

**An Exploration of Factors Influencing Mediation Outcomes in  
Comprehensive Co-Mediation**

**by**

**Gwen Pedersen**

**A Practicum Report**

**Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of**

**MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK**

**Faculty of Social Work  
University of Manitoba  
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## Abstract

Mediation has become an accepted method of alternative dispute resolution in the field of separation and divorce. Early research explored the effectiveness of mediation in resolving issues related to the separation or divorce, as well as participant satisfaction. As mediation has become more mainstream research has now begun to explore factors within the mediation process that contribute to the success of mediation. In addition, more attention has been given to issues related to child well-being, and how mediation may contribute to lower levels of post settlement conflict and the positive adjustment of children.

The purpose of this practicum was to increase my knowledge in the use of statistical methods and develop my skills in quantitative analysis; specifically the interpretation of significant relationships within the mediation process that may influence or affect the level of mediated agreement or outcome. In addition, co-parental interaction, including conflict related to issues resulting from the separation, communication patterns and supportive parenting behaviours, and the effects or influences on mediation outcome and child well-being was examined. Another focus within this study was to determine whether men and women experienced the mediation process differently.

Exploratory analysis of findings resulted from the evaluation of the Comprehensive Co-Mediation and Mediation Internship Pilot Project which ran between January 1999 and September 30, 2000 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The Federal Department of Justice funded the project while the Manitoba Department of Justice with cooperation of Manitoba Family Services initiated and implemented the program. Results suggest that

men and women do not experience the mediation process differently when variables within the mediation process were examined. As well, several factors within the mediation process appeared to be associated with level of outcome, and the helpfulness of the mediation process appeared to be the strongest predictor of mediation outcome in this study. Co-parental conflict, particularly conflict related to child issues, negative communication between parents and parental behaviours that put children in the middle of conflicts resulted in negative associations with child well-being, while positive co-parental communication resulted in a positive association with child well-being.

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Personally, I'd like to thank my son, Jess, for his understanding and his continued support—even in his moments of sarcasm when his reply to my requests were, "I'll do it when you're done your practicum!" He has recently confessed that he now has a lengthy list to attend to!

To my family, who allowed me to follow my own path, on my own time and by my own terms. You instilled in me a stubbornness which allowed me to continue forward when I felt like giving up, and as a result, I am now able to proudly reflect on my most recent accomplishment. To my friends who were always there for me, from the earliest beginnings to the final moments. Your support, belief, reassurance and encouragement provided me with the confidence to dream and the ability to accomplish my dream.

And finally, to fate, for as this chapter of my life comes to a close, the door to new beginnings has swung open and the next chapter is already being written...

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## **Chapter 1 Overview of Practicum**

### **Introduction**

This practicum involved an exploratory study of responses to an evaluation of a government family mediation program in Winnipeg. The information used in this research was gathered from participants in the Comprehensive Comprehensive Co-Mediation and Mediation Internship Pilot Program which ran between January 1999 and September 30, 2000. The study was being undertaken as a practicum because it involved an important learning goal. This goal was to learn about the application of research methods in assessing relationships between factors that may influence mediation outcome and child well-being. Of particular interest was the development of skills in applying bivariate and multi-variate analysis to an examination of these outcomes for different groups of respondents.

The Comprehensive Co-Mediation and Mediation Internship Pilot Project was funded by the Federal Department of Justice and initiated and implemented by the Manitoba Department of Justice with cooperation of Manitoba Family Services. The initial evaluation of this project, from which data used for this practicum is extracted, was funded by the federal government's Child Support Guidelines Implementation Fund. The service was offered with no charge to participants. In the mediation model that was conceived under the pilot project, separated couples met in a neutral setting with two mediators present, a lawyer mediator and a family relations mediator. These mediators worked as a team with the separating parents and assisted with resolving issues that arose from the separation. Issues of parenting such as custody and time-sharing, in addition to

financial issues such as child support, spousal support and the division of marital property including assets and debts, were mediated within this model of dispute resolution.

### Learning Goals

Since the inception of comprehensive mediation in Manitoba, research of its effectiveness has been ongoing (McKenzie & Pedersen, 2001; McKenzie & Pedersen 2003). This is a continuation of such research in an exploratory format. The author was directly involved in the initial evaluation of the Comprehensive Co-Mediation and Mediation Internship Pilot Project and engaged in tasks of data collection, data input, and data analysis. Interpretation of data analysis and report writing were tasks that the author did not undertake. Learning goals for this study have been largely influenced by the author's previous involvement with the evaluations noted above.

Learning goals for this practicum involved the development of knowledge and analytical skills that can be applied to determine the factors in the mediation process that influence a mediated outcome and child well-being. More specifically, this study was designed to explore the following: whether men and women experienced aspects of the mediation process itself, defined as satisfaction with the mediation process, helpfulness of the mediation process, and satisfaction with the mediator role, differently; whether a relationship existed between factors within the mediation process and mediation outcome; whether a relationship existed between child well-being and several factors measuring co-parental interaction pre-mediation and at follow up: whether a relationship existed

between several independent factors measuring co-parental interaction pre-mediation with the mediation outcome defined as no agreement, partial agreement and full agreement. As well, selected independent predictor variables resulting from the analysis were formulated as regression equations on the dependent variable mediation outcome to determine which factors have the greatest influence on outcome.

The following goals were established to focus my learning experience in order to achieve the desired learning outcomes. The first goal was to learn more about factors that influence mediation outcomes. This learning goal was achieved by reviewing the research literature on family mediation. The selection of variables for analysis within this study is based on this research and the data collected from the original Comprehensive Co-Mediation and Mediation Internship Pilot Project.

A second learning goal was to increase my knowledge of data analysis using statistical methods and develop my skills in quantitative analysis; specifically the interpretation of significant relationships between variables. The author possessed a basic knowledge of simple analytical techniques as a result of direct involvement in the original study. However, further manipulation of the data required the use of more complex analytical procedures. This practicum provided the author with the opportunity to apply these more complex methods of analysis, leading to a greater understanding of the use of these methods and increased understanding in the ability to interpret more complex results and outcomes.

Another learning goal was to achieve an understanding of the problems and

shortcomings that may be associated with the data collection and analysis. This involved recognizing and acknowledging some of the problems that arose within the process of both data collection and analysis. These problems are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

A final goal of this exploratory study was to make suggests for further areas of research that may lead to increased knowledge about both the benefits of family mediation and methods to improve its efficacy. This learning goal was attained by reviewing the literature on family mediation and considering the findings obtained during the further analysis of data generated by this study. These implications are discussed in the final chapter of this report.

#### Evaluation of Practicum

This practicum was evaluated on an ongoing basis with my primary advisor who provided direct supervision and necessary guidance as required. Instruction in regard to the appropriate analysis applications utilized along with direction and clarity in writing this practicum were also provided by my advisor. In addition, his feedback and suggestions provided me with the knowledge and resources required to complete this study.

There was also a self-evaluation component to the evaluation of this practicum. Expanding my knowledge base within this field was achieved through a review of the literature. It is from this material that the research questions and hypotheses emerged. The

implementation of more complex strategies of analysis provided me with further opportunity and increased my understanding and ability to interpret the resulting outcomes and relationships between variables. The presentation and defense of this study was a further element of the evaluation process.

The completion of this research study has achieved a long standing personal goal. If this study was a catalyst for other students or professionals to develop more effective procedures within the mediation process, or explore relationship findings further, it was considered an added value.

### Research Questions

Five general questions derived from the research literature have guided this study. These are: (1) Are there differences in the way men and women experience the mediation process? (2) Are there factors pertaining to the mediation process that affect or influence the outcome of mediation? (3) Are there factors pertaining to post separation co-parental interaction that affect or influence child adjustment, assessed in response to a global question by parents? (4) Are there factors pertaining to post separation co-parental interaction that affect or influence child coping, measured using a standardized scale? (5) Are there factors pertaining to post separation co-parental interaction that affect or influence mediation outcome?

### Rationale for Study

Ambert (2002) has estimated that at least 30% of Canadian children under the age of 21 have parents who have been involved in a separation or divorce. This calculation does not include children whose parents were previously living together in common-law unions, so in actuality, the number of children affected by parental separation is higher. With respect to the United States, Cherlin (1992) reports that almost fifty percent of all children will have experienced parental divorce before 16 years of age. With the growing number of couples seeking alternative dispute resolution methods, such as divorce mediation, the understanding of factors that correlate with outcome, satisfaction and child well-being have become increasingly important issues.

