

THESIS

DIVORCE FROM THE CHILD'S PERSPECTIVE

by

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Submitted in Partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Masters of Education in Counselor Education in the Division of Educational Psychology in the Graduate Program of The University of Manitoba.

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BY

NICHOLE N. MENARD

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree**

of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

Nichole N. Menard

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ABSTRACT

This study presents parental divorce from the perspectives of children who have lived in either joint custody with equal time-share, or in the custody of their fathers. The reported experiences are compared to those in the research conducted with children who were in the custody of their mothers.

This study follows a qualitative research design. Interviews were informal using semistructured open-ended questions. Data was analyzed following an emergent design based on the constant comparative method. The findings and outcomes focus on the common themes identified in the data. Four participants were recruited through the use of purposive sampling. The participants were between the ages of 13 and 23, their family life experiences were very different with the one common factor being that their parents were divorced.

The findings demonstrate that children experience life in a family with divorced parents in the same way, whether they are living with their mother or their father. As indicated by the participants in this study, living with divorce is difficult and having support is needed. However, there is a lack of resources and support for families living with divorce. Children need to feel

supported and accepted by both their parents, along with feeling accepted by their community and group of peers. Longitudinal research is needed on how children perceive life in the custody of fathers and on joint custody with equal time-share.

To the children of divorced parents
who allowed me to enter and understand
their world and life experience.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A 5-year-old child named Lee-Ann has just discovered that her parents are getting divorced. Her father left a few months ago; nevertheless, it feels like to her as if he has been gone for years. Even though Lee-Ann visits her father every second week, she misses him and wonders if he still loves her. When Lee-Ann talks about her dad, her mom gets angry, so Lee-Ann does not share her feelings with her mom or anyone else. for that matter.

Inside Lee-Ann is afraid, and she worries that her mom will leave just as her dad did. She says to herself "mom says that she loves me but she also used to love dad". Sometimes Lee-Ann has nightmares that her mom dies and there is no one around to take care of her. Lee-Ann's once safe world in which she could rely on the two adults in her life has been turned upside down. Frightened and alone, Lee-Ann cries herself to sleep at night. When she finally falls asleep, she is awakened by nightmares.

Lee-Ann's parents are both hurt and confused also, and they feel that their hopes and dreams have gone up in a puff of smoke. In their pain and anger, they constantly bad-mouth each other in front of Lee-Ann which hurts her feelings. Lee-Ann is beginning to feel pulled in opposite directions as her parents fight for custody. Lee-Ann loves and needs both her parents; she prays every night

that they will stop fighting and be a family again. Unfortunately, Lee-Ann's parents cannot see what they are doing to her. Their own hurt and anger is blinding them to Lee-Ann's pain and her struggle for understanding.

Relatives, neighbours, friends and even Lee-Ann's teacher feel the pain within this family. The once outgoing, sociable Lee-Ann has become withdrawn. Her apparent eagerness to learn is overshadowed by daydreams and the consuming fear that her mom will not be home after school. The more Lee-Ann internalizes her feelings, the more confused she feels because she does not know why she feels so sad and angry. Lee-Ann, like many other children experiencing the divorce of their parents, is not receiving any support or counselling. She is left to deal with her distress and confusion all on her own.

Statement of the Problem

For better or for worse, divorce as an option for marital difficulties is here to stay in our society. Statistics Canada (1991) estimated that the actual number of divorces since 1970 has tripled with approximately 35% of these cases involving children (cited in Kurtz, 1995). Last year in Canada, an estimated 60,000 children were involved in custody disputes (Driedger, 1998, p.40).

Children suffer especially because they do not have any control over much of what goes on during a divorce.

Outsiders decide on when and where visits will occur, and whom the child will live with. Few listen to the children's thoughts and feelings. A stronger awareness of how children feel about parental divorce is needed. Children need to be given the opportunity to speak and to be heard on this topic.

Researchers have written volumes on how children adjust to divorce by examining psychological problems, intellectual deficits, and development. The results are largely based on the parents' perspectives and on tests that measure aptitude, self-esteem, aggression, and behaviour, but a true picture of the child's experience is not presented. What is shown is the number of children who fit into preset categories, for example out of the 200 children of divorce, 50 of these children used avoidance to cope, 20 used distraction, and 30 used support. The researchers are looking for children who fit ready made categories rather than creating categories from how the children describe their experience.

I believe that a test cannot accurately reveal a child's feelings and thoughts in association with a real-life event. To understand an individual's experience from their perspective, a researcher needs to become a part of that person's world, which can best be done through qualitative research. But, qualitative research in the area of divorce and children is rare. The studies that do

exist, although very helpful, are not recent.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) provide some very useful information in regard to the way in which children are affected by divorce according to their age and gender. Even more helpful are the 10-year follow-up studies conducted by Wallerstein (1985, 1984). These studies explore the long term effects of divorce on children from the child's perspective. Such studies are invaluable because they reflect the children's thoughts, feelings, wishes, and dreams using the children's words and stories.

As a counselor, I find these studies very helpful in my work with both the parents and the children. When something is written from the child's perspective, parents seem to take more of an interest in the results, because it is in the child's words that an adult can begin to see that, "Yes, children are affected by divorce and do care about who they live with and what happens." I believe that recent research in the area of divorce from the child's perspective would benefit anyone who is experiencing a divorce as well as anyone who is working with families in the midst of divorce.

Significance and Purpose of The Study

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of how children perceive their lives living with parents who are divorced. The main focus of this study is to

develop a deeper understanding of the categories and labels used by children to describe their life experience when they are either living in joint custody with equal time-share or in the custody of their fathers. Joint custody means that each parent has legal say as to what happens for their child. Equal time-share is when each parent spends an equal quantity of time with their child. In this study, I will document the participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences around not only their parents' divorce but how living in a divorced family has made an impact on their life.

I am particularly interested in how divorce makes an impact on the lives of children because a majority of my clients are experiencing their parents' separation or divorce. My role as a therapist is to help the client process her or his emotions and develop ways of coping in her or his present life. As a result, I do not have the opportunity to hear the client's full life experience. Since I have not experienced a parental divorce, I also cannot draw on my own experiences.

Working with children creates an additional obstacle in that children learn and process life events through the medium of play (Bergen, 1987). I often draw upon what I have seen from other children and what I have read in play therapy literature to gain a deeper understanding of what the child is attempting to tell me. Since there is very

little research in the area of divorce from a child's perspective it becomes difficult for me as a therapist to connect quickly what is happening internally for the child. I believe that by interviewing young people about their experience with divorce, I will gain a deeper understanding of the factors that affect a child's adjustment to their parents' divorce. I may not find the answers to the questions I seek, but instead I may develop an understanding of the child's perspective that I could never conceptualize.

In the past, most custody cases were decided in favour of the mother; as a result, much of the research has been conducted with children in the custody of their mothers. Presently, more fathers are seeking custody and many courts are awarding joint custody with or without equal time-share (Driedger, 1998). Research is therefore needed on children who are in the custody of fathers and on children experiencing equal time-share. It is important to understand how these custody arrangements affect children from their own perspectives. Children need to be given a voice and recognized as an important part of the divorce process.

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of how children in the custody of fathers or in joint custody with equal time-share perceive their parents' divorce. I will also determine the way in which these

reported experiences compare to those in the research conducted with children who were in the custody of their mothers. The focus is to learn about parental divorce from how children describe their experience. I hope that this information will help parents and anyone working with children better understand divorce from the child's perspective.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

Despite the overwhelming amount of research that has been conducted in the area of children and divorce, a remarkably small percentage of the studies focuses on divorce from the child's perspective and experience. The majority of the research emphasizes the types of psychological problems divorce creates for children. Research in the areas of aggression, sex role development, and intellectual deficits are common. Another highly studied area is age and the way in which it relates to the child's adjustment to parental divorce.

Children's adjustment to divorce has been categorized by the many studies conducted. However, very few researchers have actually talked to the children about these matters or explored the categories children themselves might have used to describe how they feel about the divorce experience. In the following pages, I will examine several studies of children and divorce according to the way in which the following common themes and categories relate to children's adjustment: age and development, gender differences, transition and loss, visitation, parental conflict, and the child's perspective.

Age and Development

Children of all ages are affected by parental divorce. However, it has been found by several studies that, because of differences in development, each age group encounters a particular set of difficulties. In a ten-year extensive study involving observation and interviewing, Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) provided an important framework for understanding the link between age and adjustment to divorce.

Several studies refer to Wallerstein and Kelly's study, and use their findings to explore the effects of divorce on children. Malkin (1986) and Peck (1989) also provided some beneficial information in relation to some common ways one might expect a child to react to their parents' divorce. These findings will be explored by examining the typical behaviours and reactions within the following three development stages: infant, preschool, and adolescents.

Infants: Birth to 3 years. There is little written about the effects of parental divorce on infants. Malkin (1986) stated that children in this age group exhibit the following when their parents separate: regression in toilet training, increased distress after visits with the non-custodial parent, separation anxiety, increased irritability, sleep problems, and increased aggressive

behaviour and tantrums. Young children especially have a difficult time comprehending what a divorce is and therefore ask many questions about the missing parent.

The danger for infants centres on their strong dependence on their parents for basic survival and security. Consistency at this stage is vital to the young child's optimal development (Peck, 1989; Hickey, 1994). The upheaval and extra demands put on the primary caregiver can be difficult. This strain accounts for the lack of consistency and the inability to meet the child's nurturing needs. This inability can cause a regression and a delay in the child's development.

Preschoolers: 3 to 5 years. Infants and preschoolers respond similarly to parental divorce. Both age groups are in a stage where they depend highly on their parents. The predominant difference is that the preschooler believes the whole world revolves around him or her. This belief causes the preschooler to think that he or she is the reason one parent left.

Children during this stage of development see themselves as the cause of all that happens around them. This age group tends to blame themselves for the divorce and believes that they are being rejected. Fear of abandonment can lead to separation anxiety. With the stress of divorce this age group may regress

developmentally in a number of ways, including: bed wetting, clinginess, and fear of leave taking (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

Preschool children display intense upset, neediness, and a high incidence of regression when their parents separate (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Malkin, 1986). This age group displays the most distress in response to the family break-up. Wallerstein (1984) found that even children who seemed to be unaffected by their parents' divorce began to develop difficulties 18 months later. After five years, one third of these children was found to have moderate depression. Otherwise, most of the children adjusted well to their new life. The studies revealed that adjustment occurred earlier in families that worked at providing a richer more, gratifying life that included the children.

In Wallerstein's (1984) 10-year follow-up, most of the children claimed to have no memories of the intact family. Children were most likely to remember parental conflict, but memories of violence were unavailable. While this age group has the most difficulty with parental divorce, the children do not live with the memories. It appears that it is the memories that are difficult to live with and that hamper the adjustment to parental divorce, especially so with older children who are more commonly put in the middle of their parents' conflicts.

School Aged: 5 to 12 years. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) found that 6-8 year olds respond to divorce with a great sense of personal loss. They display feelings of rejection and abandonment, and believe that the intact family is necessary for their well-being. The 9-12 year olds are also likely to exhibit extreme anger at one or both parents. Children in this age group believe that the parents should be able to reconcile; if the parents do not, the children feel that they are selfish. This age group was also found to express shame and embarrassment about the divorce.

Wallerstein's 10-year follow-up, found that children six years and older were able to describe in full detail memories of their parents' marital separation and divorce. Children in this age group seemed to be the most affected by their parents' divorce, and the divorce was regarded as the central experience in their lives by the majority of these children. Many of the children still wished for their family to be back together.

A common repeating theme was the loss of the father, no matter how close the father lived or how accessible he remained. It appears that this age group takes the divorce as a personal rejection and continues to feel rejected by the noncustodial parent. Interestingly, several of the children also expressed feeling rejected by their custodial mothers. Many said that their mothers

were busy with work and were uninterested in them. Malkin (1986) also found that children in this age group commonly felt rejected by one or both parents. Malkin adds that children ages 7-10 have a very difficult time dealing with their feelings of sadness.

It is no wonder that children in this age group are often involved in loyalty conflicts. They are so afraid of being abandoned that they are especially careful in front of both parents to prevent losing them. Loyalty conflicts present a major danger for children in the latency stage (Peck, 1988; Hickey and Dalton, 1994). Children in this stage have a rudimentary sense of right and wrong and a concrete approach to all events. At this stage, they may be drawn into parentified roles as confidantes or caretakers of smaller children.

At a time when children need adult support and reassurance, becoming a parent's means of support could interfere with leading a normal childhood. This results also appears to be common with adolescents. Fortunately, adolescents have the ability to engage themselves in activities outside the home, which allows them to break away from becoming a parental support. The danger exists with those teens who become loners and spend all their time taking care of the family.

Teenagers: 13 to 18 years. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) found that, among adolescents, anger, intense sorrow, and acute depression are common responses to parental divorce. They also found that many teens with divorcing parents are quick to grow-up. While some can meet this challenge and become helpful, others still need a family base. Similarly, Peck (1988) and Hickey (1994) state that, even though the teens' primary focus is on their peers, teenagers need extra parental guidance to launch them into adulthood.

Malkin (1986) described the divorce process as an "extraordinarily painful" event for adolescents who feel a substantial amount of sadness and a sense of betrayal by their parents. Their intense feelings of shame and embarrassment prevent them from sharing their thoughts and feelings with even their closet friends. Malkin (1986) concludes that "the pain of parental divorce at adolescence may remain a persistent and unresolved aspect of the psychic life of the individual" (P.19).

It is evident in reviewing the literature that the effects of divorce vary according to the developmental stage of the child. Each stage of development contains a range of typical reactions to divorce. But, what is strongly apparent is the child's adjustment in accordance with the parents' ability to provide support and nurturance. Many of the negative reactions to divorce

have been linked to inadequate parental support. A strong theme focuses on children feeling responsible for supporting their parents.

Several studies do state that a major component in how well children adjust to divorce is linked to parenting. Most of the literature suggests that parenting practices after divorce break down in consistency and effectiveness (Emery, Hetherington, DiLalla, 1984; Belsky, Lerner & Spanier, 1984; Hickey & Dalton, 1994; Levin, 1988). The studies commonly note that parents are often so engrossed in their own pain and suffering that they cannot be there for their children, and they do not have the energy to be consistent in their parenting. Even though parenting ability appears to be a major factor in how well a child adjusts to their parents' divorce, I could not find studies that focused specifically in this area.

A topic that has been well documented is that of the effects of divorce on children according to their gender. Males and females respond to a variety of things differently. In some cases, the argument exists whether this response is because of nature or nurture. In divorce, the differences appear to rest more on nature.

Gender Differences

Several studies have shown that girls and boys respond differently to their parents' divorce, with most indicating that boys are more overtly affected by divorce than are girls (Emery, 1982; Hetherington, 1979; Hodges & Bloom, 1984; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Neugebauer, 1989). Boys from divorced families show a higher rate of behaviour disorders and problems in interpersonal relationships in comparison to girls from divorced families and boys from intact families (Hetherington, 1979).

Wallerstein (1984) found that 18 months after a parental separation, boys at the preschool level displayed significantly more trouble at school, on the playground, and at home compared to girls. Emery (1982) suggests that girls in contrast to boys externalize their emotional upset about divorce; the reason why boys display more behaviour problems is that they internalize and often act aggressively to relieve negative emotions. Girls, on the other hand, will seek support.

Wallerstein (1985) discovered that male and female children between the ages of 6 and 9 had fewer differences surrounding their attitudes about the divorce. However, girls were much more likely to reach out for support from peers, to engage in extracurricular activities, and to become involved in dating more quickly.

Boys tended to show more caution in maintaining and holding back from relationships. A common theme among both age groups was a strong fear of betrayal and abandonment. Girls emphasized betrayal, while the boys focused on the fear of being unloved.

