how the study is performed. This is why Creswell (2003) states, "the qualitative researcher systematically reflects on who he or she is in the inquiry, and is sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study" (p. 182). Since I will be using semi-structured interviews in this study, I will have the opportunity to engage the participants in an intimate, personal fashion. This, as Grafanaki (1996) asserts, can help to establish a "research alliance" between myself and the participants. This alliance, or relationship, is very much akin to the therapeutic

relationship that exists between counselor and client. This relationship helps to promote trust and relational comfort, which in turn, should help the free flow of truthful, unguarded data. This is what makes the relationship between the researcher and participant is crucial to this type of study. As in the psychotherapeutic process itself, research participants are not nearly as likely to provide personal, confidential data if there is not the perception of a trusting relationship with the researcher. This relationship is the key to effective phenomenological research (Cowles, 1988). Since the personal interplay between participant and researcher is so intimate during a qualitative study, the need for empathic neutrality is necessary. Patton (2002) defines this concept as being empathically engaged with the stories the study participants are sharing, while remaining neutral with regard to the content of those stories.

My role in this research process was to, (a) determine study, (b) determine proper design, (c) design method of participant selection, (d) develop semi-structured interview outlines, (e) conduct various data collection procedures, (f) organize and analyze data, (g) report findings of collective themes derived from data collected, (h) adhere to strict ethical standards throughout the research study.

Leedy (1997) explains that the researcher often times has a personal history with the research topic being studied and has to be aware that this history may impact the way he or she views the issue while, theoretically, examining it through the eyes of others. My personal experience with this phenomenon dates back quite a few years. I followed the call of God upon my life, while I was still in high school, to become a vocational minister. It was not until the end of my seminary experience, at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Ft. Worth, Texas, that God clarified my calling to that of

working with teenagers within the context of the local church. My passion for seeing young people grow in their relationship with Christ is still with me to this day, as I now am owner and director of counseling at The Timothy Center, a Christian counseling center in Austin, Texas that specializes in working with adolescents.

Through out my twenty years as a youth minister, I worked with countless teenagers and their families through times of grief, rebellion, confusion, as well as times of joy and celebration. But when I would come across a young person with serious emotional issues, I was too aware of my lack of knowledge and expertise to help them in a way that was more than simply loving and praying for them. This was at the basis of my decision to follow God through the next door ministry that He opened for me. That is to go back to school and obtain my Masters of Art in Professional Counseling from Liberty University, and open up The Timothy Center in the fall of 2001.

I knew that my desire was to work with struggling teenagers, but I had no idea, at the beginning, how much of my time would be spent with the parents of these struggling adolescents. The majority of the clients that I work with are ODD teenage boys. From the outset, it was not difficult to recognize that not only was there an issue with the child, but, in most cases, the parents were struggling with their marriage relationships as well. The desire to understand these parent's experience and attempt to ascertain any significant issues related to parenting these very difficult teenagers was the underlying motivation for the specific selection of the research topic of this study.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

The remaining chapters of this dissertation focus attention on how the research questions were answered and the rationale, structure, and manner in which the study was implemented. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature. The chapter shows the preponderance of studies describe the impact of parental behavior on children's behavior and the relative absence of literature addressing the effect of children's behavior on the marriage relationship. Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology of the study and examines the study participants, the role and description of the researcher, the procedural aspects of the study, and the method of data collection and organization to be utilized. Chapter 4 tells the stories of the participating couples, interprets the data, describes the results of the study, and provides recommendations for further research. And finally, Chapter 5 offers interpretations of the research findings and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Reference of the Researcher

This chapter reviews the research literature that was germane to the research questions outlined in this study. The chapter will, as Rudestam and Newton (2001) explained, “clarify the relationship between the proposed study and previous work conducted on the topic” (p. 56). The chapter also demonstrates how this research project stands distinct and unique from other studies in the field and how this study is considered necessary.

Lather (1986) noted that building the theoretical framework for a study should involve a give-and-take interaction between the data and the theory. The study must be able to produce ideas that stem from an a priori theoretical point of view that in no way inhibits the data from telling whatever story the data desire to tell. This symbiotic relationship between data and theory provides a structural set of boundaries for the study.

The a priori theoretical framework that underlaid this study stemmed from my own worldview and life experience. Because I am a Christian, my biblical Christian worldview is the lens by which I view the entire world. Human behavior, history, social interaction, science, and art all are experienced through the prism of biblical truth. My faith certainly influences my view on helping clients in my psychotherapeutic practice. Collins (1988) pointed to the fact that Christian counselors, like me, bring to the psychotherapeutic process a uniquely Christian set of assumptions, uniquely Christian goals, uniquely Christian methods, and uniquely Christian counselor characteristics, all of

which are dictated by Scripture that frames my experience and influences my theoretical approach to helping others. The psychotherapeutic theory to which I subscribe is cognitive behavioral. This theory contains the framework through which I attempt to understand people and their behavior. I believe that the cognitive patterns that individuals demonstrate play a major role in the functional or dysfunctional behaviors of those people. Sullivan and Schwebel (1995) stressed, “Cognitions such as irrational beliefs, arbitrary inference, dichotomous reasoning, and overgeneralization can be primary factors in causing, or at least maintaining, maladaptive behaviors and psychological disorders in individuals” (p. 298). Gladding (2002) perceived that all behaviors are learned and that people, as well as families, act according to the collection of reinforced behaviors. Some of the leading proponents of cognitive behavioral marital and family therapy are Aaron Beck, Frank Dattilio, Albert Ellis, Norman Epstein, and Andrew Schwebel. This theoretical structure provides my psychotherapeutic point of view, guided the perspective of this study, and sheds light on the rest of the literature review.

The Parent’s Impact on the Child’s Behavior

Much of the research to date addressed the influence of parents attitudes and actions on the behavior of their children. This section examines several of those influences and their impact on the life of the children. Mann and Mackenzie (1996) suggested that a surplus of research that examines the relationship between parental behavior and child welfare and conduct. Studies have consistently shown a strong correlation between marital dissatisfaction and overt marital conflict and children’s oppositional behavior. Buehler and Gerard (2002) examined numerous explanations for

these findings. One such explanation was that dysfunctional marital relationships lead to dysfunctional parenting practices. Buehler and Gerard reported that marital conflict has been positively linked with callous disciplinary practices used by parents, lower levels of parental participation, and more recurrent parent-child conflict. Buehler and Gerard also concluded that conflicted parents are also less likely to praise their kids, read to them, engage in recreation with them, or spend time with them in relational or social activities. This detachment fuels negative relationships within families. For example, Lindahl and Malik (1999) noted that families where both parents blame their children and scapegoat them demonstrate high levels of marital discord and externalizing behaviors in the children are evident. This type of parenting strategy, or lack of one, may be seen as an example of how maladaptive parenting styles and child misbehavior become intertwined and reciprocally reinforcing. Lindahl and Malik also noted that according to family systems theory, what is most important is the way these behaviors are substantiated through family interaction styles and how they serve a homeostatic function, in that it helps to maintain balance within the family system.

Marchand and Hock (2003) suggested other factors involving parents' actions and attitudes have been shown to affect children's behavior. For example, depression in parents is related to a particular style of conflict management in the home. Mothers and fathers with depressive symptoms were shown to use more evading and aggressive conflict resolution strategies in the marriage and family relationship. These maladaptive conflict resolution styles can be positively correlated to the children's destructive behaviors. Webster, Stratton, and Hammond (1999) showed that negative parental conflict management styles can also impact children's ability to manage conflict properly

themselves, with either family or peers. Although Verlaan and Schwartzman (2002) suggested that, in addition to dysfunctional parenting styles, parental antisocial behavior has a monumental influence on children's adjustment difficulties. Such detrimental parental conduct plays a major role in family disturbance and the growth of children's externalizing behaviors. This conduct also leads to adjustment problems in children, such as anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression, as well as destructive and aberrant behaviors.

Katz and Woodin (2002) showed that parental hostility and conflict seem to be the most prevalent negative influences on children within the family system. Antagonism and lack of involvement within the marital relationship are the most caustic form of marital disagreement and are linked to dysfunction throughout many levels of the family system. When husbands and wives participate in both aggressive and distancing behaviors in their interaction with one another, they tend to have children who exhibit harmful affect and non-cooperation with peers who have higher levels of externalizing issues. Mahoney and Scavone (1997) contended this subject can even be narrowed to include parents who improperly argue about what is proper parenting. This aspect of parents fighting with each other over parenting issues has also been shown to adversely influence children's actions and attitudes. Jekielek (1998) also showed that parental marital conflict significantly increases children's anxiety and depression. Troxel and Matthews (2004) noted that marital conflict and dissolution of the marital relationship are early environmental adversities that negatively impact children's physical health. The impact of the parent's behavior on the child's behavior is, therefore, well documented, but the timing of that influence also seems to be an important factor. In contrast, Lindahl and Malik (1999) found that if parents are able to successfully and understandingly work

through problems together, they evidence more involved and supportive parenting with their children.

The Timing of the Parent's Influence

Simons, Chao, Conger, and Elder (2001) demonstrated the time at which the dysfunctional parenting is employed also seems to be influential. Parents of compliant children demonstrate elevated levels of monitoring and authority during late childhood but then loosen parental control as their children proceed through the adolescent years. Simons et al. contended that this lessening of control is, most likely, the consequence of the children having confirmed that they can be trusted by the parents. Simons et al. also noted, however, that parents of ODD children use very little supervision and control during late childhood. They then show a propensity to exert greater discipline during the adolescent years. This movement toward more discipline is almost certainly a reaction to the oppositional/defiant behavior being exhibited by the adolescent child. There is a well-known idiom that one parents teenagers when they are two. Consistency in parental expectations is foundational to healthy parent–child interaction. This reactionary change in parenting tactics during the teen years is all but a familial explosion waiting to happen.

Transgenerational Aspect of Parental Influence

Knauth (2001) suggested parental influence, by definition, is transgenerational. That is to say, the influence of the parent's parents is crucial to understanding the parents' influence on their own children. The manner in which parents were parented and the nature of their parents' marriage can also predict how they might nurture their own

children and how the parents will treat each other. This is why helping parents of oppositional children work through their relational difficulties is so important. By helping the parents model a more functional, healthy marriage relationship, their children may avoid such family difficulties when they are grown.

Divorce and Separation

Morrison and Coiro (1999) discussed the impact of divorce and separation on the well-being and conduct of children. Issues related to divorce, such as the absence of parents, differences in custody and relationships, and deterioration in parents' psychological welfare, give explanation to an escalation in children's maladaptive behaviors. Videon (2002) posited that the loss of a positive co-residential relationship between parents acts as a source of stress for children. He noted that it curbs a child's contact and propinquity to parental influence, control, nurturance, and other parental resources, thus leading to more negative, externalizing behavior patterns. It is therefore, imperative, for the children's sake, to find ways to keep marriages together. Data indicate that when the marriage fails, there is a trickle-down effect to the children at the time of the divorce and later in life, when they seek to establish healthy marriages and families.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

Grolnick, Weiss, McKenzie, and Wrightman (1996) showed that the correlation between parental behavior and child conduct may become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Perceptions tend to be reality to those perceiving them. That is, parents who view their children as difficult tend to be less concerned and more oppressive and provide greater

structure than those who see their kids as conforming. These parents tend to stereotype their children and then look for behaviors in their children to support this stereotypical view. DeKlyen, Speltz, and Greenberg (1998) demonstrated this is also true for the marriage relationship. When that relationship is seen as positive, it can overflow to the parent–child relationship. In a good marital relationship, both parents find it easier to be concerned with their roles as parents. A relationship that is believed to be poor may lead to anxiety and a loss of social support and divert attention away from parenting. This in turn will decrease positive parental involvement and increase irritation and pessimism, which can be a form of relational cognitive distortion. Such couples tend to filter out the positive and focus solely on the negative.

The Mother's Special Influence

Hill and Bush (2001) discussed a mother's special influence in a child's life and how it can be a powerful force for good or ill. Children with mothers who feel uncertain of their parenting skills and use love conditionally tend to report more anxious children. Mothers who display hostile control and discipline are more likely to have children with conduct problems. Wang and Crane (2001) noted that mothers tend to have much more of a positive influence on their children's behavior than fathers. This could be attributed to the fact that it is socially accepted that mothers should be psychologically available to their children in spite of their own problems. Women may be able to deliberately disconnect their roles as wives and as mothers, thereby lessening the impact of a poor marital relationship on their responsibility as mothers. In contrast, Stormshak, Speltz, DeKlyen, and Greenburg (1997) assessed family interactions during unstructured clinical

intakes. The patterns of family interactions observed in this study showed that fathers tended to have a more negative impact. This may be due to the fact that disconnected fathers produce a family atmosphere in which children feel more at ease with their mothers. This may cause children and mothers to create alliances that segregate fathers and may lead to the father's retreat from family interactions and an increased expression of negative behaviors within the family.

Sturge-Apple, Gondoli, Bonds, and Salem (2003) indicated that marital conflict has also been shown to be associated with negativity in the mother's relationship with the preadolescent child. This marital conflict has been linked to a lack of responsiveness on the part of the mother in the mother-child relationship. Parents who experience unremitting marital conflict are likely to have limited emotional availability for their children. The lower the levels of conflict are, the less negative the mother-preadolescent relationship tends to be. Although parents have a paramount influence on their children's lives and behavior, other environmental factors contribute as well.

Environmental Influences on Children's Behavior

Simons, Kuei-Hsiu, Gordon, Brody, Murry, and Conger (2002) noted that not only do parents have a profound impact on their children's behavior, but the environment that the children are exposed to contributes as well. The positive influence of parents lessens as the antisocial behavior increases within the immediate community in which they live. This suggests that parental supervision and discipline approaches that are successful in normal neighborhoods may not be adequate to avoid children's antisocial behaviors in high-risk areas. Thus, children's behavior seems to mimic the behavior of

the immediate community in which they live. This is another example of an old adage being empirically reinforced. When it comes to a child's behavior and attitude, "Who their friends are is who they will become." The influence of the community on the life of the family can be seen in the real estate industry: increasing the price of homes makes the community around that home more stable and healthy.

A Child's Influence on the Parents

While researchers contend that there seems to be a symbiotic relationship between parent behavior and their children's behavior, virtually all the research only examines the relationship from the viewpoint of parental influence on child behavior and not the other way around. Except for a few studies, the research uniformly examines the issue from the top down. For example, when discussing the influence of children with cancer on the marriage relationship, Lavee and Mey-Dan (2003) noted, "The pattern of change in marital relationships across time indicates a greater deterioration in the marital relationship during the first year and in cases of long-term illness" (p. 260). Seiffge-Krenke (1999) investigated the link between family interpersonal relationships and the marital relationship and determined where there is open communication, emotional support, cohesion, and free expression of feelings within the family, these same characteristics are found in the marital relationship. Dadds, Sanders, Behrens, and James (1987) noted that spouse conflict is more frequent when children are misbehaving than when the children are behaving properly or are absent from the environment. Kashdan et al. (2004) suggested that oppositional defiant behavior in children correlates to higher levels of parental stress and other family disruptions. Therefore, even though a few

studies addressed a child's condition or a behavior's impact on the mental health and well-being of the parents, there was still a scarcity of research focusing on the effect of these behaviors on the parent's marriage relationship. There are, however, studies that point to the impact of general stress upon a marriage.

The Influences of Stress on the Marital Relationship

The literature does reflect attention to the more general role that ongoing stress may play in marital dysfunction. Ben-David and Lavee (1996) found four effects of ongoing stressful events on the marriage relationship. These effects were found in the areas of communication, agreement, cognitive and emotional roles, and family togetherness. The first effect, communication, has a positive benefit on a couple's coping skills, but during ongoing stressful episodes some couples tend to communicate less because they want to steer clear of volatile verbal conflicts. The couples try to avoid dealing with issues that would have a negative effect on the marriage relationship. Another effect of stress on the marriage relationship is agreement, which refers to families that define issues as having an impact on the entire family. Such couples show synchronization and consistency in stressful environments, which results in information being dispersed rapidly and role distribution and decisions disclosing authentic agreement. In the effect of cognitive and emotional roles within the family, in ongoing stress situations, family members usually depict their most important coping strategy as a need to keep on living in a business-as-usual way. This means that while members of the family continue in their prescribed behavioral roles, there is a need for a more cognitive–emotional understanding of those roles among family members. An example of this

would be who shows more optimism or pessimism. Finally, family togetherness was impacted. Many couples in ongoing stressful situations report a significant change in their relative closeness or distance, along with more arguments with sulking or withdrawal.

