The Faith Community As Extended Family: The Influence of Shared Spiritual Values As Experienced By Baha'i Families In The Cowichan Valley

by

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ABSTRACT

This is an exploratory study on the community context of family life, using in depth group interviews to examine the perceptions of Baha'i adults, children and youth about how the Baha'i community influences their family life. The study provides a glimpse into the nature of the Baha'i family; addresses the influence which dominant beliefs or life perspectives have on standards of behavior; and articulates a community paradigm which provides a value-based social network that is organized to provide diverse and challenging experiences and which holds the potential to do so in a more deliberate manner. The findings suggest that the influence between the family and religious community can be reciprocal and mutually beneficial, giving access to additional human resources, grounded in common values and principles, and thereby extending, supporting and strengthening the family.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated with love, respect and appreciation to my family

Nicola Lynn Cooper,

Sarah Elysia Cooper,

Jesse Matthew Cooper,

and Paul Ainsworth Cooper

Blessed is the house that hath attained unto My tender mercy, wherein My remembrance is celebrated, and which is ennobled by the presence of My loved ones, who have proclaimed My praise, cleaved fast to the cord of My grace and been honoured by chanting My verses. Verily they are the exalted servants whom God hath extolled in the Qayyumu'l-Asma and other scriptures. Verily, He is the All-Hearing, the Answerer, He Who perceiveth all things.

Baha'u'llah

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Statement of the Problem

The interaction between the family and community and our understanding of the nature and purposes of that relationship is the subject of my research interest. Since 1968 I have been interested as an education and child care practitioner in the family as the primary custodial and developmental environment. During that time period I have participated in the affairs of the Baha'i Faith community. Baha'i communities in Canada and abroad have striven, in the light of the Baha'i Teachings and of their experience, to understand the nature and characteristics of Baha'i family life and the manner in which the community can facilitate those characteristics. This understanding has been limited by the lack of research articulating the aspects of Baha'i community structure and community life which represent actual or potential influences on family life.

The Importance of the Study

Dokecki and Moroney (1983), and Caplan (1976)) suggest that social policy values be re-evaluated, giving consideration to the implications of valuing the individual and family within community. Most formal community institutions, such as schools and hospitals, deal directly with individuals and not for the most part with families, but religious institutions are involved with entire families over each stage of the life cycle. Historically, religious institutions have fulfilled an organizing capacity within communities. In reviewing research on community influences on family functioning and, despite recent interest in an ecological perspective which sees families within a wider

network of social systems. I found little attention to the part played by religious institutions (Bronfenbrenner, Moen, and Garbarino. 1984, Bahr and Chadwick. 1985)

How can religious communities fulfill a support role for families? And, how can they remain open to impact and change by the diversity of family needs and individual influence?

In considering the research problem I have targeted a community of Faith to which my own family belongs. The Baha'i Faith community meets the overall purpose and intent of the study because of its local organizational structure which establishes an elected body, the local Spiritual Assembly, for the governance of community affairs. We can find guidance for the relationship between the individual and that body, "You should go to them as a child would go to its parents" (The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 12). This echoes the conclusion offered by Garbarino and Crouter (1978) that we consider the community context of parent-child relations to enhance our understanding of the ecology of human development. Similarly, we find that body charged with, "...the arrangement of the regular meetings of the friends, the feasts and anniversaries, as well as the special gatherings designed to serve and promote the intellectual and spiritual interest of their fellow men..." (p. 12). This study explores the interactive and mutually reinforcing relationship which exists between Baha'i families and Baha'i community.

For Baha'i families, found in diverse geographical, cultural, religious, and ideological settings around the world, the teachings of their Faith hold potential both as a form of support and as a child-rearing system in itself. This raises the hypothesis that a community of affinity, or shared values and principles, might provide a transferable social support network. That is, Baha'i families would find a social network, founded on the same teachings wherever they might move. If so, this may serve as a preventive to the isolation seen by Garbarino and Crouter (1978) as one factor in child maltreatment.

Should such a community. which is both abstract (subjective) and concrete (objective), be shown to provide social support for families, then an interesting principle would be identified for policy makers. Resource allocation decisions could. hypothetically, include the marshaling of existing formal networks of affinity (shared perception. value and/or belief) to serve as agents of service delivery and centers of community assessment.

This study informs research on the interaction between the family and community and our understanding of the nature and purpose of that relationship.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of Baha'i adults, children and youth about how the Baha'i community influences their family life. In doing so, it focused on four sub-problems:

1. How do Baha'i families describe Baha'i family life?

   This provides a clearer understanding of the characteristics of Baha'i family life for the Baha'i community itself. for professionals, and for the public at large.

2. How do Baha'i families experience and understand the influence of the Baha'i community on family life?

   This identifies aspects of the Baha'i community perceived to influence family life.

3. What Baha'i community resources do Baha'i families identify as strengthening family life?

   This tentatively identifies variables that serve to strengthen Baha'i family life.

4. What changes in Baha'i community life would serve to strengthen family life?

   This identifies recommendations for enhancement and/or change in policy and practice for the Baha'i community, for professionals, and for the public at large.

CHAPTER 2

VALUES, BELIEFS AND EXPERIENCES

In this chapter, I will discuss the values, beliefs and experiences which have served to inform my work as an educator and child care practitioner and which led to my research interest. My practice has been organized around an interest in the education of children; the need for that education to be developmentally based; the importance of valuing parents as co-educators; and the role which values play in the carrying out of our lives. Given this background, I developed a philosophy of education based on the following principles:

1   In order to develop a healthy, well-adjusted and integrated personality, the holistic development of the individual is necessary. Metaphorically, the seedling must be nurtured, the roots fed. In these terms, we understand Froebel's (1974) concept of the unfolding essence that comes from within and develops to manifest function, purpose, beauty and unity without.

2   Children should be introduced at an early age to the underlying unity of all life; within the interrelated circles of their families, their communities, and their child care and education programs

3   Parents, caregivers and teachers must be concerned with the material, human and spiritual education of the child. Through interaction with the surrounding material, human and spiritual environments the child will take part in the revelation of his or her own self.

On this philosophical basis I developed a conceptual framework for school and child care programs (Cooper, 1981):

1. Provision of learning environments and experiences which meet the developmental needs of children.

2. Provision of opportunities to meet the needs of parents to be involved in the continued education of their children.

3. Development and coordination of access to and interaction with community support and resource services; available to children, families, schools and child care programs.

4. Provision of staff development programs to improve the expertise of professionals and support personnel.

Parent Involvement and Education

From 1981 to 1989 I applied this framework as an Early Childhood Education instructor at a Community College in Ontario, but I noted that students and graduates were apprehensive about the second goal. They did not actively promote participation by, or consultation with, parents. As I had observed through my years in the public education system and indeed as a parent myself, practitioners viewed themselves as expert and were reticent to make any more than cursory, token efforts to acknowledge, let alone collaborate with, parents. The family and child care environments were treated as discrete contexts for the child.

By 1989 the majority of my work was in parent education. I wondered why there was such an interest in topics such as Preventing Parent Burn-out and Discipline, but not in Ages and Stages. This led me to identify and reflect upon an interesting pattern.

Through the collection of course participant profiles I noted what parents said about their needs and expectations. I was curious about whether my workshops were meeting those needs. Evaluation forms were telling me that participants were satisfied with the content, the format of the sessions, and my instruction style. But was there congruence between what they perceived as their interests and/or problems and the actual content of the courses? If I could answer that question, I had the grounding for the improvement of those courses and the development of others. The responses fell into two categories. No matter who the participants were racially, chronologically, economically, educationally, culturally or geographically, the statements spoke of concern with conflict and self esteem. They wanted to alleviate conflict but were not confident that they had the information, skills or capacity to do so. Family members would not agree to work on issues of concern because of the conflict. A vicious cycle in more than figurative term, I saw a challenge to re-frame their questions from "how to get rid of conflict" to "how to achieve harmony"; to re-frame their perception and expectation of self and others from pessimistic to optimistic; and to re-frame the context of family support from discrete parent education to conjoint, participatory family programs. I reflected on my practice experience and wisdom to discover the common threads: families include children through birth, adoption or temporary care, so programs have to include children; parents are the primary educators, so programs have to validate that role; each family member is at a particular developmental stage, so programs have to recognize those stages; and values form the foundation of our actions, consciously or not, so programs have to be based upon, acknowledge and address values.

Community Support for Families

The design of such support programs could provide insight to our ability to meet the needs of children. parents. communities. and practitioners. and would be consistent with the third goal of my conceptual framework which addresses the development and coordination of access to and interaction with services for families in the community context. Anglin and Glossop (1986) describe the family as an open system, evolving through the actions and interactions of family members, practitioners, and policy makers. They suggest that this "social ecological approach" (p.4) challenges our way of understanding, analyzing, serving and helping families. They reiterate the growing acknowledgment of the diversity of family forms, obliging us to consider the various and complex dimensions of family relationships and functions. They argue that we no longer need to search for a particular definition of the family, but rather to further our understanding of the institutional and societal influences on how members manage responsibilities of family life. To do this work I would need to participate in the research process with families who want harmony and who have some affinity in the values which they hold as basic. I saw that my own community of affinity, the Baha'i Faith community, could serve as a starting point for such a study.

In The Promulgation of Universal Peace (Abdu'l-Baha, 1922), we find a succinct and powerful statement of the Baha'i teachings on the family.

> According to the teachings of Baha'u'llah the family, being a human unit, must be educated according to the rules of sanctity. All the virtues must be taught the family. The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. The rights of the son, the father, the mother. none of them must be arbitrary. Just as the son has certain obligations to the father, the father, likewise has certain obligations to his son. The mother, the sister and the other members of the household have their certain prerogatives. All these rights and prerogatives must be considered, yet the unity of the family must be sustained. The injury of one shall be the injury of all: the comfort of each the comfort of all; the honor of one the honor of all.

I saw three principles arise from this statement: social order (the family bond); collective benefit (the interdependence of experience); and social justice (the non-arbitrary nature of rights). In the Baha'i Teachings authority is vested in the institutions of the Faith, while power rests in the actions of the believers. This is exemplified by the absence of a clergy: the collective administration of the affairs of the community by an elected body called the Spiritual Assembly: and the meeting of the community members for consultation on those affairs at the nineteen day Feast. Authority, not being arbitrary, would lie in the framework of the family itself and be dependent upon collective decision-making, using the process of consultation.

The questions began to surface. Who would educate the family? What are the "rules of sanctity" and where can they be found? What are the rights, obligations and prerogatives of the individual family members? How can they be considered and the unity of the family sustained? I began to apply the principle of consultation, as taught and practiced in my experience in the Baha'i community, to a pattern for action by families. That process, the calling together of the members to jointly discuss the issues at hand, is equally applicable to family functioning as to the global stage. Family members wanted to change their conflict to harmony or peace. According to the Universal House of Justice, governing body of the Baha'i world community, the precursor to peace is unity, to which the precursor is justice (1985). How does this pattern fit the family? I corresponded with the Universal House of Justice. The perspective of the response (1992) affirms the family as the primary context for the personal and social development of the individual, both child and adult, and the community as the social support context for the education and development of the family.

> The House of Justice attaches great importance to all measures which will foster the
> development of family life, and commends your interest in carrying out studies in the
> interactive and mutually reinforcing relationship which should exist between the

Baha'i community and the Baha'i family. Both are based on Baha'i values, the purpose of which is to create a cohesive social unity in which each individual can find the means for spiritual development and service to the Cause of God, and which will form a training ground and building block for the development of a unified world society.

This statement provides useful metaphors in the terms "training ground" and "building block", and confirms the interests which arose from my practice experience: developmental process, children and parents, and values. The concept of affinity is referred to as the shared values of the family and community.

In reviewing thoughts to this point we return to the essential bifurcation: that we are at one and the same time the drop and the ocean. In the reconciliation of this bifurcation, we consider our purpose. That consideration is mediated by volition and leads to action. The Baha'i Teachings value the mind as the essential quality of the human spirit. Choice, then, is a spiritual attribute which we exercise according to our subjective understanding and in the light of our objective context. The ethical agent in the Baha'i paradigm is the individual. The choices which individuals make draw upon the knowledge embedded in the Baha'i Teachings; experience; and social interaction and discourse. Using the metaphor offered earlier, the family can be presented as both the training ground for this process of human development and as a social unit in itself.

Given this metaphor and the valuing of the mind as the essential, spiritual reality of the human being, more questions come to mind. Can ideas be found for a framework for human, spiritual development and social action/service? Can this framework be applied to the systematic structuring of social support programs for the development of institutions and families as training grounds and building blocks? Before developing such a framework I would need to consider research and literature about some of the concepts or terminology which have contributed to the evolution of thought on personal and social transformation.

Personal and Social Transformation

While we understand the literal nature of seeing things differently, we similarly understand the metaphorical nature of statements such as "it all depends on the way you look at it", "it depends on your point of view" and so on. This process by which human beings create templates to fit over their realities is known as a personal construct. In educational terms we use the processes of assimilation and accommodation to fit new ideas or experiences into existing, predictable constructs or schema unless and until a new one is necessitated. Mezirow (1991) calls this way of looking at things in scientific, scholastic or social context, a meaning perspective. He describes it as being articulated, theory-based and collectively held and offers the work of Freud, Marx, and Skinner as examples of theoretical perspectives which have in fact generated new vocabularies.

Used on an interchangeable basis with model, conceptual framework, approach and world view, Thomas Kuhn (1962) introduced the term paradigm to refer to ways of seeing, methods of inquiry, beliefs, ideas, values, and attitudes that influence scientific inquiry. The process of change in perspective was described by Kuhn as paradigmatic transformation.

Noting that the same event may be simultaneously interpreted by people as different, Kelly (1963) made the observation that our personal constructs have a range of convenience. Philip Candy (1989) proposed that meaning exists within ourselves rather than externally (e.g. in books) and identified assumptions about constructivist thought, suggesting that our meanings are validated through human interaction and communication. He suggests that our actions are based on our meaning. Transformation theory then would suggest that how people explain and interpret what happens to them impacts their actions, their aspirations, their well-being, and their competence to a greater extent than the simple event itself. Expectation, I would suggest, becomes a

critical element in our decisions to act. It is the change in expectation. about what has. is, or might happen that is associated with transformative learning.

Current dominant approaches to adult education emphasize both stimulus-response associations and/or the storage and retrieval of information. Mezirow drew upon Habermas's (1971) distinction between instrumental and communicative learning in his consideration of the nature of how this transformative process takes place. His conceptualization of transformative learning involves reflection or critique of our assumptions as an initial step. Through assessment or reassessment our premises may be found to be distorting, inauthentic, or otherwise invalid. Memory is viewed as an inherent function of perception and cognition, through which we actively recognize and re-interpret previously learned experience in new contexts. So, when old meaning schemes prove to be inadequate we create new ones. This process of remembering, however. is dependent on the extent to which experience and/or learning is integrated.

Habermas describes technical, practical, and emancipatory dimensions of human knowledge which are related to the environment. other people. and power. He associates the first two with instrumental and communicative learning respectively and the third with critical reflection. Instrumental learning, technical in nature, involves predictions about observable, physical or social, events which are either correct or incorrect, are based on empirical knowledge, and are governed by technical rules. This style of learning is task oriented and determines cause and effect through problem-solving. Meaning is acquired by testing a hypothesis to 'make it better'. Communicative learning, practical in nature, has as its purpose the understanding of what others mean and making ourselves understood by others. Habermas suggests that it is governed by consensual norms which define reciprocal expectations understood by at least two interacting people. The validation of such norms, to reach consensus, is achieved through a process

that Habermas terms rational discourse. Mezirow describes the conditions for this discourse as a connection between what "is" and "ought". Emancipatory learning results from self reflection. Emancipatory knowledge. gained through critical reflection. is distinct from our technical or practical knowledge. In this process we appraise our condition and are emancipated from that which limits our volition. So. the process of constructing the self is conditional upon the interactive relationship between knowledge, volition and action. This reflective, purposeful implementation of action is referred to by transformation theorists such as Freire (1970) as praxis.

Given our understanding of the process of transformation. and in particular the connection between action and reflection, we are challenged to consider the way in which this study addresses personal and social transformation. It explores the provision of family support in a community context. It provides opportunity for the children and youth of families to be heard. and for families to share their values and beliefs. It enables evaluation of the benefits of that process and the possible impact on policy related to families in the community. I will reflect on the applicability of the findings of this study to other communities of affinity and policy making bodies in later chapters.

CHAPTER 3

REVIEWING THE RELATED LITERATURE

In order to explore the influence of family participation in a community of shared spiritual values, I sought out literature which addresses families, community influences on the family, and the interface between family, community and religion. In focusing the literature review, I moved from a considerable amount of information about the first two areas, to a limited selection of studies which addressed the third.

In addition to utilizing the library at the University of Victoria, I contacted the Association for Baha'i Studies in Ottawa to ascertain their awareness of related Baha'i studies. I also drew upon professional contacts in the Baha'i community to solicit their advice or direction. These queries were met with enthusiasm and encouragement to conduct what was seen to be necessary, ground-breaking work.

The scope of the review reflects my research interest, the exploratory nature of the study, and the limited amount of literature available on the research problem. The studies that I reviewed generated predominantly conceptual, with some empirical, information for the purpose of providing a background for the study.

Families

Literature on the family provides a perspective on change in family behavior over time and within social and cultural context. Hareven (1984) suggests that historical research has shown that families are active in their contacts with external forces and that recently the view of the family has moved from that of an isolated household unit to a developmental approach, exploring family interaction with other social processes and institutions.