Kelly (1997) reports mediation has shifted the way we view adult rights and child care in the arena of separation and divorce. There is an increased focus on co-parental responsibilities and the best interests of the children. Post separation parenting is now viewed as a shared responsibility, with both parents participating in the development and best interests of their child. Along with this shift to the best interest of the child, has come a shift in the perception of the stereotypical role of mother, father and post separation parenting. The stereotype of a parent who visits with their children on specific days is fading rapidly, as is the belief that one parent owns their children and grants the other parent the right to visit them. In Manitoba, the 1996 report of the Civil Justice Review Task Force included a number of recommendations designed to support the development of alternatives to dispute resolution outside the process of litigation. In 2002, this new

focus on the child was introduced to the House of Commons in Bill C-22 with the first reading on December 10<sup>th</sup>. The intent was for this Bill to become a legislated amendment to the Divorce Act. A list of criteria pertaining directly to the child to assist in determining what outcome was in the child's best interests was outlined by the Civil Justice Review Task Force. These criteria were designed to encourage discussion, mediation or negotiation between separating parents to arrive at appropriate outcomes for each case. On February 25, 2003, Bill C-22 had its second reading. However, Bill C-22 died on the table in November 2003 when parliament prorogued. The Civil Justice Review Task Force findings were supported by results from the evaluation of the Comprehensive Co-Mediation and Internship Pilot Project (McKenzie & Pedersen, 2001) and the evaluation of Family Conciliation's mediation programs (McKenzie & Pedersen, 2003). The common outcome suggested by this growing body of research is that such alternate methods of settlement provide for flexibility and a consideration of individual circumstances when determining outcomes pertaining to post separation parenting.

As reported earlier, a growing number of children are affected by separation or divorce. It is not surprising that children's reaction to separation has been the focus of a great deal of literature in recent years. Negative effects upon children as a result of the dissolution of marital relationships have been documented by several researchers (Cherlin, Chase-Lansdale & McRae, 1998; Fischer, 1997; Lye, 1998). Academic performances of children have been reported to be lower and drop out rates higher, particularly among boys, from divorced homes (Aro & Palosaari, 1992; Call, Beer &

Beer,1994). In addition, children's behaviors have been examined by Emery (1994, 1999) and Hoffman (1994), who reported an increase in aggressive and impulsive behaviours, school difficulties, anxiety, withdrawal and depression within children from homes where the marriage has broken down. However, it appears these effects can be mitigated and the dominant buffers that run consistently throughout their literature are reassurance, love and continuous, predictable, parental involvement (Emery, 1994, 1999; Hoffman, 1994).

With greater understanding of factors that influence mediation outcome the success of mediation can be better predicted. In addition, the results from such research can be used to shape the nature of these programs and the type of parents best served by this approach to alternative dispute resolution. As well, the children of separation and divorce benefit if one can identify factors within the mediation process that seem to contribute to positive child adjustment.

Literature relevant to the topic under study is explored in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 identifies the research questions and hypotheses in more detail; as well, it describes the methodology implemented in this exploratory study. Chapter 4 discusses the results of the study and the implications for mediation. Chapter 5 presents a summary of findings and the learning goals identified earlier are discussed.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

The introduction of family mediation as a structured process, conducted by a trained professional, approximately twenty years ago was offered as a novel alternative to the traditional adversarial process of separation and divorce (Benjamin & Irving, 2002). Rather than using lawyers or the court process the concept of divorce mediation involves an impartial third party who facilitates communication directly between separating parents in order to reach a mutual agreement on issues related to the separation or divorce. Early research focused on the viability of mediation in an arena that was generally driven by adversarial forces. With results from studies of mediation indicating resolution as a result in at least 50% of the mediated cases, with the majority reporting an agreement rate between 60 and 80% (Hahn & Kleist, 2000), mediation was accepted as an effective method of alternative dispute resolution.

Edwards (1997) states that mediation allows both parties the arena to negotiate the decisions that are best for them. Dingwall and Greatbatch (1991) also support the position that mediation is a positive medium for negotiating agreements for both genders due to the organization or structure of the mediation process. The neutral setting, with the mediators acting as facilitators, increases the opportunity for parties to discuss issues of concern and decreases the possibility of inter-parental conflict or bantering in regard to unrelated issues.

One benefit of mediation appears to be the low rate of re-litigation following initial

settlement. Research reports a re-litigation rate of less than 20% in couples who mediated agreements with the majority of revisions informally agreed to between the separated parties (Emery, 1994). McKenzie and Pedersen (2003) provide support for these findings. In a Winnipeg study, they reported that re-litigation and subsequent lawyer contacts were much lower when mediation participants were compared with a group of parents who had used lawyers and the court system to resolve differences. In fact, those that utilized the adversarial process had a re-litigation rate of almost four times that of the mediation group. These results appear to support findings presented by Johnson (1996) who suggests that collaborative processes of problem-solving, such as mediation and negotiation, are associated with strong positive feelings which in turn produces further collaboration, future compliance and informally negotiated changes between parties following their separation. With the increasing use of mediation to assist with resolving issues of separation or divorce a reduction of court usage for such procedures is likely to occur.

#### Research on the Effects of Mediation

Several benefits to the mediation process have been reported in the literature, such as improved parental communication, reduction of co-parental conflict, increased levels of satisfaction with outcome and an increased perception of fairness with settlement of issues.

Irving and Benjamin (1992) reported that up to 75% of mediating couples perceived their level of communication with their former partner improved as a result of the

mediation process. A number of research studies have shown that mediation can influence positive co-parental communication (Cummings & Davies, 1994; Emery, 1982, 1988, 1994; Grych & Fincham, 1990). McKenzie and Pedersen (2001) reported a significant increase in co-parental communication with day to day decisions regarding their children, personal or school problems their children may be experiencing, problems with parenting or within the co-parenting relationship, financial issues and acceptable discipline in regard to their children. But, not all research supports these findings. For example, Mathis and Yingling (1992) reported little or no change in co-parental communication from the wives' perspective. As well, they reported an increased level of dissatisfaction in communication by the husbands following the mediation process.

Research by Jones and Bodtker (1998) reported mediation reduced the level of parental conflict and hostility. McKenzie and Pedersen (2001) reported several statistically significant changes in the level of co-parental conflict following the mediation process. For example, participants reported a decrease in arguing when discussing parental issues, in addition to a less hostile atmosphere when communicating with the other parent. Furthermore, a reduction in the amount of stress when conversing with former partner was reported. A reduction in issues of conflict which put children in the middle of those disagreements was also reported by these researchers. Negative comments about the other parent, arguing in front of the children and using the children to pass messages were all shown to decrease significantly following mediation (McKenzie & Pedersen, 2001). Furthermore, mediation appears to have a positive lasting effect on co-parental

communication. When compared to couples who litigated settlements, parents who mediated outcomes appeared to be less conflictual over long term periods (Emery, 1994).

As early as 1991, Wallerstein reported the effects of ongoing parental conflict on the parent-child relationship. In 1999, Ayoub, Deutsch and Maraganore reported a correlation between adjustment difficulties in children and co-parental conflict. Other research revealed a statistically significant relationship with co-parental conflict and increased emotional and behavioral difficulties displayed by children (Amato & Keith, 1991; Cherlin, Chase-Lansdale & McRae, 1998; Fischer, 1997; Gray, Herdrieck, Smith & Freed, 1997; Lye, 1998).

Recent literature focuses on six factors that appear to be related to negative activities displayed by children following a parental divorce; significant reduction in financial resources, diminished parenting, children are emotionally burdened with stressors, continued parental conflict, children with pre-existing problems (i.e., disruptive home live prior to separation), and genetic inheritance (Williams, 2001). Children in this situation report experiencing childhood with a decreased level in happiness after their parents separated (Williams, 2001). This distress is internalized as children miss the other parent and may blame themselves for the separation, and continuously hope for a reconciliation. They may cry more as they are sad more frequently or this emotion can be turned outwards as aggression displayed through physical or verbal attacks and other high conflict responses (Ambert, 2002). Benjamin and Irving (2002) support these results, indicating children who are involved in ongoing co-parental conflict experience an

elevated level in negative adjustment experiences. Lansky (1996) suggests that as mediation reduces parental conflict, it is likely that the negative effects of the separation on children will also be reduced. With these results the importance of facilitating a decrease in co-parental conflict is clearly evident.