Though there is little research on children who were in the custody of their fathers, it has been suggested that such an arrangement is best developmentally for boys (Santrock and Warshak, 1979). Santrock and Warshak (1979) found that girls and boys raised by the same sex parent (boys by fathers and girls by mothers) were more mature, sociable, independent, and had higher self-esteem than boys and girls raised by the opposite sex parent. Mitchell (1985) also discovered that children felt rejected by the same sex parent, even years after the divorce.

Wallerstein's 10 year study found that, for male children ages 6-11, the father-child relationship was significantly linked to how well boys functioned psychologically. A poor quality relationship was related to low self-esteem, poor academic achievement, weak aspirations, and intense feelings of rejection by the father. These studies seemed to demonstrate that identification with the same sex parent was vitally important for children. Since mothers are often the

custodial parent, boys may have a more difficult time with adjustment compared to girls.

Therefore, it would be beneficial to study children's adjustment in the custody of their fathers. Research thus far has been conducted mostly on families where the mother has custody and the father visits. Since girls tend to be able to seek support from friends, it appears vitally important for parents to ensure that their boys have access to some type of support. It would seem that that support would need to be a male, since it is the male role model that is missing. While research in the area of gender and development has provided some important guidelines, the categories do not fit every child, and every child experiences their parents' divorce differently. The child's changes and losses also differ for each family situation.

Loss and Grieving

Divorce brings about changes in daily routine, family structure, living arrangements, and future plans. Children often lose their relationships with friends and family, possessions, neighborhood, social status, and their understanding of family. A natural reaction to loss is to grieve. Yet, research on grieving in relation to children and divorce is non-existent. Hetherington (1979) stated that children's most prevalent early responses to

divorce were anger, fear, depression, and guilt. These are the same feelings associated with loss and the grieving process.

Hickey and Dalton (1994) identified 5 stages of grief in the divorce process: 1) Shock and Denial: children will deny that there is a divorce; 2) Anger: children will feel anger at the world, they will think it is unfair, and may feel betrayed; 3) Bargaining: children try to get parents back together; 4) Depression: children feel sad and helpless; 5) Acceptance: the parents are divorced, but the child understands that she still has a mom and dad. These five stages closely resemble those of the grieving cycle. It would be interesting to see if children describe the process as such and how they would name each stage.

Considering the research in the area of divorce and children's development stages, one might question whether children grieve and naturally adjust to their new family situation or adjust with maturation. As children grow and mature, are they better able to cognitively understand divorce and the reasons for it? With their new perspective, are they able to move on and recognize that the problem rests with their parents?

Visitation

The research indicates that children need to spend quality time with both parents. The way children feel

about themselves is closely correlated with the relationship they have with each parent. Children suffer immensely when their parents argue about visitation and custody rights. It also hurts deeply when the non-custodial parent stops visiting, or does not spend quality time with them.

Children whose visitation arrangements did not meet their needs felt deprived of contact with the non-custodial parent (Neugebauer 1989). Yet, Kelly (1981) found that children who had frequent visits and those who had infrequent visits all complained that their visits were inadequate. Although, the children who had frequent visits did express fewer feelings of hopelessness and abandonment than the children whose visits were sporadic and irregular. Another important factor in how children felt about their visits was the length of the visit. Children whose visits were less than 3 hours and did not include sleep-overs felt deprived and feared that they were losing contact with the visiting parent.

One of the most important factors in how positively children felt about their visits is the quality of visits, not the quantity (Wallerstein, 1985; Mitchell, 1985; Kelly, 1981). Children who described their visiting parent as too busy, forgetful of birthdays, in a hurry to end the visit, or absorbed in other activities and people during visits felt intensely hurt and rejected. These

children and adolescents did not like their visits and felt very negatively towards the visiting parent (Kelly, 1981).

Wallerstein (1984) discovered that the number of visits noncustodial fathers had with their children did not directly link to the child's attachment, nor did it predict the child's interest and concern. Children with fathers who rarely visited longed for a relationship. This interest in the absent father increased when the youngster reached adolescence (Wallerstein, 1984; Troyer, 1979). Many of the children in both Wallerstein's and Troyer's studies longed to have a relationship with their non-custodial father. In these interviews, children talked about their fantasies of visiting dad more when they got older. They also expressed sadness and confusion about why dad was not visiting them more often now.

Peck (1988) suggests that the type of custody should be worked-out according to the child's needs. Joint custody may not be the best situation for all children (Peck, 1988). Infants and preschoolers need a consistent, predictable environment, which could be hard to achieve in a joint custody arrangement. Living in two different households with different schedules and surroundings can be very inconsistent and indefinite. Research in the areas of gender and development reveals that the child's

gender, developmental needs, and ability to adjust to two separate environments needs to be considered.

It is obvious that the courts and parents need to be well-informed before making judgements regarding custody and access. All of the custody and visitation arrangements are decided upon solely by adults, leaving many children unhappy about the decisions. If children were somehow included in the process, perhaps they would feel that they were listened to and empowered. Even if they did not get what they wanted, at least they would have been able to state their feelings and needs.

Another factor that has been shown to effect children's adjustment to divorce is conflict before, during, and after the divorce. Research has found that difficulties for children can occur in the areas of loyalty conflicts, inconsistent discipline, and development of pro-social skills as a result of seeing parents unable to solve problems. When the conflict between parents is extreme, children may even reject one parent.

Parental Conflict

Children of divorce commonly have long histories of exposure to parental fighting. The majority of the research indicates that parental conflict both before and after divorce is related to a multitude of emotional,

psychological, and social problems in children (Emery, 1989; Holden & Ritchie, 1991; Hershorn & Rosenbaum, 1985; Cummings & Davis, 1995; Cummings, 1994; Walsh & Stolberg, 1989). Reported problems range from externalizing disorders, such as aggression and conduct disorders, to internalizing problems, such as anxiety and withdrawal.

Children's ability to cope with marital conflict greatly affects how well they adjust. O'Brian, Margolin, and John (1995) discovered that children cope with parental conflict in three ways: 1) by involving themselves in the conflict, 2) by avoiding and distancing themselves from the situation, or 3) by finding support from others. Children who coped by getting involved in their parents' arguments reported feeling high levels of anxiety, hostility, and a lower self-esteem than did children who avoided the conflict. However, children who avoided and withdrew reported feeling helpless, anxious, and at fault. Children who received support from others were least affected by the conflict. All children regardless of coping mechanism reported feeling depressed.

Research in the area of parental conflict as a predictor of children's adjustment to divorce is extensive. Studies in this area report that high parental conflict has a larger negative impact on children's adjustment over the divorce than does parental loss

(Emery, 1982; Walsh & Stolberg, 1989). A study conducted by Tschann, Johnston, Kline & Wallerstein (1990) indicated that conflict during and after divorce was most problematic for a child when one or both parents put the child in the middle, thus involving him or her in the conflict. It was found that children involved in parental conflict exhibited an array of emotional and behavioural problems. The strongest areas of difficulty were found in the way that the children coped with stress and problems, their low self-esteem, and their considerable amount of anger and depression.

Parental conflict is very harmful especially when the conflict involves children in custody and in access disputes. When a parent openly criticizes and degrades their divorced spouse in front of the children, the children feel pressured to align with one parent (Price & Pioske, 1994; Dunne & Hendrick, 1994; Clapp, 1988). When children align with one parent they may reject the other, which can result in parent alienation syndrome.

Parental alienation syndrome involves intense rejection of one parent after divorce. Gardner (1987) defined this syndrome as a disturbance occurring in children who are preoccupied with exaggerated degradation and criticism of one parent (cited in Price & Pioske, 1994). Dunne and Hedrick (1994) stated that parental alienation syndrome is seen in children whose parents are

consumed in extreme conflict, with one parent criticizing and placing blame on the other in front of the child. The children who are likely to be susceptible to alienation present a feeling of responsibility for one parent's emotional survival (Dunne & Hendrick, 1994). The child believes that, by rejecting one parent, the other parent will be fine.

Many studies recognize that witnessing parental conflict before, during, and after divorce negatively affects children's adjustment. The children who are most affected are those who become involved in the conflict or are put in the middle. One of the strongest negative effects was the rejection of one parent. The view that it is better to come from a broken home than to grow-up in one is well-supported. However, research conducted from the child's perspective shows that this was not always the case. Some children would rather deal with parental conflict than have to deal with feelings of rejection and loss.

The Child's Perspective

Findings in the area of how children feel about their parent's divorce are conflicting. In Neugebauer's (1989) study children expressed relief over their parents' separation, saying that home life was quieter. Oppawasky (1989) found that, even though children were happy that

there was less fighting, they could not see anything positive about their parents' divorce. In a finding similar to that of Mitchell (1985), many children thought that the divorce was a mistake. After five years, many of these children felt that their parents had made the right choice. Few children in Wallerstein and Kelly's (1980) study had seen divorce as a solution to an unhappy marriage. Even ten years after the divorce, these children had secret wishes that their parents could be back together.

Children in Oppawsky's (1989) study also revealed that they had a secret wish that their parents would rejoin. Interviews with the children uncovered that a major reason for this wish was fear that they were unlovable. The most common situation where children felt unlovable, unprotected, vulnerable, and isolated was when they were put in the middle of parental discord. In these cases, children struggled with loyalty conflicts. They felt that they could not seek support from either parent, which demonstrates the importance of outside support for children in these situations. Children need access to adults to whom they can talk and trust. Grandparents were found to be an important support for children in Neugebauer's (1989) study.

Loyalty conflicts were also a problem for children thrown into enmeshment, which includes parentification;

that is, being used for emotional comfort and conversation. Children in these situations described themselves as feeling frustrated, confused, and angry. Children experienced similar conflicting feelings with the parent who went to a great extent to give gifts, and take them on trips and outings during each visit (Oppawsky, 1989). Children stated that they liked the attention but had doubts about the objectives as well as guilt feelings for liking it. The final area where children felt loyalty conflicts was when they were used as messengers. In these situations, children described themselves as feeling insecure, guilty, and compelled to choose sides.

Family change is inevitable during the divorce process. One aspect of this transformation occurs in economic status. Changes in financial status were found to hit the hardest for children between the ages of eight to twelve (Troyer, 1979). Children at this age are self-conscious about what they wear and what they own, and there is a huge pressure to fit in; sometimes fitting in means having the very best. Another common difficulty was seeing parents fighting over money and putting children in the middle of these arguments. Children expressed feeling as if they were a burden on their parents; they felt guilty for the lack of money, and, at the same time, they expressed anger at the parent who was not paying his or her share (Troyer, 1979).

It appears that children struggle with their parents' divorce on a daily basis, though the most difficult times in the eyes of a child are holidays and birthdays (Troyer, 1979). Children wait in anticipation of their birthday and of special holidays such as Christmas. It is unfortunate that for many children this day of confident expectation becomes filled with feelings of guilt, inner conflict, and disappointment. Holidays and vacations often involve shuffling children from one parent to the other. In cases where the non-custodial parent is seldom around, these special days turn into huge disappointments for children as they anxiously await a visit or phone call (Troyer, 1979).

It is interesting to hear a child's advice on marriage and divorce. A child's wisdom reflects his or her family experience and learned reality. Many of the children in Troyer's (1979) study thought that marriage should be made more difficult to attain. Along the same theme, other children suggested that people should not get married at so young an age. The most common advice given by male children in Mitchell's (1985) study was basically to accept what has happened and move on. Girls were more likely to suggest that parents talk to their children and hide their bitterness towards each other. Another common suggestion was for parents not to put their children in the middle. Children in Oppawasky's (1989) study said

that parents should stop fighting. It is evident from these comments that a child's insight is remarkable and needs to be heard more often.

The research in the area of divorce and children in relation to the child's perspective seems to suggest that the effects of divorce on the child are likely to be mediated by the child's perspective of the divorce. Previous research indicates that much of this perspective differs according to how well the child can understand what is happening. This understanding is largely affected by age, developmental stage, and the way that the parents involve the children in their disputes. To add to this, I would say that the child's perspective is also linked to custody arrangements, visitation, cultural and religious beliefs about marriage, and the passage of time.

Conclusion

Divorce, like most negative events in life, is often seen as something that happens to other families. When divorce becomes a reality, shock and disbelief may be considerable for the children, especially since they are usually the last ones to find out and are often not given the chance to express their thoughts and feelings about the issue. At this time, parents often become preoccupied with extra responsibilities, arising difficulties, and

stress. Their ability to be there for their children is minimal.

Children, as we have seen, need support even if they are not openly displaying difficulties. Relatives, friends, and professionals can help a child express and understand his or her feelings. Support may also empower the children to communicate their emotional needs to their parents. This would be very helpful for children caught in the middle or for those who are dealing with loyalty conflicts. The following poem written by S. Raviv demonstrates the difficulty with communication between parents and children:

When I come home mad
From dad,
I hiss at the cat,
Kick the mat,
And don't even want to
Talk to mother.

All he says then,
My dad, is:
It's YOUR imagination,
YOUR imagination,
I'm sorry I'm late,
But I have to state,
That with ME he's never
A bother.

(cited in Ayalon & Flasher, 1993)

Marital discord has many negative effects on children. If divorce reduces marital conflict and thus lessens parental stress, optimal child functioning can be elevated. Therefore, one would think that divorce is in the child's best interest, although the probability is

slim that the parents will be able to resolve their problems and no longer fight. If this was possible, the parents would not have divorced in the first place. In some situations, parental discord increases following separation. When parents stop fighting and stop putting children in the middle, it is without a doubt that "divorce is in the child's best interest."

From the perspective of the child, divorce is stressful and confusing. Children do not see any benefits of divorce and seem to live with fantasies of a family they wish they had. Their perspective is closely correlated with the way that their parents are handling the divorce. Children feel loyalty conflicts when parents put them in the middle. They feel abandoned and rejected when visitation does not meet their needs. The adverse effects of divorce seem to far outweigh the probability of experiencing benefits.

It is evident from the research presented that the effects of divorce on children are multifaceted. More research needs to be done in the area of the child's perspective, because it is the child's perspective which largely effects the child's adjustment and acceptance of their parents' divorce. A more accurate understanding of children's needs and desires regarding divorce, custody, and visitation may help to dispel common misunderstandings about the "best interests" of the child.

The following chapter details the methods I used to explore the following research question: How does a child who is in the custody of her father or in joint custody with equal time-share perceive her parents' divorce? Additionally, are these perspectives similar or different from the above research which has been largely conducted with children in the custody of their mothers?

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Research in the area of divorce and children is extensive. Much of this research has been conducted with children in the custody of their mothers. The main focus of many of the studies has been to categorize children's reactions and adjustments to divorce using quantitative research approaches. While the categories are of children, they are not named by the children.

The focus of my inquiry was to understand the experience of divorce from the terms and labels given by children and how the children come to adopt such understandings. The children were either in the custody of their fathers or in joint custody with equal time-share. I was also wondering if these perspectives would be similar or different from findings reported in the studies conducted with children in the custody of their mothers.

Research Design

This study follows a qualitative research design. The goal of qualitative research is to better understand human behaviour and experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). It is a process of discovery whereby the researcher seeks

to make sense of personal stories and the ways in which these stories intersect. The outcome is a deeper understanding of the perspectives of those people in the study.

Individuals who are in the study are "participants" from whom the researcher gains knowledge and understanding. The four participants in this study were children of divorced parents, two of whom had lived with their fathers and two who were in an equal time-share situation. Each participant was interviewed individually for one hour, on three separate occasions. An interview is a joint product of what interviewees and interviewers talk about together and how they talk with each other (Mishler, 1986: cited in Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p. 88).

I followed an unstructured interview format using open-ended questions. Closed questions can cut off conversation, whereas opened questions give the participant room to speak in the areas that are relevant and important to her. I listened actively to understand the participant's story. What the participant said guided my next question or led me to probe for additional information. I followed the participant and, as a result, the focus of my study changed as I developed a deeper understanding of divorce through the participants' eyes.