Recent questioning of the viability of the family has been associated by Eichler (1983) with the notion of a particular family structure and the idea that alternatives to that structure threaten its survival. The family setting could not remain unaffected by the rapid social, technological and economic changes of the current period. In the context of change which presents so many new social phenomena, it is no wonder that we do not fully understand those changes nor their implications for families and policy makers. New patterns of family interaction for children and youth are still emerging, implying another generation of transition. Eichler suggests that we move toward an understanding of a dimensional view of the family and describes some of these dimensions. One dimension identified, but not addressed, is the religious/ethical dimension.

Baker (1990) describes seven current theoretical perspectives of the family. 1. Structural Functionalism focuses on the structures, including the family, which govern people's behavior and maintain a cohesive and stable society. 2. The Systems approach focuses on how the behavior of individuals is interrelated with that of other family members. 3. The Political Economy approach argues that how people make a living determines relationships, lifestyles, attitudes, and values. 4. Symbolic Interactionism suggests that social reality is created through the exercise of free will. 5. Exchange Theory assumes family relationships to involve negotiation and bargaining. 6. The Developmental perspective views the family as a series of relationships that grow and develop over time. 7. The Feminist perspective focuses on womens' experiences of social reality, and gender inequality. These perspectives may both enrich the study of family life and cause rifts among researchers.

The search for the good home, insensitivity to sociocultural relativity, an exaggeration of the loss of earlier functions, and moral relativism are risks associated with research about the family according to Berger and Berger (1983). Our assessment

of any social phenomenon. they argue, must respect the values of its participants. yet there is little certainty about the meanings and values of family life. Their theoretical assumptions are that: (a) people must decide what actions to take to realize their values. (b) the experience of individuals constructs society, (c) people need to create institutions to transmit patterns of meaning from one generation to the next, and (d) children need a world to grow into. Given these assumptions, they argue that the survival of society requires a shared moral consensus. Historically. the family has been the locale for such a task. The Bergers ask what kind of family institution is likely and desirable in the future.

What is the future of the family? In addressing this question, Keller (1986) expects significant changes and the emergence of what she calls novel forms of human togetherness. She reiterates the appearance of new phenomena such as serial marriages, occupational and geographical mobility, working mothers, previously forbidden topics such as abortion. homosexuality and illegitimacy, and startling new biological innovations. Public response to this changing moral and social climate is hard to predict but she anticipates a multiplicity of experiments and proposals. Asserting the importance of considering social change in the light of "moral doubt and moral reassessment" (p.532), Keller challenges us to examine the present in order to affect the future.

Community Influences On The Family

Because community can take various forms, the demonstration of community influences on the family is a complex matter. Bronfenbrenner, Moen, and Garbarino (1984) identify common elements to definitions of community. Family support, they argue. is contributed by both formal and informal community structures and they juxtapose two processes that can either reinforce or counteract each other. First, communities can provide diverse resources and challenging experiences. Second, both

formal and informal structures can serve as sources of stability and support. Of particular interest to the proposed study is their identification of religious organizations as "particularly salient" examples of formal community structures (p. 306), and their challenge to those concerned with the well-being of children and families to pay attention to the role of religious institutions, an area they refer to as "terra incognita" (p.307).

It is no easy task to specify how particular environmental factors influence people. In singling out the family-community relationship, Goodnow (1988) proposes three processes: enhancement, transmission, and access. Goodnow sees the family as a collection of people not always agreeing: negotiating alliances and the division of labor and reward; and holding expectations about exchange and reciprocity. She further challenges the nested sector view often contained in a systems approach to social science and proposes that descriptions and ideas about connections among children, parents, and settings outside the family can be expanded by viewing the extent to which there is open or restricted access to information about oneself, others, and the nature of social order. Relationships, she says, can be described in terms of the objective features of settings and the way that settings are perceived and she argues that people base actions as much on what they see as feasible as on what is actually the case.

Despite increased interest in the examination of the beneficial effects of social support, Eckenrode and Wethington (1990) found little attention to the process by which social support becomes mobilized as part of the process of coping with stress. What are, they ask, the personal and situational contingencies around the marshaling of social support resources? They identify a three stage model of help-seeking involving the perception of the situation; the decision to seek, or not seek, help; and strategies involved in seeking help. They argue that mobilization of support or help-seeking is not

necessarily an effective coping strategy, so the question is not if mobilization of support helps individuals and families but when and for whom it helps.

Echoing the conclusions above, Zigler and Weiss (1985) propose a need for continued action-research partnerships that go beyond the question of whether or not programs that support families work to ask what works, for whom, how, when, and why. They define this action-research as a partnership between researchers and practitioners to attain solutions to social problems and contribute to social scientific knowledge. This partnership is founded on the appearance over the past twenty years of common questions about knowledge and practice resulting in a shift from a child-centred to an ecological approach to the development of family support programs.

However, Anglin and Glossop (1986) argue that there has been a trend toward dependence upon professional processes of social support leading to an erosion of the viability of informal community support networks. They advocate, convincingly, that families have capabilities for positive self-determination when surrounded by community-based relationships of support. The time has come, they suggest, to support the efforts of people to develop a trusting and supportive network of kin, friends, neighbors, or others who provide an actual or perceived sense of community.

Using an ecological model of human development Garbarino and Crouter (1978) studied the maltreatment of children as a problem of social support systems and resources. Research on the neglect of children has generally centred on relationship dyads but their study focused on the environment and indicators of family stress. A central proposition underlying the research was that isolation from "potent prosocial support systems" (p.606) is a necessary condition for child maltreatment. The results strongly supported the over-arching hypothesis. They conclude that by systematic study of the community context of parent-child relations we can enhance our understanding of

the ecology of human development and "build upon the compelling insight that while the child is father to the man, the community is parent to the family" (p.61).

Allan (1991) surveyed a sample of formal group parenting programs in Australia and suggests that parent education needs to broaden its concern beyond structural or behavioral change, to the broader social context. She argues that dominant beliefs or perspectives on life, favoring vested interests, influence people's thoughts and maintain standards of behavior. These dominant beliefs reinforce a powerful ideology of family life, a key factor of which is division of labor by gender. Responsibility for parenting rests, almost exclusively, on mothers and thereby acts as a major factor in the oppression of women. Her survey found very few programs based on a critical perspective, questioning traditional beliefs. Most, based on humanistic principles emphasizing mutual respect, cooperation, responsibility and self-reliance, focus primarily on parent-child relationships within families and on the individualizing of problems. She suggests that the focus on management and communication issues is done in isolation from the material and social context in which the parents live. Problems are solved in individualistic ways and external factors are superficially acknowledged. While Allan identifies a lack of critical writing about parent education, she does surface two emerging issues. The first is the need to consider the value base of programs. The second is the need to study the experiences of individuals in programs. She contends that parent education programs must enable individuals to critically reflect on the issues emerging from their experience as parents. It is important therefore that programs are developed within a critical framework which makes clear the value base and the assumptions underlying them. She advocates a shift from gender neutral assumptions and language in order that mothers and fathers can link their experience to social context and critically question the dominant beliefs that oppress mothers in particular, and parents in general.

Family, Community and Religion

According to Crysdale (1991), religion has two broad functions. The process of forming beliefs, values and norms that determine how people define reality is internal or subjective. By creating systems or structures, which may create and nourish or deprecate other systems, religion is structural or objective. The first of these functions, "invisible religion" (p.93), is difficult to identify by quantitative analysis because of problems in definition and articulation, either by researchers or their subjects. The second function, the external or institutional side of religion, is measured through membership, ritual, attendance, assent, and knowledge. Both objective and subjective aspects of religion are important and interrelated components of this study. They provide a useful juxtaposition for understanding complex patterns of social behavior: that which requires social reinforcement by others and that which requires internal validity and support.

An important, sociological analysis of religion is found in the work of Emile Durkheim. His theory of religion is articulated by Tole (1993) in relation to the current breakdown of the normative social order, engendered by the increasing division of society into more complex forms and characterized by secularization. This transition from the sacred to the secular has ushered in a host of problems for modern societies. Durkheim predicted an egoistic individualism by which the individual is prior to society and thus has supreme reality. He attempted, Tole argues, to understand the intrinsic obligation that individuals have for one another, arising out of the nature of group life and leading to formation of moral codes, religious precepts, and ethical systems. Durkheim's solution was an ethic of individualism which grounded human freedom in community - affirming individual rights in relation to the well-being of all.

D'Antonio (1983) examined the emerging value orientations of American society toward the family and religion; many of which are in contradiction to long standing

family values. He found that religion is important to most Americans and that a majority consider the home to be the place for spiritual and religious development. While family and religion have a close relationship, the social control mechanisms that kept individuals - and society - in line are in disarray in relation to issues such as the sacredness of life and approach to sexuality. Religious communities, he argues, must emphasize social support and nurturance by drawing out the love and caring features of religious teachings. To what extent, he asks, does religion provide social support for marriage and family values such as meaning, intimacy, love, and concern for others? I asked this very question and added, how?

A classic study of community described "Middletown, U.S.A." (Muncie, Indiana) in the mid 1920's. Bahr and Chadwick (1985) studied the community a half a century later. They analyzed the two studies for a relationship between religion and family life by comparing indicators of family and religious practices. The findings show families to be more similar than different after fifty years and that religion in Middletown is at least as strong as it ever was. They argue against both the myth of the declining family and the myth of secularization. Not only was there a vigor to religion and family life consistent over the fifty year period, but it appears that these two institutions are related. Participants confirmed their religious faith and devotion to families during in-depth interviews, often linking the two in the same sentence. Bahr and Chadwick reiterate that this relationship between family life and religion is a relatively unstudied topic in the social sciences which begs attention.

In their review of academic research on the interface between religion and family, Thomas and Henry (1985) discuss change in the social science perspective. Darwin, at mid-nineteenth century, provided an evolutionary perspective that influenced social science toward a view of social order as part of the natural order, significantly altering

the dialogue between philosophy and theology. After a decline of social scientific interest in religion by the 1920s there was a revival during the 1960s and 1970s. In considering the reasons for this resurgence of interest. they cite a re-evaluation of the role of social science in claiming truth; a crisis of values and sense of community; and the need to include the spiritual realm in understanding human behavior. However. in this surge of research and theory they cite a failure to notice the role of religion in the family. The majority of research emphasized the social control aspects of religious institutions - that is. the structural characteristics of religion. Concern about the social support functions of religious institutions was absent. Yet we associate both the family and religious institutions more with emotional love and support than other social institutions. The human condition, they argue, is concerned about meaning; that meaning involves perceptions of relationships with others; and that for many people those relationships are connected with their view of the relationship with deity. The conclusions and challenges of this review serve to inform the methodological perspective of this study. We need to study the family and religious institutions simultaneously to understand and appreciate the reciprocal influence and, further, as social scientists we are challenged to look at our own presuppositions and to make apparent our own value positions because acquisition of knowledge simultaneously involves the reading of meaning into the data as much as out of the data.

During the last two centuries significant changes in family structure and relationships, connected with changes in society at large, have modified the organization of the family unit. individual behavior, and interactions within the family. Thornton (1985) documents change in the place of religion and religious beliefs in this "social fabric" (p.389). He argues that changes in the family have brought about modifications in the teachings and policies of "Western churches" (p.390) which, in itself, challenges

the moral authority of those churches and in particular the power of the clergy. Thornton demonstrates an intricate and complex web of reciprocal influences leading to difficult decisions for individuals. families. and institutions. These issues. addressed by this study, characterize an intense debate about family, religion and policy.

Although the defining characteristics of family and religion may have changed. they remain as viable institutions in today's world. Interest in the interface between the family and religious institutions during the 1980s failed to pay attention to the impact of the family's religious community. Researchers tended to emphasize religious affiliation, levels of orthodoxy or participation. Cornwall and Thomas (1990) explain that religion is also experienced within personal religious communities of people with whom individuals are directly involved: extended family, friends and associates. Citing research conducted with Mormon populations, they conclude that the relationships experienced in the religious community. coupled with primary relationships in the family, are responsible for development of personal spiritual devotion which, in turn, is predictive of adult well-being. They expect that future studies will help us understand how the social control and social support dimensions of religious communities impact individuals and families.

As families face difficulties arising from the changes in contemporary life, what do they experience in their search for support from religious doctrine and practice? Aldous (1983) examined this question in the light of contemporary issues such as women's rights, divorce and separation, and sexual behavior. We cannot ignore such elements of the interrelationship of family and religion. Individuals use religion to make sense of discrepancies between moral standards and the ways of the world, or what they expect and what they experience, and religious institutions continue to exercise control over behavior through both clerical and community sanctions. While some communities

are trying to go beyond traditional patterns to answer current problems, there is a discrepancy between family problems and the ability of clergy to cope with them. This inability may result from the incongruity of a predominantly male clergy because the control function of religion is seen to be more apparent with women. She reiterates the suggestion that we need to place priority on the support rather than the control function of religion. Such an emphasis would encourage primary contacts in local religious communities. However, she concludes that whether communities and families react to problems through control or support depends on specific stances on contemporary issues and that uncertainty about these issues contributes to uneasiness in the interrelationship of the two institutions.

The investigation of the influence of religious beliefs and practices on family life is often an incidental variable in studies dealing with other aspects of family relations. Brigman (1986) addressed the topic directly by investigating the perceptions of family life professionals asking, specifically, how churches help strengthen families. The findings demonstrate that family life professionals see the potential of churches as viable and appropriate institutions for strengthening families to be significantly greater than actual achievements. Brigman used the findings to construct a list of characteristics perceived to be most effective for churches in building family strengths: 1. contemporary orientation and flexibility; 2. family life education programs; 3. counseling services; 4. family-oriented activities; 5. encourage the application of positive Christian principles to family-life; 6. provision of a support network; 7. sensitive, caring and resourceful ministers. This list provides a valuable reference framework for this study.

Though there is a lack of research on the nature and characteristics of Baha'i family life, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada, elected governing council of the Canadian Baha'i community, published a compilation of selections from

the writings of the Baha'i Faith on the topic of marriage and family life (1983). Designed as a resource for marriage preparation; assistance to those already married; and to assist local Baha'i Spiritual Assemblies in their educational and counseling responsibilities, this compilation represents guidance for the theological grounding upon which Baha'i family values would be developed. A second type of literature on the topic of Baha'i family life consists of books published by Baha'i practitioners to offer advice or guidance on their understanding and application of the Baha'i teachings to family life (Furutan, 1980, Ghaznavi, 1989, Khavari and Khavari, 1989). This literature does not represent systematic gathering or analysis of the experience and/or perceptions of Baha'i families.

Since the conclusion of this study, a historical, archival study on the origins of the Baha'i community in Canada from 1898 to 1948 has been published (van den Hoonard, 1996). That study depicts the dynamics and struggles of establishing a new oriental religion in a new occidental country, documenting the evolution of the Canadian Baha'i community from a collection of individuals with varying theological, philosophical and experiential backgrounds and points of view in the earliest years of the twentieth century, toward a dynamic sense of collectivity by 1948. It articulates how the Baha'i community in Canada has changed in response to its membership and social context, underscoring the idea that individual action and collective consultation and decision-making play significant roles in the understanding, construction and practice of the Baha'i community. These insights contribute to our understanding of the context of this study. The Teachings of Baha'u'llah have been the unifying link from the establishment of the Canadian Baha'i community in the nineteenth century to its current configuration with functioning local communities in all of the provinces and territories. This study explores aspects of how Baha'i families and communities in the Cowichan Valley are currently striving to translate those Teachings into individual and collective practice.

Summary

The literature of the field of family research identifies a ubiquitous characteristic of this historically significant institution - change. Our understanding of what families are and what they do is undergoing a fundamental change, shifting beyond the monolithic view of the family as a particular, good, discrete household unit toward a complex, diverse view of families as developing human units which interact with social processes and institutions, and leading to controversy over the future of the family. Practitioners and researchers are questioning whether the family still performs tasks traditionally associated with it. Social changes have dramatically altered family life and raised complex questions about how individuals develop in the expanding social context of family, community and society. These include the entry of mothers of young children into the work force, the increased use of child day care, a shift in the responsibility for home chores taken by men, a delay in the timing of family formation, a rise in the divorce rate and a rise in the formation of blended families through remarriage.

These new social phenomena, previously unexperienced, have led to two trends. One, bemoaning the death of the family, is at risk to exaggerate the loss of traditional functions, condone moral neutrality, or continue the search for a best family.

The other focusses on the need to understand the dimensions of family life, the institutional and societal forces which influence it, and advocates the need for moral consensus - an area often considered the domain of religion. I have used this term in the light of its definition as, *"a collective opinion; general agreement."* (Funk and Wagnalls, 1976, p.135). This understanding of consensus as the outcome of agreement, implies, and is consistent with, discourse and choice - the movement toward unity espoused in the Baha'i paradigm.

In an age of humanistic relativism, the promotion of morals or values may be controversial. Some associate the term moral consensus in a positivist manner with the imposition of static, doctrinaire values or standards and the control function of religion. Shared values may be obscured for political purposes by the exagerration of differences in religious or cultural practice. However, reflection on the commonalities inherent in the great religious and moral systems of the world reveals the espousal of virtues such as unity, cooperation and harmony, responsibility, and principled behavior based on trust: For example, the 'golden rule' is an ethic variously repeated in religious and moral teachings. The idea that we should treat others as we would wish to be treated is found in the Baha'i Faith, enjoined by Baha'u'llah (p. 315) as, *"He should not wish for others that which he doth not wish for himself; nor promise that which he doth not fulfil."*

Almost every individual is involved in a network of family rights and obligations. Through the process of socialization people are taught, and come to accept as desirable, patterns of family life. Social scientists analyze and observe the development of individuals, beyond the clinical setting, in the context of the settings in which they live. This context includes a wide array of institutional and societal forces which facilitate family socialization and support. Formal and informal sources of support represent two views and interests, those of helping professionals and those of family, friends and neighbors, which often oppose and compete with each other. Support programs generally center on relationship dyads such as parent-child, client-therapist, victim-perpetrator. Some analysts suggest a reorientation of social policies and programs toward social support systems and resources which assist families to develop relationships of trust and support associated with a human network and a sense of community.