Participants appear to view mediated outcomes as achieved through a fairer process than those who utilized the adversarial system (Benjamin & Irving, 1995; Emery, 1995; Emery, Matthews & Kitzmann, 1994; Irving & Benjamin, 1992; Pearson & Thoennes, 1985). McKenzie and Pedersen (2001) found 87% of participants felt the custody settlement was fair to both parents and 84% indicated the time sharing settlement was fair. Eighty-one percent felt property issues were fair to both parties, 78% felt settlements involving assets other than property (such as household items, automobiles, tools and appliances) were fair to both parties and 62% reported they felt the child support settlement was fair to both parents when issues were resolved through mediation. In general, the level of satisfaction with outcome and perceived fairness with outcome have been reported to be significantly higher when mediation participants are compared with those who settled through litigation (Kelly, 1996).

The literature suggests that benefits of the mediation program extend beyond its primary function of negotiating settlement. Emotional factors such as closure, emotional healing, improved communication between participants and improved conflict resolution skills have been reported (Irving & Benjamin, 2002) to occur. Reducing the duration of time for the resolution of issues coupled with a reduction of costs to participants appear to

be other benefits of mediation. Emery (1995) found mediating couples reached agreement in less than half the time when compared to litigating couples, paid significantly less and experienced a reduction in court usage. This supports earlier results by Kelly (1989, 1990, 1994) who reported divorce mediation significantly reduced the cost of separation when compared to those who litigated outcome. Studies completed by Irving, Benjamin, Bohm and MacDonald (1981) and Pearson and Theonnes (1984), in which individuals were randomly assigned to mediation and litigation groups found evidence of a relationship between mediation and the decline in court hearings.

Some researchers writing from a feminist perspective see the public legal system, not mediation, as the best means for women to have their rights and their children's rights protected (Edwards, 1997). These arguments suggest mediation leads to unfair settlements for women. The underlying concern is the vulnerability of women to power differentials that may have arisen during the marriage which subsequently inhibit equality in negotiation. Maxwell (1999) notes that if equality of power between separating couples cannot be achieved, mediation is not appropriate (a principle followed by Family Conciliation). This inequality of power may be a result of emotional and/or physical abuse within the relationship. Other factors such as mental illness, educational background, understanding of issues and willingness to participate may represent this imbalance of power. However, other researchers have reported different results. For example, research by Davies, Ralph, Hawton, and Craig (1995) and Depner, Cannata, and Simon (1992) reported that couples who had a history of violence in the relationship or

after the relationship ended, indicated higher levels of satisfaction with mediated outcomes when compared to litigated outcomes. This is supported by Ellis (1995) who found that mediation more effectively reduced the level of violence between couples than did litigation.

Additional research fails to demonstrate that mediation provides an inherent disadvantage to women (Benjamin & Irving, 1995). Studies completed by Emery (1994) and Maccoby and Mnookin (1992) reported no disadvantage for women in settling issues of child access and property in mediation. This is further supported by Kelly (1990) and Pearson (1991) who found property issues agreed to in mediation were not significantly different from outcomes that would have been achieved through litigated agreements. In regard to outcome, Davis and Roberts (1988) and Pearson (1991) found that women were more likely than men to judge their mediated agreement as fair. Furthermore, Emery (1995) reported mothers were generally more satisfied than fathers with the process and outcome of mediation.

The question of gender differences in regard to satisfaction with the mediation process have long been debated in the literature. A series of studies (Emery & Wyer, 1987b; Emery et al., 1991; Emery et al, 1994) reported mothers as being more satisfied than fathers not only with the mediation process, but the outcome and consequences of mediation settlement as well. This same research reported fathers were significantly more satisfied with the mediation process than with the litigation process in general. Other studies (Emery, 1994 & Kelly, 1989) reported that satisfaction with mediation was not

significantly different between genders. Further research by Meierding (1993) and Ogus, Walker and Jones-Lee (1989) found both men and women to be equally satisfied with the mediation process while Pearson and Thoennes (1988) reported no statistically significant differences between men and women's level of satisfaction with mediation outcome. Additional researchers (Kelly, 1989, 1990; Kelly & Gigy, 1989; Kelly, Gigy & Hausman, 1988) have explored gender differences in several mediation studies. Their findings have been consistent in reporting more similarities than differences in the responses of men and women.

#### Factors Influencing Mediation Outcome

Many questions have been asked about what predicts successful mediation. Some general factors that appear to influence the mediation process have been self-reported in the research, while other variables have been identified as having a direct relationship to mediated outcome through data analysis.

Self-reports from participants indicate the content of disputes, level of importance of issues to the participants, and former partners' willingness to negotiate are contributing factors when mediating an agreement (Camplair & Stolberg, 1990). Other factors such as the number of issues to negotiate (Irving & Benjamin, 1992), level of understanding of financial issues and emotional readiness to divorce (Kelly 1989b), and mediator - participant interaction (Donohoue, Lyles & Rogan, 1989; Irving & Benjamin, 2002; Pearson & Thoennes, 1985) have been shown to affect the level of mediated outcome.

McKenzie (2000) suggests that a knowledgeable mediator, parties that are ready to look for new solutions rather than tied to old patterns of problem-solving or preoccupied with past events, parties that accept the separation or are prepared to come to terms with it, parties that have a general understanding of their rights and obligations, and parties who are financially motivated to achieve a solution as potential characteristics that may enhance the success of mediation.

Some studies indicate that the level of participant satisfaction with the mediation process and outcome are highly correlated (Benjamin & Irving, 1995; Irving & Benjamin, 1992; Pearson, 1991; Pearson & Thoennes, 1985). As well, McKenzie and Pedersen (2001) found that 83% of participants reached either a full or partial agreement and 85% of respondents would use the process again if further issues to resolve arose. The findings reported by the authors imply a high rate of satisfaction and high rate of resolution, although these variables were not statistically examined for correlations in their study. It is believed participant's level of satisfaction may have other positive outcomes.

According to Irving and Benjamin (2002) participants' level of satisfaction with their mediated outcome was a foundation for future compliance, reduced conflict and increased cooperation; that is, the greater the level of satisfaction with outcome the higher rate of compliance and cooperation between separated parents.

Conflict in the parental relationship may also be related to the likelihood of achieving a settlement in mediation. For example, Bickerdike and Littlefield (2000) found the higher the level of co-parental conflict the lower the level of mediated agreements.

Therefore, the lower the level of co-parental conflict the more positive the outcome of mediation is likely to be.

Limited research that explores the relationship between mediation outcome and mediator style or how mediator - participant relationships influence outcome is available (Irving & Benjamin, 2002). However, these authors suggest the quality of the mediator-client relationship, especially in regard to emotional engagement may be highly correlated with mediation outcome. Furthermore, they propose the relationship of the mediator and participant may be influenced by several external factors such as the mediators' caseload, hours of service provided, number of sessions provided, model of practice and intervention strategies. As well, the mediators' experience may influence or affect mediation process and outcome. These factors are worth exploring in more depth as McKenzie and Pedersen (2001) reported participants found the most positive element of the mediation were the mediators with 87% of respondents describing the mediators as fair to both parties. This suggests the importance of mediator impartiality when negotiating issues related to separation or divorce.

Another factor that may influence level of outcome is the theory or model mediators are working from. Donohue, Drake and Roberto (1994) and Kruk (1998b) found structural mediators focused on facts and issues and did not discuss feelings and relationships. This form of mediation tends to view divorce as a social phenomenon and tends to focus on issues outside the family itself. This may inadvertently affect the level of outcome for some participants. Kruk (1998b) notes that settlement orientated mediators

focus on facts and issues to reach agreement and whereas problem solving mediators focus on values and relationships and were willing to depart from strict neutrality. Therapeutic family mediation, which included psychological and inter-personal components as well as the component of outcome, may be viewed as more beneficial to certain participants. An interesting note is that mediators, despite the theory difference in practice, were found to be more supportive of cooperative clients than uncooperative ones (Guerra & Elliot, 1996) which may translate to more favourable outcomes for certain participants.