Morokoff and Gilliland (1993) noted that stress has been shown to have an effect on a broad variety of physiological, health, and psychological issues. Life stress has been shown to be associated with an assortment of sicknesses and physical problems. Psychologically, stress has been associated with sleep problems, cognitive issues, and mood disorders, so it is not unexpected that stress would also be linked to sexual dysfunction. Marital satisfaction may be directly related to the levels of sexual dysfunction brought on by these kinds of stressors. Benzies, Harrison, and Magill-Evans (2004) also found that parenting stress was a factor in discovering the frequency of childhood behavior problems and the impact of behavior problems on mothers and fathers. Stress has been found to be a destructive influence to people's physical health, mental health, and now their family's health.

Research Question for This Study

To study the upward effects of an adolescent's ODD on the marital relationship of the parents, a qualitative method was used. Creswell (2003) emphasized that in a qualitative study research questions are used as opposed to objectives or hypotheses. Research questions should focus on the essence of the central question asked by the study, yet be expressed in a very broad manner. The generality of the question serves to enhance exploration as the research itself unfolds. Stake (1995) added that good research

questions seek to uncover patterns in a given phenomenon and could be composed of expected or unexpected relationships.

The research question for this study is as follows: What is the day-to-day experience of parenting a child with ODD, and what, if any, are the influences of this parenting experience on the marital relationship of the parents? This question is specific enough to bring about useful conclusions to those working in the field of adolescent and family psychotherapy, without limiting the research as the experiences of the study participants are revealed.

Chapter Summary

This chapter recognized that the majority of the literature on parent–child interaction examined the influence of parental behavior on the life and conduct of their children. There is a paucity of research on the possible influences that a child with ODD behavioral issues may have on the marital relationship of the parents. To address this gap in the extant research, this study explored this issue and a possible correlation within the familial relationship. This chapter also delineated the research question for this study that will guide the entire remainder of this study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of parenting children with ODD and seek to understand any influences that experience may have had on the marital relationship. This chapter examines the methodology utilized in this qualitative study. It includes a description of the study design, the rationale of the study, the participants, the role and background of the researcher, the procedures, data organization, and ethical considerations.

Design of Study

The design of any study begins with a theoretical framework. The theoretical framework of this study is phenomenological, because as Rudestam and Newton (2001) noted, the phenomenological approach tries to explain and clarify meanings within the human experience. The underlying theoretical structure shapes the questions that are asked, how a research project is designed, the execution of the study, and the way the data are understood (Janesick, 1998). Because the purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of the parent-child relationship and its potential influences on the marital relationship, the model of phenomenology seemed to be the most appropriate method. Leedy (1997) explained, “In its broadest sense, phenomenology refers to a person’s construction of the meaning of a phenomenon, as opposed to the phenomenon as it exists external to the person” (p.161). This is why a phenomenological approach to this research topic was chosen. The approach provides the ability to describe the experiential

meanings of the events people experience while they are experiencing them (Van Manen, 1990).

A qualitative approach was preferred as the means to accomplish the research purpose, because a qualitative approach encompasses the concept of analyzing and interpreting the stories of people's lives to determine consequential themes that describe a specific observable fact (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Rudestam and Newton (2001) noted the word *qualitative* indicates data are presented in the form of words instead of numbers. The data are understood by using themes and categories evaluated subjectively, as opposed to descriptive and inferential statistics. This study sought to find meaning from the participants' experience through an interview process and the subjective interpretation of those interview transcripts.

Kvale (1996) described seven stages of a qualitative study, which were utilized in this study. The first stage is *thematizing*, which entails devising the purpose of the study in advance of the data-gathering stage. The next stage is *designing*, which refers to the task of designing the study so that the desired knowledge can be obtained. The third stage Kvale described is the *interviewing* process, during which the researcher obtains the research data from the research participants. *Transcribing* is the fourth stage of the qualitative study, during which the data are formatted for analysis. *Analyzing* is the fifth stage. During this stage, the proper method of data examination is determined based on the rationale of the study and the makeup of the data. Analyzing is followed by *verifying*, which allows the researcher to determine the generalizability, reliability, and validity of the data obtained. The last stage is *reporting*, when the researcher communicates the findings of the data analysis in a way that meets scientific standards.

Rationale for the Design

There are several reasons a phenomenological approach to qualitative research was utilized to obtain the data required to address the research questions in this study. The chosen design focused on the world as it is actually lived by the participants and centered how each couple's lived experience was described and understood, and how those interpreted meanings were extracted (Kvale, 1996). Wolcott (1990) posited one of the essential opportunities and challenges of working with people in a qualitative study is to view them as human beings as opposed to test subjects and to view ourselves as fellow human beings who are interacting with them instead of a scientific researcher. The information obtained was appropriate to the theoretical design of the study. All techniques and procedures were thoroughly documented and recorded so that a certain type of generalization of the data was maintained. Stake (1995) called this type of generalization *naturalistic generalization*, which means the conclusions are obtained through the researcher's personal interaction in a lived experience or through the vicarious experiences of others. Naturalistic generalization will aid others in further inquiries in this area of research. The qualitative study produced themes and common factors from the questionnaires and interviews and produced a textural-structural portrayal of the fundamental nature of this study.

The data collection portion of the study is composed of the compiled themes gathered in the semistructured interview sessions. Specific problems as well as positive issues attributed to parenting a child with ODD were explored within the marital relationship. The qualitative conclusions of the study, based on the collective in vivo experiences of the participants, helped to offer understanding of the experience of

parenting a child with ODD and any influences it may have on the marriage relationship of the parents involved.

Participants

This qualitative study begins and ends with the parent couples chosen as participants. Rudestam and Newton (2001) posited it was imperative participants were chosen on the basis of their ability to contribute to an evolving theory. Participants' most important credential is that their lived experience is germane to the particular study. In this case, eight couples participated in the study. Kvale (1996) noted that in qualitative research, "the number of interviews tend to be around 15, plus or minus 10. This number may be due to a combination of the time and resources available for the investigation and the law of diminishing returns" (p. 102). The participants were married couples that had sought private professional Christian counseling for their child at a private practice facility in the southwestern United States. The adequacy of the study population was determined by ensuring that the data selected gave sufficient power to the qualitative study's conclusions. The number of participating couples was intended to ensure a saturation of the data collected, without being so large as to make the study unmanageable. For inclusion in the study, a couple's child had to have received a singular diagnosis of ODD from a licensed professional counselor at the facility. To avoid another disorder confounding the results, any comorbid diagnosis excluded the child and the parents from participation in the study. The study participants in the convenience sample were intact, nonblended married couples. The intent of this study was to seek to understand the marital relationships of couples who have never been divorced;

participants were living with the first person they married and with whom that had children. Blended families can bring numerous adjustment issues into the arena of oppositional behavior that needed to be ruled out (Popenoe, 1999). Intact, nonblended relationships enabled the sample to better focus on the research questions.

The sample stem from a middle- to upper-middle class socioeconomic group. The sample group was dictated for two reasons. First, such couples have the financial means to seek private practice psychotherapy. Second, potential participants from the facility who were from a lower socioeconomic level were either not intact or were in a blended family.

The Semistructured Interviews

McLeod (2003) maintained that research interviews are a very useful and flexible technique for gathering comprehensive and intimate qualitative data. The open-ended, semistructured interview for this study was used to ascertain specific issues related to marital cohesiveness and parenting a child with ODD. The semistructured interview was designed to elicit participants' thoughts and feelings regarding the research questions and was designed in two parts. The first portion of the interview was administered while the couple was together in the interview room and was intended to ascertain their responses to questions regarding their familial past and opinions regarding the history of their family and marital relationship. Part 2 of the interview was administered to each individual separately to gather his or her thoughts and feelings on the state of their marital relationship (see Appendix A).

Study Procedures

Piantanida and Garman (1999) explained, “Well crafted procedures create the logic of justification for the study, explaining how each guiding research question will be addressed” (p. 111). During April 2006, eight married parent couples were identified and solicited from the client base of a private practice counseling facility. Each couple was evaluated in light of the research inclusion criteria. Prior to their agreement to participate in the study, each couple was given the informed consent document and any questions regarding the study were answered. After the participating couples verbally agreed to be involved in the study, an interview meeting was scheduled with each couple in May 2006. The purpose of these sessions was to conduct the parenting and marital semistructured interview. Each interview was completed in a 1-hour session. After all the couples completed the interview, each interview was analyzed to detect common responses and themes. All interviews were audio recorded with transcripts produced by a professional transcription service. The interview tape recordings were numerically identified to maintain the confidentiality of the study participants.

Data Organization

Data obtained through a qualitative study end up in the form of lengthy transcripts of the actual interviews, and a prolonged method of processing is required (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Rudestam and Newton (2001) noted a qualitative research design is not calculated to establish or analyze a theory, and in most cases the theory will become apparent once the data are brought together. The data collection process of the study brought together all the data from the interview transcripts. The next process involved

reducing the data collected through the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data from the interview transcripts (Miles & Huberman).

The final transcription was a smooth, straightforward summary of the main ideas presented by the participants. The interviews were transcribed by a professional transcribing service to render the raw research data. Miles and Huberman (1994) noted the transcription process is filled with possible dangers, most notably the competency of the transcriber. In light of this potential risk, the decision to use a professional transcription provider was made to ensure accurate data transmission.

Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) described three phases in transforming the raw data from the interview transcripts into a theoretical narrative to be employed in the study. The first phase is *making the text manageable*. In this phase, the researcher filters through the actual transcribed texts to determine which parts of the text will be used in the analysis and which parts will not be needed. The next phase is *hearing what was said*. In this stage, the researcher organizes the pertinent data into repeating ideas, which are then organized into more general themes. Their last phase is *developing a theory*. In this more abstract phase, the themes are congealed into theoretical constructs, which are eventually transformed into a theoretical narrative.

The data were reduced by a coding system utilized by the researcher and an assistant researcher as the transcripts were being interpreted. Miles and Huberman (1994) noted, "Coding is analysis. Codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study" (p. 56). The codes were used to recover and systematize the vast amounts of raw data from the interview

transcriptions. When determining a coding system, each coding piece of information was intended to answer three questions (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003): (a) Does it relate to one of the predetermined research questions? (b) Does it help give better understanding of the study participant? (c) Does it simply seem important, even if it is difficult to understand why it may be important?

It was important for the coding system utilized in this study to not be too simplistic or too complicated. If the coding system was too simplistic, much of the collected data would be unused. If the coding system was too complicated, it would be very difficult to retrieve the information stored (Stake, 1995). The coding system used for this study was uncomplicated and straightforward by design. Long statements were condensed to uncomplicated groupings such as “+” or “-” to designate if a phenomenon was present or not present. A number scale of 1 to 5 was used to indicate the intensity of a phenomenon. These coded pieces of information were then placed into categories. The categories were discovered during the actual analysis process itself (Kvale, 1996). All coding and theme interpretation was carried out by the primary researcher, with a minimum of 50% of the coding and theme interpretation additionally reviewed by a counseling professional (M.A., LPC) who functioned as a research assistant. To help ensure confidentiality, the names of study participants were kept private from the assistant researcher.

The final stage of the raw data transformation was narrative structuring. It was important that these concluding narratives provided rich descriptions of the lived experiences of the study participants to add to the replicability of the study (Aten & Hernandez, 2005). This stage focused on the stories told during an interview and worked

out their structures and their plots. Structuring through narratives will usually reduce the interview text; it may, however, also expand it by developing the potentialities of meaning in a simple interview story into more elaborate narratives (Kvale, 1996).

But in qualitative research, transforming collected data into meaningful research conclusions is more than just regurgitating the cold hard facts of the accumulated data. The researcher's own background, subjective experience of the data collection process, and innate ability to find useful pieces of information at hand is an indispensable aspect of the process. One of the main credentials of a qualitative researcher is his or her experience. The same experience that serves someone well as a psychotherapist is fundamental to this process as well. Such as determining what pieces of shared information are important and what are not. Being able to read the nonverbal aspects of the participant's conversation and to confirm the veracity of the statements is also important. This requires not only warmth, but also a healthy dose of skepticism (Stake, 1995).

The pursuit of rigor is always important when conducting research. If a researcher does not take the time to put into place practices to safeguard validity, the results of the study may be viewed as unusable (Aten & Hernandez, 2005). This study sought accuracy in the findings, through discipline and protocols that went beyond good intentions and simply the strong desire to do the right thing (Stake, 1995). To ensure validity in this study, triangulation was employed. Triangulation was employed to enhance the rigor of the study. Creswell (2003) suggested that the proper qualitative researcher will "triangulate different data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes" (p.196). This study

employed research interview transcriptions, field notes, and multiple researchers to increase objectivity. This triangulation of research strategies helped to ensure the accuracy and the unbiased nature of the study findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are paramount to any study. To ensure sound ethical practice in this study, informed consent was obtained from each participating couple. Each individual was required to sign the informed consent documents (see Appendix B) that explained (a) who was conducting the study, (b) why the particular person was singled out for participation, (c) the time commitment, (d) any potential risks and how they had been managed, (e) the study and an offer to answer questions, (f) voluntary participation, (g) the issue of payment, and (h) confidentiality (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). The researcher provided the participants with a copy of the informed consent form.

Grafanaki (1996) contended preserving the privacy of data is a vital aspect of psychotherapeutic research, because of the personal characteristics of the data being collected. The identities of the participants were protected in three ways. First, the data were numerically designated to avoid the participants' name and the data being reconciled. Second, the data were stored in a locked cabinet for the duration of the study, and when a computer was used all data were password protected. Third, the researcher was the only person to conduct the interviews or to interact with the participants in any fashion. The data obtained will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

All prudent steps were taken to ensure the highest levels of ethical standards were met during the study. Because qualitative research involves intimate interaction with people to obtain the desired data, how people are treated has to be considered equal to, if not greater than, how the data are treated. Being an ethical researcher means more than knowing the right thing to do and attempting to make the correct choices. It means that researcher has to have a commitment to a personal moral code (Kvale, 1996).

Summary

The qualitative methods chosen to be used in this study were intended to produce research conclusions that were accurate and honest and adhered to the highest ethical standards. The intent was to bring forward themed conclusions that stemmed from the data collected and only from the data collected. Wolcott (1990) warned, “Qualitative researchers seem particularly vulnerable to the tendency—and urge—to go beyond reporting what is and to use their studies as platforms for making pronouncements of what ought to be” (p. 55). This was a vulnerability that this study stridently resisted. The design of this study and the implementation of that design ensured accurate, truthful, and unbiased research findings.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS OF STUDY

Introduction

In the data collection stage of qualitative research, participants are chosen for the study, their experiences are secured through a process of semistructured interviews, and themes are derived from the collected data until finally those themes are fashioned into an authentic representation of the participants' experiences. In this chapter, each participating couple's story is told. Their experience of parenting an oppositional child and their perceptions on how their experience influenced their marital relationship are brought together to form a portrait of their interaction with the phenomenon. Within each story, the couple's history is explored, as well as their experience with their ODD child, parenting strategies that worked and did not work, their feelings about their past and present marital relationship, and their perceptions of the effects that parenting an oppositional child had on that relationship. This chapter also demonstrates how these cases relate specifically to the stated research problem and includes an expression of the researcher's own experience with the phenomenon.

The stories of these couples were gathered through transcriptions of semistructured interviews, the researcher's field notes, and the reflective and subjective insights of the researcher. The research couples were identified by alphanumeric designations: C1 for Couple 1, C2 for Couple 2, and so forth. The individual parents within each couple were designated H for husband and W for wife. OC was used to represent the oppositional child. For example, the full designation for the husband in

Couple 1 was C1H. Each couple told their stories in vivid texture and detail, and through these stories, the meanings of the couple's lived experiences were revealed.

How the Data Were Gathered and Recorded

After each couple was recruited to participate in the study, a time was scheduled for them to meet with the researcher for the semistructured interview. At the interview sessions, the informed consent documents were thoroughly explained and signatures were obtained. During each interview session, the couple met with the researcher first together as a couple to answer questions and discuss the research topics, and then each spouse met separately with the researcher to discuss their individual points of view on the various issues outlined in the interview. These interviews were tape recorded, with the consent of each couple, and lasted approximately 1 hour.

Review of Research Question

The research question for this study was as follows: What is the day-to-day experience of parenting a child with ODD and what, if any, are the influences of this parenting experience on the marital relationship of the parents? This question was presented to each of the couples at the beginning of each interview. Each couple stated they were willing, and in some cases eager, to explore this question and hoped that their experience could help elucidate its answer. The question was broken down into dozens of other, more specific questions that comprised the semistructured interviews. Each participant had numerous opportunities to share his or her opinions and experiences with regard to the research question. As each couple began to tell their own stories, their

answer to the research question came into focus. They shared their thoughts and feelings on a host of relevant issues pertaining to the study problem and often the feelings were harsh, brutally honest, and emotionally charged.