This study followed an emergent design based on the constant comparative method as outlined by Maykut and Morehouse (1994), which is a non-mathematical method designed to identify themes and patterns in qualitative data. The design involves collecting and analyzing data simultaneously, thus allowing for important information to be discovered and then explored further. This method of data analysis is thorough in that the researcher is continually refining initial and new categories so as to fully understand existing relationships.

The study's design emerged over time: I had an initial semi-structured interview guide, the subsequent interview questions, themes, and avenues for exploration all came from the data. The data in this study came from participant interviews and my field notes. The end result was written up in such a way that it reflects the participants' experiences in their own words and language.

Provisions for Trustworthiness

The question of trustworthiness asks basically: "To what extent can we place confidence in the outcomes of the study? Do we believe what the researcher has reported?" (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p. 145). The detailed descriptions of the research design, methods, and outcomes should provide readers with a foundation to determine the credibility of this study.

In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument and, therefore is responsible for both the collection of data and the extraction of meaning from the data. Qualitative researchers perceive reliability as a "fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting being studied" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p.48). To maintain the quality of the study, I needed not only to establish a trusting relationship with the participants, but also to identify my personal biases. Additionally, I needed to be aware of reactivity, the unintended effects of the researcher on the outcomes of the study (Kaykut & Morehouse, 1994).

Establishing a trusting relationship. To ensure that the data collected were valid, I spent time building and maintaining a relationship with the participants. The length of the interview depended on the participant to avoid fatigue. The interview site was mutually agreed upon, chosen by the participant, and it remained constant throughout the data collection process. Each participant was interviewed on three separate occasions, to ensure that his or her perception was understood clearly.

Identifying personal biases. To ensure that the analyzed data was trustworthy, I acknowledged my personal biases and feelings through ongoing personal reflection and review of my research journal. I also checked and rechecked my analysis for additional perspectives and ways

of confirming or not confirming the emerging themes. I had a genuine interest in each participant's story; as a result, reactivity did not pose a problem for me. I believe that I responded to each participant without leading their answers with my tone of voice, body language, or manner of questioning.

Prevention of reactivity. I found it difficult to stay in the role of researcher during interviews. I had to be careful not to ask questions that would cause the participants to process their stories rather than simply tell them. At times, this becomes a fine line because the skills of active listening while showing genuine personal regard, and probing for additional information are both necessary as a researcher and as a therapist.

I was aware continually of the fine line between providing therapy and understanding a participant's story. To ensure that I was not stepping into the role of therapist, I would think twice about my questions before asking them. I would ask myself, "What is the intent of this question?" If I felt intuitively that my intent was to ask the question so that the participant could gain a deeper understanding, I knew that I needed to rethink my question. Journalling, self-reflection, and having some of my fieldnotes read and commented on helped me to remain in the role of researcher.

Lastly, the methods of data collection and analysis which I employed left a permanent audit trail. All materials were kept, including: interview tapes, the research journal box, field notes, transcribed interviews, and unitized chunks of data. The audit trail allows me to walk people through my research from beginning to end, which ensures that the path I took can be fully understood. Upon completing my thesis all taped interviews will be destroyed to protect the participants' identities.

Research Methods

In the methods section I will help readers to follow my audit trail so that the process by which I took to arrive at the outcomes is clear. There are several components to be covered, include: the sampling strategy, ethical considerations, participant profiles, how I collected data, how I analyzed the data, and a summary discussion.

Sample

The participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). In qualitative research, the sample or setting is carefully selected based on the potential that each participant or setting will increase the variability of the sample.

Since this study focused on a small sample, I felt it important to increase the variables commonly found in the social phenomenon represented in the data. Purposive sampling increases this likelihood in contrast to random sampling which achieves variation through random selection and large sample size (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996).

Participant criteria. I intended to select four participants between the ages of 12 and 18 (two male and two female). Selection of the four participants was based on the following criteria:

- 1) Parental divorce had to occur when the participant was between the ages of 5 and 12.
- 2) The parents' divorce occurred no sooner than 2 years prior to the commencement of the study.
- 3) Two participants are male and two are female.
- 4) There was an absence of domestic violence during the parents' marriage.
- 5) Two participants (one male, one female) are or were in the custody of their fathers.
- 6) Two participants (one male, one female) are or have experienced joint custody with equal visitation.
- 7) The participant does not have a mental handicapping condition.
- 8) The participant does not have any critical psychological problems.
- 9) The participant speaks English fluently.

It was very difficult to find participants who matched all my criteria. To allow for more referrals to the study, I changed the age criteria to include young adults up to the age of 23. I also accepted two participants whose parents separated when they were 3 years of age. By the time the actual divorce went through, these participants would have been four years old, which was close to my age criteria of five.

Participants accepted into the study. I was able to interview two participants, one male and one female, who were in a joint custody situation, and two participants, one male and one female, who lived with their fathers. Two participants were 16/17, one participant was 23, and the other participant was 13. The two female participants grew up in small towns. The two males grew up in the city. Only one participant lived in a different province from her mother.

I intended to select participants from nominations received by counselors at several counselling centres in the Winnipeg area. I notified counselors at all locations about the purpose of my study and the participant criteria (see appendix A). Because of difficulties in securing participants, I had to write to an additional set of counselling agencies in the Winnipeg area. From counselling agencies I received ten referrals, of which only two became participants.

I received six referrals from friends, colleagues and friends of colleagues, out of which two became participants. Many people who knew about my study also knew someone who fit my participant criteria. For ethical reasons, I did not accept nominations from friends. I gave a letter describing my study along with my phone number to the person who knew a possible participant. The participants called me directly, at which time I answered their questions. If they were still interested in the study, I arranged for us to meet and go over the purpose of the study, sign consent forms, and schedule our first interview.

Participants under the age of 18 needed to obtain consent from their parental guardian or both parents to participate in the study. Participants were interviewed in their home unless they chose otherwise. Interviews lasted no longer than one hour. Interview location remained constant so as to build familiarity and comfort, which helped in establishing a relationship and rapport between myself and the participant. Interviews were scheduled not to interfere with school, outside activities, or visits with the non-custodial parent. All interviews were solely with the participant; I found that parents completely respected this need for confidentiality.

Recruiting Participants

Finding and securing participants for my study was rather difficult. I believe that this was because of a variety of reasons. I started recruiting participants in March, 1997. At this time I had received four names, one 17 year old, a 13 year old, and two 12 year olds. I was introduced to both the 17 year old and the 12 year old at my place of employment. Both children sounded eager to be interviewed, unfortunately the 12 year old did not match my criteria because, even though she was living in a joint custody arrangement, she rarely saw her father.

I started interviewing the 17 year old the following week. The third referral matched the criteria, but because of the flood, her mother was unable to meet with me. When I contacted this referral after the flood was over, she no longer wanted to be in the study.

During the time of the flood, I received two additional referrals. I met with one referral and his father. The boy matched all the criteria and had been in counselling for almost a year. The counselor involved said that she was closing off with this child, whom she described as very verbal and who could easily talk about his experience. The father thought the study was interesting and he asked me to mail him additional information. I mailed some information about the study and followed up with a phone call, but I never heard back

from this parent and child. I imagine that the parent was either too busy to put time aside for the study, or simply did not want to tell me verbally that he was not interested.

The second referral came from an unknown counselor whom I had spoken to about my study in May, 1997. He left a message on my answering machine saying that he had a potential participant and asked me to mail him additional information about my study. I mailed out the information and followed up with a few phone calls. I never heard back from this counselor.

In August, I received a referral for 2 participants, a 15 year old girl and a 17 year old boy. The children were siblings and were living with their father. I spoke to the mother on the phone and mailed her information for both herself and the father. She called me back to say that they were interested in the study and that her daughter would be participating. I offered to meet with both parents, but only the mother wanted to meet with me. The daughter called me the next day and we arranged to meet that weekend, however the next day, she called and cancelled the interview at which time we rescheduled. She asked me to pick her up, but when I arrived at her home the day of the interview, she was not there. I left her several messages, none of which she returned.

I called the mother to find out if I could have done things differently. The mother met with me for 30 minutes, she was surprized that her daughter did not start the study. The mother offered to drive her daughter to the next interview. I thanked the mother for being so helpful, but felt that the daughter was probably not ready to talk about this subject. The mother said, "Maybe, but her father and I think that this would be good for her: she needs to talk about this." I then realized that this young lady had been talked into the interview by her parents. I explained to the mother that talking about this subject can bring up many difficult feelings and if her daughter was not ready to deal with the feelings around this divorce, it would not be fair to push her into the interview process. The mother talked about wanting her daughter to seek counselling; and her hope was that by talking to someone, the girl may decide to go.

The mother asked me to call her daughter back and give her another chance. I did not make the phone call because at this point I realized that even if this 15 year old did come for the interviews, she more than likely would need a counselor to process her feelings. I knew that because of waiting lists in the city, finding her a counselor could take a good 6 months or longer.

In September, I received a referral for a 12 year old girl. This girl had been in counselling for 1 year and

was living in a joint custody arrangement with equal time-share. The counselor said that both the mother and the daughter appeared enthusiastic about the study, and when I spoke with the mother on the phone, she described how difficult the last four years had been for the family. The conversation ended with the mother saying that the daughter would have much to tell me. A week following that phone conversation, I called the mother to set up the initial interview. She told me that she had spoken to her daughter about the study and that her daughter had become very upset afterwards, asking if she could resume her counselling. I did not accept this girl into the study because her counselor was on a maternity leave and it appeared to me that she was still having difficulties dealing with her parents' divorce.

In the next two months, I received no additional referrals, so I decided to widen the age group to include people who were older and therefore would have had more time to process their family life experience. The ethics committee and my thesis committee both approved this change. I notified additional counselling agencies of my revised study, however, I did not receive one referral from any of these sources, but I received two from a past source and six by word of mouth. I was able to secure three participants out of these eight, ages 13, 17, and 23.

Why Recruiting Participants was Difficult

I came up with three possible reasons as to why it was difficult to secure participants for the study. The following will focus on these reasons and possible suggestions for future studies.

Stage of development. It is evident that the parents wanted their children to participate, yet the children did not make it in for their initial interviews, which tells me that the children did not want to be interviewed. The majority of my referrals were 12 years of age, and this stage of development marks a time when children struggle with identity issues (Damon ed., 1989). Children at this age are rather self-conscious, are struggling with feeling accepted, and waiver when making decisions. This age group places a great deal of importance on peers and on spending time with people their own age. Children in this age group are also entering into a new stage of development.

According to some theorists, children who have worked through issues of divorce may encounter a new set of issues when they begin a new stage of development. The issues arise because of a newly formed cognitive and emotional understanding of the event. Talking to someone about the parental divorce may be too much to handle, even if they received counselling in the past.

Too close to the event. All the children who did not attend the first interview were still living in the divorced situation. A few of the parents whom I spoke to did say that they were having difficulties with their ex-partner about visitation and parenting. One mother told me that her daughter recently expressed an interest in living with her father full time. If there are many things going on in the family environment, the child may be feeling stressed, and trying to fit in three one-hour interviews may not be a big priority for children experiencing a busy home life. Additionally, the child may fear that her parents will read the study and be angry at what she said.

Hard to match participant criteria. The difficulty is not in finding families, but in finding children who live with their fathers or live in an equal time-share situation. According to Statistics Canada (1994), fathers received custody of their children 9.8% of the time and joint custody was awarded 20.5% of the time while mothers received custody 69.6% of the time (Driedger, 1998, p.40). Considering the size of this population, I am not surprised at the length of time it took to find participants. Having experienced the difficulties I had in recruiting participants, I believe that if I had opened my study to a diverse variety of referral sources, I may have been more successful at recruiting participants.

Possible Solutions

Taking the above into consideration, I thought of 3 possible solutions that may help researchers conduct similar future studies.

Interviewing an existing children's divorce group. I It may be easier for children ages 12 to 16 to talk about parental divorce in a group setting, which could be arranged by asking an existing Divorce Group for Children if I could interview the group for half an hour each group session. The group members will feel safe in their existing group of already established peers, plus the group would be able to process what they talk about with the facilitator. With this idea in mind, I called several counselling agencies in the Winnipeg area to see if groups for children experiencing a divorce existed. I found out that such groups are rarely offered except in the school system.

Broaden the referral sources. I recruited participants from counselling agencies; so, while it is good that the children have probably received counselling, a problem lies in that it may not have been the parents' divorce that brought them in for counselling. Some of the parents I spoke to said that the child had experienced abuse and/or lived in a situation where there was alcoholism. To broaden the referral sources, I would suggest that recruitment also be aimed at resource

centers, community newsletters, and groups for divorced parents.

Conduct a survey. I think research with children living with divorce who are in the custody of their fathers and in joint custody is important. If I were to run a similar study in the future, I would first conduct a survey which would be a quick questionnaire that parents can complete before they or their children go to their counselling session. I would also conduct the survey at places that offer mediation services. The survey would be confidential with the option of leaving the participant's name with the counselor or mediator in the event that they are chosen for a private interview.

The goal of my survey would be to identify common key variables within the divorced population so that I may select participant criteria based on what is evident in that population. A survey would also help me to identify which locations of the city have the participants I am looking for. I could find the major themes present in the surveys, then select my participants according to the names that match the themes. Initially, this process would involve a great deal of work, but it would potentially help to prevent some of the problems that I have encountered in recruiting and securing participants.

Ethical Considerations

I believe that my primary responsibility as a researcher is to protect the rights of individuals participating in my study. Guidelines for ethical research attempt to ensure that "[s]ubjects enter research projects voluntarily, understanding the nature of the study and the dangers and obligations that are involved; and subjects are not exposed to risks that are greater than the gains they might derive" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p.33). To ensure that the interests of the participants in my study were protected, I followed the Faculty of Education's ethical guidelines by doing the following:

- 1) The participants' identities were protected by using pseudonyms which the participants chose for themselves. Anonymity was maintained not only for written work, but also when verbal reporting of information occurred.
- 2) All participants were made fully aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time or request that data collected about them not be used.
- 3) Research was overt; participants were fully aware of the nature of the study.
- 4) All participants were told that a summary of the study would be shared with them.
- 5) All participants, upon fully understanding the goals of the study and how the results would be used,

were required to sign a "consent to serve as a participant in research" form (see appendix C).

6) People under the age of 18 needed to receive permission from their custodial parents before the commencement of research. Legally designated caregivers were asked to sign an "authorization for a minor to serve as a participant in research" form (see appendix B). Children needed to agree to be in the study; it was their choice, not their parents.

7) All tape recorded interviews will be destroyed upon the completion of the thesis.

8) Data were not collected until the Research Ethics committee reviewed the study and allowed it to proceed.

9) Previous or past clients of mine were not accepted for the study.

10) Participants were informed that, if they disclosed any information that they or someone they knew was at risk of being hurt, I would need to report the disclosure as required by the Manitoba Child Protection guidelines.

Although the participants were not expected to suffer from their involvement in the study, the topic of divorce could possibly conjure up difficult feelings and personal discomfort. Therefore, I paid particular attention to the

comfort of the participants when they were speaking. If I saw any signs of anxiety or difficulty handling a question, I asked the participants if they wanted a break, or if they wanted to end the interview. Additionally, I did not pursue possible participants who appeared to be interested in the study out of their parents encouragement.

Interestingly, all participants told me that they enjoyed being in the study. There were no questions that a participant could not answer. The few times when participants began to show tears, they still did not want to stop the interview for fear of losing their train of thought. If I had felt that a participant needed counselling, I would have referred her to an appropriate counselling agency. However, all four participants were at a place in life where they had accepted their parents' divorce and had found positive ways of coping.

The interview data were held in confidence. Tape recordings, transcripts, and index cards were identified by codes, and the list of participants was kept completely separate from the data. Only I had access to the participants' names. Only myself and my research committee had access to the transcribed interviews.