Religious institutions continue to offer both social control and social support. Families and religious communities advocate the values of love, compassion, self-

sacrifice. and the acceptance of the intrinsic worth of others. This tends to place them in conflict with individualistic values emphasized in the school and workplace. Likewise, religions and families take diverse forms and are adapting, to varying degrees, to the pressures of economics, politics and ideology. Knowledge, resources, and organizations influence individuals within a social context. Even the nesting of social contexts suggested by ecological theorists is at risk if it fails to address the nature and use of power in the structuring and leadership of these social units. It is this dichotomy, the well-being of the individual juxtaposed with the welfare of the community, that seems to be both the reason for and the result of the current dilemma with which we find ourselves, as a species, confronted. This century has seen rapid technological and scientific advances, and humanitarian organizations and movements advocating the rights of women, children and youth alongside the failure of existing social order to ensure the safety of nations and their peoples, the failure of ideological icons and the spread of terrorism and anarchy, the increasing threat of collapse of the economic order and the absence of social justice for massive numbers of people suffering the intense tyranny of poverty, racism and prejudice.

The Baha'i paradigm (Universal House of Justice, 1985) views this dilemma in the light of two views of human nature. One view agrees to the need for peace and harmony while perceiving human nature as being aggressive and selfish. This pessimism, they argue, leaves humanity unable to construct a social order which is dynamic, progressive, harmonious, and characterized by individual creativity, initiative, cooperation and reciprocity. Alternately they present a view of human nature consistent with personal and social aspirations which are constructive and encourage harmony and cooperation. It is founded on a historical perspective which views the prevailing confusion and distress as no less than humanity's collective developmental passage. Figuratively, humanity is

seen to have passed through its infancy, childhood, and adolescence, progressing toward its coming of age. The unification of the human race is seen as the final maturation of the social context and behavior of humankind. Prejudice, war and exploitation are seen as behavioral expressions associated with immature stages in a vast historical process. Current convulsions, necessary to the release of the potential inherent in this optimistic view of human nature, are prerequisites to establishment of a peaceful world civilization. These contradictory views of human nature are applicable to the global community, the nation, the community and the family.

George Land (1987) addresses the manner in which every growing thing moves toward higher and more complex levels of interconnection and interdependence. Humanity, he suggests, has now created a complex network of connections bringing the earth into a global village. The challenge is to understand that the creative process of nature is pulling all systems, including organizations and civilization to a future different from the past. To align with this we are required to make different connections with people, ideas, resources, and opportunities.

From our reading of this analysis of the current global dilemma we see that the juncture at which we find ourselves concerns movement toward an ever-advancing civilization. The process of social evolution has taken us through tribal, nation state, and now to global connections. The response which we collectively make will be founded on our ethics and values, our view of human nature. Given this world view, the family represents the individual's experience with the earliest social environment of the species.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Methodological Perspective

This study explores the potential of religious institutions to provide a context for informal social support and connection to formal, professional family support programs and services, by examining one such community network, the Baha'i Faith community. The study combines an articulation of the Baha'i family paradigm; participation with a group of Baha'i families in group process; and documentation through the reporting of experience. The study provides opportunities for children and youth to be heard, and for families to share their values and beliefs, enabling analysis of the influence of the Baha'i community on Baha'i family life and it explores implications for application to other communities of affinity and policy making bodies.

In order to design a study which meets the content, context, values and ethics implicit in the stated research problem, I re-considered my practice work which was based on and conducted through a "re-search" process, defined by Parker (1989, p.5) as,

> looking again; of being curious; of being interested in surprising patterns; of being able to reflect upon what happens in a systematic fashion; and, above all, having the confidence to adopt a critical attitude towards conventional wisdom, accepted practice or current fashion.

As an example, I looked at a project I had undertaken in 1990 as a consultant with a First Nations community because of its similarity and participatory approach. The terms of reference included the conduct of consultative meetings with community members, through which the identity of the community was enhanced and the contributions of its members were respected and valued. This is an example of participatory research with a community of affinity. The similarity lies in commitment to

research grounded in the experience of, and describing reality from the perspective of, those who have traditionally been excluded from the production of research.

Kirby and McKenna (1989, p.65) suggest assumptions on which methods appropriate to this type of research are grounded:

1. Knowledge is socially constructed

2. Social interactions form the basis of social knowledge

3. Different people experience the world differently

4. Because they have different experience, people have different knowledge

5. Knowledge changes over time

6. Differences in power have resulted in the commodification of knowledge and a monopoly on knowledge production

This raises the important issue of methodological perspective. On the whole, social scientists have tended to emphasize theory. Farzam Arbab (1992) argues that too strong an emphasis on the development of models or theories, through experimentation and measurement, limits the types of problems that are considered worthy of investigation. Research questions, he suggests, arise from the interests of small groups, are seen through the lens of the dominating few, and are examined with instruments that have the cultural and social biases of the investigators.

Acknowledging the need for a methodological framework within which we can carry out action and reflection, this study utilized the process of consultation, which is embedded in the existing framework of the Baha'i Teachings, to gather data. The participants were familiar with this process, providing congruency between their experience and the methodology of the study.

But this process of consultation is no mere discussion of conformity to prescribed 'truth'. In her book, Asking Questions: A Challenge to Fundamentalism, Nakhjavani

(1990), suggests that a Baha'i is one who believes in the power of asking questions. She

asks (p.1),

> "How else can one approach anything so dazzling as a Revelation and avoid
> blindness? Any study of the Baha'i teachings requires that we recognize shadows to
> be our means of inquiry, shadows to be the language we construct, the images we
> comprehend. The areas of shadow are where the questions arise, where we see sharp
> contrasts and grapple with contradictions. That is where we can begin to shape the
> principles that would otherwise blind us."

This idea of shaping, constructing, through inquiry, our personal and collective

understanding, our knowledge, is fundamental to the Baha'i perspective. Hatcher and

Martin (1984) explain,

> "The process of community building is well advanced in the Baha'i Faith. During the
> first century of its existence, the Baha'i community was primarily concentrated in
> Persia where, as a proscribed and much persecuted minority, it had little opportunity
> to experiment with the teachings of its founder. Once the teaching plans were
> implemented ... however, ... the collective life of the believers began to manifest
> some of these 'society-building' potentialities."

In Chapter 2, I spoke about personal and social transformation. Danesh (1986)

suggests that human societies are transformed through a multitude of causes which may

bring about change through conformity to individual or group ideology. He argues that

successful transformation of human society must conform to universal laws of growth

which propel humanity forward toward a mature society, characterized by the assertion

of the nobility of every human being and the ultimate victory of the human spirit.

Danesh suggests that the Baha'i perspective on this process necessitates the

conscious development of a "politics of transformation which will harness the inherent

and inviolable laws of life and growth governing human societies" (p.118). Growth

dynamics of human societies, he argues, are both natural and intentional.

I chose a methodological approach grounded in the experiential knowledge of the

participants, because that is the knowledge being sought by the study. I would better

understand that knowledge through the process of group consultation, the asking of questions.

This approach utilizes data gathering techniques which encourage the researcher's experience to be part of the content and process of the research. Because I have been an educator, in both formal and non-formal settings, for over a quarter of a century; because my first formal research endeavor (1981) involved the conduct of focus groups of teachers, parents and resource professionals; and because the nature of my work since 1989 has primarily been the conduct of training workshops for parents, families, community agencies, school staffs and the like, I have developed a high standard of competence in moderating the group consultation process.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest that research which is experientially based provides greater detail which, in turn, enables more powerful descriptions and analysis. Hein (1988) states that by modeling "the kind of self-disclosing behavior which he hopes his subjects will adopt", the researcher establishes a reflexive methodology which will reveal meaningful data. Given these aspirations, the participatory method that I selected for this study was the group interview (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990).

Data Collection Methods

A qualitative, descriptive design was used to guide data collection and analysis. The primary source of the information which I sought was experience. The study focuses on the direct experience of the participants, while integrating the researcher's (my) experience and taking into account, as secondary data, what may have been written or documented about the research topic. In order to ground the study in the experience of the participants it became critical to reflect on the data gathering process. People do not necessarily share a common perspective. They do share exclusion from participation in

the construction of expressions of their own experience. even though explaining the world is a human activity.

In seeking knowledge this study reflects four aspirations: 1. It is attentive to the experience of the participants. 2. It attends the dynamics of power by facilitating a voice for the children and youth. 3. It goes beyond description to reach for theoretical explanations of what is happening in the social context of the participants. 4. Through that process, the participants are able to see themselves in the reporting of their experience.

The study utilized a group interview format by which the participants were asked to describe their perceptions of the influence on family life that results from study and reflection on the Baha'i Teachings, whether in written form or through discussion; and through participation in community events and access to community relationships with friends, between generations, through community service, and in the ethnic and cultural backgrounds and traditions of its members.

I chose the group interview method because, for several reasons, it 'fit' the research problem structurally and philosophically. 1. It enabled an initial exploration of Baha'i family and community life, topics about which there is currently no research information available. 2. It enabled direct collaboration with participants in the collection and interpretation of data, enabling participants to work with the researcher (me) to ensure that the findings accurately represent their views. Participants became co-researchers in the process rather than subjects to be studied. 3. The group process provided an opportunity for participants to gain support from one another and there is evident potential for such an experience to lead to action planning.

Groups are used in addressing social research because people choose to function in groups and thereby produce social problems. Moore (1987, p.5) provides four compelling reasons for group research methods:

1. A group can do some things better than an individual.

2. It is necessary to obtain the views of the actors to understand social problems.

3. If we are concerned about the consequences of our research it is beneficial to use groups.

4. Complex, ill-defined problems can often only be addressed by pooled intelligence.

This approach is characteristic to the twentieth century. As work with groups has evolved, techniques have been developed to overcome problems typical to groups. These techniques are designed to avert aggressiveness, to generate alternative ideas, to decrease apprehension amongst group members who have not known each other, and to provide means for recording deliberations. Because a basic tenet of group methods is that they would involve those likely to be affected by the knowledge generated, techniques were developed to assist groups to accomplish tasks such as planning for change, solving problems, or generating ideas.

Traditionally, problem solving has been carried out by experts who analyze and solve problems independent of those who live the problems. Design methods, using a different set of assumptions, were developed in the 1970's and Moore (p.21) provides points of comparison between what he calls first and second generation methods. These address expertise, decision making process, identification of fundamental issues, control over judgments, and collaborative production and implementation of proposals. The Important points of comparison are as follows:

First Generation Methods		Second Generation Methods
	Process	
linear, sequential phasing of design activities		iterative activities carried out simultaneously
	View of the Solution	
solution is fairly well defined at the outset		no clear-cut image of the solution
	Methods	
scientific, systematic, quantitative, objective		systems, "political", participatory, holistic

The process selected for this study falls within the assumptions of second generation methods because it addresses an ill-defined problem that requires the participation of those responsible for the solution. Beginning with that problem, the group provided focus and a clear agenda.

Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) describe the group interview as discussion under the direction of a moderator, generally involving 8 to 12 individuals, lasting from one and a half to two and a half hours, and possibly involving audio or video taping. The moderator may be more or less directive and, they argue, a balance between what is important to the group and what is important to the researcher must be struck. Group interviews are primarily conducted for the purpose of collecting qualitative data because they produce a rich body of natural data expressed in the participants' own words. They suggest that the successful use of groups requires assurance that their use is consistent with the objectives and purpose of the research. Steps for such a design are (p.20).

1. Problem definition

2. Formulation of the research question

3. Identification of sampling frame

4. Identification of moderator

5. Generation of interview guide

6. Recruiting the sample

7 Conducting the group

8. Analysis and interpretation of data

9. Writing the report

The groups met twice during April, 1995. The first stage was a separate group interview for adults, lasting two hours, and one for the children, lasting one hour. No youth attended the first session. Two research tasks were addressed to produce primary data. That data was categorized in preparation for the second stage. The second stage, as follow up, was joint group consultation by the adults, lasting two hours, on the nature of the data generated by the first session and on a third research task. At that second session, two youth attended and a separate one hour session was held with them to address the three research tasks and to analyze their responses. None of the children who participated in the first session chose to participate in the second. The primary means of recording these groups interview discussions was the use of flip-charts. In addition the sessions were recorded on audio-tape and transcribed to written notes and computer disk to facilitate analysis. All of the data recorded was kept secure under lock and key. This process of reaction, reflection, clarification and consolidation engaged the participants in the analysis of the data. In Chapter 5, I will expand on the way in which the adult and youth participants were engaged in the reporting process. The design of the group process was guided by four components:

1. The research purpose and approach was explained to participants at first contact.

2. The questions facilitated a sharing of ideas, philosophy and experience.

3. The setting and format suggested an equal relationship between researcher and participants.

4. The research process was dynamic. Repeated sessions were planned for the purpose of reflection and to gather any new information about strongly felt perceptions or experiences.

Given the purpose of the study the data collection process offered several advantages. It enabled a pooling of ideas, whatever their nature, from the different generational and situational perspectives. It encouraged participation and discouraged domination by the aggressive or sophisticated few, ensuring that each participant could contribute to the overall task without the inhibiting influence of power relationships. The plan enabled participants to engage in the research process, focused on the questions before them, as collaborators.

Data Analysis

By using group interviews, a large volume of data was gathered in a short time. Making sense of that data, analysis, was critical to my ability to describe and explain what was being studied and to provide a deeper understanding. The first step in my analytical plan was organizing the data. The second was understanding the data. The data collection plan offered voice to the participants and provided opportunity for critical reflection on the context of the information generated. The data analysis plan was consistent with the constant comparative method of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and provided for the examination of social reality championed by Freire (1985). Data were managed by grouping items in data files which were expected to generate specific and general patterns. Files were described on the basis of what they contained and were analyzed by bringing information together until patterns begin to emerge. Categories identified ideas, events, themes, or common properties associated with the data items.

The analysis of data within categories was the first step to consolidating information and, by analysis between categories, I looked for common properties to identify relationships. The criteria for determining the data files and emerging patterns were the four research questions which guided the study. At the first group interviews the adult and child participants addressed the first two questions by responding to the following tasks:

Describe some of the features of Baha'i family life ... values, roles, relationships, environment, people in your family, things you do and any other things that you think are characteristic of Baha'i family life.

Use examples from your own experience to describe how Baha'i community life influences your family life ... whether those examples are supportive or constraining.

Five forms of analysis were conducted. First, after the interview sessions, I ranked similar responses as data items. Second, I sorted these items into categories. The total for each category was established by adding up the number of items which were assigned to that category. Third, during the second group interviews, the data rankings and categories were presented to the adult participants by which they became part of the analysis. Because no youth attended the first interviews, these questions were addressed and the analysis was carried out at the time of the second group interviews. The results are reported in Chapter 5, Table 1 and Table 3. Fourth, the characteristics from Table 1 were compared with those found in a compilation of writings of the Baha'i Faith on marriage and family life (National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada, 1983). This comparison is shown in Table 2. Fifth, the results of Table 3 were used to create a map of perceived community influence, shown in Figure 1.

In pursuing the third question. "What Baha'i community resources do Baha'i families identify as strengthening family life?", I looked at the 305 responses to the first two group interview questions for items that specifically described aspects of the Baha'i community which strengthen and support family life. I sorted 112 responses which met this criteria into categories. The other 193 responses from the first two tasks addressed the nature and characteristics of Baha'i family life or influences which were not specifically indicative of community support. The results are reported in Table 4. Comparing the categories from Table 4 with Brigman's (1986) framework of characteristics perceived to be most effective for churches in building family strengths, yields Table 6.

Because the second task was phrased so as to facilitate the surfacing of any perceived influence, whether supportive or constraining, there were some tensions which surfaced in the responses. These will be addressed in chapter 6.

During the second group interviews the adult and youth participants addressed the fourth question by responding to the following task:

Imagine and describe changes in Baha'i community life or additional community resources that would serve to support and strengthen your family life.

I conducted two forms of analysis on those responses at the time of the second group interviews with both the adult and youth participants. After the responses had been generated and recorded, we jointly ranked them as similar data items. Then, we sorted these items into categories. The total for each category was determined by adding up the number of items which were assigned to that category. After the group interviews were concluded, I reviewed the categories and made a final array which is reported in Table 5. Because no children attended the second group interviews, no data reflect their

ideas about this question. The results were compared with the framework presented by Brigman and with Table 4. These comparisons are shown in Table 6.

I maintained the authenticity of the response items by transferring them to written pages. As these pages were changed and discarded durings the process of analyzing the data, the actual response items were reiterated verbatim.

Ethics

It is my conviction that research on a given problem is best carried out by those who experience it. Participants were seen as collaborators in this study, not only providing data but taking part, to a limited extent, in the analysis and presentation of the data. Therefore, there were some ethical considerations to address. First, the research was concerned with gathering information that would explore and perhaps transform current relations of support in the community under study. It also has the potential to offer insight for use in and by other communities and policy makers in the public domain. So, the purpose and conduct of the research was clarified at the beginning and during the study. Failure to do so would have, as Hein (1988) argues, left the subjects at risk to be treated as tools to achieve the researcher's end rather than to be seen as collaborators. Second, should the study have been carried out by this researcher (me)? The most important ethical problem for this study was the empowerment of the voice of the children and youth members of the participant families. Based on my practice experience as a school teacher I have competency in the conduct of group discussions with these age groups. Other issues around the influence of relationships of power in the conduct of the group sessions were addressed in the data collection process. In my view, the separation of age groups facilitated open discussion among participants about their experiences and ideas. This was evidenced by the participation of all of the children and

youth. Specifically. the two youth were able to speak frankly about their perceptions of the need for the provision of activities which are not folded into the adult activities and which do not call upon them to serve as child minders at community events.