The Researcher's Experience with the Phenomenon

In this type of phenomenological research project, the personal experience and worldview of the researcher is essential to the research process itself. For example, Creswell (2003) noted, "The qualitative researcher systematically reflects on who he or she is in the inquiry, and is sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study" (p. 182). My experience with the research topic began shortly after my wedding in 1979. My wife became pregnant in 1980, six months after our wedding. We were both 20 years old. Neither of us knew anything about parenting a child, since we both readily agreed that we were essentially children ourselves. Our first child, Sarah, was a fantastic baby, no excessive whining or crying. By all accounts one could describe her as an easy baby and a very compliant child. Many friends and family warned us that because our first child was so easy, the next one, most likely, would be a little terror. Josh was born in 1982 and was even more docile than his big sister. This stunned the naysayers, and they all agreed that, should we ever have another child, that one would, most definitely, be a hellion. In September 1984, Lindsey was born into our family and she was the most accommodating of the three. As a baby, if she did not gurgle occasionally, one could forget that she was in the room. This type of compliance did not end with our children's infancies. Throughout their lives they have been model children. They have always been acquiescent, good natured, funny, self-motivated, and a joy to be

around. Without question, they have all had their moments of independent thought and action that ruffled their parent's feathers, but it has always been appropriate to their age and the circumstance.

So even though I have no personal experience with raising an ODD child, my desire to understand this phenomenon stems from my counseling relationship, with couples who live it. Though my wife and I cannot relate specifically to the stresses of parenting an ODD child on the marriage relationship, our marriage has undergone numerous episodes of extreme stress, so our empathic connection with the study participants is not completely severed.

The Story of C1

The Early History of the Couple

C1 has been married for 24 years. C1H is a computer programmer for a nationally known computer company, and C1W teaches at a private Christian secondary school. While in college, he fell in love with her red hair and Christian character and she fell in love with his ability to be open and express vulnerability. This couple is very committed to their Christian faith. Each believed that God brought them together, so they married soon after meeting. Both agreed on the importance of having children but decided to wait before starting a family. After 5 years of marriage, their first child was born.

The Initial Parenting Experience

Their reaction to pregnancy was less than enthusiastic. C1W was not completely through with school, and C1H felt overwhelmed and anxious about this new unknown in

their relationship. Yet, both were excited about the birth. From that point, their young family continued to grow. The family also experienced many geographic and occupational changes. With the addition of two other boys, theirs could be described as a happy home, with only minor occasions of conflict and tension. Before their first born turned 14, C1OC was considered a wonderful child. He was bright, energetic, and passionate about his faith. Though slightly strong-willed, this aspect of his personality raised no concerns from his parents. These bouts of independence were viewed by the parents as normal and healthy for any child's development. At age 14, however, C1 knew that something was amiss. They knew C1OC's tantrums, demanding demeanor, and sense of entitlement had to be more than just normal developmental issues. They tried praying for the child, showing grace, asking God for wisdom in how to handle the situation. They tried desperately to convince themselves that he was just a phase. They tried to understand the behavior and talk through the supposed issues with the child, but nothing worked.

The behavior continued and the raw emotions of the home escalated. Soon both the child's and the parents' tempers were at the boiling point. Conflict and chaos became the norm for the family. Yelling, physical altercations (nonabusive), and bitter periods of tense silence were beginning to reshape the happy paradigm of familial interaction for this couple. They tried taking things away from the child, grounding him, and making him do additional chores around the house, but nothing curbed his aberrant behavior. C1 said this sudden influx of tension and hostility into the family had an impact on their marriage relationship.

Couple's Perspective on the Marital Relationship and the ODD Parenting Experience

Prior to the onset of oppositionality with C1OC, the couple was very pleased with their relationship. They enjoyed both sexual and nonsexual intimacy, satisfying communication, and a relational connection that was mutually enjoyable. Their parenting practices were naturally agreed upon and they shared a common sense of purpose and vision for raising their children with proper Christian values. The onset of oppositional behavior by C1OC altered much of this harmony. The tension the oppositional child brought to the family entered the marriage relationship as well. C1 tended to look at this problem of oppositionality from different points of view. They disagreed on what to do and how to do it and found it hard to present a unified front to the oppositional child.

The natural parenting reactions and philosophies that had served C1 so well for so long were no longer applicable. C1W believed she denied the behavioral problems until they escalated out of control, while C1H responded with voracity that she considered beyond the pale. They both agreed C1H's strong-arm approach only enabled the conflict to worsen. C1W seemed to desire resolution, whereas C1H seemed to simply desire victory over his young adversary. He took the parent-child conflict as a personal grudge match between himself and his wayward offspring. The role of enforcer for C1OC had changed throughout his life. When he was younger and being home-schooled, C1W was the primary disciplinarian, but once he reached the more rebellious teen years, C1H took over that role. This was due in large part to C1W's feeling that she could no longer physically control C1OC or his behavior.

The Husband's Perspective on the Marital Relationship

C1H saw the ODD behavior as having an overall positive impact on their marriage relationship. He saw the foundations of his marriage remaining unchanged and even improved in some areas such as communication and closeness. For example, C1H thought that before and during onset he and his wife might argue about how to handle a discipline situation, whereas the continued oppositional behavior has forced them to communicate more intently, grind out an agreement, and present a unified front. C1H's parents seemed to disapprove of their relationship from the very beginning. They have continually criticized him and his wife for not parenting the right way, and when C1OC became oppositional this just seemed to validate their complaints. This additional source of tension never elicited conflict within the marriage and even seemed to bring the couple together.

C1H described blame as a negative factor of parenting an ODD child. He would blame his wife for not responding to a particular discipline situation with the same attitude that he had, and she blamed him for egging on C1OC's behavior through verbal sparring and confrontation. He stated that the ODD child's behavior caused a schism between C1OC and his siblings that led to additional stress within the home, but that too had a positive side. C1H and his wife now respond differently to the behavior of the younger children and are quick to address any oppositional behavior in them before it gets worse. C1H also believed that the ODD child's behavior impacted C1's spiritual walk by making church attendance awkward. Due to the ODD child's obviously disrespectful conduct, C1OC's behavior also produced feelings of guilt for C1H because

he saw C1OC's behavior as a direct reflection of how he was viewed as a parent by other church members.

The Wife's Perspective on the Marital Relationship

C1W, like her husband, saw more positives than negatives to the ODD parenting experience, but on a relational level the impact has caused a real change. Her greatest source of tension within the marriage relationship was the nonspecific way that discipline strategies were discussed. Both she and C1H would assume too much of the other's comprehension of the parenting issue being discussed. The constant pressures of parenting a child with ODD did take a physical toll on the relationship, as well. She cited fatigue, stemming from constantly dealing with ODD behavior, as a major source of a decline of sexual intimacy. She just felt that they were always exhausted from the fight to have much left over for each other. Her modus operandi during ODD or marital conflict was to get angry and withdraw. She used this as punishment for her husband when he did not handle a situation with C1OC to her satisfaction.

As a Christian wife, C1W thought it was her place to support her husband and back him in all decisions, especially parenting decisions, since he was the head of the household. But when he would handle C1OC in a way she thought was counterproductive, she was not able to continue being submissive and conflict between the spouses ensued. She saw C1OC as having a large negative influence on the other children in the home. He was a constant source of friction and hostility that, in some ways, rubbed off on the other children. C1W resented C1OC for being that conduit of negativity in her home. In her opinion, the level of stress that the ODD child brought into

the home was the biggest negative influence. It changed the entire balance of the home and all family members had to readjust to this new equilibrium. C1W felt the experience forcibly improved marital communication, brought them closer together as a couple, and made them better parents to their younger children.

The Story of C2

The Early History of the Couple

At the time of the interview, C2 had been married for 21 years. They met while attending college at the University of Texas at Austin. Both had the same accounting class their sophomore year and had what they would describe as interest at first sight. C2H was attracted to C2W's attractive appearance, the kindness of her personality, and her overflowing energy. The thing that caught C2W's attention about C2H was his handsome features and congenial personality. He proposed after several months of dating, and during an Engagement Encounter weekend conducted by a local church, they discussed their dreams, expectations, and shared desire to have a family. They married and were excited about their new life together. After 4 years of getting to know each other and getting their home established, they had their first child.

The Initial Parenting Experience

Due to C2's mother having had a hysterectomy at an early age, they did not want to wait in fear of not being able to have the children that they desired. When their new little boy was brought home, C2H was first struck by what a big job it was to constantly

care for a baby. They were both somewhat overwhelmed, but enjoyed this new experience of being parents.

Two years after the first child was born, another son joined C2's family. This is the child for whom the terrible 2s never seemed to end. He was oppositional pretty much all his life. When C2OC entered the second grade they realized there was something out of the ordinary about their child. Due to his birthday, he was already one of the oldest children in his class, yet his social interactions and interactions with authority figures seemed overly immature compared to the other children in the class. The only template for normal child development was their first child, and when compared to C2OC there was no comparison.

Couple's Perspective on the Marital Relationship and the ODD Parenting Experience

C2OC argued about everything, whether it was important or not. Every personal conflict seemed to be taken as a competition that he had to win. When C2W would read books on parenting, she noticed that children were supposed to have a natural desire to please the adults around them, but that her oppositional child had absolutely no desire to please anyone but himself. Whereas the first child respected the authority figures in his life, C2OC looked at all persons in authority as equals at best and inferior at worst. As the school years progressed, he was constantly being placed on restriction, having to attend Saturday detention, and eventually brushes with the law and expulsion from school due to behavioral issues seemed to be a normal part of C2's family life. The worst part of this for C2W was that when he acted in these negative ways, she did not feel love for him.

And since it seemed that he acted this way all the time, she was plagued by the fear that she did not really love this child.

The Wife's Perspective on the Marital Relationship

C2W stated C2OC's behavior caused an enormous amount of stress on her marriage. Not only was there the constant bickering about how to handle the discipline issues, but they, as parents, seemed to be relentlessly judged by school teachers, church workers, and their own parents. They appeared to be failures as parents, as a couple, and as Christians. She felt completely discouraged. She reflected on the time when C2OC was young and the oppositional behavior was not as severe. C2W and her husband had always been able to talk, share, and communicate with each other, but during the height of the oppositional years she just saw their family and their marriage relationship as a world of criticism, hate, and guilt. She continually found fault in the way C2H made parenting decisions, and told him so, in no uncertain terms. When the oppositional behavior escalated at about age 11, C2W coped with the added stress by eating. Overall, she gained more than 100 pounds which impacted her marriage through lower levels of nonsexual intimacy and reduced sexual activity. Though she had lost much of this weight at the time of the interview, her gaining and losing and then regaining the weight had become a source of disappointment for her.

Before the heavily oppositional teen years, there was not too much for them to have conflict about as a couple, but now blame, accusation, and scapegoating permeate their discussions. Not only is C2OC's behavior negatively influencing the marriage relationship, but it is also a relentless source of conflict between the siblings. C2W noted

there was no love between them at all, like Cain and Abel. C2W believed the conflict between the brothers has negatively impacted their marriage relationship as much as the oppositional child's individual behavior.

The Husband's Perspective on the Marital Relationship

C2H did not share his wife's sense of frustration and bitterness. It was much harder for him to find difficulties and faults. He thought their communication as a couple had benefited from parenting an ODD child due to the fact that they were forced to talk more and come to an agreement on parenting issues. He did see their nonsexual intimacy or their sexual relationship as being adversely affected by this experience. Rather, he thought their sexual relationship had improved during this time because they had become closer throughout this shared struggle. He believed their conflict resolution skills have improved with age and experience. Even his conflict avoidance improved because he has been forced to deal with the conflicts generated by C2OC.

C2H admitted that his parents have been critical of C2's marriage and their parenting skills. However, he saw this in a positive light as well. He is in agreement with his wife that they are dead wrong in how they approach these issues, so this too has strengthened their marital relationship. He also believes that, as a couple, their religious faith has grown stronger through the years and that the oppositional child's behavior has aided in this process. C2H did, however, point to reduced social interaction as a negative aspect of parenting an ODD child. This, he thought, is due to their general fatigue and constant exhaustion from dealing with the conflict. They do not have the energy to go out

and do anything as a couple. This overall stress and unrelenting drumbeat of hostility caused by the ODD child is the biggest impact on their marriage.

The Story of C3

The Early History of the Couple

C3 met in their early twenties. She was in her sophomore year of college and he was just beginning graduate school. He was attracted to her good looks and honest smile, while she was enamored by his generous sense of humor. After several months of dating and a short engagement they married. At the time of the interview they have been wed for 25 years. Since C3W, currently employed as a counselor, came from a small family with just one brother, she always wanted a big family with four children, more like her cousins had growing up. C3H, a pastor at a local church, desired a smaller family with only two children; so, as he likes to joke, they compromised and had four children.

The Initial Parenting Experience

C3 began having children according to their agreed upon time line of about 5 years after their marriage. C3W was very excited about the birth of their first child, a boy. Since she was not around many children growing up, this was a new experience for her. Nevertheless, she was focused and ready for the exhilarating opportunities that lay ahead. In contrast, C3H was much more subdued about the birth. At this time in his life he was preoccupied with getting his career off the ground, and, by his own admission, still fairly self-centered. He, in some ways, resented the new child in that it took away from his relationship with his wife and consumed so much of his very busy schedule.

Couple's Perspective on the Marital Relationship and the ODD Parenting Experience

It was this firstborn son that became oppositional. They determined that his behavior was more defiant than normal around the age of 15, between 9th and 10th grade. Up to this point he had been considered a compliant, amenable child, but the parents discovered that he was just adept at hiding his aberrant behavior. Upon reflection, the grades dropped precipitously in the 7th grade, an omen of bad things to come. They were just unaware until his negative behavior and attitude erupted at age 15. Before the onset of the oppositional behavior, C3 considered their family and their marriage to be in good condition. Not too many fights, not too many arguments, and not too many issues to fight or argue about. C3W ran the house and was in charge of the children in the early years, but as the children became older, C3H became more opinionated. And when the oppositional behavior started, the differing parenting philosophies of the husband and wife were magnified. Prior to the onset of C3OC's negative behavior, this family and this marriage relationship had not been tested. But the test would come.

C3 viewed how to discipline the oppositional child differently. They consistently quarreled about what to do as parents and how to do it. The couple disagreed the most about rules: what the rules should be, how they should be enforced, and how the enforcement should be shared between them. C3H tended to be more lenient than his wife. He thinks this may stem from the way his parents parented him. They never really "dropped the hammer" on him, so he believed, initially, as though being too restrictive would be counterproductive. C3OC frequently griped about being the "preacher's kid" and the amount of pressure that put on him. C3H took this to be an honest expression of the child's feelings, while C3W saw this as a manipulative ploy used by the child to make

the father feel guilty and therefore get his way. C3 also thought their oppositional child's constant need for attention caused them to neglect the other children in the home. They thought the other children picked up on the tension in the home, and due to their persistent irritability with the oppositional child, C3 thought they were also more short-tempered with the other children in the home.

The Wife's Perspective on the Marital Relationship

C3W struggled a lot with anger and resentment focused on her husband and how she believed he exacerbated the behavior of their oppositional child. The anger that she felt at C3OC for his behavior was transferred to her husband, as she sought to blame him as well as the child. She saw her husband as wanting to always be the good guy with the children, and that frame of mind hindered him from enforcing agreed upon family rules. Her husband would tell the oppositional child that it "rocked his world" when the child was upset with him. She thought this made the child view him as weak and ineffectual, and left her no choice but to fill the role of enforcer in the discipline process, a role that she resents and feels has been thrust upon her by default by her husband's conflict avoidance. Her husband would believe the child's story about a situation, which he viewed as giving them the benefit of the doubt. She saw this as being repeatedly manipulated by a devious con artist. Again, he was the good parent and she was the bad one. She thought their sexual and nonsexual intimacy has been adversely affected by the behavior of C3OC.

The bitterness and umbrage that resulted in their marriage relationship caused not only an emotional distance to arise in their relationship, but a physical one as well.

C3W's religious faith has also been impacted because of the residual anger with her husband produced by the oppositional child. C3H is not only her husband, but he is also her pastor, which makes it hard for her to listen to a sermon by a man she disrespects.

The Husband's Perspective on the Marital Relationship

C3H resents the fact that they are so busy as a couple and that having four children takes up too much of their time. He readily agrees that he is more conflict avoidant and that the conflict caused by raising an oppositional child has put an emotional stress on their marriage. He believes the intimacy within their relationship has been reduced because his wife has lost respect for him. Even though, as a couple, they always disagreed about how to parent and about discipline choices, after the onset of oppositional behavior in their oldest child, this disagreement escalated. C3H thinks C3OC's negative behaviors and questionable morals have had a negative effect on the other children in the home. He can see the beginnings of these same behaviors in them, but, as parents, they are now dealing with them much more affectively. He sees the worst aspect of parenting an oppositional child as the conflict and strife generated with the relationship. If this child had behaved well, he wonders how much more fulfilling their relationship would be. On a positive note, he believes that parenting an ODD child has forced him and his wife to become better parents and more unified in the process.