#### Summary and Implications

In the literature, litigated divorce settlement is presented as a win - lose situation with too little attention paid to the best interests of the children; in contrast, mediation has been perceived as a win - win outcome with the primary focus on benefitting the children (McWhinney, 1995). This may occur in several ways: through a reduction in co-parental conflict; an increase in positive parental communication; reduced negative effects on child adjustment; and reduction of conflict which puts children in the middle. Research findings have been instrumental in encouraging the adoption of mediation as an alternative method to divorce proceedings, and the outcome of this research supports why alternative dispute resolution has continuously increased in popularity and acceptance (Bowen, 1999).

There is no question that parental conflict is exhausting, upsetting, frustrating and

stressful for those directly involved, and it is equally difficult on the children of such unions (Irving & Benjamin, 2002). Local research by McKenzie and Pedersen (2001, 2003) has focused on the effects and outcomes of mediation and they have reported a reduction in conflict between both parents related to parental interaction involving the children, decision making in regard to the children and financial matters such as spousal support and property settlement. Furthermore, improved parental communication was reported following the mediation process with parents being able to focus on problems more effectively without dredging up past issues. It seems common sense that if mediation encourages parents to develop and maintain a cooperative relationship, this in turn will model a positive relationship for their children and promote a healthy environment allowing children to develop a positive relationship with each parent. As suggested by the research, mediation appears to be a beneficial alternative to litigation with advantages for children and parents.

However, few studies have looked at gender difference in regard to satisfaction with the mediation process, perception of mediator helpfulness or level of satisfaction with mediator role. As well, the mediation process and its relationship to outcome has been explored in only a few studies.

Child adjustment and the relationship to outcome has also been largely overlooked in the literature with much of the focus exploring the effects of inter- parental conflict on child adjustment. This study will explore each of these areas in an attempt to further understand relationships between these variables.

## **Chapter 3 Implementation of the Practicum**

### **Practicum Learning Experience**

The intent of this practicum was to provide the author with the opportunity to develop knowledge and skills in applying quantitative analytical methods to a data set that includes information on family mediation outcomes as well as factors that might influence these outcomes. The effects of co-parental interaction after separation with child well-being was also explored. This chapter provides information on the mediation program, data collection methods, the purpose of the study, the research design and measures used. Research questions and hypotheses, the validity and reliability of measures and the limitations associated in this study are presented.

### **The Program**

This study is based on the findings of a the Comprehensive Co-Mediation and Mediation Internship Pilot Project (McKenzie & Pedersen, 2001) and funded by the Federal Department of Justice and initiated and implemented by the Manitoba Department of Justice between January 1999 and September 30, 2000. The pilot project was funded under the provisions of the federal government's Child Support Guidelines Implementation Fund. The expected role of comprehensive co-mediation is to address all the subsequent issues which result from the parents' decision to separate or divorce that would be the subject of a court proceeding. In the pilot project, separated couples met in a

neutral setting with two mediators present, one a legal mediator and the second, a family relations mediator. Comprehensive co-mediation involves the mediation of parenting issues such as custody and time-sharing, along with financial issues such as child support, spousal support and division of marital property, assets and debts. Upon completion of the mediation process participants were identified as having one of three outcomes: 1) no agreement reached on issues, 2) partial agreement on issues, or 3) full agreement on issues.

Initial screening of couples to determine the appropriateness of the mediation process for their situation occurred over the telephone with an intake worker. This was followed by a personal interview when the mediation process was seen as beneficial to participants. Level of conflict and other variables representing extreme imbalance of power such as mental health issues and alcohol or substance abuse concerns were also addressed during the screening process. The mediation process was not seen as appropriate for these situations, and was therefore not offered to such individuals. As a pre-requisite to mediation, all participants were required to attend a parenting program called 'For the Sake of the Children'. Additional qualifying criterion required participants to have dependent children who were affected by the separation or divorce along with the presence of unresolved financial and time sharing issues resulting from the separation or divorce.

Participants in the mediation process were advised of the implementation of the Comprehensive Co-Mediation and Mediation Internship Pilot Program and that

evaluation of feedback from participants through questionnaires was requested in order to determine the viability of the mediation project. Participants were informed in detail of the process and procedures of the comprehensive co-mediation program and were asked to sign a consent form regarding their participation in mediation. Participants were offered a summary of the results of the evaluation in exchange for their participation in the research.

Most comprehensive co-mediation cases had two female mediators as most mediators were female. On average, participants attended five to eight joint mediation sessions each with a duration of about one and a half hours. Generally, early sessions focused on family relations issues, developing parenting plans and resolving time sharing issues. Later sessions focused on financial issues. Financial issues included matters related to child support, spousal support, property such as the family home in addition to division of assets and debts (e.g., investments and pensions).

On occasion, former partners commenced mediation, but, the mediation process was deemed to be inappropriate for effective resolution of issues resulting from the separation. Three couples fell into this category. Four other couples decided to reconcile during or immediately following the completion of the mediation process. Data gathered from the participants that reconciled, as well as from the individuals who commenced the mediation process which was later ceased were not included in this study.

### Data Collection

Following the initial meeting program participants completed a pre-mediation questionnaire. These pre-tests were distributed by the mediators and participants were encouraged to complete them at the mediation site. Most complied, however a few completed the questionnaire at home and returned them at a later date. Intake for the mediation program commenced in May, 1999 and was closed on January 11, 2000 to allow participants time to complete the mediation process before the termination of the pilot project on September 30, 2000.

The second phase of the data collection process occurred from July 1999 to September 2000. Questionnaires were administered immediately following the completion of the mediation process. These surveys provided feedback on level of satisfaction with factors of the mediation process, level of helpfulness of the mediation process and perception of mediator roles. These post-tests were completed with participants over the phone or mailed to participants who returned them upon completion.

Follow-up data was collected from participants four to six months following the completion of the mediation process. This third and final phase of the data collection process took place between September 1999 and December 2000. Follow up surveys were administered in the same format as the post mediation questionnaires, either through a telephone survey or mail-out survey. Questions were identical, whether participants chose to respond by telephone or in written form. All post mediation questionnaires as well as follow-up surveys were administered by the author.

## Sample

Although comparison groups were included in the original study of the comprehensive co-mediation program this data is not utilized in the present study. For a complete review of the larger study of the pilot project on comprehensive co-mediation see McKenzie and Pedersen (July, 2001). Data used in this study comes from all three phases of the data collection process. For various reasons a number of participants failed to complete all three questionnaires. In addition, missing data, questions not answered or deemed not applicable by respondents were excluded from this analysis. This contributes to some variation in the sample sizes for different variables but ensures more reliability in responses used for analysis. Some participants completed only the pre, post or follow up questionnaire while other participants completed two or three surveys. The two groups used for this study are based on responses obtained at different intervals of the comprehensive co-mediation program.

The first group of participants in this study completed questionnaires immediately following the conclusion of the mediation process. One hundred and thirty one participants completed the questionnaires referred to as the post survey. This sample was used to study hypotheses that relate to the relationship of gender to perception of the mediators and the mediation process. This sample will also explore the relationship of perception of the mediators and the mediation process with level of mediated outcome.

A second sample of eighty-three participants answered both the initial or pre questionnaire, which was distributed prior to mediation and the follow up questionnaire,

completed four to six months after mediation ended. This second sample was used to explore the relationship of factors occurring post separation to child adjustment, child coping and mediation outcome. Selected variables measured before mediation were correlated with child adjustment and child coping prior to mediation. These selected variables were again measured at the follow up stage and correlated with child adjustment and child coping at this stage.

### Purpose of Study

The initial comprehensive co-mediation evaluation (McKenzie & Pedersen, 2001) produced some interesting results and a useful data base, however a number of important issues pertaining to mediation were not examined in that study. The initial study identified significant differences in group means when responses completed prior to mediation, at the completion of mediation and four to six months after mediation were compared. Significant mean differences were found in the pre-post comparison of variables identifying 'co-parental level of conflict' with custody, access and financial arrangements and in pre-follow up comparisons 'making day to day decisions regarding the children', 'discussing personal and school problems the children may be experiencing', and 'problems the parents are having raising the children'. Pre-follow up comparisons of 'co-parental conflict', identified by items such as 'whether an argument occurs when discussing issues with the other parent', 'whether the atmosphere with the other parent is hostile', and whether 'conversation with the other parent is tense' had statistically

significant changes at the follow-up stage. Pre-follow-up mean comparisons of items pertaining to 'co-parental conflict' in regard to putting children in the middle of conflict also showed significant decreases at the follow-up stage. Areas such as 'respondent says negative things about the other parent to the children', 'the other parent saying negative things to the children about respondent', 'the other parent keeps the children from seeing respondent', 'both parents argue in front of the children' and 'involving the children in passing messages between the parents' also improved at follow up. As child adjustment has been linked to co-parental conflict, further exploration of these variables was a priority in this study.