This leads us to specific issues associated with the group interview. Kirby and McKenna (1989) describe interviews as a special form of interaction between people to elicit information by asking questions. They outline essential components which guide an interactive interview (p.66). These address the formation and clarity of questions; the setting and relationship between the interviewer and participants; the nature of the research approach, especially that it should respond in a dynamic way to new information; and the view that collaborators are an essential component. That outline provided a starting point and standard for the design of principles and ground rules which guided the conduct of the group interviews, and which were given to the participants at the outset. Written agreements for participation. stating clearly the nature and purpose of the study and these ground rules are found in Appendix G.

The research proposal was submitted to. and approved by, the human studies research panel at the University of Victoria.

The Participants

The Cowichan Valley represents a unique phenomenon in the Canadian Baha'i community. A relatively large number of Baha'is reside in, and have formed local Spiritual Assemblies in, eight electoral districts. These Baha'i communities range in size and can be compared by standards of community functioning such as regularity of nineteen day Feasts and Holy Days; social interaction; education programs for members; public events; Assembly meetings; and so on. Resident Baha'is represent diverse backgrounds, circumstances, and family structures. In addition, the only Baha'i academic

secondary school in North America is located in the region. I lived, with my family, in the region from mid 1990 to mid 1992 and participated in Baha'i community life. Given the existence of these relatively stable communities: a population of over 500 Baha'i adults, youth and children representing a diverse range of socioeconomic, educational, racial, ethnic, Faith, ideological, and linguistic backgrounds; and given the engagement of those communities with the research topic, the study was limited to Baha'i family members residing within the geographical region of the Cowichan Valley.

Because of the exploratory and qualitative nature of the study, the groups were limited to no more than twelve people, and the categories of participants was limited to adult, children (aged 14 and younger), and youth (aged 15 and older) Baha'i family participants.

The following principles guided selection of the participants:

1. The participants had to be Baha'i family groupings.

2. The families had to reside within the geographical region of the study.

3. The participants had to be interested in the topic of study and be willing to share openly their experiences in the initial sessions and successive steps.

Possible participants, whether Baha'i families or individuals in the Cowichan Valley municipalities, all received a written invitation to take part in the group research workshop (see Appendix F), clearly indicating that by doing so they would be participating in this study. Thirteen families responded by indicating that they wished to participate. Of these, five families did not attend the interview sessions, but one additional family did turn up and ask to participate. Thus nine families are represented in the study.

There were four categories of participants in the group interview sessions: myself, as the researcher; the adult (parent) members of the families; the youth members of the families, aged 15 years and older; and the children, aged under 14 years.

The participants were diverse on the dimensions of age and gender, and brought a variety of perspectives and backgrounds to address the research questions. However, they did not represent a range of ethnic groups represented in the makeup of the Baha'i community in the Cowichan Valley. Given the importance placed in the Baha'i teachings on the organic unity of the human race, future work with Baha'i communities should pay attention to this dimension in recruiting and selecting participants. The impact of such considerations will be considered in the discussion of the findings and in the conclusion.

Summary

A total of twenty two Baha'is took part in this study. The adult group consisted of twelve participants; the children's group had eight participants; and two youth took part in the second interview session.

1. **Age**

    The age range of adult participants was from 38 to 48 years; of children, from 3 to 9 years; and the two youth were aged 15 and 16.

2. **Gender**

    Six of the adult participants were male and six female; five of the children were male and three female; one male and one female youth took part.

3. **Marital Status**

    All of the participating families were comprised of two married parents; all of whom were members of the Baha'i Faith. So, six parents did not take part.

4. **Family Status**

The participating families had eleven children and eleven youth members living at home. So, three children and nine youth did not take part.

5. **Community Representation**

Five families were from Shawnigan Lake; two were from Cowichan Bay; and two were from North Cowichan (the environs of the city of Duncan). The five smaller Baha'i communities in the region were not represented.

6. **Length of Residence**

The length of time that the families had lived in the Cowichan Valley ranged from three months to six years. The average was three years four months.

7. **Baha'i Background**

Only two adult participants had parents who were Baha'i and one of those had grand parents who were Baha'i.

8. **Length of Baha'i Membership**

Of the remaining ten adult participants, the length of membership in the Baha'i Faith ranged from five years to thirty years.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

In the Introduction to this study, I asked: How can religious communities fulfill a support role for families? And, how can they remain open to impact and change by the diversity of family needs and individual influence? I chose a community of Faith to which my own family belongs and four sub-problems were posed for exploration:

1. How do Baha'i families describe Baha'i family life?
2. How do Baha'i families experience and understand the influence of the Baha'i community on family life?
3. What Baha'i community resources do Baha'i families identify as strengthening family life?
4. What changes in Baha'i community life would serve to strengthen family life?

This chapter presents the results of the group interviews under those questions.

Describing the Nature and Characteristics of Baha'i Family Life

The following discussion is based upon Table 1, the rankings of the categories of items by the child, youth and adult participants. For a complete view of items within the categories and their scores see Appendix A.

The use of categories enabled me to identify patterns and to obtain a more accurate sense of priority or emphasis of the items. I was able to make comparisons between the adults, children 14 years and under, and the two youth participants to further explore pattern and emphasis while preserving the individuality of each group. The

characteristics related to conjoint family and community relationships assumed a higher priority for the adult and child participants, whereas the responses of the youth center on practice of values and principles and social support for individuals and reveal less about family and community interaction.

Table 1.
Characteristics of Baha'i Family Life Identified by Participants

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ADULT	YOUTH	CHILD	TOTAL
1.Relationship with Baha'i Community	23	1	5	29
2.Relationships within the Family	22		3	25
3.A commonly held Faith	14	6	4	24
4.Family activities	18		1	19
5.Tests and difficulties	14		4	18
6.Education of all family members	12	2	3	17
7.Relationship with non-Baha'i Community	8		3	11
TOTAL RESPONSE ITEMS	111	9	23	143

Relationship With the Baha'i Community

This was the most frequent category overall with 29 out of a total of 143 items included in Table 1. The category arose from the grouping of response items, describing Baha'i family life, which made reference to interaction or relationship with the Baha'i community. It was one of two foremost categories of characteristics in the adults' views about the Baha'i family, found in 23 out of 111 adult responses. They included references to the *"keying"* of family goals to Baha'i concerns; for example, service to the community and its members and the allocation of family funds to the needs of the community.

The adults spoke about the regular community events (e.g. Feasts and Holy Days) as a structure for family planning and introduced the notion of the community as a support network: *"The Baha'i community is an extended family"; "we ask other Baha'is for guidance on family matters"; "we connect with other Baha'is."* They also mentioned the opportunity for roles for individuals provided by the community; and the notion of connection to *"Institutions and ceremony"*.

The children's responses fit in this category more than any other, with five out of a total of 23 responses, although their items did not include reference to the setting of family goals or connection to Institutions. When one child stated that, *"we get to go to Feasts and Summer School and its fun"*, brief discussion took place about the difficulties of not taking part in Christmas celebrations. This problem was reframed as a benefit when reference was made to the four day period called Ayyam-i-Ha, from February 25 to March 1, during which Baha'is extend hospitality, visit others, undertake social service initiatives, and exchange gifts: *"Your friends ask, what? You're lucky to have four days'"*

Relationships Within the Family

The second most fequent category of characteristics, with a total of 25 of the 143 items, consists of response items which referred to relationships of support within the family. Adults generated 22 of their 111 items in this category. The characteristics which were valued included: *"sensitivity to stages in our development"; "Baha'i consultation on personal and family issues"*; truthfulness and respect; support, compassion and empathy; the acceptance of the ideas and emotions of family members; and the sharing of family duties and tasks. One adult participant described a family life that: *"changes as we grow"*.

A Commonly Held Faith

This category, arising from response items associated with specific Baha'i spiritual values and principles, ranked third overall with a total of 24 of the 143 items. It was the fourth priority of adults, generating 14 of 111 items. The notion of *"a commonly held Faith, as the foundation on which the family rests"* was articulated by the adults as meaning that Baha'i family life is based on reflection on Baha'i values and principles, and that behavior is based on those same values and principles: *"moral values are reflected in family behavior: alcohol, drugs, chastity, marriage, prayer, fasting, deepening"*.

The youth identified this category six times out of their total of nine responses, making it their first priority with responses such as: *"We say prayers together which makes our relationship stronger"*; *"deepening together on Baha'i writings as a family"*; *"parents teaching by example, both to children and to the non-Baha'i community"*; *"spiritual learning together"*; and *"not drinking alcohol is an advantage so Baha'i families can gain more spiritually"*. Children made 4 references out of 23, second in priority to them, referring to prayer and behavior based on Baha'i standards.

Family Activities

This category scored the fourth highest total out of the 143 items at 19. The adults centred 18 of their 111 items on responses which described the family as a *"loving environment"* for *"doing things together"*; for *"working on unity"*; and for *"creating family traditions"*. I saw this aspect to be different from relationships within the family.

Tests and Difficulties

The fifth most frequent category of characteristics of Baha'i family life, mentioned in 14 of 111 items by adults, was seen to be those tests and difficulties involved in facing

hardships together. For example, one adult said that *"we share tests and triumphs with each other, our lives are intertwined"*. The family was described as being a *"striving partnership"*, *"like a fortress"*. The adults also spoke about how the *"pressure to participate in community life detracts from time spent with family"*, and described the struggle to *"keep up with what feeds and drains"* and with *"keeping Baha'i, professional, and family life in balance"*. The children reiterated concerns associated with identity, *"Why do I have to be different?"*, but not to hardship or commitment.

Education of all Family Members

All three age groupings made reference to education and/or learning as characteristic aspects of Baha'i family life, giving rise to the sixth ranked category, with a total of 17 out of 143 items. The adults included 12 statements about education, citing the family as the location for teaching and learning about Baha'i principles and history; referring to the opportunity for all family members to participate in Baha'i community schools and other educational programs and activities and suggesting that the family can *"teach values using materials and resources available from the Baha'i community"*. The role of the mother was articulated as *"the chief educator"*. The family was described as the place for education *"to establish equality between men and women"*. The children made note of education in the family in three of 23 items, making specific reference to community education: *...its a good idea to have a family schools committee because it involves the children not just the adults"*. The youth referred to education, suggesting that it is encouraged by, *"parents encouraging their children to read Baha'i books and to attend teaching activities and conferences"*.

Relationship With the Non-Baha'i Community

The seventh category of characteristics was mentioned in 11 out of the 143 items;
eight times by adults and three by children. The nature of the relationship between
Baha'i families and the non-Baha'i community was variously described by adults as
hospitality and inviting people to the home; providing assistance to those in need; and
telling friends about the Baha'i Faith. Children made one reference to hospitality and two
references to telling others about their Faith. The relative lack of references to
relationships outside of the Baha'i community is consistent with the extent to which the
participants describe their intimate involvement with the Baha'i community and their
struggle to balance time, resources and energy.

Comparing the Responses With Previous Work In The Field

How do the characteristics of family life generated by the participants in this
study compare with other literature in this area?

The allocation of equivalent importance to relationship with the Baha'i
community and relationships within the family is consistent with Hareven's idea (1984)
that our view of the family has shifted from that of an isolated household unit to being an
interactive social unit.

It also supports Eichler's (1983) suggestion that we pay attention to and explore
the religious/ethical dimension of family life to further our understanding of the
implications of rapid social, economic and technological changes for families. Eichler
notes that families vary greatly in their structure or composition; and in the range of
experiences, from satisfying to exploitative, that they provide for their members. In order
to avoid a restrictive, monolithic categorization of families, she suggests
reconceptualizing the aspects of family definition from 'functions' to 'dimensions of

familial interactions'. In Chapter 3, I mentioned that Eichler describes some of these dimensions. She also notes other dimensions worthy of consideration, including the religious and ethical dimension. Within each dimension, she argues, various degrees of interaction can be identified. This view is useful in discussing the results of this study. It is apparent from the responses in Table 1 that the participants have described a family life which involves complex, interactive relationships. This is consistent with Eichler's perspective. Indeed, interaction with those outside of the traditional nuclear family, specifically the Baha'i community, was referred to with equal frequency as relationships within the family. Because my categorization of the responses arose from the patterns which emerged out of those very responses, the bias of a preconceived definition of family was avoided.

The participants see Baha'i family life as inextricably linked to the Baha'i community. In Baker's (1990) articulation of theoretical perspectives of the family, this view is consistent with both Structural Functionalism, which focuses on the social structures which govern behavior and maintain social cohesion and stability; and the Systems approach, which focuses on the interrelationships within the family. The results suggest that the latter approach also applies to the ecological relationship of the family within the larger community; and with values or principles.

Eleven of the categories found in the compilation on marriage and family life published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada were represented in the responses generated by the first group interview question. A comparison of the twelve headings used in the chapter on family life (p. 28) with the categories generated in Table 1 is found in Table 2. The idea that the relationship with family members continues after death was not raised by the participants. The order of the headings in the

compilation does not imply any priority or hierarchy of values or principle, and I did not determine to what extent the participants were familiar with the compilation.

The emphasis given by the adult participants to relationship with the Baha'i community and relationships within the family suggests congruence between the declaration of agreement implied by membership in a specific Faith community and the striving to translate its teachings into lifestyle. Given the challenge of achieving this balance of belief and practice in their family and community lives, it is not surprising that several of the items generated by the adult participants referred to such a struggle.

Similarly, the children participating in this study referred to all of the categories in the compilation except death. The youth responses disclosed little about family interaction but did relate to several of the compilation headings.

The primary difference between the framework of headings from the compilation and the results of this study is simply that the first is a set of statements intended to guide value, principle and behavior. The second is an articulation of the actual experience and observation of people striving to conform their lives to that guidance. The findings suggest that the guidance and expectations found in the teachings of the Baha'i Faith have relevance to and influence on the actions and experience of the participants.

Table 2.
Comparing Categories of Characteristics of Baha'i Family Life In the Writings of the Baha'i Faith With Categories Identified by Participants

COMPILATION	PARTICIPANTS
1. Love and Unity	Relationships within the family Family activities
2. Communication	Relationships within the family
3. Tests and difficulties	Tests and difficulties
4. Equality of men and women	Relationships within the family A commonly held Faith Education of all family members
5. Education of children	Education of all family members
6. Relationships within the family	Relationships within the family
7. Death	No references
8. Work and finance	Relationship with Baha'i community Relationships within the family Tests and difficulties
9. Hospitality	Relationship with non-Baha'i community
10. Relationship with Baha'i Institutions and Community	Relationship with Baha'i community Tests and difficulties
11. Family life and Baha'i service	Relationship with Baha'i community Family activities Tests and difficulties
12. Prayers	A commonly held Faith

Describing the Influence of the Baha'i Community on Family Life

The following discussion is based upon Table 3, the rankings of the categories of examples of how the Baha'i community influences family life. For a complete view of the items within the categories and their scores see Appendix B.

The results of the first group interview question suggest that family life, for the participants, is a reflection of shared values and principles which provide social structure. The highest number of characteristics associated with Baha'i family life refer to relationship with the Baha'i community. The second question asked for specific examples of how the Baha'i community influences family life. A total of 162 responses were generated. The two categories mentioned most frequently were the expectations of service to the community; and the modeling role of the community. Adults emphasized the challenges and demands of Baha'i community life; children emphasized taking part and helping out; and the youth focused on community support for the individual.

Table 3.
Aspects of the Baha'i Community Which Influence Family Life
Identified by Participants

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ADULT	YOUTH	CHILD	TOTAL
1.Expectations of Community Service	26	1	4	31
2.Modeling practice of values and principles	25	1	5	31
3.Social support for families	21		6	27
4.Feasts, Holy Days and formal events	24	2	1	27
5.Social support for individuals	14	4		18
6.Education	14			14
7.Institutions and Resources	14			14
TOTAL RESPONSE ITEMS	138	8	16	162

Expectations of Community Service

The expectations and needs of community service were referred to in 31 out of 162 responses found in Table 3, making this category one of two mentioned most frequently. Of the 138 adult responses, 26 fit this category, focusing on the overwhelming demands on time, energy and resources: *"so much is required of us by being a part of this community"*. The adult participants acknowledged the opportunities for individuals to serve and the attendant choice to set individual priorities: *"community life gives opportunity for service"*, *"I give myself the power to say no"*. The expectations which community members have of each other, *"we expect too much of each other at times"*, and the potential negative effect which these demands can have on children, *"parents are too busy so this affects children"*, were reframed in the notion that community service is, in itself, a family activity: *"service can provide time for family activity"*, *"this age is different from the age to come. This is an age of construction. We are building the foundation, we have to sacrifice our interests, pioneer on the homefront, etc."*; and as an experience of a new reality, *"our child traveled to Siberia - travel teaching"*. In the next chapter, I will address tensions arising from these expectations.

The children reiterated this view of community expectations by describing how: *"every family takes part in some way"*; *"you get a chance to help out with things"*.

Modeling Practice of Values and Principles

In a similar manner to the way in which, in Table 1, participants identified the family as the location for reflection on and application of shared values and principles; the community was seen to be a location of, and to have a responsibility for, modeling them: *"community attempts to understand, and reflect, Baha'i principles provides a model for families about back-biting, gossip, alcohol, and so on"*.

This responsibility for modeling Baha'i standards received equal weighting to the expectations for individuals and families to contribute to the community, affirming that the relationship between Baha'i families and the Baha'i community is interactive. 25 of 138 adult responses identified the role of the community in modeling standards of behavior and morality and that in providing the opportunity for interaction with a diversity of people who share common belief. The adults also emphasized peer behavior as a motivating influence on the conformity of children to Baha'i standards of behavior and morality; and that the community is a location for shared study of the Baha'i writings and for prayer. They noted that these standards can be applied as criticism; and that sometimes *"words and deeds do not meet"*.