Participant Profiles

This study is about the children of divorced families and it is based upon the responses of the following four participants. They reveal their thoughts, feelings, and insights in confidence to me, knowing that their identities would be safely concealed. However because of the explicit nature of these stories, a parent, after reading this study, may be able to identify their child. I apologize to the participants if this recognition should occur and they are embarrassed. I could not have concealed their experiences any further without falsifying their entire story.

Ashley. Ashley was my first participant; she was 17 at the time I interviewed her at my office. Ashley was a very busy, young girl. She appeared to have a large group of friends, and participated in a variety of school activities. Ashley also enjoyed being physically active. She spoke with ease during the interview process and was never short of words. Ashley has two siblings from her mom and dad.

Ashley's parents divorced when she was in Elementary school. For the first 7 years, Ashley lived with her mother and visited her father every second weekend. After these initial seven years, Ashley asked to live with her father, so her parents agreed on a joint custody arrangement with equal time-share. Ashley had much

freedom within the equal time-share because she was allowed to go back and forth as she pleased.

Matt. Matt was my second participant; he was 13 at the time I interviewed him in the living room of his mother's house. Matt did not enjoy sports; his favourite pastimes were cartooning and playing a musical instrument. Matt struck me as extremely laid back, the type of personality that lives in the moment and is not too concerned about yesterday or tomorrow.

Matt's parents separated when he was 3 years of age, and they divorced when he was 4 years old. Matt has always lived in a joint custody arrangement with equal-time share. He has three siblings from his dad's side and he is the only child from his mom's side.

David. David was my third participant; he was 23 at the time I interviewed him at my office. David was attending University and was involved in a variety of personal activities. David spoke with ease and at great length. He has two siblings, both from his mother and father.

David's situation is unique in that his parents separated when he was a teenager and they have not, as of yet, divorced officially. David has always lived with his father and visited his mother. He was the only participant who could recall what life was like living in an intact family.

Sabrina. Sabrina was my last participant; she was 17 years of age when I interviewed her. Sabrina was living on her own, and so I interviewed her at her apartment. She was an active young adult, busy with her friends and after-school activities. Sabrina also enjoyed drawing, which she would be working on before I arrived to interview her. She spoke very easily and had much to share.

Sabrina has two siblings, both from her mother and father. Sabrina's parents separated when she was 3 years of age, and she believes that they were divorced a year after that time. Sabrina has always been in the custody of her father; however, she has lived with several different families, going back and forth between her dad and the families with which she lived.

The four participants come from very different family situations, but they all have one thing in common: their parents are no longer married. Yet with just one common event, they all spoke about similar feelings and experiences. Thanks again to the four young people who shared their world with me. It is in their words that I have discovered a great deal about the world of children who are living with divorce.

Data Collection

As a method of data collection I used indepth interviews with an open-ended question format (see appendix E for the interview guide). Interviewing allows the researcher to gather descriptive data in the participant's own words. To deepen my understanding, I also kept a research journal in which I wrote a personal record of insights, working hunches, ideas, questions, concerns, and decisions made throughout the research process. Finally, I recorded field notes, which are a written record of what I observed and heard before, during, and after the interview (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

The interview format was mostly informal with some semistructured elements. Informal interviews do not involve any specific type or sequence of questions. My primary intention in using an informal interview was to build rapport and to provide an initial set of data which would guide the subsequent interviews. I wanted to base the interviews on the information that I was receiving from the participant, not on my research questions.

I used semistructured questions to gain a deeper understanding of the emerging themes. A semistructured format bases subsequent interviews on previous information. However, I did follow a similar interview pattern with all four participants. The first interviews focused on getting to know the participant. The second

interviews focused on the themes from the first interview, as they related to the past. For example, in the first interview a participant mentioned that his mother had a boyfriend. In the second interview I asked, "What was it like for you when your mom started dating?"

The third interviews focused on the emerging themes as they related to the present and future. For example, a theme for the above participant was his parents' inability to communicate; so, in the third interview I asked, "In the future, what would you like to see differently in how your parents communicate?" Basically, I never asked a question about something that the participant did not already mention or talk about. Following this procedure allowed me to follow the participant and record their story, not the story I was hoping to hear. I did deviate slightly from this interview format with Matt (see appendix F).

I offered an introductory interview to all parents of participants under the age of 18. The purpose of having an initial interview was to inform them of the purpose of the study and to explain the parameters of confidentiality (see appendix D). During the first interview with the participant, I explained the purpose of the study, the meaning of confidentiality, their rights as a participant in my study, and then I commenced the interview process (see appendix E).

The only parent who wanted to meet with me was the mother of Matt. I met with both the mother and the participant together. With both of them present, I explained the purpose of the study and the meaning of confidentiality. I talked a little bit about myself and answered their questions. I then asked the mother to sign the consent form. When I had my first interview with Matt, I reviewed everything we talked about and asked him to sign a consent form. I raised the question at a separate time to ensure that it was he who wanted to be in the study.

The twelve interviews took place at a time and location that was mutually agreed upon by myself and the participant. Once we decided on a location, that location remained constant, but the time varied according to the participant's schedule. Two participants requested that the interviews take place at my counselling office, and the other two participants requested that we talk in their living room at home. Interviews were no longer than one hour in length. To create a more comfortable, relaxed atmosphere, I always provided some refreshments.

I recorded my field notes on coloured index cards. Each participant had a different colour, which corresponded to the colour of paper that I used to print their transcribed interviews. Field notes are a written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences,

and thinks during the time of collecting and reflecting upon data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). These notes became especially important because the tape recorder could not capture the body language, the environment, and the extra remarks made before and after the interview.

There were times when I ran out of tape before the interview was over, but the participant continued to talk. The funniest situation occurred when I met with a participant for an introductory interview. After I explained the study, he talked about his parents' divorce. My mind was racing: first of all, I did not bring any paper and second, I did not want to interrupt him for fear of being perceived as uninterested and impolite. So I listened, then asked him if he could repeat that same story again when I had my tape recorder at hand. We had a good laugh, then I raced home to write down as much as I could remember.

A research journal was difficult to maintain. It just so happened that my best thinking occurred while driving to work, or sitting in a restaurant with friends. There was no way to tell when an idea would pop into my head. As a result, my journal ended up being a box of assorted papers, in which I could find my working hunches, frustrations, titles for new categories, and discussions I had with colleagues.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the qualitative interview data following an emergent design based on the constant comparison method as outlined by Maykut and Morehouse (1994). The emergent design allowed me to develop and refine my collecting and analyzing style as the study progressed.

I fully transcribed onto my computer each interview along with the field notes. Each page of transcribed material was coded to its source, so as to return to the original data set when necessary. Coded, transcribed material was then printed and photocopied onto coloured paper. Each participant had a different colour paper.

Once a complete set of interviews was transcribed and printed onto the coloured paper, I identified chunks or units of meaning in the photocopied data. These units were cut out and coded to their source then taped to index cards. As each new unit of meaning was selected, I compared it to all other units of meaning and subsequently grouped them which allowed for continual refinement of relationships, units of meaning, and patterns among the chunks.

When I was working with my first set of data, I started with a colour coding system. Using coloured markers, I coded the chunks of data to their emerging categories. I found by the second interview that this method was not working because, as I collected more data,

the units of meaning changed, which meant that I had to change the colour code. So instead of using a colour system for the categories, I simply wrote the categories on cards and filed the data under its category.

When I started analyzing my next set of interviews, I encountered a new dilemma. I needed to be able to see clearly which participant belonged to which data. To solve this problem, I decided to print the transcripts onto coloured paper. Each participant had his or her own colour, and whichever colour they had was the colour I also used when I wrote field notes about their interview. The coloured paper also helped me when I needed to go back into the filed cards to retrieve a set of data that, at one time, did not apply to any of the categories.

This process reminds me of sifting sand; the more one sifts, the finer the product becomes. As the categories of data grew, I clustered together several categories to create what I called a possible theme. I would give that theme a proposition rule which indicated what chunks of data could be included in that cluster. For example, the theme titled, "Life with each Parent" had the following propositional rule for inclusion: Children compare their parents according to; the kinds of activities they do with each parent, what the parent's expectations are, and the kind of stuff the parent has in their home. As

propositions were created, I examined them continually for possible connections and patterns.

At this point in the analysis process, the data was falling into place much faster, especially the newly transcribed data. When all the data were organized into themes with proposition statements, I still found myself reorganizing these themes as I explored the relationships or lack there of, between them. To get a better sense of how the themes related to each other, I taped the themes and their chunks of data onto walls which allowed me to sit back and view the themes altogether. I then mapped out on paper possible connections until I found the connections that worked.

Finally, I pulled the themes off the wall one by one. On a regular sized piece of paper, I wrote whatever came to mind. These themes (along with what I wrote) and their data were subsequently filed in my working box, separate from the data that I decided not to use. I used the themes, quotations, and written work from this box to write up my data and outcomes. However, even when writing up the data, I would see a new connection and remember a quotation from the unused theme's files. This was easy to do because all chunks of data had been carefully coded and filed for easy retrieval.

In summary, the constant comparison method as outlined by Maykut and Morehouse (1994) provided me with a

thorough means of collecting and subsequently analyzing the data. The finished report reflects the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of children living in a family with divorced parents. It is the reader who must decide whether the findings of the study apply to other people or settings. It is expected that the reader will reflect on the research report and take from the study whatever applies to them and their world.

Conclusion

This qualitative study was designed to explore and develop a deeper understanding of the way in which children perceive life in a family with divorced parents. Four participants were selected by using purposive sampling. Data were gathered through unstructured interviews and analyzed using the constant comparison method as outlined by Maykut and Morehouse (1994).

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings presented in this chapter focus on the seven major, common themes identified in the data. Each theme describes a component of life in a family with divorced parents from the perspectives of the four participants who I interviewed. The significance and relevance of these themes to children, their families, and the professionals who work with children will be explored in the last chapter.

Two Homes, Two Parents

The four participants had different visiting arrangements and different experiences with the parent who was no longer living in the household. The ways in which the parents acted around their children and the amount of time they gave to their children were both important factors in how these participants adjusted to their new living situation.

The absent parent. Every child needs the chance to maintain a meaningful, healthy relationship with both parents. Unfortunately, divorce often means that the child loses contact with one of her parents. Three of the participants in some way experienced an absent parent, one who is gone often or who is no longer in the child's

everyday life. From the perspectives of these participants, having an absent parent is difficult because children need to feel that both parents are somehow involved in their lives.

Sabrina's mother lived in a different province and basically had no contact with Sabrina, "I can count on one hand how many times I've seen her". Additionally, Sabrina did not have the opportunity to write or to talk on the phone with her mother because of the family's financial situation. Sabrina described not having her mother around as the "worst thing that could have happened" to her and because of her mom's absence, "there's always going to be something missing."

Ashley said that her father was never around when she was younger: "my dad lived in Winnipeg which was far ...I didn't see him very often." Ashley describes feeling as if there was something missing: "I just had the empty feeling, I always missed him." Sabrina and Ashley both had an absent parent at a young age and, as a result, they felt as if something was missing. In this case, the common variable is that the parent was not readily available to the child. Neugebauer (1989) found that children whose visitation arrangements did not meet their needs felt deprived of contact with the non-custodial parent, though increasing visits does not necessarily fill the need (Wallerstein, 1984; Kelly, 1981). David's

experience tells me that the child requires the freedom to fill the need as it arises.

David had an absent parent in the sense that his mother worked a great deal and was not around much when his parents were married: "when we were kids my mom wasn't around all that often." Since David did not see much of his mother, for him it felt as if his father was a single parent: "he was the parent.....she was never around." David reacts differently to the parental absence than do Ashley and Sabrina. David did not talk about having an empty feeling or suggest that he missed out on something in his life.

The difference exists because, even though David's mother was gone physically most of the time, she was living under the same roof, and her presence could be felt. Since David's mom was still living in the house, he had free access to her. He even says that when he had a problem she would be there to help. Hickey and Dalton (1994) write that the most important thing for children is that both parents are available. I define available as meaning freely accessible, at hand when needed. If both parents are perceived as being available, the child will feel supported by both parents because both parents are just as easily accessible.

Matt did not talk about missing a parent or feeling empty, nor did he refer to one parent as never being

around. Matt talked mostly about his day to day life in each of his homes. It was evident that Matt spent an equal amount of time with each parent. When Matt talked about summer break, he said, "this depends on how much time parents get off, but it's probably about even." Even when Matt's parents had a conflict in their parenting schedule, they made sure that Matt still spent equal time with each of them: "If my mom is doing something special on the weekend, they switch weekends so I can have 2 weekends in a row at both my mom's and my dad's." What surprised me most was that Matt goes to his dad's everyday after school: "I go to my dad's until she (his mom) gets off work." When I asked Matt what happens when his dad is out of town, Matt replied, "I still go home and do my homework." Matt's dad doesn't have to be around for Matt to go to the house, because Dad's house is Matt's house. Matt's having equal access to both parents and their houses allows Matt to feel supported by both parents.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) found that children with frequent and free access seemed to feel less hopeless than children with restricted access. The common denominator is "free," because free means that the child has control over the amount of access. During a parental divorce, the child's world is turned upside down and it is the adults who make all the decisions. Allowing the child to have

control over something gives the message that what the child's needs and wants matter, too.

Do I "visit" or do I "stay"? The participants who were in an equal time share arrangement referred to the time spent with each parent as "living with" or "staying at". Matt doesn't "visit" his parents, he "stays" with his parents. Ashley uses similar wording when she talks about her life in the equal time-share arrangement: "I can always go to my mom's house if I don't want to be with my dad, and if I don't want to be at my mom's, I can go to my dad's..."

When Ashley was living full-time with her mother, she called time spent with her father "visiting". The concept of visiting is different from staying at or living with. To visit connotes a sense that the time is brief and concentrated. Visiting means doing special activities and spending special time with each other, whereas "living at" gives the image that you are there, but each person in the home does their own thing, which sounds more natural.

Sabrina's situation is unique; she not only had an absent mother but she often lived apart from her father for varying amounts of time. Sabrina never indicated that she missed her father during these times away from him. She had "visits" with her father during these times and said that the visits helped improve her relationship with him, "it was like so much fun, we would spend time

together, go for walks, go shopping...." Whenever Sabrina talked about her father, she spoke of a dad who was having a difficult time learning how to be a father; the time they did spend together when she lived with him involved cleaning and fixing the yard and house. When Sabrina got to visit her dad, it represented "time spent together doing stuff." Therefore she actually spent more time with her dad when she didn't live with him.

Children need different things from both parents.

When the participants talked about their parents they described each parent differently pointing out that each parent has different interests. Matt describes his father as being "more scientific" and "stricter" than his mother. Matt said that he does different things with both his parents. "I deliver flyers with my mom." "I go to Tae-kwon-do with my father," and each parent celebrates the holidays differently, "For Thanks Giving I go to the lake with my dad, then I come back here and have more pie." "When I'm here for Christmas I get to open my presents Christmas Eve...At my dad's I open them in the morning." Matt talks about the differences in a casual manor as if surprized that I am interested in this part of his life. Matt did not state that he preferred one way of doing things over another, but rather that he enjoyed both.

Ashley noticed that she needs different things from each parent, and she can tell when she has not had enough

time with one parent over the other. Ashley describes this inner knowledge in the terms of feelings: "I feel kinda lost..like an empty feeling..I haven't been with them enough.. I haven't seen her in two weeks.. I'm missing something like maybe that motherly advice."

Ashley also recognizes that it's the things she does with each parent that she is missing: "if I am with my mom and I haven't seen my dad for a while I feel like I'm not active enough...when I am at my dad's I miss doing stuff with my grandparents." David shares a similar viewpoint, he talks about the importance of having both parents, but he generalizes it to children rather than himself. "Instead of thinking of how well could they support the kid without the other person in their life...make sure they (the children) know that they can talk to either one of them about their problems or count on either one of them for support." David and Ashley perceive that balance is important, they recognize that for themselves having free access to both parents is necessary.