The intent of this practicum was to expand the analysis of data gathered in the initial comprehensive co-mediation evaluation to address a series of research questions. The research questions, as noted below, were developed based on the literature reviewed as well as results obtained from the initial study of comprehensive co-mediation in Winnipeg.

- (1) Are there differences in the way men and women experience the mediation process?
- (2) Are there factors pertaining to the mediation process that affect or influence the outcome of mediation?
- (3) Are there factors pertaining to post separation co-parental interaction that affect or influence child adjustment, assessed in response to a global question by parents?
- (4) Are there factors pertaining to post separation co-parental interaction that affect or influence child coping, measured using a standardized scale?

(5) Are there factors pertaining to post separation co-parental interaction pre-mediation that affect or influence mediation outcome?

### Instrumentation

Non standardized measures used in this study were developed for the initial comprehensive co-mediation evaluation based on the literature. Several questions used a summed scale approach to scoring and other measures reflect standardized questions developed for other research on parenting after divorce.

The way men and women experience mediation was explored by assessing three general concepts, 'satisfaction with the mediation process', 'helpfulness of mediation process' and 'perception of mediator role'. These concepts were defined by several independent items and were scored using a Likert-type point scale.

The concept 'satisfaction with the mediation process' was determined by asking participants to provide responses in regard to the mediation process itself. Items including factors such as wait time to start mediation, number of sessions, and the use of two mediators, were assessed. Possible responses were: 1 = very dissatisfied, 2 = dissatisfied, 3 = neither dissatisfied nor satisfied, 4 = satisfied, and 5 = very satisfied. A summed scale of the individual items was also calculated.

The concept of 'helpfulness of the mediation process' in resolving custody, access and financial issues was determined by several statements. For each item participants could respond using a four point scale with 1 = not at all helpful, 2 = marginally helpful, 3 =

somewhat helpful, and 4 = very helpful. Seven statements measured how helpful mediation was at: 1) reducing the financial cost of separation, 2) doing what is best for the children, 3) dealing with marital property, 4) working out fair custody arrangements, 5) working out fair child support, 6) reducing conflict between respondent and former partner, and 7) improving communication with the former partner. A summed scale of the individual items was also included in analysis.

The concept 'perception of mediator role' was assessed by asking participants to respond to a series of eight statements. Mediator role was measured by asking whether the mediators assisted participants in: 1) understanding child support arrangements, 2) understanding parenting arrangements, 3) understanding details regarding marital property, 4) negotiating with their former partner, and 5) generating options for settlement. Three additional items asked were 1) if the mediators were unbiased, 2) if the mediators were aware of the needs and concerns of their former partner, and 3) if the mediators were aware of your needs and concerns. Statements were evaluated on a four point scale with 1 = not at all true, 2 = somewhat untrue, 3 = somewhat true and 4 = definitely true. A summed scale of individual items was also included in analysis.

Mediation outcome was measured by the level of agreement obtained on issues related to the separation following the completion of the mediation process. This resulted in one of three options: 1 = no agreement on any issues, 2 = partial agreement on some issues, and 3 = full agreement on all issues.

The concept of 'co-parental conflict' post separation was explored in three areas: the

level of conflict related to issues resulting from the separation, negative co-parental communication and negative parenting patterns. In the first scale parents were asked to respond to four items indicating their current level of conflict in regard to child issues such as where the child will live, when the child will see each parent, how the child will spend time with the other parent and how decisions in regard to the child will be made. The second scale measured the level of co-parental conflict in regard to financial issues and was measured by asking respondents to indicate their current agreement level with child support, spousal support, use or ownership of assets and use or ownership of the family home. Responses were recorded using the following scale: 1 = none, 2 = a little, 3 = some, and 4 = a great deal. A summed scales of all individual items was calculated and included in analysis.

‘Negative co-parental communication patterns’, another measure of co-parental conflict was determined by four items. Questions were asked about how often the parents argue in front of the children, how often the underlying atmosphere between parents is hostile or angry, how often the conversation between parents is tense or stressful, and how often the parents opinions differ in regard to child rearing. The items were scored on a scale ranging from one to five with choices being 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often and 5 = always. A summed scale of the individual variables was included.

A third measure of co-parental conflict, ‘negative parenting patterns that place children in the middle of conflict’ was measured by asking parents to rate six items on the scale ranging from 1 to 5 as discussed above. Variables used to measure this concept were:

respondent says negative things to children about other parent, other parent says negative things to children about respondent, respondent tries to keep children from seeing other parent, other parent tries to keep children from seeing respondent, children used in passing messages between parents, children caught in the middle of co-parental conflict and both parents argue in front of the children. A summed scale of the individual variables was also calculated.

Co-parental support was explored in two areas: supportive parenting and positive co-parental communication. The first measure of co-parental support was 'supportive parenting patterns' and this was examined with statements such as the respondent assists the other parent in accommodating schedule changes, the other parent assists respondent in accommodating schedule changes, the other parent understands respondents needs as the custodial or non-custodial parent, when respondent's needs help regarding the children they seek it from the other parent, the other parent is a resource to respondent in raising the children, and the respondent is a resource to the other parent in raising the children. These items were scored from 1 to 5, ranging from 'never' to 'always', as earlier noted in this section. Again, a summed scale of the individual items was also calculated.

'Positive co-parental communication' was explored with a four item scale. Questions based on statements that 'there is good communication with my former partner', 'my former partner is fair minded about the separation', 'my former partner is flexible in dealing with issues pertaining to the separation' and 'both parents are able to focus on present problems without dredging up the past' were answered using a five point

disagree-agree scale where 1 = disagree strongly and 5 = agree strongly. A summed score of the individual variables was included.

The concept child adjustment was measured with a global question that asked parents to self-rate how well each of their children had adjusted to the separation. Responses were recorded using the scale: 1 = very poorly, 2 = poorly, 3 = adequately, 4 = well, and 5 = very well. Although each child is listed in this scale in the questionnaire, only results obtained for the first child were utilized. This child represents the oldest child affected by the separation in each family situation.

A seven item standardized scale measuring level of child coping, developed by Portes, Haas and Brown (1991) was also used to assess child well-being. Statements such as 'respondent feels children understand why parents separated', 'children feel separation was their fault', 'children understand both parents still love them', 'children have acted aggressively since separation', 'children have had problems at school since separation', 'separation has caused a lot of emotional problems', and 'overall children have been unable to cope with separation' were answered using the five item agree-disagree scale with 1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree somewhat, 3 = unsure, 4 = agree somewhat and , 5 = agree strongly. The range of possible scores for the Children's Coping Scale is between 7 and 35. The summed scale was used as the variable child coping. Items in this scale were answered regarding the oldest child affected by the separation in each family situation.

## Reliability and Validity

Reliability indicates the extent to which a measure reveals actual differences in what is being measured, rather than differences that are inherent in the measuring instrument itself (Marlow, 1993). This is usually achieved in two ways; one is to assess sources of error within the instrument and the other is the degree to which the reliability has been tested. Sources of error may occur in several ways. An unclear definition of a variable may contribute to a response error. That is, if the wording of the questionnaire statement is not precise, it may lead to a different interpretation of the question by respondents. Variations in the conditions for collecting data may also affect reliability of the measure. Even though the author collected the data from participants either via telephone or with mailed out questionnaires, a lack of control over the external variables may have affected the reliability of the data to some degree.

Reliability using Cronbach's alpha correlation coefficient to determine internal consistency was performed with variables using multiple items. Results are expressed with alpha numbers varying between 0 and 1. Mitchell and Jolly (1992) suggest a reliability coefficient of no less than .70 is required with .50 regarded as low, while Marlow (1993) reports .50 or higher as "probably reliable". George and Mallery (1999) set the standard significantly higher with .70 defined as acceptable, and this is considerably higher than the minimum .50 standard applied in 1967 by Nunnally. Regardless of minimums, reliability results obtained within this study were well above the .70 level. For example, 'helpfulness of mediation process' resulted in an alpha value of

.89, 'satisfaction with mediator role' resulted in an alpha value of .90 and 'satisfaction with the mediation process' resulted in an alpha value of .88. These numbers represent validity levels between good and excellent (George & Mallery, 1999).