Children generated five responses in this category, citing a desire for more opportunities to get together with a diversity of people to make things better: *"we're trying to make world peace and build a bigger community"*. The one response by a youth which fits to this category addressed the potential for positive or negative peer modeling in the community: *"the community affects you as a whole. If the community is negative it will bring you down, usually within your peer group. The same effect in the positive."*

Social Support for Families

Consistent with the notion that family life interrelates with community life, the third most frequent category, generating 27 of 162 items, associated the community with informal social support functions; as an extended family. *"Baha'i community becomes our family"*, *"... almost like cousins"*; or a circle of friends providing feelings of intimacy and unity, *"close relationships are formed between families"*. The potential for tension and estrangement was also addressed, *"acceptance seems conditioned if you're not up to their standards"*; as was the extent to which the community dominates the social life of

families. *"opportunities to socialize outside are limited by time, energy, values, beliefs"*

This category had the highest frequency of responses by children who referred six times to the community as a source of social influence: *"Its a good idea. Lots of people in the community". "Its fun to go to children's things".* And, reframing the tension experienced in bringing together Baha'i and non-Baha'i social relationships, one child stated, *"its fun, but I really would like one of my friends to become a Baha'i".*

Feasts, Holy Days and Formal Events

The regular or formal social support mechanisms of Baha'i community gatherings were mentioned as an influence on family life with equal frequency to the informal social support functions, in a total of twenty-seven items. This was due to the generation of 24 out of 138 responses by adults, who cited these events as a means by which families are connected to the community and to the Baha'i Faith, *"the Feast keeps the family in touch with the Baha'i community and in touch with the Baha'i administrative order".* They also mentioned that the planning and atmosphere of these events can make it difficult to bring children, *"events can be boring for children and the long term effect is that children don't want to be associated with the Faith".* Yet attendance at community events was seen to literally bring families together, and to provide for the nurturing of self expresssion.

The youth referred in two of their eight responses, to community gatherings as an influence: *"the community comes together at Feasts, Holy Days and gatherings which usually results in the sharing of ideas".*

Social Support for Individuals

I chose to separate response items which referred to social support for individuals from those about support for families because it was a category to which youth referred

four out of eight times and about which women made significant and important comments. *"The community is like your family"* one youth stated, affirming the notion of extended family. *"it would help you out with problems, guidance"*; and. *"when someone in the community is struggling, they will support them and pray for them"*.

The adults included six comments about the experience of isolation and devaluing of women. For example, *"the present Baha'i community is my biggest challenge. The majority are professionals. I feel isolated, something is missing for me. I don't know my place. I am a mother and sometimes it isn't valued amongst community members"*; and, *"I am only a mother; looked down upon if I have difficulties"*. One adult raised the issue of the *"blurring between I am a Baha'i and I am a member of the Baha'i community"*. Yet, the adults also spoke about. *"individual support in times of crisis"*. For one, *"interacting with the community is a stimulus for individual growth"*.

This category suggests that the experience of social support from the community is complex, dimensional, and related to individual developmental stages, needs and expectations. The implications of this are discussed in more depth in Chapter 6.

Education

Children and youth participants did not refer to education as an aspect of community influence on family life; but adults generated 14 of 138 items in this category. They noted that formal classes for children and youth provide togetherness, *"children's classes help children to get to know other children"*; that education activities nurture spirituality, *"firesides and deepenings spiritually feed adults"*; and that there is a need to plan for family learning activities, *"Baha'i school could be done as a family activity, not separated"*. Further discussion of the implications for the planning of education activities can be found in Chapter 6.

Institutions and Resources

This category arose from 14 responses generated by adults which made specific reference to community institutions or human resources. They stated that, *"constraints resulting from expectations of participation in community institutions can provide structure for life"*. The opportunity for participation and leadership in community institutions, planning groups and decision-making is sometimes limited by gender roles and perceptions, *"who talks, who are the secretaries and chairman"*; and *"We have work to do to bring, encourage women to become scholars and speakers"*. This category surfaces two issues which will be explored in the discussion of the findings: the limited reference to support from the local Spiritual Assembly and tension around gender roles.

Comparing the Responses With Previous Work in the Field

The findings of this study are consistent with the suggestion of Bronfenbrenner, Moen, and Garbarino (1984, p. 306) that religious organizations are "particularly salient" examples of formal community structures, thereby implying a role in the well-being of children and families. First, they argue that community supports the family by both formal and informal structures. Second, these structures, they suggest, should provide diverse resources and challenging experiences. Third, these structures should serve as sources of stability and support. The findings describe a balance in the experience of the participants, including a clearly articulated, value based social structure. The findings include reference to the demands and expectations of community service as well as the diversity of, and opportunity for, experience and interaction, usually termed by the participants as service. The findings provide consistent evidence that the participants experience support and a sense of belonging and purpose in the context of the Baha'i community. The descriptions by participants of connections among children, parents and

settings outside the family are consistent with the needs for access to interaction with others; social order; and opportunity for individual development, seen to be pertinent to the family-community relationship by Goodnow (1988). The results suggest that the Baha'i community provides the type of supportive community-based relationships advocated by Anglin and Glossop (1986); a network that is consistent with the ecological model of social support systems and resources. From this point of view, the Baha'i community would be what Garbarino and Crouter (1978) describe as a "potent prosocial support system" (p.606). An interpretation of these results can be found in Chapter 6.

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the relationships of influence between the Baha'i family and the Baha'i community, described in the 162 responses found in Table 3.

Figure 1.
Mapping Baha'i Community Influences on Family Life Identified by Participants

Describing Community Influences Which Support and Strengthen Family Life

What factors motivate social support in the Baha'i community; and when and for whom does the Baha'i community provide social support? The results in Table 3 offer some insight to these questions.

The following discussion. based upon Table 4, ranks data items from the first two group interview questions that are examples of Baha'i community influences which support and strengthen family life. For a detailed accounting of the specific items within each of the categories and their scores see Appendix C.

The notion of a mutually beneficial, interactive relationship is underscored by this analysis. It is apparent that informal social support. the idea of extended family and connection to a broader social context, including the events which constitute the rhythm of Baha'i community life, is emphasized and highly valued by the participants.

Table 4.
Aspects of Baha'i Community Influence Identified by Participants
Which Strengthen and Support Family Life

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ADULT	YOUTH	CHILD	TOTAL
1.Informal social support for families	21		7	28
2.Modeling practice of values and principles	21	1	4	26
3.Community events	21	1	2	24
4.Education	15	2	2	19
5.Community service	8		4	12
6.Institutions and resources	3			3
TOTAL RESPONSE ITEMS	89	4	19	112

Informal Social Support for Families

I assigned twenty-eight response items to this category which describe the community as an extended family and circle of friends that engenders feelings of intimacy and unity. Embedded in these responses are concrete examples of how this support is achieved. For example, *"music nights that are family inclusive"* were mentioned in the adult group. And, from one of the youngest children, I heard, *"playing the piano"*. When I pursued that comment his siblings explained that every Friday night other Baha'i families come to their house for a music evening when those who come play instruments, listen and sing together. This struck me as a significant concrete experience for the preschool child, constituting an early element in his idea of what the Baha'i community represents. Manifestations of social support surfaced in other specific references made by children; for instance, *"pot luck dinners"*. Adults said that, *"other adults have a profound effect on children through play, love, etc."*; and, *"it is easier to socialize because of shared values and beliefs"*. The experience of social support as a transferable phenomenon, significant in an increasingly mobile society, is suggested by two items: *"we get visits from Baha'is from former communities"* and, *"we make visits to former communities"*.

Modeling Practice of Values and Principles

Adults clearly described the community's role in providing, *"Positive examples available to us as to how we should lead our lives"*. It was reiterated in items such as, *"Baha'i laws can help the family to be safe, secure, happy - freedom is not the ideal."* and *"For our children, positive peer influence has motivated them to confirm to standards and adopt a Baha'i lifestyle."* The community was seen to specifically model: *"responsibility"*; *"hospitality"*; *"standards of behavior"*; and *"discipline"*.

In one item we can see how a child viewed the community as a place to learn through example: *"I learn from hearing the adults talk"*. In total, twenty-six responses were assigned to this category.

Community Events

Regular events such as Feasts and Holy Days and other types of community gatherings, whether formal or informal, were cited twenty-four times as supportive elements of community life. Adults spoke about how, *"Our community included all of us in Baha'i activities such as summer school, Feasts and Holy Days"*; and, *"The community encourages children to attend Feasts, etc., to get a feeling of being a Baha'i"*. The children identified the Feasts and Holy Days as an opportunity for sharing, affirmed by one of the youth who said, *"At the Feasts, we get together. The youth dance."*

Education

Education activities were referred to as a supportive form of community interaction in nineteen items. Adults made fifteen references to community schools, programs and activities; the provision of feelings of togetherness for children and youth; and the nurturing of spirituality. The concern about being different, voiced by the children in some of their comments, was addressed by one of the youth participants, who said, *"It's easier to to be a Baha'i at a Baha'i school because you're not different"*.

Community Service

An interactive dimension of community, described as supportive of Baha'i family life, was the opportunity provided for individual and family service. *"Baha'i community*

or being a Baha'i allows individuals to realize talents"; and, one child described Baha'i family life as, *"Sort of like being involved a lot"*.

Institutions and Resources

The participants made no references to any formal advisory or counseling groups or individuals as a resource for families. The adults made only three references to the local elected community council, the Spiritual Assembly, as a source of support through guidance and consultation. This is of note because of the importance placed on the role of the local Spiritual Assembly in the teachings and administrative structure of the Baha'i Faith. Lacking a clerical order, the affairs of the local community are managed by this elected body and its relationship to the community is described in similar terms as those of parents to the family. This is a significant finding and will be explored in Chapter 6.

Describing Community Resources To Further Support and Strengthen Family Life

Given the examples of social support generated from the first two interview questions, what suggestions would the participants have for changes or additional resources in the Baha'i community to enhance and strengthen family life?

The following discussion is based upon Table 5, the rankings of the categories of items by the adult and youth participants in response to the third interview question. For a detailed accounting of the specific items within each of the categories and their scores see Appendix D.

As in the analysis of the first two questions, the use of categories was useful in enabling the identification of patterns and priority. Of the thirty-nine total responses generated, the three responses from youth addressed only one category topic: the need for planned activities for their age group. This was consistent with their responses to the

first two questions, which centered on issues directly related to them as individuals This focus is developmentally appropriate and thereby gives validity to the results because the primary task during the teenage years is to establish self identity. Developmental theorists, such as Erikson (1950), have explained that youth are involved in anticipation of adulthood. Young people seek leadership to inspire them and test their ideals and try various roles to find their personal style. The adult participants provided ideas for the design and planning of mechanisms to establish a stable social and material context for family life. They suggest an active, multi-dimensional community with shared values and principles that guide moral standards and behavior with resources that families can contribute to and draw from.

Table 5.
Ideas To Further Support and Strengthen Family Life
Identified by Participants

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ADULT	YOUTH	TOTAL
1.Systematic social support	8		8
2.Activities for children and youth	5	3	8
3.A gathering place	6		6
4.Individual growth and development	5		5
5.Family oriented activities	4		4
6.Marriage and parenting education	4		4
7.Diversity and expansion	4		4
TOTAL RESPONSE ITEMS	36	3	39

*   No children attended the second group interviews

Systematic Social Support

One of the two most frequent categories generated by adults, with a total of eight of 39 items, was systematic social support. This category included suggestions for mechanisms to identify and respond to needs; the connecting or pairing of Baha'i families and individuals in relationship, *"... for prayer, consultation, visits, love, etc."*; and literally used the language of extended family, *"Children need aunties and uncles"*. Some of these needs included: *"a Baha'i economic sub-culture to allow more commerce and support"*; the need for the local Spiritual Assembly to *"ripple outward to connect with others in the community"*; and to develop *"... a caring of the whole community, the whole organism"*. The relative priority and nature of these ideas suggests a strong desire on the part of the participants that the community deliberately plan for social support.

Activities for Children and Youth

The second category with eight response items was associated with the planning of activities for children and youth. All three responses generated by the two youth participants spoke directly to the need for, and impact of, specific plans for them which are not folded into other activities: *"More youth activities because the youth are really important in the community. When they are not active it brings the whole community down. If they are not attracted because of these things, they won't want to grow spiritually with their families"*. And, *"More activities for youth and children only, will develop youth and hopefully their attitude within the family"*.

The adults raised three items addressing, *"More effective youth and children's classes so that different interests can be met"*; and two ideas about outdoor experiences and camps: *"There is a gap for the 10, 11, 12 year age group; a need for something, someplace, some identity - like Boy Scouts"*.

A Gathering Place

The adult participants generated five responses about the need for a Baha'i center, *"... where people could hold large gatherings for long enough periods of time to form stronger bonds"*. Activities suggested for this center included deepening studies on the Baha'i Faith, cultural activities, and a sports complex. One participant recommended that, *"the physical environment should integrate people, by age, etc., to enhance community and family life."*

As is the case with most Baha'i communities in Canada, those in the Cowichan Valley gather either in members' homes or in rented facilities to observe Feasts and Holy Days; to conduct educational activities; to hold public presentations; and for other gatherings as necessary. Yet, as mentioned earlier, the Cowichan region is one of few locations in Canada with a Baha'i property, a residential secondary school. In Chapter 6, I will consider why, in spite of this facility, the participants identified the need for a gathering place, and, how and for whom do community resources work and what barriers to access exist?

Individual Growth and Development

Reiterating the notion of systematic planning, the adults generated five ideas about support mechanisms to assist individuals to find roles and responsibilities and to *"...develop individual skills and talents"*; to offer support, guidance and encouragement, *"... to find out what we have to offer and to connect"*. Planning to facilitate voluntary sharing and service, was suggested to establish *"more equity in growth and development"* because, *"All of us need to develop, not just those who are fortunate financially"*.

Family Oriented Activities

Consistent with the results from the first two interview questions, which suggested that the Baha'i community provides a strong social support network and structure, the adults generated four responses reiterating the need to plan meaningful, fun activities for families, and their friends, around the Baha'i calendar. Given the number of items found in Table 3 which suggest that the expectations and demands of Baha'i community life are overwhelming for some, I made note, somewhat humorously, of one recommendation for *"having more frequent Baha'i activities"*. These, one participant suggested, should be, *"More fun activities to invite friends"*.

Marriage and Parenting Education

Four response items suggested the provision of classes *"for young people in preparation for marriage and after marriage"*; classes and support for parents; marriage retreats. Again, I heard the need to find ways to *"... honor the critical role that mothers play in family life and the education of children"*. This category suggests a desire for systematic, planned community resources to enhance the strengths and address the challenges of Baha'i family life.

Diversity and Expansion

The adults made four specific recommendations about the need to increase the size and diversity of the Baha'i community, to *"... allow more diversity and distribution of responsibility"*. This included a need for *"More knowledge and understanding about local aboriginal cultures and their way of approaching life."* which would *"... add a richness to Baha'i activities"*. These notions were reiterated in a recommendation for *"More interaction with different cultures for greater diversity in how to do things"*.

Comparing the Responses With Previous Work In The Field

The findings reported in Table 4 confirm that the participants value their spiritual community as a source of social support. The findings in Table 5 suggest that they desire a more systematic approach to providing that support. How do these examples of actual and potential support compare with literature on religion. family and community?

The participants describe a community in which individuals are aware of, and strive to further understand, the obligation that they have for one another. a community which provides moral standards and ethical systems. This structural context for shared beliefs, values and principles is consistent with Crysdale's (1991) objective structural and subjective value based functions of religion referred to in Chapter 3.

The findings describe a vigorous relationship between religion and family life, in the Cowichan Valley, similar to that suggested by the "Middletown, U.S.A." study (Bahr and Chadwick, 1985) in which the participants linked religious faith and devotion to families. The responses in this study describe an interactive, dynamic, supportive and reciprocal relationship. It is this reciprocal influence that the methodology of the study was designed to understand.

Thomas and Henry (1985) argue that the human condition is concerned with meaning and relationships with others, a condition which is connected with their view of relationship with deity. By studying the family and religious community simultaneously, this study included the spiritual aspects of human behavior and addressed the role of religion in the family/community interface. The findings contribute to our understanding of the impact of the religious community as an extended family and as a circle of friends and associates. The participants describe an environment that nurtures meaning, intimacy, love, and concern for others. Cornwall and Thomas (1990) concluded from their work with Mormon populations that the relationships experienced in the religious

community, coupled with primary relationships in the family, are responsible for development of personal spiritual devotion which, in turn, is predictive of adult well-being. The participants in this study did, indeed, refer to this nurturing of spirituality.

Brigman (1986) investigated the influence of religious beliefs and practices on family life directly by asking family life professionals how churches help to strengthen families. He found the potential of churches for strengthening families to be greater than actual achievements. I have compared the results in Table 4 and Table 5, which show the perceptions of the participants about actual and potential support for families provided by the Baha'i community, to seven characteristics which Brigman suggests are most effective in building family strengths. These comparisons are found in Table 6

Three aspects of community influence from Table 4, are consistent with Brigman's list: informal social support; the modeling of spiritual values and principles; and community events. I chose to associate his notion of contemporary orientation and flexibility with the participatory and consultative nature of the Baha'i community, seen in the opportunities and demands of community service and decision-making. Given the absence of clergy in the Baha'i Faith, I matched the role of the local Spiritual Assembly to Brigman's category about counseling services and ministers. Family life education programs are not specifically mentioned in the examples of influence, but education programs and activities for children, youth and adults are.