The Story of C4

The Early History of the Couple

C4 was an older couple who met and started dating when they were in their mid to late thirties. Both had successful professional careers and were single by choice. He was first attracted to her physical beauty, the fact that she was well educated, and her professionalism. He struck her as a sound, steady, responsible person. When dating, they discussed their mutual desire for children, and subsequently pursued a family soon after the wedding.

The Initial Parenting Experience

Since they were married later in life, they did not believe they had any time to wait, so she became pregnant with their daughter after only a few months. C4H remarked how taken aback he was at actually having a child of his own. He was glad that his wife knew more about raising kids than he did. He remembered being surprised that a baby had to be bathed every other day. They suddenly became concerned about everything, such as wondering if the paint in the baby's room was going to poison her and they constantly called the pediatrician to make sure the baby was normal. C4H wondered if it was all a little too much responsibility. For two people who had experienced the single life of independence and autonomy for so long, having a child to take care of was a life-altering experience. Thrilling, but definitely life altering. The first years of their marriage were spent learning to live with each other and to adequately bring up a child. They described these years as good, steady, and solid.

Couple's Perspective on the Marital Relationship and the ODD Parenting Experience

It was their firstborn that became oppositional. She was always a strong-willed child, but when the couple adopted a second daughter, when C4OC was 12, her behavior became abnormally defiant. She was excited about the adoption at first, even enthusiastic, but when the new child entered the home, she reacted with jealousy. It seemed as though the arrival of the new child, the teen years, and hormones all converged to create a rebellious, oppositional, and stridently defiant child. Most of C4OC's vitriol was directed at the mother. Though her ire was generally focused on both parental units, the mother, as the harsh one, caught the brunt of the outbursts. Home life changed from stable and solid to being in a constant state of turmoil and conflict. From a parental point of view, the couple continually second-guessed themselves about the child's behavior. They wondered, whether they caused this rebelliousness, if it was some cultural or developmental phase, if it was hereditary, due to the fact that the father was an oppositional defiant teenager, or if it was their parenting methods that inadvertently led to these misbehaviors.

This oppositional behavior led to an inordinate amount of discontent within the marriage relationship. The couple argued on a regular basis regarding consequences for the child's behaviors. C4H believed that C4W had it out for the child. She always painted the oppositional child in the most negative light, never giving her the benefit of the doubt. He saw his daughter as basically good, while his wife saw her as basically bad. C4W read many books on parenting and parenting theory. She feels, however, that she has read so many books on parenting and that, at some point, those methods should be implemented in the parenting strategies with their oppositional child. Her husband, on

the other hand, wants to leave well enough alone and just let these issues work themselves out. This places C4W squarely in the role of enforcer, a role she resents having to play, and she resents C4H for “never” trying to improve his “obviously poor” parenting style. C4H feels that his wife has read so many books that all the theories have run together and none of them are worthwhile. This couple’s parenting philosophies directly conflicted, and this juxtaposition placed them on a relational collision course.

The Wife’s Perspective on the Marital Relationship

C4W has always understood her marriage to be solid and strong. In some ways, like communication, for example, raising an oppositional child has improved areas of their relationship. The negatives, however, far outweigh the positives. Their sexual and nonsexual intimacy has declined since the onset of their oldest child’s severe oppositional behavior. She sees C4H as pulling away from her in this area, so she reciprocates by pulling away herself. This leaves them with a non-affectionate living arrangement. She fondly remembers the early years of their relationship when there was very little conflict or argument. Due to this lack of disagreement, their conflict management skills were all but unused. This changed, however, when C4OC hit puberty and the oppositional behavior rapidly increased. Now, a large portion of C4’s communication concerns managing the conflict generated by the oppositional child.

C4W was the first to identify the oppositional behavior and her husband denied things were anything but normal, and she has nagging fears that she placed this biased view of their daughter in her husband’s mind. Her husband has a natural tendency to avoid conflict and their child’s defiance has given him so much more conflict to avoid.

The child's increase in oppositional behavior correlated with an increase in his conflict avoidance in light of the couple's increase in conflict over discipline. One major basis of contention is C4OC's church attendance. C4W believes that since, as a family, church attendance is a priority, C4OC should be made to attend church with the family.. In contrast, C4H thinks that if the children are fed and clothed, then everything else can be left to their personal choice. The chasm of disagreement that has developed between her and her husband has led C4W to a deepening level of bitterness toward him. Another source of disharmony in the home is C4OC's malicious treatment of the younger child. This combative disturbance seems to permeate their home life. If the oppositional child is not fighting with her parents, then she is picking at and fighting with her younger sister. Conflict seems constant. C4W recognizes the struggle between herself and her daughter has become personal. When the daughter leaves the room after an argument, she will take a parting shot at her mother like, "I hate you!" C4W finds herself mumbling, under her breath, the same comments about her daughter at the same time, like, "Yeah, well I hate you too."

The Husband's Perspective on the Marital Relationship

C4H could see from the very beginning that he and his wife viewed child rearing differently. She was more of a disciplinarian, expected better behavior from the children, and was in favor of harsher punishments. She would always get angry at him if he did not agree with her and join her in her parenting efforts. These disagreements were enflamed by the onset of oppositional behavior in C4OC. This increase in disagreement led to his fervent attempt to avoid those disagreements by pulling back, disengaging, and becoming

more passive aggressive. This distance was increased by the fact that so many of the skirmishes with their daughter occurred at night, right before bedtime. When the adrenaline is flowing and personal resentment is at its highest is no time to attempt any level of intimate behavior. He believes, unlike his wife, that the way in which he and his wife handle the conflict within their marriage has improved due to the oppositional behavior. He thinks that now he is forced, by the extreme nature of the behavior, to address it and not avoid it. They have also been forced, as a couple, to talk issues through and come to resolution. One area of constant contention has been the issue of church attendance by the daughter. C4H believes that by age 15 or 16 children should be able to make up their own mind concerning their religious faith. Forcing children to attend church is viewed as counterproductive to their spiritual development. This, coupled with so many other parental disagreements, has led to vitriol in the relationship. He sees the constant disharmony and the emotional upheaval that it brings as one of the most negative aspects of parenting an oppositional child. His constantly being judged by his wife as a bad parent and a weak husband has had an emasculating effect, which has widened the distance between them.

The Story of C5

The Early History of the Couple

C5, at the time of the interview, has been married for 15 years. They met at a local gym where she was an aerobics instructor. He was taken by her infectious smile and spirit, and she picked him out of the crowd due to his handsome appearance and strong

and secure disposition. They were wed after a short engagement. After several years of married life, began to have children according to their agreed upon timeline.

The Initial Parenting Experience

When their first child was born, C5W was ecstatic. Though having a little person to take total care of was a daunting experience, she was thrilled and considered it a dream come true. C5H, on the other hand, thought as though the entire experience was a bit overwhelming with the physical demands of child rearing. He mourned the loss of his wife's attention now that a child was placing more physical and emotional demands on their schedule.

Couple's Perspective on the Marital Relationship and the ODD Parenting Experience

It was the firstborn child that became oppositional. He was a strong-willed child with a deep-seated personality, who demanded the total attention of both parents. They ran to comfort him when he would cry and he sat with them in church, as they refused to put him in childcare. These parents agreed that the word "spoiled" was applicable in his case. Compared to all the other children that C5OC played and socialized with, his behavior was beyond the pale. C5H feared all the early attention they lavished on their first born may have caused him to become especially egocentric. Although he demanded a lot of attention, by age 13 both parents agreed something about his oppositional and defiant behavior was beyond normal.

There were many strains on this young family. C5H's parents lived with them for quite some time, as his father fought and eventually succumbed to cancer. His mother's

domineering personality, made the prolonged stay enormously stressful. There seemed to be a constant struggle as to who was going to raise the children, the mother or the grandmother. Add to this dysfunctional mix the rantings of a defiant child and the home environment became quite miserable. Initially C5 tried to threaten C5OC with punishment to see if that would discourage his aberrant behavior. Eventually, they tried restricting privileges, but nothing seemed to work. Because C5W was raised in a household with yelling, raising her voice was another instinctual, yet ineffective, response. She was burdened with guilt, thinking that she had failed as a parent and that her lack of parenting skills created a monster. She sees other people's children have slight oppositional episodes and then fall right back into line, but her child will not respond. C5W thinks her child seemed damaged because he is unresponsive like other kids. She wonders if she and her husband damaged him beyond repair. This constant state of turmoil makes these parents thankful for the calm, compliant personalities of the other children in the home. These thoughts, however, bring about more guilt for not having these feelings toward their oppositional child.

C5OC's continual assault against all things related to God has taken its toll on the spiritual life of the home and the marriage relationship. The oppositional child actively campaigns against going to church and coerces the other children to go along with his defiance. This makes church attendance a major source of conflict and makes it easier for C5H and his wife to just stay home. When religious faith is one of the biggest catalysts for family conflict, it fails to be a source of peace and contentment within the marriage.

The Wife's Perspective on the Marital Relationship

C5W grieves over the impact that parenting C5OC has had on their marriage. She believes that the parenting conflict has caused her to be uptight and frustrated in the relationship, while C5H believes as though it has killed the romance between them, because C5W claims that he fails to protect her. They did not necessarily disagree on discipline decisions. Rather, the relational disharmony arose from her perception that C5H simply refused to act. The husband readily agrees that his disciplinary vision gets “blurred by the circumstances of the moment” and that he does, at times, not act immediately to address a parenting issue. He sees his wife as the “relational champion” always looking for books to help with new parenting skills, but he tends to retract into himself and become more passive aggressive.

C5W is actually hopeful about their marriage relationship. They have sought counseling, committed to parental and relational changes, and are seeing positive results. This is in stark contrast to the previous years of hopelessness and feelings of abandonment and isolation. Ironically, communication is one area of their relationship that she thinks has improved since the onset of their child's oppositional behavior.. She believes that it has improved by necessity. Due to constant combat, they have to talk more, to communicate more, to understand each other better, and this has resulted in much better communication between them. Their levels of intimacy, both sexual and nonsexual, come and go and rise and fall all based upon her feelings of security with the relationship and in the home. When she perceives that C5H is fulfilling his role as husband and father by maintaining order within the home and protecting her from

physical and emotional harm, she is quite open to profound expressions of intimacy with her husband. When she does not feel protected by him, the intimacy is withdrawn.

After they first got married, she believed that a Christian wife was to be totally submissive and do everything the husband asked without thought or question. That philosophy, she now believes, did not serve her very well. She came to the point in her attempts at disciplining C5OC that she believed she had no choice but to confront her husband and try to bring about change. His conflict avoidance was no longer acceptable, and she demanded that things be different. For example, she has refused to go out to dinner any longer as a family if C5H does not take the steps necessary to curb C5OC's embarrassing behavior. Though he claims not to notice the offending behavior, she believes he is avoiding the inevitable public conflict. This has caused a great deal of bitterness toward her husband. Her attempts at prompting her husband to act or pointing out ways in which he could intervene went unappreciated, so he just seemed to always just step back and let her handle things. C5OC's disrespectful treatment of the female members of the family is another great concern. Not only is she upset at the way her son treats the women of the family, she is even more concerned that her husband does not model the way a godly man should treat women. C5W believes that he is failing in this responsibility as well, only adding to her growing bitterness toward him.

C5W had enormous conflicts with her mother-in-law over inappropriate attempts to parent her children against her will. C5H's mother was overbearing and forceful, and the couple believed as though she was making a direct attempt to take over the raising of their children. This situation came to a boiling point and they finally had to put their foot down and tell her she was no longer welcome in their home. The mother-in-law blames

C5W for this, and as C5W put it she “hates me and probably wants me dead.” Oddly enough, this conflict seemed to unite her and her husband rather than pull them apart. They agreed on this issue and it united them against a common foe.

Spiritually speaking, C5W believes that parenting an ODD child has had both a positive and a negative impact. She is confused that God would allow her family to struggle in this way. She has been a good Christian mother; she has taken her children to church and believes that God should respond by allowing her family to live in peace and harmony. Ironically she also believes that this constant turmoil with her oppositional son and her dissatisfaction with her husband has “left me on my knees before God.” At present, she believes strongly that God is seeing her through this storm, and in that confidence she finds peace. She feels this horrific experience is a litmus test to gauge where they are as a couple and as a family. She believes that this experience, with God’s help, is going to have a positive outcome and strengthen their familial relationships.

The Husband’s Perspective on the Marital Relationship

C5H, like several other husbands in this study, tended to minimize the issues present in the home and in his marriage. He was not completely blind to the issues, but he did not share the extremely negative views of his wife. He too, believes their communication skills as a couple have vastly improved because of parenting an oppositional child. He finally saw the manipulative ploys of C5OC, how the child would ask one parent one thing and the other parent something else, and determined that he and his wife would have to discuss all aspects of their parenting decisions. If they did not maintain a united front, then their oppositional child would be able to divide and conquer.

Intimacy within their marriage relationship was a major source of dissatisfaction between C5H and his wife. He feels he came into the marriage with high expectations regarding sexual intimacy. He now feels he placed too much importance on it. He felt as though it was through sexual intimacy that he received love from his wife and his self-esteem as a person who is loved. When C5W would pull away from him due to feelings of not being protected, this rejection had an additional negative impact on him, because of this dysfunctional belief. It made him feel inadequate as a husband and a father and unloved as a man.

C5H readily agrees he has been somewhat conflict avoidant, especially in the past, but most of the conflict with his spouse concerning their oppositional child, he feels, stems from his wife's unrealistic expectations of him. Because she is dealing with the defiant child all day, she compiles a list of infractions that she wants C5H to deal with upon his arrival home. He may not see the infractions in the same light as his wife and may not see the consequences the same way. Therein lies the seeds of marital conflict. He thinks that his wife judges him as a bad parent, but he does not see her that way at all, just because they are different. He believes that she is a microwave oven that heats up very fast and he is more of a crock pot that takes quite a long time to get hot. No one is the good guy or the bad guy, they are just different. He also admits that he is somewhat "spacey." While enjoying his food at dinner, he will notice her glaring at him, as if to say, "Hello?! Where have you been?!" He suddenly finds himself in a quandary. What happened? Did he miss something? Then he is left to try to ascertain what the oppositional child did and what disciplinary actions should be taken. His wife, however, considers this response to woefully inadequate. Her expectations of his parenting actions

place him in a constant state of unease. He feels a heavy sense of performance anxiety due to this pressure placed on him by his wife's expectations. He is constantly being judged on his parenting actions and the speed at which he takes those actions. His wife's expectations have become the gold standard for parenting by which all of his decisions are judged. He thinks as though unless he crawls insight her head and thinks her thoughts, then he is set up for failure.

C5H also agrees with how his wife views the conflict with his parents. He believes his parents are manipulative, demanding, and controlling. He believes that when they moved into his and his wife's home due to illness, it was a big mistake. He laments the fact that his family of origin has many issue with addictions and compulsive behaviors and that this negative influence was brought into his home. He resented the fact that his parents attempted to pit him and his wife against each other and in some ways attempted a coup within the home to see who would raise the children. He was in complete agreement in asking them to move out and they are no longer welcome in their home. Though he too is pleased that this conflict has unified them, he is saddened over the breech of relationship.

C5H believes his feelings of inadequacy as a father and a husband would have to be the most negative aspect of parenting an ODD child. When C5OC misbehaves, he believes he has failed as a parent, and when his wife continually points out his shortcomings as a father, he believes he bears responsibility for the disruption in the family. And when his wife distances herself sexually due to him not being the solid, protective partner that she desires, feelings of guilt and inadequacy permeate his thoughts and feelings.

The Story of C6

The Early History of the Couple

C6 have been married for 19 years. They met when she was still in college at the University of Texas at a friend's birthday party. He was 30 years old and making his way in the working world and she was 20 years old, and they felt a strong attraction to one another. They attended the same church, seemed to have a lot in common, and were physically attracted to each other, so a relationship was born. After 4 months of dating she became pregnant with their first child, so the wedding, that they had planned on anyway, was hastily put together and performed. It was not a shotgun wedding, but her family was not supportive. His parents, though not thrilled, remained sympathetic.

The Initial Parenting Experience

This rapid transition from single life to married with a child understandably caused tension within the relationship. C6W began her married life in a constant state of anxiety. She thought that if she was not the perfect wife and did not do everything he required that he would leave her, and she would be stranded, alone in life with a young child. C6H seemed thrilled with the sudden introduction of a wife and child. His personal life, however, was not so thrilling. He had been laid off for the first time in his life at the exact time he found out he was going to be a new father and new husband. When he found work, his new career demanded so much of his time, for the first 5 years, he did not have much left for his family. He sees this as the breeding ground for future familial conflicts.