Sabrina, having searched for most of her younger years for a mother figure, recognizes all the more the importance of having access to both a mother and father. The solution for Sabrina is for the single parent to play a dual role: "You have to try and expose them to the mother type and the father type..children need the parent to try as much as they can to fill the roles of both..it's

just taking you through anything in life....it's usually not the same person who enjoys all those things." Sabrina talked at length about needing a mother and what she missed out on because her father could not play the mother role.

A significant life event for females is when their bodies begin to change and they begin to menstruate. Sabrina talked about the difficulties during this time of her life. She did not feel comfortable talking to her father about what was happening to her body. Sabrina says, "Going through all the changes of life I wasn't as educated as every other girl. The guidance counsellor at school really helped me. I really missed having a mom." When I asked Sabrina what would be different if she had a mom, Sabrina explained that she, "couldn't talk to her dad about her periods, I was embarrassed and didn't even tell him for two years. I was embarrassed by all the changes that were happening, my dad never talked about the changes so I tried to hide them." Sabrina also said that she could have talked to her mom about dating and boys but not her father. Hearing Sabrina's story helped me understand why it can be so difficult for children who grow-up with one parent. It would be difficult for one parent to expose their child to the culture of both genders.

These participants are saying that children need both their mother and father. Sabrina points out that children

at least need the one parent to play both the mother and father roles. Several researchers do say that a major component in how well children adjust to divorce is tied to parenting. Parenting practices often break down in consistency and effectiveness because the parent does not have the energy to do everything (Emery et al, 1984; Belsky et al, 1984; Hickey & Dalton, 1994; Levin, 1988). While children need both a mother and father figure, it is difficult for one parent to meet all the needs of a child.

Put in the middle. David made an interesting comment when he talked about the importance of communication between divorced parents. He said that if communication is not possible, "it shouldn't be where a kid feels like they are being pushed towards one side." David added that he believes that some children are "brainwashed" by one parent not to like the other parent. David never did say that he was being pushed toward his father, but when David talked about visiting his mother he said, "I can go for months without visiting my mom, it doesn't cross my mind." David attributes this attitude to "feeling uncomfortable about visiting his mother and worrying that he may hurt his father." These feelings of discomfort interfered with both visits and with speaking to his mom on the phone. What David is talking about fits with the definition of parental alienation syndrome (Mitchell, 1985).

There is very little written about "parental alienation syndrome," but the studies that do exist describe it as an intense rejection of one parent by the child after divorce. The children who are likely to be susceptible to alienation present a feeling of responsibility for one parent's emotional survival (Dunne & Hendrick, 1994). The child believes that by rejecting one parent the other parent will feel better. A majority of parents who fall into the behaviors which cause alienation often do not realize that what they are doing is harmful (Dunne & Hendrick, 1994). They believe that the other parent is truly bad and that is why the child does not want to see him/her.

The participants' stories demonstrate that parents play an important role in helping their children adjust to life in a family with divorced parents. These participants needed not only quality time but the assurance that they could contact their parent when they needed to. No one person is the same, as a result each parent is different and can expose their children to different activities and ways of doing things.

Life With Each Parent

The participants' view of their parents affected their need to live or spend more time with one parent over the other. I already described the need of the

participants to form a connection with each parent. If the participant is missing that connection, she or he feels a need to spend more time with that parent. How the participants view their parents either confirms or disconfirms the need to spend more time with one parent over the other.

The need to compare. Ashley compares her parents to confirm why she wants to spend more time with her dad. The expectations that each parent has on her, play an important role in this decision making process:

I like living at my dad's because I can just do whatever and he'll trust me...I don't have to clean as much at my dad's...my mom's always on my case. She's always wanting me to do stuff. I can't just relax.

Along with having more freedom at her dad's, Ashley sees many similarities between herself and her father. She says that they are both active which motivates her to do more physical activities. Finally, Ashley often refers to her father as someone she can talk to, which is important to her.

...my dad can really express his feelings...we're really close, we talk about stuff...mom is harder to talk to.

I can totally more communicate with my dad and I just get along with him really good, we just have this

bond...I feel nervous talking with her, she exaggerates all the time, she's pretty judgmental, I don't seem to know her that well.

This special bond Ashley describes and the fact that Ashley perceives that she has a strong rapport with her father, further confirms for Ashley that she needs to live with her father.

David does not compare his parents to the same extent as does Ashley. One reason for this is that David does not need to justify why he wants to live with one parent over the other. When David's parents separated his mother said, "the children are better off living with their father." David also believes that his mother does not need him in the same way as his father. David says,

...my mom is in another relationship so she doesn't need us.

I would feel guilty (if I did not live with him)... there would be extra guilt on my shoulders cause there would be no one around, things would be less happier (for his father) cause there would be no one around.

Additionally, David does view his relationship with his father to be like a friendship, "he's like a dad and a friend, we have the same sense of humor, we have some of the same interests too." David was not only given permission by his mother to live with his father, but also

has convinced himself that his father needs him and his mother does not.

Sabrina does not compare her parents, which makes sense since she doesn't need to justify why she wants to live with one parent over the other. Her mother remained in Alberta and Sabrina was never given the option of visiting or living with her mother. Sabrina also felt that her mother did not want her. "I think she is totally selfish, she doesn't really care about us anymore and actually she never did." Sabrina knew her mother had an addictions problem, so the thought of living with her mother was not an issue, it was not something that she needed to make a decision about.

When Matt talked about life with both his parents, it sounded as if the two houses were run differently, but Matt says, "I guess it's different, I don't know it's sorta the same." It was evident that even though things were slightly different, Matt did not need to compare the differences to justify why he would live with one parent instead of the other. Matt does different things with both his parents; his dad has a bigger house, is more stricter (he says this with a laugh), and is more scientific. Matt says that the chores are different at both houses; he doesn't always want to do the chores but he does them anyway. The relationship Matt has established with both parents is within a natural setting.

not based simply on fun activities with one parent while the other does the actual caregiving. Matt does not need to decide on who he will live with because he already lives with both his parents and both his parents are easily available to him.

Deciding on who to live with. Ashley did not have much contact with her father when she was young, and at this point in her life, he is the parent with whom she wants to live.

...I didn't think I saw him much so I asked my mom if I could live with him half time, she said that's your choice. I'm thinking of moving in full time...I talked to my dad about it, he says that you're always welcome to live here.

David would rather live with his dad, "if it were my mom who ended up in the house and my dad moved away, I still would have gone with my dad." Yet David did not see much of his mom while growing up.

...he'd take us to our activities, help us with our school work, put a house over our head, help us through problems we have. When it comes to problems my mom was also just as big a part, it's just that my dad was always around.

...my mom was never around, it was like having a single parent.

Since David's mother was not around much, why is it then that David doesn't need to spend more time with her now?

There is a distinct difference between Ashley and David's situation. David's mother was available when he needed her; it is not as if she was living in a different house. David had the opportunity to form an understanding of who his mom is and feel supported by her. Since Ashley barely saw her father, she did not have the opportunity to form her own perception of him. All she had were the stories which her mom told her. Ashley also did not have many chances to confide in her father and discuss problems until recently.

It is not necessarily the quality of time nor the quantity: what appeared to be important for the participants was knowing that they had access to each parent. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) found that children felt helpless and victimized by inflexible visiting schedules. While this did not come out in my study, it is evident that the time spent with each parent plays an important role in how the child perceives each parent and themselves. The perception that the participants had of their relationships with each parent ultimately guided their decision on who they wanted to live with.

Is my Family "Normal": A Definition of Family

The messages the participants received about their family members and how their new family operated, all impacted upon their definition of "family." These messages were largely given by parents but also by the many systems of which the participants were a part. (i.e., school, peers, society and community). The participants' beliefs of whether they were "normal" or "different" depended on their perception of their family in comparison to other families and their definition of what makes a family, "normal".

Where my family ends and begins. The four participants all described their families differently. Family for Ashley and David consisted of two families: a family with a father and a family with a mother. Matt talked about his family as one family living in two houses. When he drew his family, he drew himself, his dad, and his two sisters on one page and his two mothers side by side on the other page. When he described his family in the present, he named all of these people together. Sabrina had a different description of her family; she said, "actually I have 4 families, my foster family, my dad's family, a different foster family, so there is a lot of family."

View of family and self. Each participant defined the way their family looked; three of the participants

referred to the intact family as "normal" and/or "traditional." While referring to their own family system as "divorced." Two of the participants, Ashley and Sabrina, compared their families with friends' families, and other families in the community. Through comparison, the two participants not only developed a negative perception of their family, but of themselves, too.

Ashley calls her family a "divorced family" and calls other families "normal or traditional" families. She defines a traditional family as "normal, happy people who live in the same house." Ashley formulates this definition from observing the families of her friends:

..it was a big change just because it was so different from everybody else's family. My friends all had both parents living together...I was kinda excluded from all my friends...I was different and I just wanted to have the same kind of family as them; they seemed to have such a nice family, but for me it was going back and forth.

Ashley felt left out because she perceived her family as different from the norm. The norm for Ashley represented the majority, and her friends were part of that majority.

Ashley says that she would prefer the "traditional family," but she says that she does not know what it would feel like to have a "normal family with mom, dad, and sisters." Ashley's inability to remember her family

before the divorce leaves her to think that the "traditional family" is somehow better. Her perspective is evident when she says, "...I didn't want the divorce, I wanted a family like everyone else had...I don't remember what my family was like before the divorce...I've always wanted to know how that feeling was..." Not knowing somehow makes it harder because it is difficult to understand something that you've experienced but cannot remember.

Sabrina like Ashley became very observant of other people's families. Sabrina often talked about feeling like an "outcast" and having no friends because she was the only one in her community that had a divorced family:

I would be an outcast. I was the only one with divorced parents so facing that kinda thing in school was tough.

Parents didn't allow them to be friends with people who had divorced parents; they thought that we were not good kids because we didn't have a stable family.

Sabrina perceived that having divorced parents was unacceptable to others where she lived, and as a result she felt unaccepted by them.

Sabrina wanted to feel accepted which is a natural human need. Maslow suggests that everyone has self-esteem needs: the desire to believe that we are worthwhile,

valuable people (cited in Adler & Towne (1993) p.9). To feel worthwhile, Sabrina needed to find someone who also had divorced parents: "I would remember in the yearbook, I would look at every single person and be going no, no, no, no, they all had parents, we were the only ones."

Sabrina believes that, if she could have found one person who had divorced parents, she would not have felt so alone and different.

David referred to intact families as normal only once, and when he did he said, "I miss when the family did things together like the whole family, and we functioned like a normal, quote unquote, family." David is indicating that a "normal" family is defined as a family that exists with both parents living together. David has a valid point; society does tend to label the intact family as "normal." Like many things in life, people differentiate events or other people as either being normal or different. The unfortunate side to this is that the labels created by society ultimately affect an individual's perception of self, if the label is negative the person feels that they have negative qualities.

The view that society has of divorce needs to change so that children don't feel different and alone. I do see that this change is happening slowly from some of the T.V. programs that portray families where the parents are

divorced. Divorce is not going to go away, it has become a fact of life.

Memories, The Need To Know Why

What the participants remembered or had been told about their parents divorce helped them better understand the event. With understanding, they could better accept what had happened, recognize that it was not their fault, and move on. The participants who did not know the reasons why, pieced together memories and stories to create a reason of their own.

Three of the participant's talked about why they thought their parents broke-up. Two of these participants were not quite sure why, but they had put together bits and pieces of what they had heard to formulate a reason. The three participants whose parents divorced when they were young could recall what they saw in their environment but not what was told to them.

Sabrina said that she could not remember what her dad had told her about why her parents broke up, "I don't remember.. that's weird because I remember that my dad told me stuff on the day that it happened, I remember the car ride, and when we got to our apartment in Winnipeg.. we stopped at Dairy Queen." Ashley also does not remember what was told to her when her parents broke-up, but she does remember seeing her parents fight the night it happened: "like when it happened me and my sisters were

peeking. they were fighting, they always fought." Ashley believes that a reason why her parents divorced was because they fought all the time. When I asked if things would have been different if her parents had stayed together, Ashley explained that, "they would have been fighting still so it's better that they are divorced, they always fought, it was annoying."

Matt did not talk about why his parents broke-up, but he did mention that the night his parents split-up "it was in our old house, there was the stairs, the floor and the stairs had a whole pile of stuff piled up there...I remember seeing a teddy bear lamp." Matt, Sabrina, and Ashley grew-up not knowing why their parents divorced. For David it was different, his parents separated when he was an adolescent, so he could understand cognitively and formulate what a separation meant for him and his siblings. As a result, he can "recall clearly what each parent said to him about why they broke-up."

David, unlike the other three participants, had many memories of his family before the parental separation. His parents didn't fight but appeared to get along fine. David would recall the past to try to determine what went wrong for his parents. David said that it was in "hindsight" that he recognized that his parents didn't really talk much in the last two years. "I noticed that when I was younger everyone would wake-up and they would

talk about their days at work, as time went on that kinda stopped." Recalling the past helps David understand what his parents could have done differently.

Knowing why is helpful. Sabrina and David both say that knowing why is helpful. For David, knowing why opened the doors to communication: "you can make sense of why, and I feel that I can go talk about it." David also felt that "getting as much out in the open as possible helps put things into perspective much faster." Sabrina never could not remember what she was told about why her dad left, she had a "vague idea, but it was never elaborated." Sabrina said that not knowing why caused her to feel bad: "I felt guilty, I felt embarrassed by it and I felt ashamed." She added that, when you don't know why, "you just keep thinking worse and worse," but when you know why "it just helps you to let go of it, you have an answer, it helps you deal with it."

David felt that it was important for parents to tell their children about the divorce at the same time. He felt that it would prevent the children from feeling confused by hearing two stories. David's parents spoke to him separately and, as a result he heard the same story from two different perspectives; he said that it was difficult. Similarly, Ashley heard a different story from both parents, and as a result, Ashley processed what she was told and decided on what she thought was the truth.

Unlike Ashley, Sabrina did not have a parent who talked to her about what happened. Sabrina says that it would have helped if her dad could have shared something:

My dad would never share whether they be good moments or bad moments, he'd never bring it up.

Just things that would help us understand, like we didn't know why they got married, how they met or anything.

Wallerstein & Kelly (1980) found that the majority of children in their study were not given an explanation or an assurance of continued care. The parents difficulty in telling their children about their decision involved not knowing how much, when, or where to tell them. Since I did not interview the participants' parents, I do not know if they had any difficulty with talking about why. What does stand out is that these participants needed to know why and they believed that knowing why helps children move on.

The need to know why is strong for these participants. They asked questions and looked into the past to validate what they have been told by their parents and develop understanding of why their parents divorced. According to these participants parents can help their children adjust by keeping things in the open and encouraging conversation about the past.

Individual Roles in a Family

The participants in this study established different roles within their families. People play different roles depending on where they are and who they are with (Adler and Towne, 1993): at work he is a ruthless lawyer, at home he is a caring father. The roles adopted by the participants depended on how they perceived: their parents, themselves, and themselves in comparison to others.

Sabrina: the unlovable one. Sabrina's parents divorced when she was young, and her life after this event was filled with many transitions and perceived rejections. Sabrina spoke often about the times from her past when she felt that no one liked or loved her. When talking about her parents she gives the perception that her father loved her but her mother did not. The main reason for feeling unloved was the fact that her mother was not there for Sabrina and her mother could not change, she could not stop drinking.

Sabrina said that her dad was never around and that she did not feel very supported by him; however she does view him in a positive light and identifies positively with him.

...I love him for who he's become, he has improved so much, I think us leaving was a good thing cause for that he improved himself, my step mom is super

nice. He's really into the arts so I get my music from him and my talents too.