In comparing the ideas for change or additional resources to support and strengthen family life found in Table 5, the topic of marriage and parenting education programs is included. The counseling services and support resources suggested by Brigman are echoed in the participants' articulation of need for systematic social support and guidance for individual growth and development. The desire for community diversity and expansion fits Brigman's notion of a flexible and contemporary orientation,

and the ideas about moral education for youth and children and the provision of guidance for individuals is consistent with the application of spiritual principles to family life. Family oriented activities and a support network are categories common to both Brigman's list and the ideas for enhancement of community support expressed by the Baha'i participants in this study.

Comparing Table 4 with Table 5, shows that the participants identify the community as a source of informal social support and suggest the development of systematic social support mechanisms. The community is identified as a modeling agent for the practice of values and principles. The participants suggested planned activities for the moral education of children and youth; systematic guidance and encouragement of individuals; marriage and parenting education programs; and expansion and diversification of the community. Community gatherings are affirmed as a source of social support. In particular, the establishment of a Baha'i center, and meaningful and fun family activities related to the Baha'i calendar are suggested. Education as a mechanism of support is reiterated in the desire for the provision of activities for children and youth and marriage and parenting education. Service to the community is described as a strengthening aspect of the family/community interface and is pursued in ideas about systematic social support and individual growth and development. Finally, the local Spiritual Assembly, mentioned infrequently as a source of support, is identified as the primary mechanism for the systematic planning of social support.

Chapter 6 will provide an interpretation of these results.

Table 6.
A Comparison of Brigman's Characteristics Perceived to Strengthen Family Life With Categories of Actual and Potential Support Identified by Participants

BRIGMAN	PARTICIPANTS: ACTUAL SUPPORT	PARTICIPANTS: POTENTIAL SUPPORT
1.Contemporary orientation and flexibility	Community service	Diversity and expansion
2.Family life education programs	Education	Marriage and parenting education
3.Counseling services	Institutions and resources	Systematic social support Individual growth and development
4.Family-oriented activities	Community events	Family oriented activities
5.Encourage the application of positive (Christian) principles to family-life	Modeling practice of values and principles	Individual growth and development Activities for children and youth
6.Provision of a support network	Informal social support for families	Systematic social support
7.Sensitive, caring, resourceful ministers	Institutions and resources	Systematic social support Individual growth and development

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This is an exploratory study on the community context of family life, specifically examining the influence of the Baha'i community on Baha'i family life. In Chapter 5, the results of the study were presented in relation to four research questions. This chapter will provide a discussion of those findings.

1. Baha'i Family Life Involves Complex Relationships, Understandings and Skills

The data from this study provide a glimpse into the nature of Baha'i family life as seen by Baha'i families. The data involve varied and complex relationships which require the acquisition and application of sets of understandings and skills. The findings show that the characteristics of Baha'i family life are associated with the teachings and principles of the Baha'i Faith; with the individual and collective expectations, concerns and difficulties of family members; and with the Baha'i community. Each of these will be addressed in turn.

a. Baha'i family life is grounded in the values, principles and practices found in the teachings of Baha'u'llah

This finding directly addresses the theological dimension of Baha'i family life, the relationship with deity referred to by Thomas and Henry (1985), which impacts relationships with others. As followers of the teachings of Baha'u'llah, whose Revelation they believe to be Divinely inspired, it is incumbent upon Baha'is to bring their lives into conformity with those teachings. These are the guiding ethical and moral directives upon which individual and collective behavior is based. The family and the community

provide location and opportunity for the application or practice of those values and principles. It is this very striving to translate belief into behavior that constitutes a definable characteristic of the Baha'i family.

Woven throughout the data generated by this study are references to Baha'i values and principles. Virtually all of the characteristics of Baha'i family life mentioned by the two youth participants spoke about spiritual growth in the family through prayer, study and reflection on the Baha'i teachings. and behavior that is based on those teachings.

While it was expected that the Baha'i teachings would be associated with Baha'i family life, the responses generated across the age groupings tell us that the participants actually *experienced* the application of those values and principles in their families. For example, each of the three age groups mentioned prayer as a practice of Baha'i family life and relationships within the family were described as being characterized by truthfulness and respect, compassion and empathy, all of which are described in the Baha'i teachings as virtues to be acquired and practiced.

Given this context of principle and practice. we find evidence that these Baha'i families seek to create an environment of love and unity through the valuing of consensus. This view moves away from a paternalistic or maternalistic view of love by which one or more powerful individuals may assume authority and make decisions for the collective. The search for unity through the practice of consultative decision-making, is associated in the findings with other characteristics of the Baha'i family.

b. Baha'i family life integrates individual and collective needs, rights, functions

The responses in Table 1 show that these Baha'i families define a family in which individuals adopt functions related to perception of needs, rather than a family in which members assume static roles according to age and/or gender. Indeed, this framing of

individual function is carried over into the relationship which individuals and families have with the community and includes a consciousness of membership in a global human family. It appears that individuals acquire sensitivity to diversity and the ability to function in social settings according to the needs of the moment; the requirements of the situation; and individual or group differences and developmental stages, similar to the "developmental" perspective of the family (Baker, 1990). This implies a changing family dynamic over the passage of time.

The adults characterized family life as a supportive, respectful, consultative, loving, compassionate environment in which families have fun, celebrate and honor each other, and create family traditions. They listed games, picnics, reading together, and other activities, as ways in which their relationships are consolidated. They identified the family's role in helping children to reach their potential. They consistently referred to the practice of consultation in facilitating the free expression and acceptance of ideas and emotions, and in bringing about decisions on personal and family issues.

The children also described the family environment in positive terms, although they were not as forthcoming with examples about the family doing things together. The lack of disclosure about relationships by the two youth participants must be viewed in the light of their developmental preoccupation with autonomy, a focus which was consistently illustrated in this study. They clearly view the family as a location for leadership and example, implying that failure to maintain a responsive, collaborative, studious atmosphere would potentially alienate children and youth within families and from the Faith, and thereby from the community.

Such an environment, in which the needs, rights and functions of individuals are evaluated and juxtaposed with the needs of the collective family unit, within the parameters and expectations of a given set of values and principles, would be conducive

to the development of analytical skills: and, at the same time, would be at risk to a lack of models and experience of how to achieve this ideal state. Here we find a challenging dilemma for Baha'i families. How, for example, would a Baha'i family reconcile the view of the mother as first educator of the children with the establishment of equality between men and women? How does the first view differ from discrete roles for individual family members? That is, does it imply that the mother is the sole educator and/or caretaker of the children? The resolution is suggested by the findings.

In this study, we find the articulation of concepts, skills and strategies for organizing family life which pay attention to the diversity of the individual members of the family. Instead of clear cut family roles, we find reference, across the age groupings, to the concept of shared duties, functions and responsibilities that are not related to power or authority, but to the well-being of the family unit and its constituent members. The results illustrate a family life which strives to facilitate individual and collective growth; is flexible and dimensional; and accepts tension and difficulty as dynamics which are potentially conducive to change and evolution. This is a collective and organic veiw, consistent with the "ecological" approach (Garbarino and Crouter, 1978).

This collaborative approach is facilitated through the practice of Baha'i consultation. References to consultation, a strategy of collective decision-making, permeate the findings. The learning and regular use of this strategy in the family would implicitly strengthen its efficacy as the primary method of decision-making used in the functioning of the Baha'i community. The attitudes and strategies learned in the family are transferable to other social contexts. This finding fits with the reference, found in Chapter 2, to a letter from the Universal House of Justice in which they metaphorically describe the family-community interface as a "training ground" and "building block" for the development of a unified world society.

Perhaps addressing issues of personal and social justice within the context of the principle of unity, and through the use of consultation, will foster new understandings, insights, and adaptations for those practitioners and agencies concerned with the family.

c. Baha'i family life fosters critical reflection and active learning

If Baha'i family life is grounded in shared values and principles which also constitute the basis of affinity around which a community, a social order, is created. If those shared values are concerned with collective benefit, social justice, and diverse, supportive relationships, then I am led to ask, "how are those values and principles learned and internalized?" Personal and social growth and development are variously referred to by the participants as education and deepening, achieved through reflection.

The results describe a family environment in which there is evidence of on-going reflection on Baha'i principles and moral values, practiced through conjoint study, prayer, and discourse on the Baha'i teachings. In turn, the challenge to apply these principles to behavior is brought to bear on individuals by family life and by community service. The family was associated with fostering knowledge of the Baha'i historical paradigm, which views Divine Revelation as progressive and related to the developmental progress and needs of the human species; with the implicit need to educate children for knowledge about, and respect for, other religions; and with individual character development.

The adults, children and youth groups all articulated this process of reflection and action in their descriptions of family life, and in their references to the interactive family-community relationship. Participation in community activities and service to the needs of the community were identified as opportunities for learning and the family was seen to have a role in encouraging its members to access community education and deepening through participation in classes, programs and/or conferences.

The Baha'i family facilitates personal and social transformation by encouraging critical thinking, active learning, rational discourse, and reflection. It fosters people who respect themselves and others: who think about themselves and about interrelatedness.

d. Baha'i family life is embedded in the Baha'i community

Regular interaction with the Baha'i community is a primary characteristic of Baha'i family life in the Cowichan Valley. The participants emphatically connected family life with the Baha'i community, and associated complex expectations, demands and emotions with that relationship. Family goals are set, and decisions made, in that context. Because this study was designed to study the family community interface, this is a significant finding.

For adults, the Baha'i community provides support, encouragement, focus and challenge. They articulated a balance between the structural context and predictability and informal social support. Their concerns emphasized responsibility, accountability, organization, and "shoulds". They spoke about the struggle to reconcile goals and reality and the negative impact of community service on time spent with the family. This is understandable when we recognize that they are the members who are eligible for election to Spiritual Assemblies; who are most often appointed to committees and task forces: and who are the primary source of funds for the functioning of the community. They described the community as an extended family, articulating a paradigm which goes beyond traditional understandings of family structure and membership (Hareven, 1984, Eichler, 1983). The irony to this strong family-community interface is that few comments were made about relationships with people outside of the Baha'i community.

For children, the benefits and fun of being part of a larger community of people through regular, organized community events and through informal social interaction,

were important. This suggests that the community provides a sense of belonging and security for children, necessary for their primary developmental tasks: independence and initiative; and not so different from the predictability and purpose suggested by the adults. One interesting aspect of the children's descriptions of Baha'i family life had to do with their expressions of isolation from their friends. They spoke about feeling "different" and wished out loud that more of their friends were Baha'is. This is important because of the manner in which the children framed their frustration. I found it noteworthy that, in resolving these tensions (Christmas, etc.), the children did not express disdain for being part of the Baha'i community but rather expressed a desire that more of their friends would join them. For these children, the norm is to be a Baha'i. This goes beyond a focus on self and indicates the degree to which the Baha'i Faith is an active, dynamic and positive factor in their family life and their emerging sense of self.

The findings illustrate a dynamic social interaction at the family level both within and outside of the requirements and events of a community of affinity. Adults, children and youth view the Baha'i community as a supplement to their family life and as a potential environment for self-direction and actualization. It would serve Baha'i communities well to consider how they can be accessible as a model, or as a support mechanism, to those outside of their Faith and how they can draw on the strengths of non-Baha'i individuals and resources.

How Baha'i Spiritual Assemblies, family practitioners, family agencies, and policy making bodies might access and utilize this existing, latent resource network will be discussed later in this chapter.

2. Influence Between The Baha'i Community And The Baha'i Family Is Reciprocal

This study addresses the broader social context of family life and the influence which dominant beliefs or life perspectives have on standards of behavior. It is not easy to specify how particular environmental factors influence people, but the results describe a community that has the potential to influence the lives of families and individuals in both supportive and constraining ways; according to the extent to which they participate in and contribute to its composition, functioning and development. The Baha'i community provides social order around shared values; access to diverse and challenging experiences; and formal and informal social support for families and individuals.

a. The Baha'i community brings people together to advocate, practice and model shared values and principles

Religious communities most often form around the teachings of individuals who have experienced an enlightenment which they declare to be Divinely inspired. Similar to Moses and the "Burning Bush"; the Buddha under the "Bodhi Tree"; Jesus and the "Holy Spirit", in the form of a dove; and Muhammad and the archangel Gabriel: Baha'u'llah was summoned to bring a new revelation to humanity by the "Maid of Heaven" in a dungeon of Teheran.

The worldwide Baha'i community is inspired by and grounded in the teachings of Baha'u'llah. At the time of the passing of Baha'u'llah, in 1892, there were about 50,000 Baha'is in the world. Presently, the Baha'i Faith is the second most geographically widespread religion, after Christianity, with communities in no less than 205 countries and independent territories, and numbering more than 5 million followers.

The Baha'i community is a social structure based on, and extending, the relationship with deity in which the findings tell us Baha'i family life is grounded. It

gives a social and moral context and a sense of belonging for Baha'i families. This Faith community serves as a focal point for planning; offers roles for individuals; and, in striving to reflect the Baha'i principles, provides a moral, ethical, and practical model.

The regular gatherings, such as Feasts and Holy Days, the educational activities, and service on institutions are examples of formal aspects of the community which influence, and are influenced by, the family. With equal frequency, the participants mentioned informal mechanisms of community influence, such as visiting and forming relationships with other families: an influence that was voiced strongly by the children.

If social isolation might be a predictor of child maltreatment (Garbarino and Crouter, 1978), it would serve us well to consider religious communities as important potential contributors to family well being.

Not all religious organizations, however, may necessarily meet this definition because of the emphasis by the participants on the participatory, interactive nature of the Baha'i family-community relationship. For example, there are no items citing the provision of influence and/or support by individuals of authority in the community such as clerics or counselors. In the Baha'i community structure there is no clerical order. Governance is carried out through group consultation at the nineteen day Feast and the annual election and functioning of a local governing body, the Spiritual Assembly. Research with other Faith communities would help to identify variables which might be associated with the perception and experience of support. What is the effect of this access to community decision-making and the concurrent expectation of active participation and service to community functioning as juxtaposed with communities in which authority is vested in designated individuals?

b. The Baha'i community involves complex roles, challenges, demands and tensions

The findings show that difficulties and tensions can arise from a participatory community of shared doctrine and practice. While the participants described a community striving to go beyond traditional patterns to answer current problems, there is some discrepancy in experience, suggesting that for some the community can be a source of feelings of isolation, role ambiguity, lack of visibility, and control.

The Baha'i principle of the equality of women and men, in concert with the notion that mothers are the first educators of children, provides a value base to which Baha'i family members could link their experience. In other words, the Baha'i teachings invest a significant worth and voice for women in the affairs of the family and community.

> At the heart of all activities, the spiritual, intellectual and community life of the believers must be developed and fostered, requiring: ... the encouragement of Baha'i women to exercise to the full their privileges and responsibilities in the work of the community. (Universal House of Justice, 1979)

Yet, for some female participants, the results show that the community experience has produced feelings of isolation and exclusion and the devaluing of the role of mothers, not unlike the perceptions of women in the community at large. Why?

I think that the results found in 3 categories of Table 3 offer insight to this question. In the responses referring to Feasts, Holy Days and formal events, 8 responses addressed difficulties associated with bringing children to Feasts. For example, comments such as *"Feasts are stressful, they require children to sit"*, *"I have felt judged by how my children behave"* and *"Nobody else pitches in: so I don't bring them"*, coupled with assumptions that the responsibility for the care of children falls solely onto the mother, creates a scenario in which mothers are potentially isolated from the social interaction and support and the spiritual and administrative content of the Feast.

In addition. 6 responses in the category about social support for individuals referred to the isolation and devaluing of women. One participant, in giving voice to this dilemma. offers insight to a possible contributing source. *"... present Baha'i community is my biggest challenge: the majority are professionals. I feel isolated, something is missing for me. I don't know my place. I am a mother and sometimes it isn't valued amongst community members."*. The Maxwell International Baha'i School in Shawnigan Lake has drawn an inordinate number of professional educators and other professionals to the Cowichan Valley region. These Baha'is, whether male or female, can be found in active leadership positions in the various communities in the region in which they reside. While the Canadian Baha'i community is, for the most part, comprised of heterogeneous groupings of members, the Cowichan Valley has a concentrated number of individuals who have professional roles and identities which tend to be associated with leadership, authority and dominance. If mothers are seen to be occupied with a traditional domestic. child rearing role. then they may also be seen to be unavailable for community service on appointed or elected groups. 4 responses in the category of items which referred to institutions and resources spoke of limitations in community roles for women.

The adult participants in this study brought not only the influence of the Baha'i Teachings and community, but also of their families, cultures, races and Faiths of origin; their education and work experience; and all of the attitudes and assumptions invested in those influences. They have grown into adulthood at a time of rapid social change and have not experienced a larger social climate which has modeled gender equality.

As a researcher, I am interested in this problem and the manner in which the community under study responds to it. Aldous (1983) argues, whether communities and families react to problems through control or support depends on specific stances on contemporary issues and that uncertainty about these issues contributes to uneasiness in

the interrelationship. The findings show awareness and certainty about the principle of equality of men and women and about the importance of activities for youth; and they emphasize the support, rather than the control, function of the religious community. This awareness and emphasis, reiterated in ideas about initiatives and resources which would enhance support for family life, provides a starting point for resolving "uneasiness" and discrepancy between word and action; policy and practice.

The Universal House of Justice described the conditions for addresssing these issues in the Baha'i community in a letter to an individual (July 25, 1985),

> The principle of the equality between women and men, like other teachings of the Faith, can be effectively and universally established when it is pursued in conjunction with all the other aspects of Baha'i life. Change is an evolutionary process requiring patience with one's self and others, loving education and the passage of time as the believers deepen their knowledge of the principles of the Faith, gradually discard long-held traditional attitudes and progressively conform their lives to the unifying teachings of the Cause.