Couple's Perspective on the Marital Relationship and the ODD Parenting Experience

C6OC was a “golden child.” He was a good baby, he was walking at 9 months, and as he grew, he was the best athlete on the team and rode his bike before anyone else. This began to change by the first grade. He began to have problems in Sunday School, acting in a “rowdy manner” and was disruptive during the lessons. His concerned parents dutifully required him to write apology letters for his outbursts at inappropriate times, but this did not curb the behavior. That fact that he was one of the smaller kids in his class made him easy prey for the other kids. In grade school he began getting into fights, and this sort of aggressiveness and peer confrontation continues. This caused significant conflict within the relationship. C6H seemed to take pride in his son fighting with the bigger kids. Having a Master Gunny Sergeant as a father, C6H was taught to handle problems aggressively, to never show weakness, and to always “act like a man.” In this way, he relished teaching the child fighting techniques and encouraged his son’s pride in never letting himself be pushed around. C6W was appalled by this parenting philosophy. She believed fighting was wrong and was certainly nothing to take pride in. She stayed angry at her husband for encouraging the child’s negative behavior. When their second child began to show oppositional behavior by the sixth grade, a very unhappy home was in the making.

The marriage relationship had severe problems from the very beginning. Within the first 5 years of marriage, C6W left her husband on three separate occasions; the longest separation being 15 months. The “sheer and constant” disagreements on how to handle the children’s oppositional behavior simply fanned the flames of an already troubled relationship.

C6H admits he was oppositional as a child and remains somewhat oppositional as an adult. He feels guilty that he is unable to restrain his anger when arguing with his wife about parenting issues, especially in front of the kids, which fuels their children's negative behavior. He realizes one of his biggest issues is learning how to deal with opposition in his children without being oppositional himself. C6W believes she deals with the disappointment with her husband by yelling at him. But even this verbal attempt at correction is becoming tiresome from its apparent lack of success. She said, "It no longer matters what name I call him. I don't care who he is anymore." She thinks she is the only one protecting their kids, sometimes even from their own dad. When he fails to correct or tries to explain away a child's disruptive behavior, she thinks he is encouraging the behavior and making the situation worse. Her deep resentment toward him has made their marriage distant.

The Wife's Perspective on the Marital Relationship

Like several of the couples in the study, C6W believes that the couple's communication has improved because of the actions of the oppositional children. Because she has "almost come to my breaking point," it has forced her husband to get involved and relieve some of the parenting pressure she is feeling. The communication has been forced, but they do believe that it is better. The distance in their relationship, however, is apparent; no morning kisses, no evening kisses, no good-bye hugs, and these refusals to be intimate stem from her. She rebuffs any attempts he makes to be close. She finds herself constantly fighting the negative feelings that permeate her cognitive patterns, but the smallest mistake by her husband will send her into an emotional tailspin.

It is not that they do not know that correct parental and relational things to do. She believes that after all the counseling they have been through they could write a book on proper parenting and marriage relationships. It is not that they lack the knowledge, but that they lack the will to do what they know they should.

In front of the children, C6W will force herself to sit in her husband's lap or cuddle with him, so they can model a good marriage. She readily admits, however, a heavy layer of dislike lurks beneath the surface. C6W believes that the sexual relationship that she shares with her husband is the only positive aspect of their relationship. Not only does she feel close to her mate during sexual intercourse, but this is the only time that she feels close to him. It is a welcome break from the constant state of disagreement over parenting issues.

C6W does not like to take the children to a restaurant or to social gatherings, but not because of the children's oppositional behavior. Rather, she dislikes being out as a family because of her husband's behavior. He minimizes and excuses their oppositional behavior at home, but in public, he further yells when they do not respond instantly. This exemplifies the "heavy and severe" resentment she continues to feel toward her husband.

The Husband's Perspective on the Marital Relationship

C6H admits that communication in their marriage is better than when they first got married, although it is still "not as good as she would want it." He thinks his wife is just one of those people who need "tons" of communication, and he will probably never be able to meet this need. He is careful to not admit a deficiency in his own character where it comes to openly communicating with others; he tends to shift the blame for the

communication problem in their marriage to her unrealistic need for an overabundance of talk. He believes he is actually better at nonsexual intimacy than his wife. Unlike many women, he says she does not need or want much affection, hand holding, and so forth. She is much more interested in the sexual aspect of their relationship, which he thinks is better now than it has been in a long while.

Because his wife stays in a constant state of disapproval of his duties as a husband and a father, C6H thinks he is bullied at home. He finds himself perpetually in trouble for his actions, or lack thereof. He believes his point of view with regard to parenting issues is not considered valid and that his wife speaks too harshly and degradingly in front of his children. This, in his estimation, has given rise to a high level of resentment toward C6W, and he struggles with how to deal with that. He concedes that he and his wife have always differed in their opinion of how best to discipline their children and that disagreement inevitably led to conflict and confrontation between them. But instead of discussing these differences calmly and coming to a resolution, his wife berates and rebukes him in a demeaning manner. He believes his wife's negative behavior trumps his negative behavior in its impact on the family.

C6H is disappointed that the vitriol shared between him and his wife has impacted her spiritual walk. Though they used to pray together, it is no longer a spiritual force in the home. In some ways, he sees his wife's resentment toward him transferring to her resentment toward God. He feels somewhat responsible for that. He recognizes that the family's social outings have been restricted, not simply because of the oppositional child's behavior, but also because his wife disapproves of the way he handles the kids when they are in public. He downplays his and his boys' demeanor in public as no more

than “horsing around,” just like he and his brother did growing up. Her attitude about this is another example of her emasculating attitude toward him. He looks forward to the day when the children have moved out of the house and he can try and rekindle the relationship with his wife. He realizes that “it might take twelve years” to get to know her the way he desires to, but he is willing to put forth that effort no matter how long it takes.

The Story of C7

The Early History of the Couple

The story of C7 began in 1989 at a Po’ Folks restaurant in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. C7W, who was 29 at the time, walked into the restaurant with her family and immediately noticed a 20-year-old waiter. There was no romantic attraction at the beginning, she just invited C7H to church. Every time she and her family dined at that restaurant, he would wait on their table. C7W was impressed with the young man’s maturity and sense of responsibility and it was not long before amorous feelings developed between them. C7H was taken by her good looks, plain and simple. Even her father commented that the boy just could not keep his eyes off her. As the romance began to unfold, C7W’s parents were very supportive, but the young man’s parents were set against the couple, due to the age difference. He was just a sophomore in college at the time, and they were afraid that marriage could derail his future plans and cause him to drop out of school. The words of caution from his parents in no way dissuaded the couple and they were married after only 6 months of courtship. The wedding took place quickly because C7W found out that she was pregnant after several month of engagement. C7H

worked offshore at the time, and the wedding was hastily arraigned to take place before he had to return to sea for another month.

The Initial Parenting Experience

The subsequent birth of their first child so soon after they were married was difficult on the couple. This was especially true for C7H. He was so young at the time he barely understood who he was and where he was going as a person. Add to this discovery and uncertainty a new wife and a new child, and juggling work, school, and family and his sense of feeling overwhelmed is understood.. He worked hard at trying to adjust to all of the changes and challenges in his life, but he still struggled just the same. Both described these first few years of their marriage relationship as rocky.

Couple's Perspective on the Marital Relationship and the ODD Parenting Experience

This first child was strong-willed, but showed no real signs of being oppositional until he was 14 years old. At this time in the family's life, C7H was a logistics manager for a high-technology computer company and C7W was a retired law enforcement officer. It was at this age they concluded that his behavior went beyond stubbornness or independence. He was manipulative, demanding, and coercive in his behavior. He was quite successful at being able to pit his parents against each other for. C7H used anger to deal with his son's unruly behavior, but his anger just started with C7OC and quickly moved to the other members of the family. To his family, he seemed to always be angry. He describes himself as a fairly passionate person, stemming from his Italian heritage. He found it very difficult to feel anger and not express it, and he felt a lot of anger toward his

oppositional son. When he came home from work, he appeared angry before he opened the door. It took very little aberrant behavior from C7OC to ignite an anger outburst that impacted every member of the family. When they heard that daddy was home, they walked on eggshells to avoid setting off an explosion.

C7W handled it differently. She was raised in a very strict home, by a very angry and abusive mother. When she was 18 years old, C7W's mother beat her with a belt for simply being displeased with her daughter's behavior. She swore to never put her children through anything like that. Accordingly her parenting style was an easygoing approach. She tried to mold C7OC's behavior by offering rewards and by attempting to understand his explanations. This created a classic good cop-bad cop scenario. The father was harsh and the mother was sympathetic. The son played them both against each other. The father resented the fact that he was constantly being put in the position of being the villain during disciplinary episodes with their son. He felt bitterness toward his wife for sacrificing his relationship with his son, because she was too weak to enforce the rules. C7W felt this tension as well. She believes, however, that the marriage is solid, and she's learning, through counseling, to handle her oppositional child differently. She is drawing clear boundaries and enforcing agreed upon rules, but this new parenting policy is not only disrupting her son's life but hers as well. She feels like a prisoner in her own home. Now that he is being grounded for poor behavior choices, she is being forced to stay at home with him to make sure that he complies with the consequence. She believes she is paying a high price for her son's behavior.

The Husband's Perspective on the Marital Relationship

C7H thinks the onset of oppositional behavior in his son caused a severe disruption in his communication with his wife. They fundamentally looked at parenting from opposite points of view. He saw the child as a problem a long time before she accepted the fact. Since they disagreed so often on how to parent the child, they stayed mad at each other a good part of the time. Since they were frequently mad at each other, they had very little to say to each other. The anger that emerged over parental disagreements led to a steady decline in the amount and quality of their marital communication. The couple's intimacy level was impacted as well. C7H thought that because he stayed in a constant state of irritation, he did not feel much like being intimate with his wife. He is not able to turn his emotions on and off that easily. Once he got mad, he tended to stay that way for quite some time. In contrast, his wife constantly tried to avoid all conflict with the child and him, and he believed that this exacerbated the situation. Since they have received counseling, he believes that she has improved at dealing with parental conflict with the oppositional child and with finding resolution to marital issues as well. C7H also believes that the couple's religious practice and social life have been negatively impacted by the oppositional child's behavior. There were times, for example, that he would be out of town and C7OC would act so badly in church that C7W would have to pack up the children and go home early. And as far as going out together socially, they are afraid to leave their son home alone, so they just don't go anywhere. The best they can come up with is sneaking out of the house when all the kids are asleep for a quick cup of coffee together. The thing he regrets most about the experience of raising an oppositional and defiant child is the resentment it has caused. He

resents being constantly angry, not being able to go anywhere with his wife, and longing for the day his son is out of his house for good.

The Wife's Perspective on the Marital Relationship

C7W sees the relationship in similar ways. She believes that the communication level of the couple was adversely affected after the onset of their oldest son's oppositional behavior. She also contributes this to the fact that her husband stayed in a constant state of agitation. He, of course, struggled with anger issues their entire marriage, but after C7OC became oppositional this anger seemed the dominant feature of his personality; consequently, discussing the anger-producing issues became more difficult. Another adverse consequence of her husband's anger issue toward their son is her lack of sexual interest. She describes it as, "a big ball that is rolling downhill and there is nothing you can do to get out of the way. And when that ball hit me, the last thing in the world I want is to have sex." She believes that women want to experience love and feel valued; when that does not happen, she resents his actions and reflects his anger back at him.

C7W is seldom overt with her expressions of anger. She tends to avoid open conflict and chooses instead to retaliate in more passive aggressive ways. She does not feel she is capable of going one on one with her husband in open conflict, but she has a vast array of more effective retaliatory options by going behind his back. For example, she admits withholding sexual relations, cutting off communication, and being uncooperative over family management issues. She disagrees with her husband that her conflict avoidance has caused him to be the heavy with their oppositional child. She

believes while C7H is gone all day, she is taking on a majority of the conflict by herself. She sees her husband taking over the disciplining chores in the evenings as turnabout is fair play. She has a view of parenting fundamentally opposite to her husband's, including the parenting of all of their children, not just C7OC. But the disagreements over how to discipline the oppositional child, is just the most dramatic dispute.

She agrees with C7H that her faith, more than his, has been affected by their son's oppositional behavior, but not in a negative way. She believes that her faith is much stronger because of her interaction with C7OC. It has forced her to spend more time in prayer seeking God's grace and guidance. She believes this spiritual emphasis keeps her calm and prevents her from overreacting. In contrast, their social lives have been very unfavorably affected. She feels, as her husband does, afraid to go anywhere. And even when they do venture out together, her mind is constantly focused on what her oppositional child is doing or what he has already done in their absence. And finally, she agrees with her husband that resentment is the biggest negative to parenting an oppositional child. This would imply resentment on both sides: the husband for the things she has done or not done, and the wife for his anger outbursts and constant criticism.

The Story of C8

The Early History of the Couple

C8 met each other in 1985 at a church singles function in San Antonio, Texas. She was 22 at the time and he was only 20. He was struck by her obvious good looks and servant's heart, and she was drawn to his strong, outgoing presence. It took about 6 weeks for the couple to begin a dating relationship. That relationship lasted over a year

and half and weathered several break ups and reconciliations. It was during one of these periods of separation that both realized they were destined to spend the rest of their lives together. They were married with the support and enthusiasm of both families.

The Initial Parenting Experience

The couple had discussed on several occasions the subject of having children, but C8W had medical issues that made conception very difficult. They, therefore, had an unspoken 5-year plan that included paying off all major bills before beginning a regimen of infertility treatments to conceive on their own. C8H recalls the decision for C8W to stop taking her contraception, which was causing her health problems. It was a difficult decision because they knew there was a possibility they could conceive and they were not in an adequate position financially to have a child. Despite their plans, eighteen months after they were married they became the proud parents of a new baby boy, followed 10 months later with the birth of their daughter. So 2½ years into their 5-year plan, they were the parents of two children. The initial reaction to being parents was mixed for the couple. C8H was thrilled with this new deep, instant love he felt for these new children, whereas his wife was overwhelmed by the awesome responsibility of taking care of these little babies.

Couple's Perspective on the Marital Relationship and the ODD Parenting Experience

Although both children eventually developed symptoms of ODD, C8's second child showed defiant tendencies first. Her terrible twos just never went away. She had been born prematurely and spent substantial time in the neonatal unit of the hospital.

When her mother finally brought her home, she immediately knew that something was different about this child. She was emotionally hypersensitive. Just singing “Happy Birthday” to her in a restaurant was enough to cause her to go into an emotional outburst. Her intellect allowed her the ability to finish her kindergarten work before most of the other kids. Her “free time” would result in getting into trouble for fidgety, disruptive behavior. Even bedtime was a horrendous battle. Their daughter’s attitude seemed to be, “How dare you try and force me to do something that I don’t want to do!” The child’s unending defiant attitude put her and her parents at constant odds. The parent-child relationship quickly became adversarial. There was no inward motivation for good behavior. Even when C8OC was compliant, it was evident to all that it was a forced compliance.

The couple attempted to understand their daughter and her actions. They quickly experimented with every form of discipline, and tried to explain to their daughter that their intent was not to hurt her, but to help her. When that failed they tried spankings, but adverse behavior increased requiring the punishments to increase. C8W handled most of the discipline in the early years. It was not until the child’s early teen years that C8H believed the need to get involved and the couple’s divergent parenting strategies became an issue. C8W believed that the child should be given more freedoms to balance out the restrictions that were always placed upon her, while C8H took a “you do the crime, you do the time” type mentality. C8W was also the parent that tended to address difficult discipline episodes through yelling and screaming. She was yelled at as a child, and this parenting strategy seemed the most natural to her. In contrast, C8H addressed problems from a more analytical, logical perspective. This was a more tranquil approach, but it also

left him emotionally distant from the family. Even though the couple disagreed with each other on the best method to handle the discipline issues with their defiant child, neither was supremely confident that his or her technique was correct. They both felt ill at ease and unsure as to what was best.

The Husband's Perspective on the Marital Relationship

C8H believed the oppositional child's behavior caused him and his wife to doubt their parenting abilities and question each other's methods of dealing with their daughter. This conflict brought about a deterioration of the couple's communication with each other. Both seemed intractable in their viewpoints and no amount of griping at each other was going to change them. C8H believes this breach in relationship impacted the couple's nonsexual intimacy level. When C8W is mad at him, the last thing she wants to do is be intimate with him in any way. Consequently, the couple's sexual relationship was similarly impacted. If there was conflict, generated either by the husband or by the daughter, the sexual faucet was turned off. He, on the other hand, could engage in sexual activity in spite of conflict. Additionally, he feels that the couple's confusion over discipline strategies has resulted in very poor conflict management within the couple's relationship as well.