Validity of a measuring tool indicates if the concept scores recorded represent the assumed measured concept (Marlow, 1993). There are three general types of validity. Criterion validity refers to the extent to which a correlation exists between the measuring instrument utilized and another standard of measurement. Most scales were devised specifically for this study based on questions from previous research. There is a generally established approach in the field to measuring these concepts and this approach, including some of the items used previously, was followed in this study. With the exception of the child-coping standardized scale, criterion validity with another previously used measure was not statistically established for the scales used in this study. The child-coping scale was developed from the Divorce Adjustment Inventory (Portes, Haas & Brown, 1991), and the authors of this inventory indicate that this scale was the highest predictor of child adjustment in their research (.69,  $p < .001$ ).

Content validity, also termed face validity, focuses on how well the instrument represents what we want to measure. Within this study several items being measured are abstract concepts identified and defined by the researchers, then interpreted, scored and recorded by the participants. Measures such as satisfaction with mediation process or mediator role, helpfulness of mediation process, child adjustment, co-parental conflict and co-parental communication imply abstract concepts and as a result the task of

establishing validity becomes more difficult (Hudson, 1981). Andrulis (1977), stated few, if any measures can be valid in the abstract. Instead validity should be examined as 'valid for whom' and 'valid for what'. These questions were designed to capture stages of the mediation process based on what occurred, and individual variables were grouped appropriately to support general concepts. Face validity is established through careful examination of whether the measure identified key elements of the concept or process being examined. Other research studies measuring these variables were examined and items used in those studies were included in the current study where appropriate.

Construct validity indicates the extent to which the instrument used measures an identified theoretical construct. It is generally the most difficult to establish. As noted above, several items measured are within the abstract realm and interpretation of each is subjective. Furthermore, the ability to ensure an exact level of construct validity is hindered as this measurement is theory based and it is too early to confirm the theoretical underpinnings of some of these concepts.

### Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following five research questions were developed based on the literature reviewed as well as results obtained from the initial study of comprehensive co-mediation in Winnipeg. The intent of this practicum is to expand the initial analysis of data gathered in order to address the research questions below.

(1) Are there differences in the way men and women experience the mediation process?

- (2) Are there factors pertaining to the mediation process that affect or influence the outcome of mediation?
- (3) Are there factors pertaining to post separation co-parental interaction that affect or influence child adjustment, assessed in response to a global question by parents?
- (4) Are there factors pertaining to post separation co-parental interaction that affect or influence child coping, measured using a standardized scale?
- (5) Are there factors pertaining to post separation co-parental interaction that affect or influence mediation outcome?

Each research question is discussed in more detail below and the hypotheses developed with each question are identified.

The first research question was concerned with whether there were differences in the way men and women experience the mediation process. As reported earlier, several studies have looked at satisfaction level between women and men with variables associated to the mediation process. This stems from a concern raised by researchers writing from a feminist perspective that women are disadvantaged by the mediation process. This perception suggests women are less satisfied than men with the mediation process and resulting mediated outcomes. At the same time, other research, as reviewed in Chapter 2, contradicts this. Given the amount of research in this area and the fact that

most studies find no significant differences based on gender it is possible to specify predictive hypotheses regarding gender relationships. In each case, no statistical significant difference, or the null hypothesis, is predicted.

**Hypothesis 1(a): There will be no statistically significant difference in level of satisfaction with the mediation process as reported by men and women with the items below:**

- a) the intake process;
- b) the length of time to wait to start mediation;
- c) the content of mediation sessions;
- d) the use of two mediators;
- e) the number of mediation sessions;
- f) the overall mediation process;

and the summed scale measuring 'Satisfaction with the Mediation Process'.

**Hypothesis 1(b): There will be no statistically significant difference in level of perceived helpfulness of the mediation process as reported by men and women on the following items:**

- a) improving communication between the former partners;
- b) reducing the level of conflict between the former partners;

- c) working out fair custody arrangements;
- d) dealing with marital property;
- e) doing what is best for the children;
- f) reducing the financial cost of separation;

and the summed scale labeled 'Helpfulness of the Mediation Process'.

**Hypothesis 1(c): There will be no statistically significant difference in the perception of mediator role as reported by men and women with the items below:**

- a) mediators' awareness of respondent's needs and concerns;
- b) mediators' awareness of the former partner's needs and concerns;
- c) mediators' ability to be unbiased;
- d) mediators' assistance in generating options for settlement;
- e) mediators' assistance in former partner's negotiating more reasonably with each other;
- f) mediators' assisting respondent with understanding details about the marital property settlement;
- g) mediators' assisting respondent with understanding details about the parenting arrangements;
- h) mediators' assisting respondent with understanding details about the child support arrangements;

and the summed scale identified as 'Perception of the Mediator Role'.

As discussed previously, the group size for hypotheses 1(a), 1(b) and 1(c) is based on the number of participants who completed questionnaires immediately following the mediation process (n = 131). There were 63 men and 68 women in this sample.

The second research question examined factors pertaining to the mediation process that affect or influence the outcome of mediation. A limited amount of research has been done in the area of the mediation process and its relationship to outcome. However, conclusions from the research on family therapy (Dunn & Schwebel, 1995; Jacobson & Addis, 1993) suggest that the level of engagement of the therapist and collaboration between therapist and clients is related to success would suggest that the same should be true within the context of family mediation. The mediation literature reviewed suggests a relationship exists between participants' level of satisfaction with the mediator role and outcome. Irving and Benjamin (2002) reported that the participant perception of mediator role, as well as participant satisfaction with the mediator role, were positively correlated with mediated outcome.

The following hypotheses have been developed based on this research and related literature in the field of family therapy.

**Hypothesis 2(a): Variables measuring the ‘level of satisfaction with the mediation process’ will be positively correlated with outcome; that is, satisfaction with**

- a) the intake process will be positively correlated with outcome;
  - b) the length of time to wait to start mediation will be positively correlated with outcome;
  - c) the content of mediation sessions will be positively correlated with outcome;
  - d) the use of two mediators will be positively correlated with outcome;
  - e) the number of mediation sessions will be positively correlated with outcome;
  - f) the overall mediation process will be positively correlated with outcome;
- and the summed scale ‘Satisfaction with the Mediation Process’ will be positively correlated with outcome.

**Hypothesis 2(b): Variables measuring the ‘helpfulness of the mediation process’ will be positively correlated with outcome; that is, mediation helpfulness with**

- a) improving communication between the former partners will be positively correlated with outcome;
- b) reducing the conflict between the former partners will be positively correlated with outcome;
- c) working out fair custody arrangements will be positively correlated with outcome;
- d) dealing with marital property will be positively correlated with outcome;

e) doing what is best for the children will be positively correlated with outcome;  
f) reducing financial cost of separation will be positively correlated with outcome;  
and the summed scale measuring 'Helpfulness of the Mediation Process' will be positively correlated with outcome.

**Hypothesis 2(c): Variables measuring the 'perception of mediator role' will be positively correlated with outcome;** that is, higher perceptions of each of the following will be positively correlated with outcome:

- a) mediators' awareness of respondent's needs and concerns;
  - b) mediators' awareness of the former partner's needs and concerns;
  - c) mediators' ability to be unbiased;
  - d) mediators' assistance in generating options for settlement;
  - e) mediators' assistance in former partner's negotiating more reasonably with each other;
  - f) mediators' assisting respondent with understanding details about the marital property settlement;
  - g) mediators' assisting respondent with understanding details about the parenting arrangements;
  - h) mediators' assisting respondent with understanding details about the child support arrangements;
- and the summed scale labeled 'Perception of Mediator Role'.

The third and fourth research questions examined the following (a) factors pertaining to post separation co-parental interaction that affect or influence child adjustment, assessed in response to a global question by parents, and (b) factors pertaining to post separation co-parental interaction that affect or influence child coping, as measured using a standardized scale. The relationship between co-parental interaction and child well-being has been well documented. Most research indicates that a higher level of co-parental conflict is associated with poorer child adjustment issues (Amato et al., 1991; Aro et al., 1992; Call et al., 1994; Cherlin et al., 1998; Emery, 1994, 1999; Fischer, 1997; Gray et al., 1997; Hoffman, 1994; Kelly, 1993; Lye, 1998, Spigelman et al., 1991). Earlier research by McKenzie and Pedersen (2001) reported that the level of co-parental conflict in areas of when the children will see each parent, how to make decisions about the children, use of family home and division of assets and debts decreased significantly from before the mediation process to four to six months following the completion of mediation. As well, McKenzie and Pedersen (2001) found a significant decrease in co-parental conflict in communication patterns, specifically a reduction in arguments, hostility and anger between the separated parents and tension within conversation over this same time period. Post separation co-parental interaction was assessed by items that examined co-parental conflict and co-parental support. Co-parental conflict scores were determined in three areas: level of conflict related to issues resulting from the separation, negative communication and negative parenting patterns. Co-parental support was examined in

two areas: positive co-parental communication and positive parenting patterns.