Sabrina perceives that her father changed because of losing the children, for Sabrina this validates that he loves her. Sabrina does not feel the same way about her mother. Sabrina's mother was not able to change, and for Sabrina this means that her mother did not care about her. When Sabrina talks about her mother, tears begin to form in her eyes.

She's very selfish, her disease has taken over...she doesn't really care about us anymore but actually never did...I'm mad at her deep down, I'm not mad at my dad anymore, I've come to terms about him, but my mom I still have a grudge with her...I love my mom because she's my mom.

Sabrina loves her mother even though she believes that her mother wants nothing to do with her. The love Sabrina has for her mother sounds like the universal love a child has for her parent.

For Sabrina, divorce meant not having the love that others had: "...I also realized that I didn't have in my life what other people did, my mom and that, I didn't have a relationship with my grandparents, I just felt really unloved." I asked her how she knew that others received more love than her, and she said:

I don't know they'd just have more stuff than us. around Christmas they'd always have more...it was also a reputation thing, at school everybody had more than us, not many people wanted to be friends with us. like their parents didn't allow them to be friends with people who have divorced parents. They thought that we were not good kids because we didn't have a stable family, money and stuff.

Sabrina has developed the perception that it is only acceptable by the community if you have a family with both a mother and a father. The perception that others did not like her because of her family situation confirms her role of being unloveable.

Sabrina lived with three different families, two of which were foster families. Family is very important to a growing child, and it is taken for granted easily by those who have never been without one. Sabrina says with a sheepish look that she chose to live in foster care. She says that she was selfish for wanting to live in a family, and in her selfishness ended up in a "bad" foster family. As Sabrina talks about her first foster home, it becomes painfully apparent that her perception of herself was negatively affected by her experience in this family:

I was treated like dirt, I literally had to do everything, I babysat....every single day...do all the clean-up, all the cooking, everything...I was

really disturbed there too, I wasn't good in school and I almost failed a class and I didn't go to school.

What struck me was that, earlier on, Sabrina had said more than once that she was very good in school: "I was blessed with the academics...I like school I really enjoy going to school." Sabrina not feeling good about her scholastic achievement had more to do with how she felt about herself than on her ability to do well in school.

When talking about this foster family, Sabrina mentions that they did not have a good reputation in the town, "the yucky family, they didn't have a good reputation in the town cause people knew that they were in space." Through-out the three interviews Sabrina often talked about having a bad or good reputation. Sabrina perceived that if the town felt that her family had a bad reputation, then she too had a bad reputation.

Sabrina then moved into a second foster home, she refers to this family as the "good family." Sabrina says that when she moved into the "good" foster home her reputation changed from bad to good:

Oh it was perfect, within 2 weeks I had a job, a boyfriend, I got my license, I just kept getting happier and happier. I didn't miss one day of school...my report card grades were going up,

teachers were saying great attitude... my reputation in town sky rocketed.

What an incredible change, and much of it had to do with the way Sabrina now perceived her situation and therefore herself. She felt that others believed she was "good" and therefore she felt good. For Sabrina, a "good" reputation was important; she wanted to belong, to fit in. After speaking at great length about this family, she smiled and said that she was "so thankful for the opportunity to have lived with a good family."

David: taking care of Dad. David's perception of his father's loneliness causes David to worry about his father, and this concern is a strong theme throughout all three interviews. David believes that his father is "unhappy and lonely." David perceives that his "dad changed after his mother left," and therefore it is his mother's fault that his dad is so unhappy. Since it is his mother's fault and his father was the main caregiver, David feels that he cannot talk about his mother with his father. David is so uncomfortable about the situation that he cannot even tell his father when he is going to visit his mother: "I couldn't tell dad outright that I was going to go to mom's." David does not see or talk to his mom regularly partly because of the overall perception that his dad is uncomfortable hearing about his mother.

I asked David if things would be different if he lived on his own, but David could not even imagine such a situation; his reply was, "I think I would really want to live with my dad, I think I would feel guilty." Some of David's worries are also built upon the knowledge that he and his siblings "are his dad's only family." His mother has a boyfriend so she has someone, whereas his father has no one but his children.

Towards the end of the three interviews, David came to an interesting conclusion: "I'd like to see them get things worked out...so that I don't feel quite so uncomfortable doing stuff with my mom." When I think of conflict, I envision two people yelling and saying terrible things about each other to the children. David's situation demonstrates that there can be silent conflict. Children can be put just as easily into the middle when parents are choosing not to talk about their difficulties.

Speaking to David reveals that just because a child is older does not mean that the event of a parental divorce is easier to cope with. Even an older teen or young adult can be put in the middle, feel a confusing sense of loss and a sense of responsibility for a parent's well-being.

Ashley: keeping the peace. Ashley talks a lot about the fighting that occurred between her parents and between her mother and older sister.

That's their biggest problem, that they (mom and dad) fought so much, they both had different rules, different ways of doing stuff.

...when it happened, me and my sister were peeking in the other room, they were fighting, they always fought, like a lot...

My sister and my mom always fought. I think cause she was rebelling.

Ashley having seen a lot of fighting in her family takes on the role of trying to keep the peace. "I always tried to make peace...I don't like fights cause I don't fight with my friends. I always try to stay on the good side of people." Ashley wanting to keep the peace does not tell her mother that she wants to move in full time with her father. Ashley believes that if she tells her mother that she wants to live with her father, her mom will react with disappointment and sadness:

I'm thinking of moving in full time...I still have to talk to my mom about it, I think she'll be disappointed and sad....I think she kinda gives me a guilt trip...It's the way she pouts about it.

Ashley's perception of her mother combined with the role that Ashley has taken prevents her from speaking to her mother about living with her father.

Matt: No need to compare. Matt perceives that his parents are friends: "like they are still friends, they

are not sworn enemies ... that's cool." Since his parents are still friends, Matt does not feel the need to take a side or to be responsible for a parent's well being. Matt goes with what ever happens in life; he sees that he has a different role in each home, and he fills the role without complaint: "At my dad's I usually clean my room, I have my own VCR and TV... I don't do as many cartoons at my dad's, I do most my cartoons here...I have all my clothes here (at his mom's)." Matt talks about the different chores he has at both homes and about his role as a big brother which involves babysitting his two sisters.

My father is more like a friend. The parent who is given less blame for the divorce happens to be the parent to whom the participants describe feeling closest to. Ashley often refers to her dad as someone she can talk to, and she says that they have a special bond. That Ashley perceives her dad in this way supports why she needs to defend her father in her mind. He is not as bad as her mom made him out to be, and he is maturing and more responsible:

..he's irresponsible, well like he's responsible, but he's really a kid at heart, but more and more he's maturing..

..we're really good friends, it's not like a father daughter relationship, my dad can really express his feelings..

We're really close, he's really nice, we talk about stuff..

I just get along with him really good, we just have this bond...

Ashley talks often about this special bond which tells me that she views her relationship with her dad as very important. Ashley sees herself in her dad, similarly to David who also talks about his ability to talk and to do fun things with his father.

David refers to his dad as a friend. "He's really involved, he's really interested in us, he's like a dad and a friend..we have the same sense of humor, we have some of the same interests too, in that respect he's kinda like a friend..he'll talk to us about things and vice versa.." David and Ashley both view their fathers in a similar manor. The perception these two participants have of their fathers guides their choices in regard to whom they want to spend more time with and who they place more blame on.

Each participant's role, healthy or unhealthy, was different and seemed to serve a purpose. David took care of his father because he needed to know that his father was going to be happy, was going to feel wanted. Ashley

became the peace keeper because she needed to find ways of solving her problems without fighting like her parents. Sabrina wanted a family, being the unlovable one, helped her continue to search for a family that would not abandon her. Finally, Matt did not fall into one specific role, instead he filled the many roles that were assigned to him.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Parental Divorce

The ability to see and search out the positives is one factor in how well these four participants adjusted to life in a family with divorced parents. These participants were able to balance the positives with the negatives, and recognize what is changeable and what is not.

Finding balance: Accepting the good with the bad.

Matt made an interesting point when he said, "there are good and bad things about both houses." Matt talked a lot about the differences between his two homes. He never said that he felt negatively about the differences, but more that he came to accept the differences and to live with them.

Matt describes the positive things that have happened for him:

get more brothers or sisters.. bigger house with more stuff.. living near people you know.. living

close to both parents.. not having to change schools.. two different sets of rules and chores, like you may get to stay up later at one house, if your parents were together you probably wouldn't be allowed to ... more presents at Christmas time and at birthdays.

Matt also describes what he thinks are the negative things about having divorced parents:

if a parent gets remarried that means there is no way for your parents to get married again.. you can't just go see them when you want.. moving a lot is hard.. having two different sets of rules and chores.. confusing cause people ask where you live and it's like here and here.. bringing stuff back and forth.

A few of the things from the two lists overlap, which shows that it is possible to see both the positive or the negative side of a situation.

Ashley explained that when she was younger she would often think about what she liked and disliked about her family situation. She says it was a way to "console" herself and feel better about her situation. When Ashley looks back into her past, the disadvantages that she talks about are related to her feeling different and alone. Ashley did not like having to pack her clothes on the weekends; she said that she felt like she didn't have a

home, but that she was always visiting. She said that her friends never knew where she was living, and this was annoying. Ashley talks about feeling different because she was the only kid whose parents were divorced.

The advantages for Ashley are in what she has gained by being able to spend individual time with each parent. She says that she knows both her parents better, and she knows them in a "different way." She doesn't get tired of her parents because she does different things with each of them, and she has the freedom to visit or call whenever she wants. Ashley recognizes that she gets two of everything: "I get twice the bunnies" on Easter. Finally, she thinks that if her parents lived together, the chances are that her father would follow her mother's rules and life would be stricter.

I am who I am because of what I lived. Sabrina indicates that the toughest thing about the divorce was losing her mom and feeling unaccepted during her elementary school years. Even though Sabrina had a difficult time during her early years, she talks more about the positive things that grew from her parents' divorce: "If I could deal with them getting a divorce, I can deal with any kinda thing...I've learned a lot more than a person whose never known what a problem is.. I learned that it is okay to say good-bye, I also learned that there can be problems, life isn't perfect." Sabrina

believes that her parents' divorce gave her the life she had, and her life made her who she is today. She says that she likes who she is and would not want to change.

I'm the only one. Ashley and Sabrina both talked about feeling out of place during their elementary school years. They both felt that they were the only children with divorced parents, which according to many researchers is normal for children in this stage of development. Children aged 6 to 12 commonly feel ashamed of their parents' break-up and have difficulty explaining it to others. As a result, children during this time feel unsettled and confused about what is really happening (Dalton & Hickey, 1994). The probability exists that Sabrina and Ashley were the only children in their town with divorced parents. The fact of the matter is, it is the child's perception that shapes how she feels about herself. There are not too many children who want to stand out or be perceived as different.

Accepting life how it is. David did not describe things as either negative or positive. When I asked him if anything positive came out of his parents' divorce he said, "she is in a good mood all the time...generally speaking my family me, my brother, my sister and my dad are a lot closer together. Those are basically the positives that I see." David did talk very much about feeling worried about his dad and feeling uncomfortable

talking to his dad about his mom or even being in the same room with the two of them at the same time. However, he did not describe these situations as having negative outcomes; it seemed as if he had accepted life the way it was.

Accepting the negatives while searching out the positives helped these participants adjust and cope with their parent's separation and divorce. Additionally, by looking on the bright side of life these participants were able to accept their parents' divorce and move on.

Coping Styles

It is not the actual divorce that is most difficult, but the day to day life after the parents have split-up that is most strenuous and which takes time to adjust to. How well these participants adjusted to their new family situation depended largely on their coping skills and on the amount of support they received.

David describes his parents' divorce as a major event in his life, an event that created significant changes for him and his family: "When parents split-up, you start to worry about them more, well when anything major happens, you start thinking about it a lot...when something major like that happens, every day after effects your life." David has a good point; parental divorce is not something that children deal with in a prescribed amount of time. A

parental break-up impacts upon the child's every day life into the future.

Finding support. The amount of support directly affects how well the child copes because support opens the doors to communication. When the child is given the freedom to talk, he no longer feels so alone. David believed that children without siblings particularly needed support: "Especially single kids cause you got to have somebody, like they don't want to feel alienated and think they are the only ones." Unfortunately, it is difficult to pick out which children need added support and which ones do not.

There are children who cope by withdrawing and other children who some how find outward ways to cope by seeking support (Emery, 1982; Hetherington, 1979; Neugebauer, 1989). Children who are able to find support feel better about themselves and about their family situation. Interestingly, I found that Ashley, David, and Sabrina had four things in common: they all like to talk; they believe that communication is important; they appeared to be active both individually and socially, and, at some point, they said that seeking support is helpful.

Matt did not fall into the same categories, he was not extremely talkative during the interview process and did not talk at all about having friends or being involved in extracurricular activities. Matt mostly enjoyed doing

solitary activities: Tae-kwon-do, delivering flyers, drawing, and playing the clarinet. On the surface Matt appeared to be coping well with his parents' divorce. Unfortunately the data I collected from Matt did not indicate how he copes or whether he has received some support from family and friends.

Where support was found. Ashley mostly spoke to her mother when she was younger, as she grew older this transferred to her father, who she described as very supportive and a good listener. David had both friends and family to talk with: "my sister and I talked a lot, and my girlfriend. I had many outlets." Sabrina says that there was no one to talk to, but that did not stop her from finding a way to express her feelings: "I didn't really talk to people about it ..I wouldn't realize it but I would express what I was feeling on assignments." Sabrina believes that a counselor could have helped her deal with her emotions and answer some of her questions. David and Sabrina both felt that it would be more helpful talking with someone who had or was experiencing a parental divorce. David said that this approach would be "more interactive as opposed to someone who listened but could not fully understand."

Additionally, I noticed that the three participants were the types of people who searched for answers; as Sabrina said, "knowledge is power." For these three

participants, the quest to find people to talk to helped them understand and better cope with everyday life.

Sabrina attributes this to her curiosity: "I'm the curious one. Okay, I'm going to try and make this better how do I do this better. I'd ask the questions." David needed answers from his mother, so he asked the questions and from there was able to better understand why she left and from there begin to build a new relationship with her.

Difficulties coping, choosing not to seek support.

These three participants each had a sibling who had a difficult time dealing with life after their parents' divorce. These siblings were described as having difficulties with communication and in reaching out for support from inside and/or outside the family.

Ashley described her sister as having many problems: she watched her sister and decided that she didn't want to be like that: "She reacted by being a rebel, she was very different, I don't know if insecure is the word, but she was very angry and she took it out on everybody." Sabrina watched her brother go through much of the same: "Instead of looking for a mom he shut himself down, he just hated the world," "he was more of an angry person...he seemed distant..he didn't want any help." Sabrina recalls trying to talk with her brother about things only to be turned away.

David noticed that his brother dealt with things by not talking: "For the longest time my brother wouldn't talk to my mom. He wouldn't talk to my mom for about a year." David thinks that the reason why his brother did not easily cope was "because he didn't have anyone to talk to...he didn't really have any friends that he could talk to."

David's brother was the youngest in the family. Therefore, he would have watched how David and his sister coped. Additionally, David made the effort to talk to his brother and take him to visit their mother. Even though his brother did not reach out for support, at least he was surrounded by people who would listen when he was ready to talk. whereas the other participants' siblings were older and did not have a role model from which to learn coping skills from.

From the participant's stories and the suggestions they gave, it appears that expressing feelings is helpful. Also, knowing as much as possible and talking with other children that are living in a family with divorced parents is crucial to a child's feelings of self-worth and acceptance. Children who do not talk about their situation, who appear to be holding in their feelings, and who do not have many friends are at a greater risk of having a difficult time adjusting to their new life (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1984; Troyer, 1979; Kurtz 1995).

The stories told by the four participants outline seven issues that children encounter when their lives have been changed by divorce. The seven themes were also found in previous research demonstrating that while divorce is experienced from different perspectives, it is an event that contains common difficulties for many children. In the following chapter, the outcomes and the implications of the findings will be presented.