During the interview, C8H tended to downplay issues, minimize problems, and superspiritualize remedies. He claimed that prayer was his primary mode of conflict management, even though many of those conflicts ended with vitriolic, emotionally damaging exchanges. In his view, seeking a higher power when he was at the end of his ability was the most productive strategy he could employ. He believed that his spiritual

life was adversely affected by the conflict with his wife that was initiated by the daughter's opposition. Because he was unable to come to some sort of compromise or find any agreement with his wife, he began to question the presence and purpose of God. It caused him great concern that he was unable to find and follow the will of God in his life. If he were able to ascertain God's will, then he thought all this conflict would end. He took spiritual responsibility for what was happening in his family.

Socially and recreationally, the couple was hampered as well. When the oppositional child was acting up, the couple was afraid to venture out in public, and when he and his wife were at odds, neither of them felt like going out together. And since these conflicts made up a majority of their family life, the family tended to isolate themselves from the outside world. C8H believed that parenting an oppositional child caused him to question who he was as a parent and to question who he married and why he would choose to stay with this person for the rest of his life. The constant conflict caused him to look for someone to blame, and his wife was the most logical scapegoat.

The Wife's Perspective on the Marital Relationship

C8W agreed with her husband that their communication as a couple as suffered due to the hostility generated by arguing over how to discipline their oppositional child. After a battle occurred over some disagreement concerning a discipline issue, they would not have much to say to each other afterward. They could not find anything to talk about. They disagreed and there was no convincing the other person he or she was wrong. She attributed these awkward silences to lingering anger and frustration. She did not think their nonsexual intimacy was affected in any way because their marriage never had much

of it to start with. C8H, she felt, had never been a “touchy-feely” kind of person. For the life of their marriage, he was never one to show outward demonstrations of love or affection, so their anger toward each other over parenting issue had very little impact on this aspect of their relationship.

Sexual intimacy, however, was a very different story. Their sexual relationship was definitely negatively impacted by the frustration and anger spawned by parenting an oppositional child, but not because of the anger or frustration. C8W believes their decrease in sexual frequency and satisfaction was due more to the separation and withdrawal that the couple employed during disagreements and the constant fatigue she experienced. She recalls being so exhausted by the relentless barrage of conflict within the home that sexual intimacy was the last consideration on her mind.

C8W considered her husband to be conflict avoidant throughout their entire relationship, which was only exacerbated by the increased oppositional behaviors during their daughter’s teen years. This problem grew worse only because there were more conflicts to avoid. She recalled that when conflicts arose with their daughter and disagreements arose over how best to handle it, he would shut down, be quiet, play on the computer, or just generally retreat from all interaction. This left C8W feeling lonely, abandoned, and eventually very resentful. She considered the differences in their parenting styles to be fundamental. She developed her view of parenting from the way she was brought up. She considered her mother to be overbearing and highly restrictive. So to counter this negative memory from her childhood, she decided to be decidedly less restrictive. She believed a parent should not say “no” to everything. She used her mother’s style of parenting as a guide for what not to do with her kids. And since her

husband's discipline philosophy seemed to be closer to his mother's philosophy than to hers, she had a hard time seeing any issue from her husband's point of view. It was as if agreeing with her husband, meant agreeing with her mother. She would never allow that to happen.

C8W believed that her religious faith has been severely impacted by the conflict that has risen from parenting an oppositional child. Her problem was that God knew that neither of them, as parents, had good parenting models growing up. So how could they be expected to know how to handle these situations? If God knew they were ill equipped to parent an oppositional, defiant child, why would He let them have two? She would watch other people's children at church or at school and wonder why God punished her with children that hated God and hated her. This observation left her with no confidence in her abilities to parent properly and no confidence in God to help her in her times of need. She believes that the conflict that has occurred over the years due to the oppositional behavior of her children has ripped the fabric of their home. The stress has caused the entire family to withdraw from each other, which leaves their home with a relational void that nothing seems to fill. The only positive that she could think of is that parenting an oppositional child has forced her and her husband to "get in there and figure out what we're going to do." In hindsight, when it came to parenting decisions, sometimes she was correct and sometimes her husband was correct, but they always tried to be unified in what they were saying, even if this unity was more of a façade than genuine cohesiveness.

How Participants' Stories Relate to the Research Question

The research question for this study centered on each couple's experience of parenting a child with ODD and what effects, if any, this had on their marriage relationship. Each of the couples interviewed stated unequivocally that the experience had in fact affected their marital relationship. Most of the effects were negative, but some consequences turned out to be positive. The most noted negative effects were disagreement over parenting issues, being critical of or blaming spouse for parenting difficulties, increased stress levels, a disruption of religious faith or practice, poor communication, a reduction of sexual and nonsexual intimacy, restricted social interaction, and increased resentment. The most noted positive effects were being forced to be on the same page, being made to be better parents for the other children in the home, and a strengthening of the couple's religious faith.

Summary

This chapter sought to give a detailed account of how the research data were gathered and recorded, provide a review of the research question, and offer a reflection of the researcher's own experience with the phenomenon. The chapter concluded with the participant's personal stories. These case studies attempted to relate in the clearest manner possible the couple's concerning the raising of an oppositional defiant child. It explored the individual participants' thoughts on the ramifications it may have had on their marital relationship. The next chapter will seek to identify, from the collected data, the research findings, a notation of any discrepant or nonconforming data,

recommendations for further research, and a reflection of the researcher's own experience during this study.

CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The final chapter should not be used to determine a conclusion to the research question. In qualitative research, the emphasis is much less on conclusions and more on opening doors of understanding. Qualitative researchers are especially susceptible to the propensity to reach past reporting what is and to use their research projects as a stage for making declarations of what ought to be (Wolcott, 1990).

Within the methodology of phenomenology, my observations and understanding were entwined in a substantive exploration of each couple's lived experience. This chapter includes a phenomenological attempt to bring understanding to those experiences. The chapter includes an interpretation of the findings that were derived from the collected data. The common attitudes of the participating husbands and wives, the observations of the couples concerning ODD, and the perceived negative and positive effects of parenting a child with ODD on the marital relationship are all discussed.

Interpretation of Findings

The trouble with phenomenological research is not that we end up knowing too little about the phenomenon, but that we know too much (Van Manen, 1990). This chapter expresses the end result of the data analysis, of searching through the massive amount of data collected to find the common themes that can lead to understanding. Through the coding of the interview transcripts by the researcher and the assistant researcher, the field notes taken by the researcher during the interviews, and the perceptions and insights of the researcher, this section seeks to interpret those findings. The common attitudes of the participating husbands are discussed first.

Common Attitudes and Actions of the Participating Husbands

Though the participating husbands in this study differed in age, family background, education, and years of marital experience, they shared several common attitudes, thoughts, and feelings. Some husbands were eager to discuss their views concerning their marriage relationship as it related to their ODD parenting experience, whereas others were not as open and attempted to minimize many issues. Some participating husbands had anger control issues, as opposed to others who were more passive and unengaged. Some verbally manipulated and controlled their spouses, whereas others felt bullied and emasculated by their wives. Although the husbands differed in many areas, they had these five attitudes in common. The first attitude listed is the most referenced attitudes derived from the interview transcripts, or perceived by the interviewer, and the subsequent attitudes are listed in descending order of frequency.

Passive and Conflict Avoidant

The most striking and prevalent revelation that emerged from the interviews and the perception of the researcher was the number of husbands who were weak-willed, ineffectual, unengaged, conflict avoidant, or passive in their interactions with their wives and children. This attitude was more common than any other and was a commonality among all but one of the participants. During the interview process, many of the men minimized the seriousness of the situation and the role their behavior played in it. Many of them had adopted a *peace through appeasement* strategy. In other words, “What can I do or say to make this uncomfortable confrontation go away?” They wanted everyone to get along, and when members of the family were not able to comply with this desire, they

would retreat and let the wives handle any disciplinary confrontations. In reaction to their husbands' behavior, the wives harbored a great deal of resentment toward them because they believed they were forced to deal with the difficult parenting issues alone as a result of their husbands' lack of initiative and fortitude. C2W stated, "There are conflicts where he won't go there. He just won't go there." The husbands' lack of engagement in the discipline process with the children and in conflict with their wives seems to have left a power or authority void within the families that the wives felt obligated to fill. The more the men were criticized and berated for their lack of engagement, the more they withdrew from the family dynamic and harbored deep resentment toward their wives for the way they were reprimanded. For example, one of the husbands explained that his coping mechanism while at dinner with his family was to "not notice" the aberrant behavior of his children. In other words, if he did not see the bad behavior, then he was not obligated to deal with it.

It is not that these men do not feel anger toward their children or wives; they do. They simply subliminate these feelings and suppress their expression. C5H explained, "It's like I'm not a screamer. I'm not a door slammer, but again, I go for the scornful look or the, you know, passive-aggressive sort of, just ignore it. You know, the silent treatment." Another similar coping strategy employed by some of the husbands is to irrationally trust the word of their oppositional child. Even when the defiant child was known to compulsively fabricate to avoid consequences, some of the husbands blindly accepted the child's word regardless of the facts presented. This seemingly irrational trust in the child once again prevented the father from having to discipline the child. If the husband accepted the child's word, there would be no need to engage in a potentially disruptive

confrontation. As C4H explained, “The kids are basically good, so I say, leave them alone.”

Ill-Prepared for Parenthood

Another point of view shared by a majority of the husbands interviewed was their seeming lack of preparedness for the role of being a parent. Most of these men were focused on their careers and pursuing personal goals and were shocked at the weighty responsibility of caring for a child. C1H said, “It was completely alien to me.” While C4H stated, “Like I was surprised that they [the baby] had to have a bath everyday.” This difficulty in moving the focus from themselves to the welfare of a child was a foreshadowing of future self-interest that would come into play later in the life of the couple. It also was a precursor to the feelings of many of the wives that they were abandoned by their spouses and they believe they have to raise the children alone. C2H stated, “You don’t realize what you’re getting into, even though you thought you were prepared.” This attitude of self-interest was also expressed by one husband who felt jealous and uneasy about the child when it was born. C3H admitted, “I felt irritated. Probably because it took away my time with my wife, and you just lost sleep.”

Confused and Overwhelmed

Several of the husbands expressed not only thoughts of being unprepared for the birth of their children, but also being ill-equipped to handle difficult discipline issues when they arose later in the child’s life. The thoughts of unpreparedness could stem from not having adequate parental models growing up or an innate sense of indecision, but

confusion regarding discipline decisions stood out as a common theme. C3H stated, “Mine is just not knowing what would work. That was my biggest struggle.” These men, paradoxically, showed much less interest than their wives in taking the time to learn improved parenting skills. While the wives went to classes, read books, and sought counsel on how to effectively deal with an oppositional child, many of the men spurned most of those aids, choosing instead to simply complain about the situation or criticize their wives for their parenting decisions. C8H concluded, “I didn’t have any great confidence either, that, you know, that I knew what was right.” Many of the husbands correlated their confusion with a sense of being overwhelmed by the constant agitation of parenting an oppositional, defiant child. The relentless conflict with the oppositional child and the resultant disagreement with their wives led these men to feel besieged by their circumstances. C5H concluded, “I get home, it’s like forget the clothes, man, forget changing clothes, forget eating, forget everything. Just look around for any sign of disaster.”

Increased Involvement in Discipline Process due Solely to Spousal Pressure

Most of the husbands stated that they improved their parenting skills throughout the years of parenting an ODD child, especially after engaging in the counseling process. However, the men did not improve because of an inward motivation to change. Most related that their improvement in parental behavior was due to aggressive pressure from their wives. The wives had to prod, poke, manipulate, and coerce their husbands into changing their parental involvement. The husbands appeared content to continue on their dysfunctional parenting course if not for the persistent, forceful intervention of their

wives. As C4H stated, “[My] wife wants me to be stricter, so I’m stricter. And I look at it’s like having a job where there is a company policy. Where you don’t agree with the company policy, but nevertheless, you’ve got to do it.”

Explosive Anger and Resentment

A less common characteristic shared by the husbands was uncontrolled anger or an explosive temper. Some of the husbands were by nature conflict avoidant, but when pushed too far they lashed out in a rage, while others were more naturally quick-tempered. C6H confessed, “I’m oppositional myself. So when my children pulled that off, it triggered something in me that shamed me.” The catalyst for these emotional outbursts ranged from the behavior of the oppositional child, blaming the wife for her handling of the discipline situation, to the wife’s perceived emasculation of the husband by her disapproval of his handling of a discipline situation. The anger led to intense resentment by the husband toward not only his wife, but the oppositional child as well. C7H put it this way, “I resent a lot. I resent the fact that I have to think about, gosh, when is he leaving? When is he going to be out of my house? You know.”

Less Common Attitudes

Other attitudes that were either directly mentioned in the interview transcripts or perceived by the interviewer were an overemphasis on career, avoiding parenting method improvement, and the feeling of emasculation by the wife.

Common Attitudes and Actions of the Participating Wives

From the outset the wives interviewed for this study seemed more engaged, more urgent about the issue, and more emotionally involved with the family difficulties being discussed. As a group, the wives seemed to be the driving force behind seeking professional help for the parental and marital issues that were prevalent in their families and the catalyst for any meaningful change. This was not a detached issue in their minds. They were personally guilty, personally grieved, and personally angry. In fact, most of these women were angry. They were angry at the children for their behavior, but much angrier at their husbands for their lack of involvement and passive demeanors. Most of the women felt abandoned, hurt, and frustrated, and two of the wives called the researcher after the interview session to make sure they had not been ambiguous about the depth of their frustration and resentment held toward their husbands. Not all the wives held this level of vitriol toward their husbands. Generally, they were a diverse group. Several wives saw themselves working together with their husbands toward a common goal or even feeling closer to their spouses because of the struggle. Although they differed in many areas, they shared these six attitudes in common. The first attitude listed is the most referenced attitude derived from the interview transcripts, or perceived by the interviewer, and the subsequent attitudes are listed in descending order of frequency.

Feelings of Abandonment

The most common characteristic shared by the participating wives was a sense of abandonment by their husbands. They felt alone. They had to deal with the turmoil within the family while the husbands were at work and then had to continue to deal with it at

night when many of their husbands came home and still refused to engage. C4W stated, “I feel like I’m on this pinnacle by myself trying to enforce this and my husband is not behind me on it, backing me up, much less standing beside me enforcing it with the child.” The wives not only felt abandoned in the area of discipline with the oppositional child, but also emotionally abandoned by their husbands as a result of the anger produced by their disagreements and conflicts. Abandonment is one of the main reasons these women sought out professional counseling despite the pleas of it being unnecessary by their husbands. They needed to talk to someone. They believed they needed someone who would understand their feelings and help find solutions to long-standing parental and marital issues. C5W stated, “And understand that when you do have someone who is passive and maybe doesn’t deal with it, well it is my role. And until that person rises up, you know, I do a lot of times feel very alone.”

Anger with Husband

The next most prevalent attitude that was shared by the wives interviewed was anger at their husbands. They were angry at them for a myriad of reasons: the husbands were too passive, too strict, too volatile, or too detached. C7W, who was angry at her husband for his uncontrolled anger, shared, “Oh he’s fine at work and I’m sure he’s having a good ol’ time at work. And you know, he comes home, hits the door and automatically [the whole family] walks on eggshells because he’s already mad.” Most were angry that their husbands had forced them into a more adversarial relationship with their children, while the husband tried to remain the children’s nice, understanding friend. One of the main results of this anger was withholding of communication, sexual

intimacy, and nonsexual intimacy. Their anger led them to feel very critical of their husbands. They were critical to the point of agreeing with their husbands that they had, in some ways, become verbally abusive as a result. Screaming was the most prominent coping mechanism chosen by several of these wives. C5W stated, “I think I tend to, you know, if I get upset, I will yell.” While C8W said, “Well, it’s one of those hereditary things. I was screamed at. You know?”

Hopelessness

Hopelessness was another attitude that was shared by several of the wives. They were tired, they had tried so many remedies, and they felt they were so alone that they had all but given up. C2W stated, “Well, I mean, it’s just a world of criticism, hate, and guilt. And you just . . . there’s nothing good about it. Nothing.” As the interviewer, I observed this sense of hopelessness in these women’s body language. As their husband would speak, there was a spirit of despondency about them. It was as if they had heard it all before and did not comprehend how this unbearable situation could ever change. This is why C4W stated, “I realize, like he [her husband] told us one time, he’s not going to change, and I’m not going to change. So we just have to muddle through.”