This perspective is consistent with Eichler who suggests (1983, p.26),

> In short, then, families are currently in a process of transition that can be expected to continue for another generation since many of these changes at present involve the middle aged, and patterns of familial interactions for the young are still in the process of emerging. These changes are touching the very basis of our definitions of self and others. We have neither fully understood what the changes are, nor have we sufficiently tried to describe and analyze them and to try to look at some of their implications for individual members of families and policy makers. Working towards an understanding of some of the contemporary changes seems to be the most appropriate response to the situation.

Future research on this subject and with the Baha'i Faith community, should pay attention to gender discrepancies in planning for the collection and analysis of data.

Youth, who are developmentally concerned with the establishment of self identity, spoke about aspects of community life which support or constrain them as individuals, and discussed the potential impact of ignoring their voice and their needs.

The use of consultation in the family setting suggests a means by which women and youth, in fact all individuals, could be empowered to share concerns about invisibility and justice. During the Nineteen Day Feast, there is opportunity for open consultation amongst community members. The use of the Feast as an institutional mechanism is consistent with the concept of unity which permeates the Baha'i paradigm. It is the most regular and systematic communication link between the community and its elected governing council, the local Spiritual Assembly. Reference to this elected body as a specific source of influence, is notably lacking in the results. So, Baha'i communities might pay attention to how they utilize their participatory model of governance to influence community social policy. Later in this chapter, I will discuss the potential of the Spiritual Assembly to fulfill a support role for families.

The Baha'i community in the Cowichan Valley exerts a profound influence on family goals, aspirations and practices. In seeking to understand this influence, the study illustrates an interactive relationship which draws heavily upon the time, energy and resources of individuals and families. The expectations of community service were variously referred to as important opportunities for individual or family roles and as all-consuming demands which can be frustrating and overwhelming. Clarity about the expectations of community service, and the encouragement and support for all family members, and all families, to share in the tasks and responsibilities of the community enabled some participants to reframe the feelings from "*overload*" to "*creative tests*"; as aspects of commitment to a commonly held faith. The findings emphasize the support role of the Baha'i community, without denying or ignoring the constraints and dilemmas inherent in the values, principles and requirements of participation in and service to that community. They also suggest a need to monitor access to support in order to avoid privilege by age, gender, professional status or material resources.

c. The Baha'i community is organized so that individuals and families can support each other

The provision of social support for Baha'i families is a function of the social organization of the community. How does this support work? The discussion at this point is brief because the items which were categorized as indicators of support for the family were derived from the results which generated the previous discussion on the Baha'i family and its interface with the Baha'i community.

In bringing people together around shared spiritual values and behavioral norms. the Baha'i community provides both a formal social structure and an informal social network. The findings describe structural dimensions of community influence such as regular gatherings and events and, to a lesser extent, educational programs, institutions and resources, which are highly valued by the participants. At the same time. the content and context of these responses emphasize the social nature of the benefits derived from these events and resources. The participants in this study spoke about the benefits derived from coming together with other Baha'is, whether in the role of friends, confidantes, child-minders, mentors, or behavioral models. They spoke about the community as an environment by which they gain access to their Baha'i peers: by which they can structure the rhythm of their lives; and by which their spirituality, their relationship with deity, can be nurtured.

Which aspect takes precedence? This is a moot question because, in its asking, it underscores the interactive and reciprocal nature of the family-community interface found in this study. The teachings of Baha'u'llah guide the rules and processes which govern the functioning of the individual, the family, and the community. These families and individuals would not necessarily interact with each other, except for their commonly held Faith. That value based interaction constructs the Baha'i community.

3. The Baha'i Community Has The Potential To Develop And Provide Systematic Support For Baha'i Families

The 39 items generated in response to the third group interview question, dealing with ideas about how the community could further strengthen and support families, produced a consistent focus. After articulating a community paradigm which provides a value-based social network that is organized to provide diverse and challenging experiences, the participants essentially said that they valued and wanted deliberate planning for more of the same. Systematic planning was fundamental to the responses that the adult and youth participants generated about how the Baha'i community could further strengthen and support family life. The local Spiritual Assembly was identified as the community agent responsible to guide this systematic approach.

a. Assessment and planning is required to develop strategies and resources by which the Baha'i community could provide systematic family support

The results provide insights into the characteristics of Baha'i family life and the manner in which the Baha'i community provides a social network to model and facilitate those characteristics. What is missing from the findings is any consistent reference to human or material resources which are proactively designed and implemented specifically to support families. If Baha'i families designed support mechanisms for the Baha'i community, what would they be? And, what are the important factors to emphasize in planning for family support?

The ideas generated in this study were developmental in nature. That is, they described "movement" in the community toward mechanisms for assessment and integration to address the apparent contradictions between what "is" and what "ought" for

women and youth; to *"assist and embrace"* the *"disadvantaged, disturbed, disabled";* and to produce effective, systematic community based support for families and individuals.

The participants also articulated the benefits of such a systematic approach to *"caring"*. They suggest that finding ways to assist everyone in the community to find roles, responsibility and opportunities for service would lead to equity in growth and development and a concurrent expansion in resources available to the community.

Whether in relation to the planning of activities for children and youth, the encouragement of individuals, the modeling of moral standards, or the development and provision of community resources, the findings reflect the importance of responding to needs and utilizing capacity. The first step in *"moving"* or developing the community would be an assessment of the needs, capacities and capabilities of its members, thereby raising the awareness of that community. That awareness would begin the process of removing barriers which might limit access to community support and has the potential to resolve discrepancies in individual experience.

b. Systematic support for Baha'i families would identify and integrate diverse individual and collective needs and capacities

The second step to enhance community support for families would be the integration of identified needs and resources in the planning of community events and initiatives. This type of planning response would integrate specific activities for children and youth. It would provide programs for marriage preparation, parenting, and family development. It would develop and mobilize the human and material resources necessary to implement those initiatives. It would also respond to the needs, and draw from the resources, of the community at large: those who are not Baha'is. The findings suggest that the Baha'i community should increase acquaintance and interaction with

local aboriginal cultures and other ethnic and religious communities. This integration with the non-Baha'i community was seen as adding to the richness of the Baha'i community as well as providing diverse views of how to do things.

But the concern with social dilemmas was not limited to cultural diversity. The integration of broad social concerns and issues such as the impact of financial, health and emotional constraints were also important. Mechanisms by which Baha'is who are living in poverty, or who are struggling with physical or emotional health issues, could access support services within or outside of the Baha'i community are not in place. What impact would such grass roots interventions have on families? And, how would such innovative models benefit other Baha'i communities; inform those who work with families; and offer alternatives to those who determine social policy and the allocation of resources?

Another important, concrete resource for integration was the establishment of a "*gathering place*" where large events could be held and which would facilitate the coming together of people of differing gender, age, background and interest. Shawnigan Lake is the site of the Maxwell International Baha'i School, a residential secondary school with a population of 200 students from grades 7 to 12 and a staff of over 75 which operates under the auspices of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada.. It has two large assembly halls, one with a stage and facilities to provide meals for 200 people. Why, in spite of this facility, did the participants identify the need for a gathering place? Has a systematic approach been taken to the issue? Consultation between the eight local Spiritual Assemblies in the area and the school administration, about use of the school facilities, paths of communication, and jurisdictional issues, has the potential to facilitate a mutually beneficial relationship.

c. Systematic support for Baha'i families would deepen awareness and understanding of the teachings of the Baha'i Faith

Another aspect of systematic planning, along with assessment and integration, would be the use of existing resources or the development of new ones, to facilitate personal and social transformation within the context of the Baha'i teachings. This could include educational study programs for adults, known to Baha'is as deepening programs: classes and projects specifically designed for children and youth; programs and activities for family groupings or for like-minded individuals to pursue common interests; and public programs for the community at large. Both formal and informal settings and formats could be used.

These activities were identified in the findings, across the age groupings, as important aspects of community support for individuals and families. Educational processes and programs were consistently used as examples of opportunities for nurturing spiritual development. This suggests that the deepening of individual understanding and commitment in the context of a commonly held Faith, a common set of values and beliefs, is a factor in strengthening the family as a social unit. In turn, because of the reciprocal nature of the family-community interface, this factor impacts and strengthens the social fabric of the Baha'i community.

But the value of this process should not be limited to Baha'i family and community activities. One of the dimensions of Baha'i family life which was found to be constrained by the demanding expectations of community participation was relationship with people who are not Baha'is. The participants voiced a desire for, and systematic planning should provide, activities to which they could invite the public and their friends. But how, and by whom, would all of these activities be mobilized in response to the identified and expressed needs of the community?

d. The local Spiritual Assembly is the primary agent for the planning of social support mechanisms in the Baha'i community

Baha'i family life and community life are guided by the same values, principles and practices. The Nineteen day Feast, the Holy Days and observances, the Ayyam-i-Ha celebration, and the annual election of a local governing council, are significant focal points around which the family and community are organized. The design of this participatory religious community is such that authority is vested in elected institutions, while the power or capacity to carry out the plans of those bodies rests with the community. The participants, in expressing a desire for the systematic planning of social support for individuals and families, recognized that the authority to direct that planning is vested in the local Spiritual Assembly.

The findings emphasize the support, rather than the control, function of the Baha'i community. The absence of a clerical order or any designated individuals with authority to prescribe or judge individual, family or community behavioral standards and functioning could create a policy vacuum. Yet, the Baha'i model produces instead a fertile policy environment which capitalizes on collective decision-making. The local Spiritual Assembly has the potential to manage the affairs of the community and to develop social policies based on identified needs. It could design strategies to implement social policy with the people who are affected by and contribute to them through consultation at the nineteen day Feast. By improving its administrative capacities, management of community resources, and ability to build partnerships, within and outside of the Baha'i community, the local Spiritual Assembly serves as a potent model for how religious communities might fulfill a support role for families.

In the final chapter, I will discuss the limitations and implications of this study and how it informs research on the community context of family life.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the perceptions of Baha'i adults, children and youth about how the Baha'i community influences their family life. While the findings are limited, they suggest fertile ideas for more studies to pursue their implications. I have developed some suggestions about how religious communities can fulfill a responsive support role for families. These suggestions are organized according to the influences, opportunities and contradictions identified in the study and offer examples of five crucial variables: balance, diversity, unity, deepened understanding, and systematic planning which could contribute to that task. That framework is aimed at furthering the understanding, and motivating the interest, of Baha'i communities, professionals, and the public at large about the influence of shared spiritual values on family life. I hope to continue to conduct research in this field.

The Limitations Of The Study

I chose to focus my study about the actual and potential family support role for religious communities on a specific Faith community, in a specific geographical location. I found no body of research about Baha'i family and community to draw upon. So, although research on the family is a large field, I was limited in the extent to which I could draw upon related work. The methodology which I chose, the group interview, was limited by the number of people who chose to participate. And the diversity of age amongst the participants was limited because no teenagers took part in the first group interview session and no children returned to take part in the second session. Because I

was interested in the experience of the participants. these limitations were also its strengths.

This study increases the body of work in an important field of research. It contributes thoughtful evidence and stimulates the consideration of other Faith communities, family support practitioners, and those who determine social policy, about the community context of family life. It has the potential to impact the policy and practice of the Baha'i communites in the Cowichan Valley, throughout Canada, and abroad.

While a survey approach might have accessed more quantitative participation in the study, the use of group interviews generated a large amount of rich information and facilitated the reflection on that information by the participants themselves, in a short period of time. Since the families took part in response to an invitation to participate which was supported by their local Spiritual Assemblies, the participants entered into the process with a spirit of willingness and interest in the subject. I felt like a facilitator and a collaborator, connected to the participants and their consideration of the issues under study, in the group interview sessions. The collective nature of the research environment, the atmosphere, was comfortable and, as the findings indicate, proved to be consistent with the very experience that was being studied. It appears that using a participatory approach to understanding the dynamics of a participatory community was an appropriate decision.

How did my status as an "insider", a member of the community under study affect the findings? Given the rigor which I applied to structuring the methodology and the group interview sessions, I am confident that my knowledge and experience base was conducive to the conduct of the sessions. I was able to understand responses if they were embedded in Baha'i jargon or assumed Baha'i understanding; and, I was able to provide

explanatory content to the presentation and discussion of those responses. My experience and interest in the research subject enhanced my interpretation of the results.

The gap in representation by age in this study is consistent with the findings of the study. If the Baha'i community is an important source of social support for Baha'i individuals and families, which could become more responsive and effective through systematic planning, then it would make sense that one of the potentially invisible groups, the youth, would not necessarily participate in a "generic" exercise. Also, the families taking part in the study included only 11 teenagers in total. Children, developmentally, would not have an interest in rational discourse without a concrete, understood reward or vested interest. Having taken part in one group interview, set up outside of the usual context of community activities, I was not surprised or concerned that they chose not to attend the second. The findings are clear in implying need for further community research, phrased as assessment of the needs and capacities of individuals and families, which would address the expectations and draw upon the ideas of youth and children. In future studies, I would consider specific methods to access the experience and thoughts of youth and children, such as group environments in which they would already be participants.

The Implications of The Study

The participants described a family paradigm in which consultation is used to address personal and shared issues; in which labor and reward are shared; and in which there are expectations about respect, caring and reciprocity. They described an atmosphere which fosters access to information about oneself, others, and about social order; an atmosphere in which individuals are encouraged to perceive not only what "is" feasible but what "ought" to be feasible. For them, family life fosters critical thinking

and active learning. Participants described a community environment in which individuals are concerned with understanding what others mean and with making themselves understood in the context of shared norms that establish reciprocal expectations. They describe an environment which encourages and demands rational discourse, and which nurtures critical reflection leading to purposeful action.

In other words, the participants described the Baha'i family and the Baha'i community in the Cowichan Valley in similar terms. The functioning of both social units is grounded in shared values and principles. Both provide a stable, value-based social structure. Both provide access to others, and processes by which the ideas of self and others are heard and considered. Both the family and community are sources of love and caring. Each holds the potential to develop and offer concrete support for individuals and families through collective decision-making.

As I considered the findings of this study, the paradigm of the community as an extended family became increasingly useful to me. Remembering, as the Baha'i teachings suggest, that Baha'is should go to the local Spiritual Assembly as children would to a parent, the paradigm does work as a model of extended social support which is transferable in a time of increased mobility and economic uncertainty. The same community structure, grounded in the same values and principles, would be found in various manifestations anywhere in the world. The same opportunity to contribute to the construction of a given local community would be available anywhere in the world. The same opportunity to find "family" would exist anywhere in the world. Social isolation would, theoretically, be difficult for Baha'i families to experience.

However, it is important to acknowledge the very thrust of these findings. They illustrate a family-community interface which is affected by the degree of systematic planning undertaken by the local governing council. The capacity for and experience of

that planning would be as varied as the localities in which Baha'i communities exist. We have learned that, over 150 years, the Baha'i developmental paradigm has favored widespread, global dispersion to establish small communities, rather than concentrated, large communities. Therefore, the process of maturation which is embedded in the findings of this study would be locally organic and responsive rather than centrally determined and imposed. It would capitalize on and learn from the sharing of local experience. This underscores the value of the sharing of experience; and it underscores the value of this study in contributing to that sharing.

Praxis: A Framework For Extending The Family

In the Introduction, I asked, "How can religious communities fulfill a support role for families? And, how can they remain open to impact and change by the diversity of family needs and individual influence?"

In Chapter 2, I reconsidered my practice experience in the light of the metaphor used by the Universal House of Justice to picture the family and community as training grounds and building blocks of social order. I asked, "Can ideas be found for a framework for human, spiritual development and social action/service? Can this framework be applied to the systematic structuring of social support programs for the development of institutions and families as training grounds and building blocks?"

The findings of this study confirm that religious communities can indeed fulfill a support role for families, in which the influence between the family and community can be reciprocal and mutually beneficial. The results also suggest a paradigm in which the family is extended by the community context; giving access to additional human and material resources, grounded in common values and principles, which thereby support and strengthen the family. A systematic approach would articulate the family paradigm

by providing opportunities for individuals and families to be heard and to share their values, beliefs and concerns; and enabling evaluation of the benefits of that process, and its impact on policy related to families, within the given Faith community. This systematic, community based, family support would be characterized by:

1. **Balance and Reciprocity:** Successful family support would reinforce movement from individualism toward interrelatedness by drawing attention to membership, role, relationship and goals.

2. **Diversity:** It would recognize that individuals and families will not manifest their developmental progress at the same pace and would reinforce this insight through assessment and integration of individual and collective needs and functions.

3. **Unity:** It would offer individuals and families the opportunity to find common principles and practices; enabling them to make collective decisions and work together for change.

4. **Deepening and Critical Reflection:** Time for critical reflection would be accommodated, nurturing deepened awareness and deeper understanding, through active learning, consultation, and community service.

5. **Systematic Organization:** It would enable individuals and families to draw on and contribute to the process of community support at their own pace by providing stable, ordered opportunities to gather for social interaction; by facilitating rational discourse on shared concerns; and by providing education programs, grounded in the shared spiritual values, principles and practices of the community, and which utilize transformative learning techniques, to nurture respect for self and others.

Ideas For Further Research To Promote Community And Professional Learning

Further research questions arise from the limitations of this study. Some have to do with replicability. Others are comparative, exploring whether these findings are a function of involvement with the Baha'i Faith, or of involvement with any given community of shared spiritual values. For example, we might ask. "What would the experience of Baha'i families in other localities and/or other ethno-cultural settings be? What would the experience of families in other Faith communities be? What would the experience of families in other types of communities of affinity be? Are the findings a function of the socio-cultural experience and expectations of middle-class Canadians?" Future studies could therefore be conducted using more exhaustive and diverse populations.