CHAPTER 5

OUTCOMES AND IMPLICATIONS

The outcomes and implications are discussed in this chapter, focusing specifically on what children need to adapt successfully to life with divorced parents. The findings will be discussed in relation to prior research, literature, and implications for education, counselling, and future research.

Divorce is Divorce

Children experience life in a family with divorced parents in the same way whether they are living with their mother or their father. No matter what the living arrangement, divorce is divorce. I interviewed 4 very different young people from 4 very different family situations, yet each participant described his or her experience of divorce using similar terms and themes. When comparing my study to previous research, I found that other studies also found similar themes among their participants, which tells me that there are typical day to day events that are common for children living in a family with divorced parents.

Adapting To Life with Divorced Parents

Much of the literature and the results from this study suggest that adapting to life with divorced parents is a process that occurs over time. The process involves adjusting to new roles within the family, creating a new definition of family, reestablishing a self-identity as a child of divorced parents, and trying to figure out why. Additionally, as a child grows and develops, she changes, her needs change, and her understanding of the divorce changes. Divorce doesn't just happen, then goes away. Children deal with divorce on a daily basis right into the future, from answering their friends' questions to remembering to tell people which house they will be at.

For Matt, it means continuously adapting to one family that lives in two separate homes. For Ashley, it means finding the right time to tell her mother that she wants to live with her father. For David, it means worrying about his father and trying to figure out a way to deal with being uncomfortable around both parents. For Sabrina, it means never knowing her mother and trying to find a place in her stepfamily. These are the things about living with divorce that the participants are struggling with today; by next year it could be something totally different.

In the literature review, I stated that if adapting to divorce is a process occurring over time, one would

think that time would bring understanding and adjustment. I did not take into account that divorce is the child's life, and life brings with it new challenges everyday. With that in mind, divorce is not a black and white event; it contains a variety of different factors for each family that experiences it.

Dealing with the Losses

For children the losses associated with parental divorce and death are similar. In both events, children are dealing with the break-up of the family home and the necessary adjustments that the family must make to accommodate changes in family structure and role allocations (Worden, 1996). For a child to make this type of an adjustment, she needs to grieve her past situation and perception of the future (Hickey & Dalton, 1994; Worden, 1996). To fully grieve is difficult for children of divorced parents. A significant difference exists, because death as a permanent loss, helps the child and family get on with the task of rebuilding the family unit, whereas in divorce, hopes of reuniting the family may keep the reality of the loss at a distance (Worden, 1996).

As each participant in this study as well as in several other children from previous studies indicate, children of divorce keep a silent wish that their parents will remarry (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Troyer, 1979).

Holding onto this wish prevents them from fully letting go and moving on. The research on divorce states that children wish for their parents to reunite so that they can be a family again (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1984; Troyer, 1979). Interviews with the children in Oppawsky's (1989) study uncovered that the major reason for this wish was the fear that they were unlovable. The participants in my study also described wanting their parents back for similar reasons, but the main reason was because they perceived the intact family as normal and the divorced family as abnormal. This tells me that children are receiving a message that divorce in a family is unnatural.

Societies Perception of Divorce

I am not what I think I am.

I am not what you think I am.

I am what I think you think I am.

Aaron Bleiberg & Harry Leubling

(cited in Adler & Towne, 1993, p.50)

As children define who they are in their new life, they also try to figure out what kind of a family they have. As previously discovered in the data findings, how a child defines the meaning of family impacts upon their perception of self as normal or strange. Children of divorce, more so than not, perceive themselves as different (Troyer, 1979). Yet, according to Statistics

Canada (1991), the divorce rate since 1970 has tripled in Canada with 30% of these families involving children (cited in Kurtz, 1995). So the fact of the matter is, children living with divorced parents are statistically more normal than not. Unfortunately, more normal is not how children of divorced parents perceive themselves.

The different environmental systems that people come into contact with such as school, church, extended family, community, friends, and the media transmit information about family and the meaning of divorce. These messages shape the child's perception of self and family. As in Sabrina's and Ashley's cases, their community gave the impression that they did not approve of divorce, and as a result, these two girls viewed their family situation as abnormal.

If children feel that their parents' divorce is unacceptable, they will have a difficult time talking about it and learning how to adapt to it. It would be helpful if society, as one of the environmental systems, talked more openly about divorce and offered more support services for parents and children. In Winnipeg, there is very little that is offered to families experiencing divorce, but in Alberta, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, and Ontario, this is not the case. All parents who are seeking a divorce are required to attend a mandatory six-

hour course called Parenting After Separation (Driedger, 1998).

Some movement to help divorcing families is beginning to occur, although it will probably take more than a six hour parenting course to help families adapt to their new life situation. Wallerstein and Kelly (1984) identified that there was an absence of resources and guidance for divorcing parents. Their study suggested that parents receive counselling and proper support in preparation for the many changes brought on by divorce. While I believe that this is very true for today's divorcing parents, I wonder how many more parents would seek the help if it were more easily attainable.

Resilience

Resilience is a person's ability to cope positively with and survive stressful life events. Literature and previous research written on children's ability to adjust to divorce all agrees that divorce is a stressful event for children. However, there is little mention of which coping strategies work for children during this time. Studies that do write about coping skills do not focus on how to help children develop positive coping skills, but rather on the negative behaviors which are seen as a result of parental divorce.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) attributed positive adjustment to being socially mature, self-confident, being able to seek support from friends and teachers, having a healthy relationship with at least one parent, and understanding why the divorce took place. Troyer (1979) concluded that self-reliance was the main factor associated with a positive outcome for children of divorced parents. Kurtz (1995) identified the ability to seek social support and engage in problem solving as important characteristics toward positive adjustment. For the participants in this study, the following factors were identified as helpful when adapting to life with divorced parents: knowing why the divorce happened, receiving support, having equal access to both parents, having the ability to negotiate with self and see the positive aspects of divorce, and feeling accepted by others at school and in the community.

Werner and Smith (1982) found in their study that certain temperaments play a role in developing a child's resilience. Resilient children tend to have positive social and emotional skills. Non-resilient children tend to withdrawal and have low social and emotional skills (cited in Zeitlin & Williamson, 1994). Research on resilience emphasizes several personal characteristics that help a person cope with life's misfortunes: faith in the future or a higher power, human support, ability to

set goals, belief in oneself, ability to recognize personal strengths, and the development of strong coping skills (Blum, 1998, p.36). Coping skills are the types of behavioral patterns that a person draws on to manage stressful situations. Children with positive coping skills have the following behavior traits: flexibility, independent problem solving, expression of emotion, generalization of learning, self initiation, and the ability to seek human support (Zeitlin & Williamson, 1994, p.62 & 177).

"All people have the capacity for resilience. We just have to learn to draw it out and to support them" (Grotberg cited in Blum, 1998, p.38). It is helpful to know that resilience can be taught. It is also evident in the divorce research that children who adjust well exhibit several of the behaviors described above. The children at most risk of maladjustment to divorce are those who withdraw and have few social supports. Therefore, it is important to identify the children who appear non-resilient and to help them by providing support and by teaching them positive coping skills through peer support groups and/or individual counselling. This information would also be helpful for parents so that they can find ways at home to help their children develop resiliency.

Feeling Supported by Both Parents

If anything, this study validated for me the importance of parents in the lives of their children. Children need support, especially from their parents. They need to hear why the divorce happened and what the future will look like. Children need to hear that it is alright to love both parents. Most importantly, children need to perceive that both parents have a genuine interest in who they are and what they do.

Every child deserves the opportunity to have a meaningful, healthy relationship with both parents. "Both relationships are part of the child's identity, and to disrupt the bond between a child and either mother or father is traumatic" (Hickey & Dalton, 1994, p.51). In this study, it became evident that children need both a mother and father figure, and that the two roles and individual persons are different. This recognition allows the child to develop all needed areas of self, view life from different perspectives, and learn that it is alright to be different.

Two participants in this study said that the main caregiver needs to try to be both the mother and father figure. David's father played both roles even while his parents were married. Sabrina said that she would have liked it if her dad could have been both a mother and father. While I believe that it may be possible for one

parent to play both roles of mother and father. I question how successful a parent could be at it. My reasoning behind this is that one human is not both male and female. There are simply some things that one sex cannot fully understand about the opposite sex. Sabrina experienced this reality as she struggled to find a female role model, someone who could show her what being a female was all about.

What became most apparent in my study was the need for balance. Balance is not necessarily equal time; it is the child being permitted to spend the kind of time that she needs with each parent. The time needed may change as the child grows and develops. What is important is that the child feels fully-supported by both parents and knows that she can go to either parent with her problems or questions. This will require parents not only to put the child's needs first but also to trust that the child is able to identify what she needs. It would also require the parents to understand their own behaviors and how those behaviors can cause brainwashing, parent alienation syndrome, and loyalty conflicts.

At this time, there is not enough data in my findings or in previous research to establish the right time when parents can begin to give the child more freedom in choosing her visiting schedule. I would say that parents need to consider child development and truly listen to the

needs of their child when determining the type of living schedule the child needs. As Sabrina said, "knowledge is power" the more informed parents are, the better able they will be to make decisions in the best interest of the child.

Help Is on The Way?

A majority of the research concluded that children need support from people outside their family (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1984; Troyer, 1979; Malkin, 1986; Neugebauer, 1989). The participants in my study also indicated that support was necessary and helpful, and the one participant who did not receive support said that she would have felt better about her family situation if she had had someone to speak with. The ideal place for children to receive support is within the family. Though as some of the participants in my study stated, support is often not available because sometimes parents and siblings are not prepared to talk about the past. Most of the literature asserts that parents are often so engrossed in their own pain and suffering that they cannot be there for their children (Emery, Hetherington, Dilalla, 1984; Hickey & Dalton, 1994; Levin, 1988; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Fortunately, the key factor is having someone who will listen and be able to respond to the child's worries, fears, and pain.

Considering that much of the divorce research on children was conducted in the late 70's and early 80's, I am surprised that there are not more resources and support systems for divorcing parents and their children. This study and previous research demonstrates that adapting to life with divorced parents is difficult. The process of adapting involves an array of tasks from letting go of the past and once-perceived hopes and dreams to starting up a new home and organizing new living arrangements for the children. The many tasks are stressful and difficult to accomplish because many parents do not have their own personal histories to draw from. As a result, parents make long-range decisions based on emotion rather than on planned thinking.

The help that is presently available. In Winnipeg, there is Family Conciliation which offers divorce mediation and an information seminar for parents, "For The Sake of The Children." Schools with counselors are doing their best by providing groups for children. There is also a support group for divorced adults called New Beginnings, which also runs a parallel support group for teenagers. While these services exist, few people know about them. Another road block to receiving counselling is the cost, because when parents are divorcing, their money situation is often very shaky. In Winnipeg, there are few organizations that offer affordable counselling, and the

places that do often have waiting lists ranging in length from 6 months to one year.

In Ottawa, Rainbows, a program for elementary school children, was offered in 1987. Now, Rainbows as well as the adolescent and adult versions are offered in more than 870 schools, churches, and community centers across Canada (Jenish, 1998). It is a relief to see that adult versions are being offered because I think that adults are often the forgotten "children" of divorce. In my study, Matt was an adult and was coping with feeling worried about and responsible for his father. Just because someone is an older teen or an adult does not make parental divorce any easier.

The Rainbows program was found to be very successfully in helping children recognize that they are not the only ones with divorced parents. However, Wallerstein says that while children need the connection with other peers, they often also need individual therapy (Jenish, 1998). Unfortunately, the program is not advertised so again a person has to know someone who knows about the program if they are interested in it. Since most children in Winnipeg attend either public or private schools, the ideal place to inform parents of such programs could be through the monthly school newsletter. The chances of such programs developing and growing depends on the amount of interest in this type of service.

However, if no one knows of the services, it appears to the service provider that no one is interested.

Limitations of the Study

The greatest strength of qualitative research is the attainment of a deeper understanding of the way that people experience life. It is the belief that each person is a unique individual whose behavior cannot be predetermined or categorized into predictable units that makes qualitative research meaningful for those who read and learn from it. The worth of a qualitative study is the degree to which it generates theory, description, or understanding (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In this study, the primary method of collecting data was through unstructured interviews, and this is where both the limitations and the strengths of the study design can be found.

The subject of parental divorce is difficult to talk about, and for this reason participants in the study may not have discussed all aspects of their experience. Possible reasons could be the fear that their parents will read the study and identify what they said, or that some things are very emotionally difficult to talk about and as a result are avoided during the interview process. I was aware of these factors and structured the interviews in such a way that would build rapport and trust. I was also receptive to the participants' body language to ensure

that sensitive information could be comfortably discussed. However, I will never know if a participant avoided a subject or embellished the truth.

A related reality is my time line and the number of interviews I had with each participant. There is a fine line when conducting qualitative interviews in that the interviewer does not want it to become therapeutic. I wanted to set up enough rapport so that the participant could comfortably share their experience, but not a deep rapport which would create a therapeutic relationship for the participant. To prevent this, I decided to interview each participant three times. I found that the three interviews worked well, and by the third interview, many of the same themes were being repeated. However, I would have liked to have interviewed more participants. A larger sample would have enabled me to better conceal the participants' identities and possibly discover additional themes and outcomes.

Reflecting on the fact that I interviewed four participants, and that it is possible that they did not talk about their complete experience with divorce, can I say that the findings from this study are generalizable, and if so who are they generalizable to? Considering the scope of this study, I believe that the findings accurately reflect each participant's experience with divorce. It is up to the reader to decide how the results

apply to them and their world. I cannot say that all children experience divorce within the same context as this study. However, I can say that parental divorce is difficult for children and that from this study and previous research, it is evident that divorce permanently changes a family's life; it is these changes that children try to adapt to and cope with.

Implications for Counselling and Education

The results of this study indicate that adapting to life with divorced parents is difficult and requires adjustment to different rules, roles, and routines. It is clearly evident that children need support during and throughout this process. However, the needed supports are not readily available or easily attainable. Teachers and school counselors are in a position in which they can help children adapt to a family with divorced parents. These two professions can help by advocating that support programs be offered in schools or in the community. Since teachers are with students the majority of the day, they can help identify which students are in need of individual or group support. Counselors can facilitate support groups for children and pass on needed information on resources, support, and guidance for the parents.

Schools can also help by changing the perception children have of being the only child with divorced

parents. All grade levels teach family life, and this subject is the perfect place to teach children about family. Teachers can talk to the class about divorce and let children know that there are many children living in families with divorced parents. Divorce needs to be normalized for children so that it does not carry the stigma of shame that it apparently does. "Making connections with other children is terribly important for these youngsters because half the class can be divorced and every child feels, Why me?" (Wallerstein, cited in Jenish, 1998).

An implication for therapists working with children is the reality that often parents need help in understanding the way that their children perceive the divorce. Parents may need help in exploring different parenting techniques and in finding innovative ways of communicating with each other so that they do not put the children in the middle. Parents may need some guidance in finding resources and support services for themselves, and therapists need to be knowledgeable about the services that are offered so that parents can make use of them.

An additional implication is that children may need counselling support through-out their life span. Parents may remarry, have more children, or combine two families into one. Children also encounter new difficulties with their parents' divorce when a new stage of development

occurs. As children grow older their cognitive understanding of what happened between their parents develops. A deeper understanding can bring on additional grieving and the need to ask more questions. It would be helpful to inform parents that this is normal and that additional counselling can help.

Implications for Future Research

A number of research recommendations arise from this study. Given that there is no research on children living in joint custody with equal time-share arrangements, longitudinal research in this area is recommended. This research is crucial given that joint custody is still considered a new living arrangement for children of divorce, so there is little known about whether it is beneficial for children. The other living arrangement which is rarely seen is children in the custody of their fathers. Research in this area will demonstrate the importance of fathers in the lives of their children. It may also dispel any myths about fathers not having the ability to provide adequate nurturing and care for their children. Granted, research may uncover the opposite, that fathers are not capable of taking care of children, but whichever the case, research is needed so that parents and professionals can make more-informed decisions.