Guilt over Bad Parenting

Hopelessness led many of the women to doubt their own abilities as mothers or wives. Several of the women exhibited a pervasive sense of guilt because they saw their own parenting mistakes as the causative reason their children were oppositional. C4W said, “Have we done something to inadvertently cause this in our child? Was it our

parenting methods?” While C5W concluded, “I feel like I’ve failed as a parent. I feel like that if he’s [the ODD child] acting like this, it’s because of our upbringing of him.” The guilt also makes the mothers more sensitive to the opinions of others concerning their parenting skills. Several of the wives felt judged by others. The list of those judging them is long. They stated that they felt judged by family, parents, school teachers and counselors, church workers, and neighbors. C2W stated, “Because when you have an ODD kid, everyone is judging it.”

Feelings of Lost Love for Oppositional Child

Another feeling that produced guilt and added to the hopelessness in several of the wives was their admission that they often felt no love for their oppositional child. The conflict had lasted for so long and there was such an accumulation of anger and resentment that, at times, they could not find it within themselves to feel love toward their oppositional child. C2W confessed, “I think the worst feeling is, I don’t love him when he acts that way. And that is who he is. So maybe I don’t really love him.” While C4W added, “After a fight with [the ODD daughter], there were times when you walk out muttering the same things she is saying out loud. I hate you, well, I hate her. It’s a terrible thing for a mother to say.”

Proactive in Seeking Improved Parenting Skills

Another common attitude among these women was their desire to be better parents and partners. They constantly read self-help books about parenting and marriage enrichment. They attended classes, went to retreats, and were the motivating force behind

seeking professional counseling for their home situation. Several of the wives were irritated that the desire to grow and learn was not shared by their husbands. C4W stated, “I mean, I feel like I’ve been reading all these books on child rearing. I keep trying to employ some of the methodology, which takes training yourself because you just naturally parent. I felt like we [she and her husband] have not been on the same page in trying to do some of those things.”

Less Common Attitudes

Other attitudes that were either mentioned or perceived by the interviewer were guilt over births of oppositional child out of wedlock, being overwhelmed by birth of first child, and having severe marital issues prior to onset of oppositional symptoms in child. Both couples who had their children out of wedlock were also the only two couples who experienced severe marital discord prior to oppositional onset.

Observations on ODD Based on Couple Interviews

Although the experience of parenting a child with ODD differs from family to family, the couples that participated in this study shared many aspects of the experience in common. The first observation listed is the most referenced observation derived from the interview transcripts, or perceived by the interviewer, and the subsequent observations are listed in descending order of frequency.

- Seven of the eight couples involved in this study had their firstborn child exhibit oppositional behavior.
- Six of the eight oppositional children were male.

- Six of the children had onset of oppositional symptoms during the early adolescent years. C3W stated, “We started having great difficulty in seventh grade. That’s when we noticed a definite decrease in his motivation. He just didn’t care.”
- Six of the children exhibited extreme egocentrism. C7W said, “Yeah, I mean because he definitely believes he’s the center of the universe and the world revolves around him. And unfortunately I’m giving him a lot of satisfaction in that.”
- Five of the eight children had high levels of conflict with other siblings in the household. C2W stated, “The conflict between our children has affected our marriage about as much as the ODD child himself.”
- Three couples felt that they had neglected the other children in the family because of the constant attention demanded by the oppositional child.
- Three of eight children were compulsive liars.
- Three of the eight children found it almost impossible to respect authority.
- Three of the fathers had exhibited symptoms of oppositional behavior when they were teenagers.
- Two of the children had earlier childhood onset. C8W shared, “So she had terrible twos and just stayed there. So she has been oppositional and defiant her whole life.”

Perceived Negative Effects of Parenting an ODD Child on the Marital Relationship

The crux of the interview sessions was the exploration of each couple's insight into the effects, if any, parenting a child with ODD had on their marital relationship. Each couple seemed eager to explore the situation. Even during the recruitment process the couples, wives specifically, seemed enthusiastic about the opportunity to express their insights pertaining to an issue that had so radically influenced their home lives. Most of the couples appeared relatively honest during the first half of the interviews when they were answering together, but when they were separated during the second half, the vitriol that had remained under the surface for many of the couples was easily exposed.

The overwhelming conclusion of the data collection process is that, in the mind of the couples, parenting an oppositional child has had numerous negative effects on their marital relationship. This section of the study specifies which negative effects were most apparent to the couples themselves. The first listed will be the most referenced effects derived from the interview transcripts, or perceived by the interviewer, and the subsequent effects are listed in descending order of frequency.

Disagreement over Parenting Issues

There were three negative consequences of parenting an oppositional child that were most prevalent in the data. Disagreement over parenting issues, however, was the most foundational characteristic to this discussion because all of the anger, resentment, bitterness, withdrawal, and hopelessness stem from a fundamental disagreement between the marital partners on how to discipline their oppositional child. C3W stated, "Yeah, as he [the oppositional child] got older, then [my husband] started having opinions on how

to handle him and I didn't agree with those. That's what caused his huge conflict." The couples disagreed on a myriad of issues ranging from what discipline strategies to employ, the level of anger employed, the role of each partner in the discipline process, and what constituted aberrant behavior in the first place. This divergence of opinion was not superficial, as one might disagree on where to eat an evening meal; rather, these disagreements stemmed from diametrically opposing worldviews that had been established within each partner throughout his or her life. C6H stated, "I think a lot of it has to do with what we brought into the marriage, what our parts are. Because some of the things she really wants me to be serious about are not ingrained in me that way. . . . She has a big problem with that."

Being Critical of or Blaming Spouse for Parenting Difficulties

C7H commented, "[Because my wife was so lenient], I just had to be harder and harder. So you really had the good cop, bad cop scenario. So I would just get stricter and stricter. It would put more stress on me." Parental disagreement quickly turned to blame for many of the couples. Each spouse was sure that the other spouse's method of dealing with the oppositional child was not only wrong, it actually exacerbated the problem. The other spouse's out-of-control anger caused the child to act that way or their lenient inconsistency caused the child to act that way. And even if one spouse was not absolutely certain that his or her approach to parenting the rebellious child was correct, he or she was extremely confident that the spouse's approach was the wrong way to handle it. In the blaming of the spouse, the beginning of all the other negative consequences begins to emerge. The disagreement metastasized into personal hurt and hostility. C3W said, "I

would be furious with my child about something fairly minor and I'd realize in the midst of it that I am more furious with [my husband] than I am at the child and what he did.”

Increased Stress Level

Parenting a child with ODD is a difficult endeavor. The constant conflict and irritation produces a large amount of stress for even the most committed couples with the best parenting strategies. But when the stress of raising an oppositional child is combined with the stress of continuously being at odds with one's spouse, the stress level can become unbearable. Numerous couples commented on the amount of stress they experience in their marriages and families. Several spouses thought this stress led to adverse consequences such as interrupted sleep patterns, weight gain, and depression. Most couples referred to the incessant nature of the problem. The anger and conflict was there when they got up in the morning, it seemed to worsen throughout the day, and was still very strong when they went to bed that night. There seemed to be no escaping the nervous tension. Even if the couple managed to get some time away to be together, their relationship was so strained, even the escape was affected. C8W stated, “It rips the fabric of your home. I mean, the stress of dealing with the child causes you to be stressed out, so it causes you to be stressed in the way you react to everybody else in the home.”

Disruption of Religious Faith or Practice

The first three negative effects listed in this section were of a general nature. Disruption of a couple's religious faith or practice was the most common specific effect mentioned by the couples interviewed. Most who mentioned this effect referred to how

they, as a family, felt restricted in going to church activities because of the oppositional child's behavior. They either were embarrassed by the child's behavior or feared judgment from others at their church. Others referred to the child's rejection of the family's religious tradition and how best to handle that from a parenting point of view. Several couples disagreed on the best way to come to a resolution with the prodigal child. C4W stated, "Some people, like my husband, will say, 'Well then they're 16 they can choose what they want,' but I disagree with that." Others suffered from what Dobson (1993) described as the betrayal barrier. They believed that God had in some way let them down. They had gone to church and raised their children in a Christian home, so they wanted to know why God cursed them with a rebellious, defiant child? C5W stated, "And so I think that ODD has left me on my knees before God. And I do sometimes question God, you know, why did I have to get this difficult child?" The final group, in contrast, believed they had let God down, not the other way around. They were Christian leaders in their church. They believed that if they were better, more committed to their faith, their children would not be behaving this way. C1H confessed, "First, I'm a deacon, so I kind of felt that I was supposed to have my family more in control." *Poor Communication*

C7W shared, "Well, communication was definitely better before onset. I think because he [the husband] wasn't as angry then." Poor communication between the partners was another frequently mentioned consequence of the anger and stress brought on by parenting the oppositional child. Because of the disagreements over parenting issues and the anger that stemmed from those conflicts, communication was one of the first casualties in this battle. Withdrawal seemed to be the most frequent strategy employed.

When the antagonism rose between the spouses and words of anger were exchanged, many times the couples would physically separate from each other or emotionally withdraw from the situation. They did not seem to possess the relational tools necessary to overcome substantive disagreements without resorting to anger outbursts and emotional retreat. C8W said, “I think it was more, we would kind of retreat. I would be so worn out from [the fighting] that I would just go to bed, and [my husband] would stay up late and brood.”

Reduction of Sexual and Nonsexual Intimacy

Another relational area that the couples believed had been negatively affected was sexual and nonsexual intimacy. The anger and resentment had been present in their relationships for so long that being physically or emotional engaged with their spouse no longer ranked as a high priority. C3H stated, “We’re in constant conflict with each other, so we’re not as motivated to hold hands.” C4W said, “I just don’t think of it any more.” During disciplinary episodes when the oppositional child was spewing threats and condemnations, several wives felt they were not safe. This was due in large part to the husband’s failure to take control of the disciplinary episodes. The wives felt they were not being protected by their husbands. This feeling of abandonment, as stated earlier, led to deeply held resentment on the part of the wives. And when some of the angry wives would berate and rebuke their husbands, sometimes in front of the children, the husband’s feelings of emasculation also led to deeply held resentment. Both spouses felt neglected and betrayed, which led to a vastly reduced desire for sexual and nonsexual intimacy. C7W declared, “It starts with the child acting out, then my husband getting

angry, then that starts the ball rolling. And it's rolling toward me and it's going to run over me. And the last thing I want at that time is sex."

Restricted Social Activity

Most of the participating couples that referred to their social activities being restricted as a couple attributed this restriction to the disruptive, awkward behavior of the oppositional child. They had experienced so many embarrassing public episodes with the child that they decided, as a couple, to reduce the times that they would engage publicly as a family. C6W stated, "We don't even have people over for dinner anymore. We haven't had people over for a long time." While these couples feared the child's public behavior, they also expressed another fear that led to limited social interaction: the fear of what the child would do at home in their absence. Several couples had witnessed very destructive behavior by the child when he or she was left with siblings or with a babysitter, so responding to the fear of a similar episode happening again, they decided it was best to just stay home. C7W noted, "That's because we're afraid to go anywhere!" Another aspect of restricted social activity mentioned by the couples was their inability to go anywhere socially as a couple because of the punishments that had to be carried out on the oppositional child. Because the child was regularly being kept home, or in his or her room for behavioral infractions, a parent was forced to be at the house to enforce this disciplinary action. Thus, when the child was grounded, the parent was grounded as well. And since the child seemed to be grounded all the time, these parents felt imprisoned almost all the time. C7W said, "When he's grounded, I can't go anywhere. I can't do

anything because he ends up getting stuck in his room for whatever he's doing and I have to be there to monitor him."

Increased Resentment

The resentment and anger experienced by so many of these couples led some to a deeper sense of hopelessness and despair. The hopelessness and despair eventually developed into strong, overwhelming feelings of resentment and bitterness. The persons suffering this way put a large portion of the blame on their spouses for the negative state of their family life and marriage. They had moved from simply complaining about their spouse's behavior to being universally critical of their spouse's character and personhood. C7H stated, "I felt like I had to pull up the slack. And I would resent that against her, you know, because I didn't want to be the enforcer. That's all I was." The couples had developed coping mechanisms for dealing with this antipathy: to try and appear to be a happily married couple, even when that was not the case. One couple tried their best to not show this deep-seated relational anger in front of their children. C6W said, "So I forced myself to sit in his lap and forced myself to go and cuddle with him, just so [the children] can see there is intimacy even though there is dislike there."

Perceived Positive Effects of Parenting an ODD Child on the Marriage Relationship

Even though a large portion of the comments made by the participating couples during the interview process focused on the perceived negative effects that parenting an oppositional child had on their marriage relationship, there were also several positive consequences that the couples shared. Most of the positive effects were seen as being

forced upon them by the circumstances of raising an ODD child. But regardless of the reason the positive outcomes occurred, most of the couples could see hope springing from their very difficult parenting ordeal. This section of the study specifies which positive effects were most apparent to the couples. The first listed will be the most referenced effects derived from the interview transcripts, or perceived by the interviewer, and the subsequent attitudes are listed in descending order of frequency.

Forced to “Be on the Same Page”

The most frequent positive effect perceived by the participating couples was the idea that the unremitting conflict and stress generated by the oppositional child had forced them as a couple to come together and find common ground as parents. They had to find agreement to regain the authority in the home. Presenting a common front became very important in dealing effectively with the oppositional child’s aberrant behavior. C7H stated, “I tell you what. I see a positive impact right now, because we’re now on the same page. And it makes us feel better together as a team.” Several couples stated that the turmoil had forced them to communicate better, to speak to each other more about what was happening in the family, so future parental conflict could be avoided. In fact C6W said, “I think communication is better, because we’ve had to come together and deal with it.” The concept of being unified against a common enemy was also a common theme shared by several couples. If they were going to win this battle, if they were going to eventually be victorious against this adversary within their home, then they would have to build a united parental coalition. C8W stated, “Even if we were in disagreement, we had to show a common front.”

Made to Be Better Parents for Other Children in the Home

C1H stated, “I think it made us stronger, you know, as parents with the other two [children].” Many couples felt that the mistakes made and the lessons learned in raising an oppositional child enabled them to be better, more affective parents with their other children. They have learned things through this experience such as establishing clear, strong boundaries, not letting their own anger influence the discipline process, and not giving in to terroristic threats uttered by their child. The lessons learned from the mistakes made gave them great confidence that those mistakes would not reappear while parenting their other children. As C4H stated, “[We’re] making more of an effort with the younger ones to set, you know, clear boundaries.”

Strengthened Religious Faith

Several of the parents mentioned that their religious faith had been strengthened by the difficult experience of parenting an ODD child. The adversity had caused them to rely more on prayer and increased their dependency on their relationship with God. C7W noted, “You’ve got to be prayed up and not just in the morning or in the evening. I mean this is all day long. That [prayer] keeps me from overreacting.” Several believed that God had allowed them to go through this experience for a reason, that God was going to use this experience for their ultimate good, as a believer. C5W stated, “[I can] see how God is using this moment in our lives to create a way for us to deal with this child. It’s given me great hope.”

This section expressed the culmination of the data collected and the shared themes that emerged in the interviews of the participating couples. The themes included how the

couple's perceived their past and present relationships, their perceptions of how parenting a child with ODD might have affected their marriage relationship, and an anecdotal reflection of what ODD looked like in these couples. The next section will look at the data that did not thematically correspond with the major themes presented.

Discrepant and Nonconforming Data

The couples that participated in the study shared many common attitudes and characteristics. There were, however, some data that were inconsistent with the majority of the data presented. This section identifies the nonconforming data and seeks to determine its relevance.

Preexisting Marital Disharmony

Two couples shared that they had marital issues that predated the onset of oppositional behavior by their child. One wife shared that early in the marriage, she had taken the kids and left the marriage three times, all before her oldest son began to exhibit defiant tendencies. C7H stated, "It [the marriage] was rocky in several different places. I think for me it was being married too young." As the research question for this study seeks to understand how parenting an oppositional child affects the marriage relationship, having preexisting marital difficulty makes it difficult to ascertain what adverse relational components were affected by the behavior of the child and which components existed before onset of oppositional behavior.

Other Children in the Home Neglected

While most couples thought that they had become better parents for their other children because of the experience of and the lessons learned from parenting an ODD child, one couple had another opinion. They believed that the experience had hindered their ability to parent the other children in the home adequately due to the overwhelming amount of time, energy, and emotion it took to control the oppositional child. This left very little time, energy, and emotion to properly raise the other children.

Closer Relationship with the Oppositional Child

With all but one exception, the couples stated that the experience of parenting an oppositional child had strained their relationship with that child. The constant state of turmoil and the unremitting exchange of vitriolic words and actions had left the parent-child relationship damaged. One discrepant report came from C6W who shared that her relationship with the oppositional child had actually been strengthened by the experience, “because I’ve had to talk to him. I’ve had to almost enter into his world.”