I also wonder about action research on the application of the findings, especially utilizing the above framework, and what the impact would be. Could means be designed to define and measure that impact in the same region; in other Baha'i settings; with other Faith communities: and so on? First, I would ask, how can the Baha'i Spiritual Assembly develop and provide systematic support for Baha'i families? And, what would be the impact?"

In conducting further research, we would learn more about the nature and dynamics of the relationship between the family and Faith community and inform our understanding of an important, potent source of support for families.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Characteristics of Baha'i Family Life

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ADULT	YOUTH	CHILD	TOTAL
1.Relationship with Baha'i Community	23	1	5	29
Family goals "keyed" to Baha'i concerns	8			
Feasts, Holy Days	5	1	2	
Extended Family	5		2	
Individual Roles	3		1	
Connection to Institutions and Ceremony	2			
2.Relationships within the Family	22		3	25
Acknowledge differences/development	6			
Consultation on personal and family issues	4			
Truthfulness and respect	4		1	
Support, compassion and empathy	4			
Accept ideas, emotions	3		2	
Sharing of duties and tasks	1			
3.A commonly held Faith	14	6	4	24
Reflection on Baha'i values, principles	8	2		
Prayer	4	2	2	
Behavior based on Baha'i values, principles	2	2	2	
4.Family activities	18		1	19
Doing things together	10			
An environment of love and unity	5			
Creating family traditions	3		1	
5.Tests and difficulties	14		4	18
Face hardships together	4			
Balance family/community commitments	4			
Isolation from or conflict with community	4		3	
Striving to achieve goals/standards	2		1	
6.Education of all family members	12	2	3	17
Teach/learn about Baha'i principles/history	5		1	
Community schools/programs/activities	5	2	2	
Role of mother as educator	2			
7.Relationship with non-Baha'i Community	8		3	11
Assistance to those in need	2			
Hospitality/inviting people to the home	5		1	
Telling friends about the Baha'i Faith	1		2	
TOTAL RESPONSE ITEMS	111	9	23	143

Appendix B

Aspects of the Baha'i Community Which Influence Family Life

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ADULT	YOUTH	CHILD	TOTAL
1.Expectations of community service	26	1	4	31
Overwhelming demands of resources	10	1		
Opportunity for individual service	6			
Repression of individual priorities	3			
Expectations of each other	3			
Negative effect on children	2			
Community service is family activity	2		4	
2.Modeling practice of values and principles	25	1	5	31
Model of standards of behavior/morality	10	1		
Diverse people with common belief	5		4	
Peer influence motivates child to conform	4			
Baha'i principles applied to criticize others	4		1	
Prayer and study of Baha'i Writings	2			
3.Social support for families	21		7	28
Extended family/circle of friends	12		3	
Feelings of intimacy and unity	4		2	
Potential for tension and estrangement	3			
Social life dominated by Baha'i community	2		2	
4.Feasts, Holy Days and formal events	24	2		26
Families are connected to community/Faith	10			
Difficult to bring children to Feasts	8			
Events bring families together	4			
Nurturing and enjoyable sharing of ideas	2	2		
5.Social support for individuals	14	4		18
Encouragement/support for individuals	7	4		
Isolation/devaluing of women	6			
Blurring individual identity in community	1			
6.Education	14			14
Children/youth classes provide togetherness	5			
Education activities nurture spirituality	5			
Need to plan for family learning activities	4			
7.Institutions and Resources	14			14
Constraints can provide structure for life	8			
Limitations based on inclusion/gender roles	4			
Guidance of local Spiritual Assembly	2			
TOTAL RESPONSE ITEMS	138	8	16	162

Appendix C

Aspects of Baha'i Community Influence Which Strengthen and Support Family Life

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ADULT	YOUTH	CHILD	TOTAL
1.Informal social support for families	21		7	28
Extended family/circle of friends	17		5	
Feelings of intimacy and unity	4		2	
2.Modeling practice of values and principles	21	1	4	26
Model of standards of behavior/morality	10	1		
Diverse people with common belief	5		4	
Peer influence motivates child to conform	4			
Prayer and study of Baha'i Writings	2			
3.Community events	21	1	2	24
Families are connected to community/Faith	10			
Feast, Holy Days	5	1	2	
Connection to institutions and ceremony	2			
Events bring families together	4			
4.Education	15	2	2	19
Children/youth classes provide togetherness	5			
Education activities nurture spirituality	5			
Community schools/programs/activities	5	2	2	
5.Community service	8		4	12
Opportunity for individual service	6			
Community service is family activity	2		4	
6.Institutions and resources	3			3
Guidance of local Spiritual Assembly	3			3
TOTAL RESPONSE ITEMS	89	4	19	112

Appendix D

Ideas to Further Support and Strengthen Family Life

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ADULT	YOUTH	TOTAL
1.Systematic social support	8		8
Mechanisms to identify/respond to needs	3		
Connect/pair Baha'i families/individuals	2		
Baha'i economic sub-culture	1		
LSA reach out to connect with community	1		
Community as a whole, caring organism	1		
2.Activities for children and youth	5	3	8
Planned activities for youth		3	
Effective moral education for children	3		
Outdoor experiences/camps	2		
3.A gathering place	6		6
Baha'i center for large gatherings	5		
Sports complex	1		
4.Individual growth and development	5		5
Systematically support/guide/encourage	3		
Identify roles/responsibilities/opportunities	1		
Voluntary sharing and service	1		
5.Family oriented activities	4		4
Meaningful activity around Baha'i calendar	3		
Fun activities to bring friends	1		
6.Marriage and parenting education	4		4
Marriage preparation classes	1		
Parenting classes	1		
Marriage retreats	1		
Honor the role of mothers	1		
7.Diversity and expansion	4		4
Increase in size and diversity of community	2		
Learn about/understand aboriginal culture	1		
Interaction with diverse cultural groups	1		
TOTAL RESPONSE ITEMS	36	3	39

Appendix E

A Brief Outline of Characteristics of Baha'i Family Life Found in the

Compilation of Writings of the Baha'i Faith on Marriage and Family Life

1. Love and Unity

The core concept here being that agreement in the family will lead to advancement whereas enmity will lead to division and dispersion. The family is described as a microcosm of larger circles or systems (e.g. the nation; humanity) and thereby the location for acquisition and practice of attitudes of love, agreement and encouragement which would lead to the strengthening of social institutions.

2. Communication

An emphasis on the practice of consultation and the avoidance of criticism and backbiting, which is seen to be harmful to the development of the soul. The family is seen as the location for acquiring attitudes and skills useful in other social contexts.

3. Tests and difficulties

Hardship and tribulation are seen as essential characteristics of life in this world. Emphasis is placed on addressing problems as opportunities for personal and family growth. The struggles of others are to be seen with compassion and understanding, avoiding blame and fault-finding. Reference is made to the need for patience and commitment to marriage and family relationships, taking priority over other considerations. Service to the Baha'i Cause should not produce neglect of the family.

4. Equality of Men and Women

One of the fundamental principles of the Baha'i teachings, which state unequivocally that, in this age, women must become equal to men, enjoying equal rights.

5. Education of Children

It is the duty of parents to ensure the education of their children. The mother is identified as the first teacher of the child but the father's role is not thereby minimized.

6. Relationships within the Family

The integrity of individual family members must not be transgressed, nor be arbitrary.

7. Death

Here the notion of ascension to another sphere, sanctified from time and place, in which those who have died have different, non-contingent, attributes or conditions from those who are on earth. Therefore, relationship with those family members is seen to be continued through reflection and prayer.

8. Work and Finance

All are enjoined to engage in a profession or craft, the practice of which is regarded as worship. Contribution to the financial needs of the Baha'i community is enjoined, but to do so in a manner which causes suffering to others, or incurs debt, is discouraged.

9. Hospitality

The notion that Baha'is should associate with all peoples in such a manner as to promote unity and concord.

10. Relationship with Baha'i Institutions and Community

Included in this category are the conditions of firmness in the Baha'i Covenant; the importance of expanding knowledge about the Baha'i teachings; the importance of support for and participation in local activities; the importance of the 19 Day Feasts as an opportunity for the community to express its views; and particular reference to the need to turn to elected Spiritual Assemblies for advice and guidance.

11. Family Life and Baha'i Service

Here the notion of translating the love and devotion that individuals have for their Faith into deeds and actions which are conducive to the well-being of society is emphasized. Baha'is are encouraged to lead a balanced life and to avoid fanaticism.

12. Prayers

This category contains specific prayers for expectant mothers; infants; children; youth; parents; families; and marriage.

Appendix F

Letter of Invitation to Baha'is in the Cowichan Valley Region

COWICHAN VALLEY BAHA'I FAMILY SCHOOLS COMMITTEE

March 6, 1995

TO THE BAHA'IS OF THE COWICHAN VALLEY REGION:

DEAR BAHA'I FRIENDS;

Mr. Ken Cooper has been given permission by the Cowichan Valley Family Schools Committee to ask Baha'i families in the Cowichan Valley region to work with him on his dynamic research project, *Exploring the Community Context of Family Life: The influence of shared spiritual values as experienced by Baha'i Families in the Cowichan Valley*. Your names will not be given to him unless you sign the enclosed permission form (this form only enables him to get in touch with you - no other information will be given about you). We feel strongly that his research will be very helpful in furthering our understanding of the interactive and mutually beneficial relationship between Baha'i families and the Baha'i community.

Ken has been active in the Baha'i Faith community since 1971. His experience includes involvement with programs for children and families over that time period and he serves as a faculty consultant to the Baha'i Family Life Institute (appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly). Ken and his family resided in the Cowichan Valley from 1990 to 1992 and in 1992 he began graduate studies in the faculty of Human and Social Development at the University of Victoria. In addition Ken served as Administrator of the Baha'i school in Thailand from 1993 to 1994. The Family Schools Committee feels that he is a mature and responsible individual and that his work will be of benefit to those who choose to participate.

Your involvement would entail participation in group consultation about the research topic. It will not require a lot of time or any on-going involvement. Ken expects that the group sessions will be finished by the end of April. If you are interested in participating, Ken will contact your family and let you know when, where and how the study will be conducted. Whether your family 'fits' a particular definition or configuration does not matter. The only criteria are that you are a Baha'i; that you reside in the Cowichan Valley; and that you are interested in the topic. Your ideas and input will really help us understand how the Baha'i community influences family life.

Please fill out the permission form whether you are interested or not. We have made it easier by putting in a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Make sure that you keep one of the copies of the permission form.

Please give full consideration to taking part in this exciting and important study of Baha'i family life.

Sincerely,

FOR THE FAMILY SCHOOLS COMMITTEE

Appendix G

Written Agreement For Participation In The Study

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY ENTITLED,

EXPLORING THE COMMUNITY CONTEXT OF FAMILY LIFE:

THE INFLUENCE OF SHARED SPIRITUAL VALUES AS EXPERIENCED

BY BAHA'I FAMILIES IN THE COWICHAN VALLEY

I understand that this research project is studying the perceptions of Baha'i adults. children and youth about how the Baha'i community influences their family life.

I understand that I will be participating in group interviews to determine aspects of Baha'i community structure and community life which represent actual or potential influences on family life.

I understand that my participation is completely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without explanation.

I understand that any data collected will remain confidential and that the results of the group discussions will be kept secure under lock and key or through computer password coding. Furthermore, I understand that my privacy and anonymity will be protected by not using names or any other identifying characteristics in any published results. However, I understand that other participants in the group discussions will recognize me, which will offset my anonymity during the group interview phase of the study.

I understand that the group interviews will be recorded through the use of flip-charts and on audio-tape so that nothing is missed and so my words are not changed or

misunderstood, and that the charts/tape will be destroyed/erased immediately upon completion of the study.

I understand that I will be given the opportunity to participate in the review and analysis of the information arising from the group interviews and that I can suggest modifications for accuracy, clarity or addition.

I understand that the group interviews will be conducted using the following framework of principles and ground rules for participation:

1. While participants have different capabilities and experience, all will be encouraged to participate as equal
   partners in the group interviews
2. All participants will have access to information on request
3. The researcher will lead the groups in discussion
4. A high level of trust and willingness to work together is required of participants
5. Discussions will not be viewed as an opportunity to criticize or evaluate particular individuals, agencies
   or institutions
6. There will be respect for one's views, opinions, confidences, and silences
7. There are no right or wrong ideas, answers or suggestions
8. Asking questions to clarify ideas is helpful; interrupting people or discounting their ideas is not
9. Effort will be made to ensure that everyone has equal time to talk, and that everyone who wants to talk
   can
10. Taking part, or not taking part, in discussion is not related in any way to receiving service or being
    involved in a group or program. There is absolutely no obligation for participation in the discussion or in
    any ongoing activities. People can leave the group discussion whenever they want to.

Date: _____   Researcher: _____

Name: _____   Signature: _____

Signature of Parent or Guardian, if under 19:   _____

Appendix H

Participant Profile

Participant Profile: Family Code #_____

1. Age:_____

2. Gender: Male:_____Female:_____

3. Marital Status: Married_____Single_____Separated_____Divorced_____

4. Family Role: Parent:_____Child:_____Other:_____

5. Describe the make-up of your family:_____
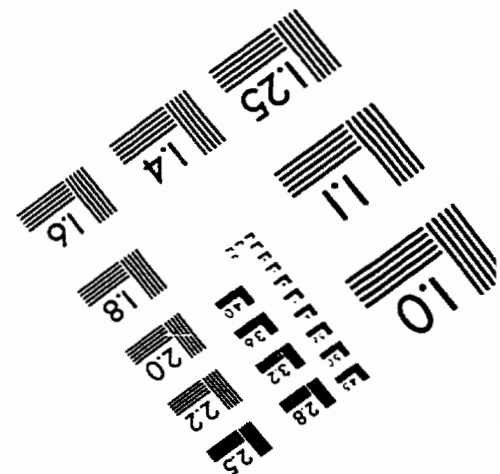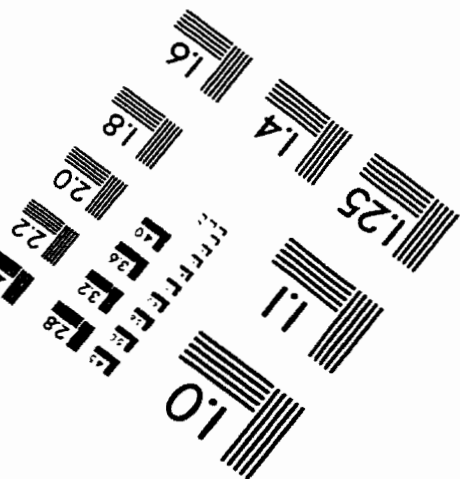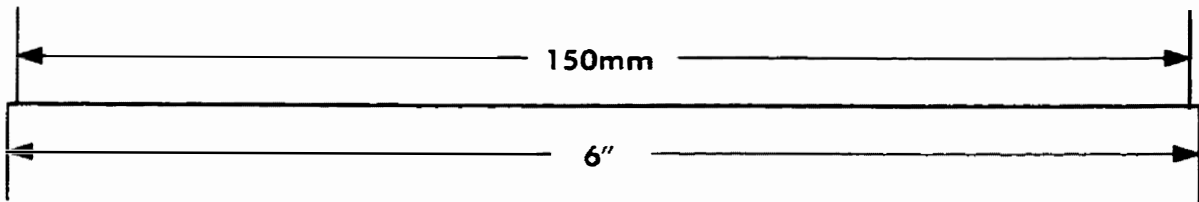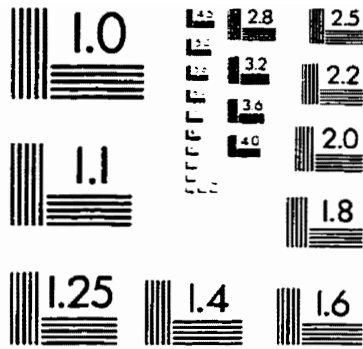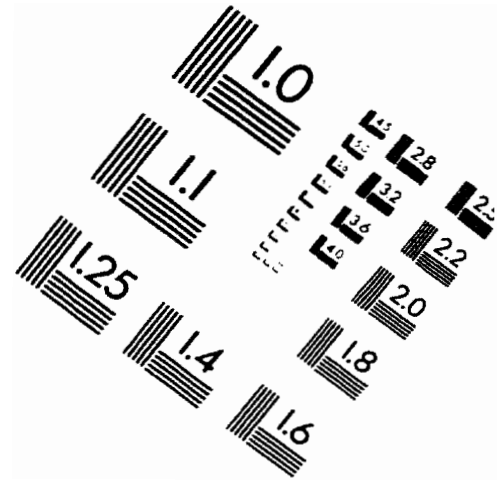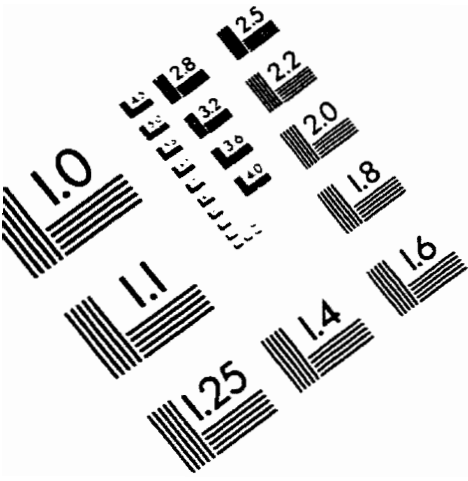
_____

_____

6. Baha'i Community:_____

7. How long have you lived in the Cowichan Valley?_____

8. Are your parents Baha'i? Yes____No____ Grandparents? Yes____No____

9. If no, when did you become a Baha'i?_____

10. Is your spouse a Baha'i? Yes_____ No_____..N/A_____

IMAGE EVALUATION
TEST TARGET (QA-3)

150mm

6"