Hypothesis 3.1 to 4.2 were analyzed at two different times during this study. Selected variables measured prior to mediation were correlated with variables of child adjustment and child coping prior to mediation. These same selected variables were measured at follow up and correlated with child adjustment and child coping variables at follow up. The child adjustment variable is a self-reported global measure based on the perception of parents while child coping consists of a summed score of standardized measures identifying child coping variables related to the separation. The sample size used to examine the relationship with child adjustment and child coping is 83. Based on previous literature the hypotheses identified below were developed.

**Hypothesis 3.1(a): Variables measuring post separation ‘co-parental conflict in regard to issues resulting from the separation’ will be negatively related to child adjustment;** that is, higher scores of parental conflict in each of the following items will be associated with lower child adjustment scores:

- a) where the children will live;
  - b) when the children will see each parent;
  - c) how the children will spend time with each parent;
  - d) how parents make decisions about the children’s lives;
- the summed scale labeled ‘Conflict Regarding Children’;

e) child support;

f) spousal support;

e) use or ownership of family home;

f) use or ownership of other assets;

a summed scale identified as 'Conflict Regarding Financial Issues';

and a combined summed scale labeled 'Conflict Regarding Separation'.

**Hypothesis 3.1(b): Variables measuring post separation 'negative co-parental communication patterns' will be negatively associated with child adjustment; that is,**

a higher level of conflict will be associated with a lower the level of child adjustment,

a) when discussing parenting issues with former partner, an argument results;

b) the underlying atmosphere is one of hostility or anger;

c) the conversation with respondents' former partner is stressful or tense;

d) both parents have differences of opinion in regard to child rearing;

with a summed scale based on these items identified as 'Negative Communication'.

**Hypothesis 3.1(c): Variables measuring 'negative parenting patterns that put**

**children in the middle of conflict' will be negatively correlated with child**

**adjustment; that is a higher score on the variables identified below measuring the**

concept 'children in the middle of co-parental conflict' will be associated with a lower score of child adjustment;

- a) how often the respondent says things to the children the other parent wouldn't want them to hear;
- b) how often does the other parent says things to the children the respondent wouldn't want them to hear;
- c) how often does the respondent try to keep the children from seeing the other parent;
- d) how often the other parent tries to keep the children from seeing the respondent;
- e) how often the respondent and other parent argue in front of the children;
- f) how often the children get caught in the middle of conflicts between the respondent and other parent;
- g) how often the children are involved in passing messages between the respondent and the other parent;

with a summed scale based on these items identified as 'Children in the Middle'.

**Hypothesis 3.2(a): Variables measuring the post separation concept 'co-parental supportive parenting' will be positively correlated with child adjustment.** As the level of co-parental support increases in each of the items below, so too will the level of child adjustment. The specific items are:

- a) the respondent assists the other parent in accommodating change;

- b) the other parent assists the respondent in accommodating change;
  - c) the respondent feels the other parent understands their needs as the custodial or non-custodial parent;
  - d) when the respondent needs help regarding the children they seek it from the other parent;
  - e) the other parent is a resource to the respondent in raising the children;
  - f) the respondent is a resource to the other parent in raising the children;
- and a summed scale of these items labeled 'Supportive Parenting'.

**Hypothesis 3.2(b): Variables measuring the post separation concept 'positive co-parental communication' will be positively correlated with child adjustment;** that is a higher score measuring the concept 'positive communication' will be associated with a higher score on child adjustment. The items identified as 'positive communication' are:

- a) there has been good communication;
  - b) respondent's former partner is fair minded about separation;
  - c) respondent's former partner is flexible dealing with separation issues;
  - d) the parents can focus on current problems without dredging up the past;
- and a summed scale composed of these items identified as 'Positive Communication'.

**Hypothesis 4.1(a): Variables measuring the post separation ‘co-parental conflict in regard to separation issues’ will be negatively related to child coping.** That is, higher scores of co-parental conflict in each of the following items will be negatively correlated with child coping:

a) where the children will live;

b) when the children will see each parent;

c) how the children will spend time with each parent;

d) how parents make decisions about the children’s lives;

a summed scale of the four items above identified as ‘Conflict Regarding Children’;

e) child support;

f) spousal support;

g) use or ownership of family home;

h) use or ownership of other assets;

a summed scale of the four items above on financial issues identified as ‘Conflict Regarding Financial Issues’ and;

a summed scale of the eight individual items in this concept know as ‘Conflict Regarding Separation’.

**Hypothesis 4.1(b): Variables measuring post separation ‘negative co-parental communication patterns’ will be negatively associated with child coping;** that is, a higher level of co-parental conflict in each statement below will be associated with a lower level of child coping. The items are:

- a) when discussing parenting issues, an argument results;
- b) the underlying atmosphere is one of hostility or anger;
- c) the conversation with respondents’ former partner is stressful or tense;
- d) both parents have differences of opinion in regard to child rearing;

and with a summed scale of these items identified as ‘Negative Communication’.

**Hypothesis 4.1(c): Variables measuring ‘negative parenting patterns that put children in the middle of conflict’ will be negatively correlated with child coping;** that is a higher level of co-parental conflict in each item below will be associated with a lower level of child coping. The items are:

- a) how often the respondent says things to the children the other parent wouldn’t want them to hear;
- b) how often does the other parent says things to the children the respondent wouldn’t want them to hear;
- c) how often the respondent tries to keep the children from seeing the other parent;

- d) how often the other parent tries to keep the children from seeing the respondent;
  - e) how often the respondent and other parent argue in front of the children;
  - f) how often the children get caught in the middle of conflicts between the respondent and other parent;
  - g) how often the children are involved in passing messages between the respondent and the other parent;
- and with a summed scale based on these items identified as 'Children in the Middle'.

**Hypothesis 4.2(a): Variables measuring the post separation concept 'co-parental supportive parenting' will be positively correlated with child coping.** As the level of co-parental support scores increase so too will the scores indicating a positive level of child coping. The items used to assess co-parental support are:

- a) the respondent assists the other parent in accommodating change;
- b) the other parent assists the respondent in accommodating change;
- c) the respondent feels the other parent understands their needs as the custodial or non-custodial parent;
- d) when the respondent needs help regarding the children, they seek it from the other parent;
- e) the other parent is a resource to the respondent in raising the children;
- f) the respondent is a resource to the other parent in raising the children;

and a summed scale of these items labeled 'Supportive Parenting'.

**4.2(b): Variables measuring the post separation concept 'positive co-parental communication' will be positively correlated with child coping.** Higher scores on items included in the concept positive co-parental communication will be associated with higher levels of child coping. The items used to assess positive co-parental communication are:

- a) there has been good communication;
- b) respondent's former partner is fair minded about separation;
- c) respondent's former partner is flexible dealing with separation issues;
- d) the parents can focus on current problems without dredging up the past;

and a summed scale composed of these items identified as 'Positive Communication'.

The fifth research question examined whether there were factors pertaining to post separation co-parental communication that affected or influenced mediation outcome. Limited research in the exploration of variables that influence mediation has been done. Irving and Benjamin (2002) suggest the more positive the relationship with the mediator, the more positive the mediation outcome. Based on this information the following hypotheses were developed.

**Hypothesis 5.1(a): Variables measuring post separation ‘co-parental conflict in regard to issues resulting from the separation’ will be negatively related to mediation outcome;** that is, higher scores of co-parental conflict in each of the following items will be associated with a lower number of full agreements. The items are:

- a) where the children will live;
- b) when the children will see each parent;
- c) how the children will spend time with each parent;
- d) how parents make decisions about the children’s lives;

a summed scale labeled ‘Conflict Regarding Children’;

e) child support;

f) spousal support;

e) use or ownership of family home;

f) use or ownership of other assets;

a summed scale identified as ‘Conflict Regarding Financial Issues’;

and a combined summed scale labeled ‘Conflict Regarding Separation’.