A third area of research is in the area of resilience and the role it plays in how well children adjust to life with divorced parents. It would be beneficial to explore in greater depth which coping skills most help children cope with the many changes and stresses involved with parental divorce, along with understanding how children acquire these coping skills and how these skills can be best taught.

A final area of needed research is on the effectiveness of individual and group therapy for children and parents of divorce. Much of the literature states that families need support, yet research in this area is sparse. It would be helpful to know what percentage of the divorcing population actually uses counselling services and for how long. Additionally, do divorced parenting programs make a difference in how parents choose to settle their divorce and arrange their children's living schedule?

Conclusion

There is no doubt that parental divorce is difficult for children. I have not yet read a piece of literature or a research study that can say parental divorce is a positive event for children. And judging by the difficulty I had with securing participants for this study, it is clear that parental divorce is a difficult

subject to talk about. Additionally, the three participants who had siblings all described one sibling who displayed negative behaviors after the divorce and refused to talk about the divorce with family members. I am not advocating that parents stay unhappily married, but rather I hope that parents can find a way to have a happy divorce, and part of having a happy divorce is developing a better understanding of how children cope.

A strong theme throughout the study was the participant's need to have both parents in his or her life. Children need to know and develop an understanding of who their parents are so that they can develop all aspects of their identity. An aspect of developing a sense of self is feeling fully supported by both parents. Children need to know that they can go to both parents with their problems. Family is the ideal place to receive support, but it is not always possible to get the needed support from parents and siblings.

Parental divorce is difficult for children and for families. As indicated by the participants in this study and in previous research, having someone to talk to is important. Speaking to an adult or to other children with divorced parents helps children recognize that they are not the only ones. However, in the City of Winnipeg there appears to be a lack of resources and support for families living with divorce.

I hope that the results from this study will call attention to the need for additional research on divorce from the child's perspective focusing on both equal time-share and children in the custody of their fathers. Additionally, it would be beneficial for children of divorced parents to have access to groups for children of divorce, along with affordable counselling and support services for the whole family.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER FOR COUNSELLING CENTRES

Nichole Menard
4113-193 Victor Lewis Dr.
Winnipeg, MB.
R3P 2A3

Dear _____,

I am enrolled in a Master's degree in Educational Psychology at the University of Manitoba. I am presently conducting a qualitative research project for my master's thesis. I am interested in understanding the experience of divorce from the child's perspective. My goal is to interview four people between the ages of 11 and 18 who either are or were in the custody of their fathers or in joint custody with equal time share. The collected information will help in understanding how children adjust and cope with divorce so as to provide better future services for divorcing families.

Participants in the study will be interviewed on three separate occasions for no longer than one hour. The identities of the participants and information gathered will be kept confidential. Participants will choose a pseudonym. All interviews will be tape recorded and then transcribed. All tapes will be erased after having completed the thesis. Participants at any time during the study may withdraw or refuse to answer questions. When the research is completed all participants will receive a summary of the results of the study.

I am presently in the process of looking for referrals. Participants need to be between the ages of 11 and 18, have experienced their first family divorce between the ages of 5 and 11, experienced the divorce two years prior to the commencement of the study, do not have a mental handicapping condition or a psychological disorder and speak English fluently. If you have any clients who qualify and might be interested in the study please contact me at 489-6740. I would be able to come to your office and provide you with the needed information and consent forms for your client(s). If you have any questions you may contact me at 489-6740 or my advisor Dr. Ray Henjum at 474-8740.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to your involvement in this beneficial research project.

Sincerely,

Nichole Menard

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF CONSENT TO PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

Nichole Menard
4113-193 Victor Lewis Dr.
Winnipeg, MB.
R3P 2A3
489-6740

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am enrolled in a Master's degree in Educational Psychology at the University of Manitoba. I am presently conducting a qualitative research project for my master's thesis. I am interested in understanding the experience of divorce from the child's perspective. My goal is to interview four people between the ages of 12 and 18 who either are or were in the custody of their fathers or in joint custody with equal time share. The collected information will help in understanding how children adjust and cope with divorce so as to provide better future services for divorcing families.

Your son/daughter will be asked to participate in three, one hour interview sessions which will take place at your home or any other mutually agreed upon location. If you or your son/daughter wishes to withdraw his/her participation in the study, you may do so at any time during the course of the project without penalty to yourself or the child. Your son/daughter will be informed of the purpose of this study and will be asked to share her/his thoughts and feelings about her/his parent's divorce. She/he will be informed that she/he only has to share what she/he wants too and that she/he may drop out of the study at any time without penalty.

The information gathered about your son/daughter will be strictly confidential. All information will be placed under a pseudonym to protect her/his anonymity. All interview sessions will be taped and then transcribed. All tapes will be erased upon the completion of the thesis. A summary of the study's results will be shared with all participants in written form. Younger participants will also be given a verbal description.

If you require any additional information about the study please contact myself, Nichole Menard at 489-6740 or my advisor, Dr. Ray Henjum at 471-8740. Thank you for your involvement in this study. I look forward to working with you and your son/daughter.

Sincerely,

Nichole Menard

APPENDIX C

LETTER OF CONSENT FOR PARTICIPANTS

Nichole Menard
4113-193 Victor Lewis Dr.
Winnipeg, MB.
R3P 2A3
489-6740

Dear Participant,

I am enrolled in a Master's degree in Educational Psychology at the University of Manitoba. I am presently conducting a qualitative research project for my master's thesis. I am interested in understanding the experience of divorce from the perspectives of children. My goal is to interview four people between the ages of 11 and 18 who either are or were in the custody of their fathers or in joint custody with equal time share. The collected information will help in understanding how children adjust and cope with divorce so as to provide better future services for divorcing families.

You will be asked to participate in three, one hour interview sessions which will take place at your home or where ever you feel most comfortable. You will be asked questions which will help you to share your thoughts and feelings about your parent's divorce. You may refuse to answer any question or talk about any topic. If you wish to withdraw from the study, you may do so at any time during the course of the project without penalty to yourself.

The information gathered about yourself will be strictly confidential. All information will be placed under a false name to protect your anonymity. All interviews will be tape recorded and then transcribed. All tapes will be erased upon completion of my thesis. A summary of the study's results will be shared with all participants in written form. If you require any additional information about the study please contact myself, Nichole Menard at 489-6740 or my advisor, Dr. Ray Henjum at 474-8740.

Thank you for your involvement in this study. I look forward to working with you on this valuable project.

Sincerely,

Nichole Menard

APPENDIX D
INITIAL MEETING WITH THE PARENT(S)

Introduction

- Who I am, name and educational background.
- Description of the research project, who I will be sharing information with (research committee).
- Inform parents that their child is one of four people who will be interviewed. Explain confidentiality, the right to withdraw the child from the study, and the right for the child to withdraw from the study or from answering questions. Explain that the child will be choosing a false name so as to protect his or her anonymity. Explain that if the child appears distressed in any way, he or she will be asked if he or she wants to discontinue the interview. The child will also be reminded that he or she does not have to answer the question.

Interview Process

- Describe the interview process, that it will be tape recorded **and that** I will take notes after the interview to ensure that I did not miss anything.

- Inform parents that interviews will take place at the child's home or any other place which is mutually agreed upon. Let parent(s) know that I would like to provide the

child with a snack and a drink. I will ask parents if this is okay and if their child has any food allergies.

Interviews are not to interfere with school,

extracurricular activities or visits to the non-custodial parent.

- Tell parents that a summary of the findings will be given to each participant, and for younger children it will be explained to them verbally.

Consent Form

- Have parents read the consent form and ask any questions before they sign.

- Inform parents that their child will also be signing a consent form and if they choose not to be in the study, that choice will be honored.

- Set an appropriate time to meet with the child.

APPENDIX E
UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction

- Who I am, name and educational background.
- Description of the research project, who I will be sharing information with (research committee).
- Inform participant that he or she is one of four people who will be interviewed. Explain confidentiality, the right to withdraw from the study at any time and choose a fake name.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how children perceive their parent's divorce from their terms, labels and categories. I am particularly interested in your perspectives and experiences, as they relate to your life as a child whose parent's are divorced.

The stories from all the people I will interview will be combined into a summary that I will be sharing with my thesis committee and hopefully will submit to be published in a reputable journal. I will also be sending you a copy of this summary.

- Explain the interview procedure which involves, tape recording, note taking, and confidentiality. Let the participant know that the interview will be tape recorded. Explain that tape recording allows for the true capturing of their words and ideas. Then explain that notes will be taken after the interview so as to record anything which was missed. Tell the participant that nothing they say will ever be identified with them personally, and to protect their identity they will choose a false name. Choose the name before starting the tape.

Turn on Tape Recorder and Test it Together

For younger participants have blank paper and markers handy for doodling and drawing. Let the participants know that the paper and markers can be used at any time. Also have a squish ball on the table for participants to help with any nervousness.

The initial interview will be unstructured using single open-ended questions. The participant's answers will lead me to either ask another question related to the response or to probe for additional information. My focus for the initial interview is to build rapport with the participant, listen to their life story and wrap up the interview. The following open ended questions will be used:

1. I am interested in knowing a little bit about you. How would you describe yourself? (Here it would be good to

obtain general information such as age, likes and dislikes, favorite foods, how many siblings, grandparents, cousins, ect..).

2. I would like to know what a regular week looks like for you? (Here I am interested in seeing how the participant describes his/her daily life).

3. I am wondering how you celebrate special occasions? (I am seeking to understand how the participant views holidays and birthdays with family).

4. In two months it will be summer vacation, what do you do during the summer break? (Here it would be beneficial to see if time is spent with both parents and what that time looks like).

5. Wrap up

During this time I will review what was said and thank the participant for their time. At this point I will also offer a snack and a drink. This is time to relax and put closure to the interview.

These interview questions will differ according to the age of the participant and how they answer the questions. This is a general outline which will give me a broad base to build from and will help to direct the questions for the next interview.

APPENDIX F
MATT'S INTERVIEW PROCESS

I needed to change my interview format for Matt because he was having difficulty elaborating on his answers. I noticed from the first interview that he recalled information visually and that he needed a lot of time to think about my questions before answering them. After I would ask a question Matt would look up at the ceiling as if to be visualizing the question, he would then answer with one sentence. I had a difficult time seeking more information or knowing where to go because of his one sentence answers.

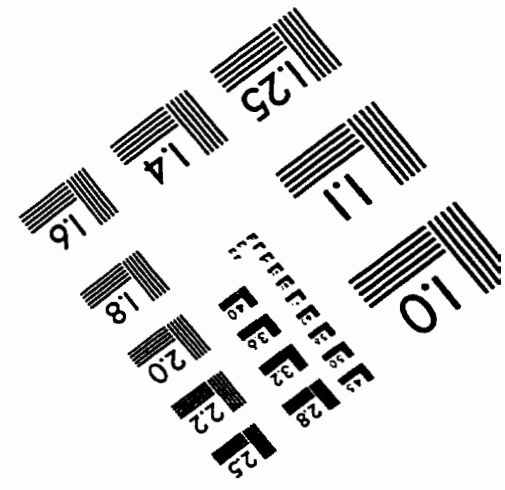
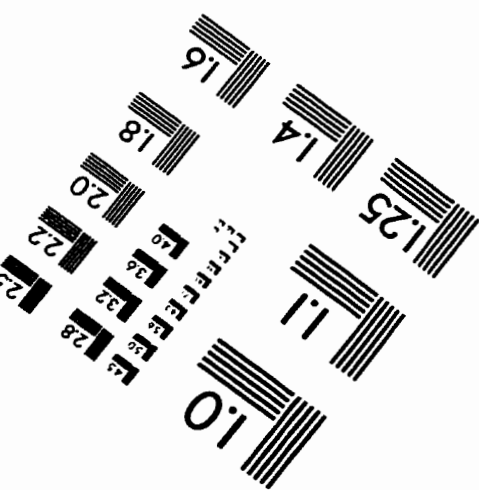
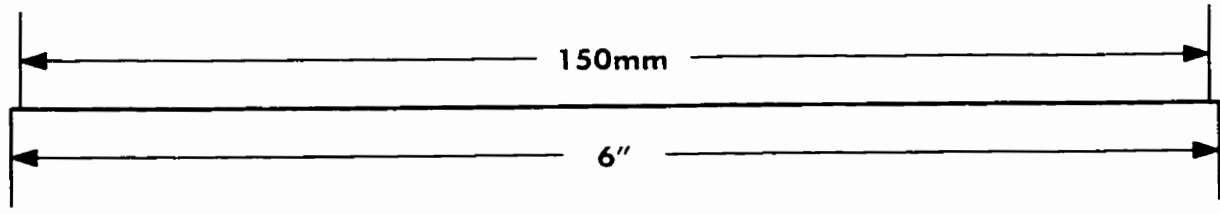
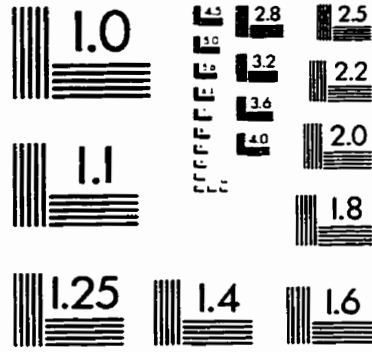
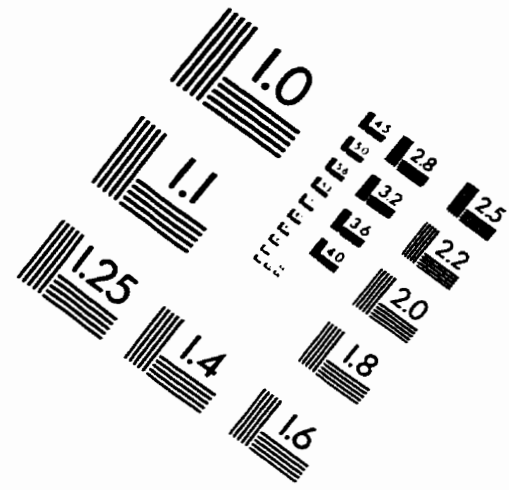
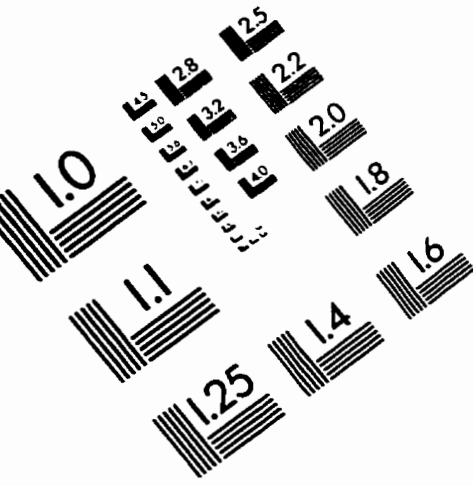
During the second interview I helped Matt visualize the questions and put distance between himself and the topic by asking him to draw his family both before and after his parents' divorce. I decided to have him draw because during the first interview he showed me all his cartoons that he had drawn. He felt good about his drawing ability, so I thought that it would be a positive vehicle to use in talking about his family. I asked questions about the family members in both pictures. This worked for Matt, he was able to elaborate on his answers and talk at greater length.

During the third interview I asked Matt to pretend that I was a student at school whose parents just got

divorced. I knew that his parents were divorced so I asked if he could talk to me about what it was like living in a family with divorced parents. Matt laughed when I asked him to do this but started talking immediately. We talked for an hour in this fashion. I even ran out of tape and had to take notes on his last comments.

Changing the interview format to suit Matt's needs helped by enabling Matt to feel more at ease with talking about the subject. He still needed much time to answer the questions, but his answers were longer and contained more information.

IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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