Structures of the Experience

To adequately reflect upon the phenomenological themes produced from the data, the data must be understood in some way other than categorical statements. Describing a lived experience cannot simply be summarized in conceptual constructs (Van Manen, 1990). When viewing the themes derived from the perceived negative influences of parenting an oppositional child and the common attitudes and actions of the husbands and wives as a whole, a deeper and more reflective understanding can be considered.

Experiential structures such as isolation, abandonment, contempt, and hopelessness can be perceived from a contemplation of a more overarching understanding.

Both husbands and wives communicated a sense of isolation from peers, family, and ultimately from each other. No one could understand the frustrations and conflict that permeate every aspect of their lives, so there was virtually no support system they believed they could turn to. The child's aberrant, disruptive behavior also caused the family to pull back from social interactions with friends or at church, so not only did these couples sense an emotional detachment from others, but they experienced a physical isolation as well. Since there was almost universal disagreement between the spouses on how to handle the ODD child, a more personal experience of isolation emerged as they found themselves isolated from each other. This feeling of isolation seemed to lead to a more relationally destructive feeling of abandonment.

Feelings of isolation may be unpleasant for a couple to experience, but feeling abandoned by your spouse has a much more accusatory tone and implication. The wives described feelings of being deserted by their husbands to deal with the tough parenting decisions required when raising an oppositional child. Because they perceived their husbands as passive and detached, there was an overabundance of resentment and anger because the wives believed they were always forced to be "the bad guy" and enforce the boundaries. The husbands thought that their wives could not be pleased and were always critical of them as husbands, fathers, and human beings. The husbands believed that their spouses had become constantly negative, vitriolic, and disrespectful to who they are as men.

The strong feeling of abandonment experienced by the couples led to feelings of contempt and disdain for each other. The prolonged contempt, coupled with no perceived improvement in the oppositional child's behavior, eventually led to a sense of hopelessness. Hopelessness describes each of the couples that participated in the study. Even though each couple sensed this feeling of hopelessness in some way, some were more pronounced. The couples seemed to have all but given up on their marriage, their families, and in some cases, their faith.

Implications for Counseling Couples with Children Diagnosed ODD

The results of this study could be used to assist counselors to better treat couples who parent ODD children. Knowing, in advance, that these couples are more apt to blame their spouses, that their marital stress levels are going to increase, their communication, and intimacy levels will decline could aid the counselor to address these issues in session in an anticipatory manner. For example, knowing couples in this situation tend to blame the other spouse could help the counselor to engage the couple in communication and relational strategies to help avoid this issue becoming a deteriorating factor later on. Another example would be to urge conflict avoidant husbands to engage in the discipline process to help prevent the feelings of isolation and abandonment experienced by many of the wives. Conversely, encouraging overly critical wives to respect and encourage the husbands parenting skills could help lessen his feelings of emasculation and resentment. Foreknowledge of these issues and preemptive intervention in counseling could help to reduce the negative influences that parenting an ODD child can have on a family.

Recommendations for Further Research

Van Manen (1990) noted, “A phenomenological description is always one interpretation, and no single interpretation of human experience will ever exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary, or even potentially richer or deeper description” (p. 31). The results of this study showed that the participating parents who raise a child with ODD suffer from a variety of relational maladies. The participants perceived that the relentless turmoil within the family caused by the behavior of the oppositional child affected their marital relationships in a variety of ways. However, the insight derived from this study is only a beginning to understanding the inner workings of these embattled families.

Even though the general experiences of these couples have been considered, individual aspects of this familial experience also deserve exploration. The first aspect is the passive, weak nature of the father and husband. This was the most striking observation made during the data analysis portion of the study. All but one of the participating husbands demonstrated this submissive relational style. Further research could examine if these husbands developed this passivity due to a stronger, more aggressive wife, or if the wives developed this assertiveness due to a more passive husband. It would also be worth investigating if these husbands were passive throughout their lives or if the trait developed after marriage.

Another issue that could fuel further research would be the benefit of parenting instruction early in the life of the couple. An additional common trait of these couples was their lack of understanding basic parenting skills. When met with parenting decisions brought about by the behavior of the oppositional child, they stated that they were ill

equipped to find a solution. They could not, together as a couple, decide on the most appropriate discipline strategy, and when they each reverted to the parenting skills observed in their families of origin, conflict and argument ensued. Another aspect of this issue would be how much the couple's poor parenting skills contributed to the development of ODD in their child.

Feelings of being isolated, fatigued, overwhelmed, and hopeless were other shared characteristics with several of the couples. These attitudes are also prominent symptoms of major depressive disorder. Another beneficial study might address the possibility that the parents were depressed. If they did suffer from clinical depression, the history of the onset of the disorder could be studied, as well as whether depression played a role in how they parented their children. This could help determine whether it played a role in how the spouses related to each other, and whether the depression was a by-product of the increased stress and tension in the home. In this study, all other psychological disorders were ruled out in each of the oppositional children involved to eliminate the possibility of those disorders tainting the possible causal relationship between the child's oppositional behavior and the parent's marital relationship. No psychological disorders were ruled out, or even addressed, with regard to the parent couples involved.

Another interesting issue that could be addressed by future research would be the timing of the onset of ODD in the life of the child, whether the child was oppositional from an early age or the aberrant behavior developed in early adolescents, and whether the timing of the onset had any bearing on the way the parents developed their parenting skills. If the oppositional behavior developed early in the child's life, it could be studied

whether the parents acquired more beneficial discipline management techniques that would aid them as the child grew. If the child's onset began in adolescence, it could be determined whether the parents were caught unaware by the sudden change in behavior that rendered all previously learned parenting strategies insufficient.

Relationship with Previous Research

Several findings of this study seem to agree with previous research mentioned earlier in this study. Firstly, the breakdown of interpersonal relationships and communication within the family reported by the couples and the negative impact this had on their marriage relationship seems to follow closely to the findings of Seiffge-Krenke (1999). Secondly, all couples reported the defiant behaviors of the child added to their stress levels. This seems to corroborate the findings of Kashdan et al. (2004) which suggest that oppositional defiant behavior in children correlates to higher levels of parental stress and other family disruptions. Finally, the impact of this added stress reflects the findings of Ben-David and Lavee (1996), Benzies, Harrison, and Magill-Evans (2004), and Morokoff and Gilliland (1993) that suggest that ongoing stress results in numerous negative consequences in the marital relationship.

Reflection of Researcher's Own Experience

The topic for this research study was selected by this researcher for a very specific reason. As an LPC in the state of Texas that works primarily with oppositional teenagers, I work on a regular basis with couples struggling to hold their marriages and families together during the volatile experience of raising a child with ODD. Seeing the fear,

confusion, pain, frustration, and hopelessness in the couples made this topic an easy decision. As all counselors who work with children know, counseling means not only working with the child, but with the family as well. I saw this research study as an opportunity to more adequately assist the parents of the oppositional teens that I see to weather this relational storm with their marriages healthy and intact.

The literature review served as a very educational experience. I was surprised to find so little research that addressed how a child's behavior affects the parents' marital relationship. With virtually all of the research discussing how parents' behavior affects their children, I was in hopes that this study might begin to open up the doors of understanding with regard to how a child's behavior may impact the parents' relationship. The decision was made to include examples of all the research that discusses a parent's impact on the child to demonstrate the dearth of research available on my topic. With considerable help from my committee chair, the literature review was formulated and brought together.

Academic, scholastic writing has never been an ability that I have excelled in. I have written several published works, but relatively little of a professional research nature. This study has taxed my academic writing ability to the limit. It has led to hours of slowly bringing cogent points together and hours of rewriting those points after my committee offered their suggestions. This has been an invaluable experience for me to strengthen my writing skills and hone my ability to accurately and clearly present complicated information.

The data gathering experience was a very satisfying one. After so many months of viewing the topic from a theoretical vantage point, it was very gratifying to finally be

able to sit in a room with a real live couple grappling with the issue and seek to gain understanding from their experience. My challenge was to not let the semistructured interviews become too structured. I wanted the questions asked to prompt discussion, not constrain the interviews to answering only the questions asked. The interview process also enhanced my listening skills and helped my ability to extract pertinent information from a participant. I could not thank those couples who chose to participate in the study enough. They took time out of their busy schedules to engage in an emotional conversation. The interviews turned out to be a very difficult, uncomfortable, and in some ways an embarrassing experience for several of the individuals. Their willingness to open up and go on the record with their experiences and insights made this research possible. And if this research helps any future couples who find themselves struggling with this issue, it will be because of the courage and compassion of the participating couples.

The data interpretation experience was also a rewarding experience. I was surprised by how much each of the couples had in common. They did not know each other, yet their stories were very much the same. The passivity of the husbands and the anger and resentment of the wives were revealed as though the couples were reading from the same script. Hopefully, this commonality can demonstrate a more generalized experience with this phenomenon. Another positive outcome of this research study is a support group for these couples and any other parents struggling not only with an oppositional child, but in their marriage relationship as well.

This research experience has changed me as a therapist, husband, and father. It has enabled me, as a husband and father, to take what I've learned and apply it to my relationship with my wife and children. I am more cognizant of my communication and

intimacy with my wife and of the necessity to be on the same page when it comes to our interactions with our children and extended family. It has changed me as a therapist in that I am better equipped to meet the needs of those who seek my counsel and guidance. The understanding garnered by this study will enable me to better understand the families that I work with and better prepare me as a therapist to share that understanding with them and therefore enhance their probability of a positive outcome to their counseling experience.

Summary

Chapter 1 discussed the basic question to be explored in this study and outlined the study, including its purpose and significance. The assumptions contained the study were also examined and the organization of the entire study was delineated.

Chapter 2 contained a thorough review of the existing literature pertaining to the phenomenon being studied. The first section revealed the theoretical viewpoint of the researcher. This was followed by an examination of the literature concerning the impact of parents' behavior on the well-being of children. The third section looked at how the environment that a child grows up in influences the behavior of the child. The effects of stress upon the marriage relationship were considered in section four and the chapter concluded with a declaration of the central research question.

Chapter 3 reviewed the particular methodology used to speak to the research problem, including how the phenomenological methodology was applied. Other issues addressed in the chapter were the study's rationale and design, the participants, the role of

the researcher, an explanation of the semistructured interviews, the data organization, and all pertinent ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 presented the results of the data collection, the themes detected, the essence of parenting an ODD child and its effects on the marital relationship, how the data were collected, and a review of the research question, as well as an exploration of the researcher's own experience with the phenomenon. Then the stories of each of the participating couples were presented, along with how those stories related specifically to the research question.

Chapter 5 began by presenting the interpretation of the research findings. Discrepant and nonconforming data were revealed, as well as the structures of the experience and recommendations for further research. Finally, the researcher's own experience was shared. This qualitative, phenomenological research study accomplished its stated objective of seeking to gain understanding of the lived experience of couples who have raised a child with ODD and their perceptions of the effects that experience has had on their marital relationship.

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Appendix A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project Title: *Understanding the Influences of Parenting a Child with Oppositional Defiant on the Marital Relationship: A Phenomenological Study.*

Jimmy K. Myers, M.A., LPC, Doctoral Candidate
 Dr. John C. Thomas, Ph.D. Faculty Advisor
 Liberty University

I, _____, agree to be interviewed as a participant in a research project entitled: “*Understanding the Influences of Parenting an Oppositional Defiant Child on the Marital Relationship: A Phenomenological Study*” being conducted by Jimmy Myers as an authorized part of the doctoral program of Liberty University.

Purpose: I understand that the purpose of this study is to help understand the experience of parenting an Oppositional Defiant Child and any influences it may or may not have on the marital relationship.

Procedure: I understand that the investigator will conduct a 1 hour semi-structured, audio-taped interview with us. I also understand that a transcriber may be employed to transcribe the tapes and that I may need to participate in a follow-up e-mail or phone interview of not more than 1/2 hour if necessary. The total time estimated is 1.5 hours.

Privacy/Confidentiality Consent: I understand that neither my name nor any other personally identifying marks will be attached to any of my data (the tape recorded interviews or transcripts) and that the code sheet linking my personal identity information with my data will be kept in a locked and protected location in the investigator’s office. I also understand that the interview tapes will be kept in a locked and protected drawer in the investigators’ office, that only the investigator and his committee members will have access to the tapes, and that all tapes will be destroyed at the end of the study.

Further, I understand that my participation in this research is entirely voluntary, involves no risk to my physical or mental health beyond those encountered in everyday life, and that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without consequence. I also understand that I may decline to answer any specific question asked of me, that my participation in this study is confidential and that only the researcher listed above will have access to my identity and the information associated with my identity. I further understand that for any correspondence conducted by email, confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically I understand that no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties. I understand that this may or may not benefit me specifically, but that

the information provided by me, will contribute to the collective knowledge in this subject area.

Questions: I understand that the information given to me along with any questions I might have had related to this study have been satisfactorily answered. I also know that if I have any additional questions about this research project, I may contact Jimmy Myers by phone at (512-331-2700), or by email at jmyers@timothycenter.com, the doctoral committee chairman, Dr. John C. Thomas at (434) 582-2000, or by email at jcthomas2@liberty.edu.

I also understand that Texas State law requires that evidence of (1) child/elder abuse or neglect, or (2) in intent to seriously harm one’s self or others, be reported to appropriate officials. Should information of this nature emerge as a result of the proposed study, authorities will be notified immediately.

I also understand that should I have any questions regarding my rights as a participant in this research, I may contact Dr. Jaesook Gho of the Liberty University Office for Research Protection at (434) 592-4054.

By signing this form I certify that I am 18 years of age or older and fully understand and agree with what I have read.

Please check one of the following:

_____ I give my permission to be audio taped.

_____ I do not give my permission to be audio taped.

Participant Signature

Date

Participant Signature

Date

Researcher: I certify that the informed consent procedure has been followed and that I have answered any questions from the participant as completely as possible.

Researcher Signature

Date

Revocation from Study:

Due to personal reasons, I withdraw my participation in this study.

Participant Signature

Date

Participant Signature

Date

Appendix B

Research Interview Outline for Participating Parent Couples Part I

This portion of the interview will be administered to the couple together while they are in the same interview room. They will each be given an opportunity to answer and expound upon each question asked.

1. How long have you been married?
2. What aspect of your spouse first attracted you?
3. When did you first discuss having children?
4. Who was more interested in having children?
5. Did you begin having children according to a agreed upon timeline?
6. What was your initial impression of being parents after you children were born?
7. Were you pleased to be parents? Why or why not?
8. Which child became oppositional?
9. When did you first consider your child to be oppositional? Their age at the time?
10. When did they first show signs of being oppositional?
11. How would you describe your marital relationship prior to the year your child became oppositional?
12. What were the biggest difficulties you found, as parents, to raising a defiant child?
13. How did it affect your parenting of other children that were in the home?
14. What did you find as the biggest impact that parenting an oppositional child had on your marital relationship?
15. How did you, as parents, initially respond the oppositional behavior of your child?

16. How often did you and your spouse agree on discipline choices pertaining to the ODD child?
17. What areas did you disagree about the most?
18. How were those disagreements rectified?
19. Did you seek professional counseling? Who recommended it?
20. Did you seek assistance from another source first?
21. Did the counseling seem to help?
22. How did it help? How did it not?
23. On a scale of 1 to 9, 9 being most satisfied and 1 being least satisfied, how would you rate your marital satisfaction today?

Research Interview Outline for Participating Parent Couples Part 2

This section will be administered to the husband and wife separately. While the spouse waits outside the interview room, each participant will discuss several aspects of their marriage relationship. Each question will be asked twice to each participant. The first response will be their view of the marriage relationship prior to the onset of the oppositional behavior of the child, and the second response will be their view of the marriage relationship currently.

1. Discuss the communication aspect of your relationship:

Before Onset

Currently

Additional Comments: _____

2. Discuss companionship in your relationship:

Before Onset

Currently

Additional Comments: _____

3. Discuss physical (non-sexual) intimacy in your relationship:

Before Onset

Currently

Additional Comments: _____

4. Discuss your sexual relationship?

Before Onset

Currently

Additional Comments: _____

5. Discuss conflict management in your relationship?

Before Onset

Currently

Additional Comments: _____

6. Discuss conflict avoidance in your relationship

7.

Before Onset

Currently

Additional Comments: _____

8. Discuss the level of conflict between you and your spouse stemming from incompatible parenting decisions related to you ODD child?

Before Onset

Currently

Additional Comments: _____

9. Discuss the level of extended family disharmony in your relationship? In other words, is there conflict between you and your parents or your in-laws?

Before Onset

Currently

Additional Comments: _____

10. If there are other children in the home, discuss the oppositional child's influence on the other children in the home?

Before Onset

Currently

Additional Comments: _____

11. Discuss, as a couple, your commitment to your religious faith?

Before Onset

Currently

Additional Comments: _____

12. Discuss your participation with social/recreational activities as a couple?

Before Onset

Currently

Additional Comments: _____