**Hypothesis 5.1(b): Variables measuring post separation ‘negative co-parental communication patterns’ will be negatively associated with mediation outcome;** that is, a higher level of co-parental conflict in each item identified will be associated with a

lower rate of full agreements. The statements used to measure negative co-parental communication are:

- a) when discussing parenting issues, an argument results;
- b) the underlying atmosphere is one of hostility or anger;
- c) the conversation with the other parent is stressful or tense;
- d) both parents have differences of opinion in regard to child rearing;

and with a summed scale based on these items identified as 'Negative Communication'.

**Hypothesis 5.1(c): Variables measuring 'negative parenting patterns that put children in the middle of conflict' will be negatively correlated with outcome;** that is a higher score on items measuring co-parental conflict will be associated with a lower level of full agreements. The items used to measure negative parenting patterns that put children in the middle of conflict are:

- a) how often the respondent says things to the children the other parent wouldn't want them to hear;
- b) how often does the other parent says things to the children the respondent wouldn't want them to hear;
- c) how often the respondent tries to keep the children from seeing the other parent;
- d) how often the other parent tries to keep the children from seeing the respondent;
- e) how often both parents argue in front of the children;

f) how often the children get caught in the middle of conflicts between the respondent and the other parent;

g) how often the children are involved in passing messages between the respondent and the other parent;

and with a summed scale based on these items identified as 'Children in the Middle'.

**Hypothesis 5.2(a): Variables measuring the post separation concept 'co-parental supportive parenting' will be positively correlated with outcome.** That is, as the level of co-parental support increases the rate of full agreements will increase.

a) the respondent assists the other parent in accommodating change;

b) the other parent assists the respondent in accommodating change;

c) the other parent understands the respondent's needs as custodial or non-custodial parent;

d) when the respondent needs help regarding the children, they seek it from the other parent;

e) the other parent is a resource to the respondent in raising the children;

f) the respondent is a resource to the other parent in raising the children;

and a summed scale of these items labeled as 'Supportive Parenting'.

**5.2(b): Variables measuring the post separation concept ‘positive co-parental communication’ will be positively correlated with mediation outcome;** that is higher scores on items measuring the concept positive approach will be associated with the presence of more mediated full agreements. The items used to assess positive co-parental communication are:

- a) there has been good communication;
- b) respondent’s former partner is fair minded about separation;
- c) respondent’s former partner is flexible dealing with separation issues;
- d) the two parents can focus on problems without dredging up past;

and a summed scale of these four items identified as ‘Positive Communication’.

Several regression equations were formulated that explored the effects of the mediation process and aspects of the co-parenting relationship on mediation outcome. The summed scale measures of co-parental conflict variables and co-parental support variables in addition to the summed score variables of the mediation process were regressed on the dependent variable outcome.

### Analysis

In this study, scales that were constructed from ordinal items were considered as interval data, and analysis techniques for interval scales were applied. Despite those who argue against such practice (e.g., Siegel, 1956), social researchers who have debated this

issue have established that there is very little, if any difference in results when using ordinal data in tests requiring interval level data (Gaito, 1972; Lord, 1972). Ordinal data represents categories such as 'dissatisfied', 'neutral', 'satisfied' that have some order. Interval data has the same distance between points such as numeric values (e.g. age). Data obtained through ordinal scales was interpreted as interval scale data in correlation and regression analyses used for this study. As mentioned at the beginning of the analysis section, this is a practice that is questioned by some and should be considered when interpreting results.

Results from the study are discussed in terms of statistical significance. A finding is statistically significant when the null hypothesis is rejected and the probability of a relationship occurring due to chance falls at or below a certain cut off point. The cut off point this study used was the criterion of  $p < .05$ , which indicates the relative likelihood that differences would occur by chance no more than 5 times out of 100. Using  $p < .05$  indicates that 95 out of 100 times the difference reported in the comparison could not be explained by chance. Despite the fact that differences reported at  $p < .05$  are considered to be statistically significant in this study, differences determined to be at a higher level of significance such as  $p < .01$  or  $p < .001$  were reported when they occurred. Sometimes an error may occur in either accepting or rejecting the null hypothesis. These types of errors are referred to as Type I and Type II errors. A Type I error is the rejection of the null hypothesis and the conclusion that a relationship exists between variables when no

relationship in fact exists. The frequency with which this was likely to occur was roughly calculated by examining the criterion used to determine statistical significance. A Type II error is the failure to reject the null hypothesis and the failure to identify a relationship between variables when one is present (Marlow, 1993, p.216-217). The ability of a statistical test to correctly reject a null hypothesis is referred to as the power of the test. In general, power is increased as the sample size increases.

Analysis for hypotheses testing of predicted relationships between men and women's experience with the mediation process was completed using independent t-tests to determine mean differences between the groups. A two-tailed test of significance was used as it examines whether the mean of one group differed significantly from the mean of the other group, regardless of the direction (positive or negative) of the difference.

Bivariate correlation analysis using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) was used to determine significant relationships between variables. Correlations range in value from +1, a perfect positive association to -1, a perfect negative relationship. A correlation of 0 means there is no relationship between variables. Associations with a value of less than .19 are considered to be very weak, .20 - .39 weak, .40 - .59 moderate, .60 - .79 strong and .80 - 1 very strong (Swinscow, 1997). Variables which are statistically significant and with a correlation coefficient of at least moderate strength were included in the multivariate analysis. Regression analysis was then performed on the selected independent and dependent variables to study the relationships among them. Regression

identifies the portion of variance in the dependent variable, which is explained by variances in the identified independent predictor variables. In this study, the dependent variable is mediation outcome and predictor variables are the summed scale scores of co-parental conflict, co-parental support and the mediation process. By identifying predictor variables and their effects on outcome, the level of outcome can be better predicted.

The step-wise method of regression analysis was applied to the statistically significant correlated data, called independent predictor variables. This method enters each of these predictor variables one at a time, based on the significance level of  $p < .05$ . This means that the independent predictor variable with the highest ability to explain variance in the dependent variable is identified first; this is followed by the second predictor variable. This process continues until no other predictor variables are able to explain additional variance or change in the dependent variable.

Even though all independent variables entered into a regression equation were found to be significantly correlated using bi-variate analyses, this does not mean each of these variables will emerge as a significant predictor of the dependent variable. When multiple variables are compared at the same time, the effects of any one variable may be 'controlled' or partially explained by other variables. Thus, at times a variable that is entered into a regression equation loses some of its predictive ability when other variables are entered. When this occurs, the weakened variable may be removed as a significant predictor.

### Limitations

Limitations within the research design may compromise the ability to generalize results outside the study. This study involves an assessment of variables that influenced mediation outcome, child adjustment and child coping. Conclusions were based on data collected using three questionnaires applied at different intervals during the mediation process. Some of the data utilized was based on subjective parental perceptions, such as the global question on child adjustment in which participants self report their perception of their children's adjustment in regard to the separation. However, the amount of parent-child contact post separation, and the level of co-parental conflict or support may have influenced such scores. Therefore, conclusions within this study should be interpreted with some caution.

As mentioned at the beginning of the analysis section, in this study, scales that were constructed from ordinal items were considered as interval data, and analysis techniques for interval scales were applied. Social researchers who have debated this issue have established that there is very little, if any difference in results when using ordinal data in tests requiring interval level data.

A process termed maturation can also affect outcome. When responses are compared over time - in this case, prior to mediation, at the conclusion of mediation and four to six months after the mediation ceased - changes may occur as a result of the passage of time and this natural progression may influence results. Thus, it may be difficult to conclude

with certainty whether it was factors within the mediation process or the passage of time that affected outcome. For example, results could have been affected by a natural decrease in stress level and conflict level between participants over time. The absence of control group comparisons limit the ability to rule out the effects of maturation, although strong relationships between independent and dependent variables that coincided with the intervention (i.e., mediation) were used to support the conclusion that the intervention was influential in determining the outcome. Another caution is that participants were not randomly assigned to the mediation process under study; instead they self-selected this option. This may be interpreted as participants having a pre-disposition to this format of problem solving suggesting an alternative to the traditional process of separation and divorce. However, because results were analyzed for only those who selected mediation, conclusions can be generalized at least to those who selected this model of resolving their post separation differences.

### Summary

The intent of this chapter was to provide a summary of the Comprehensive Co-Mediation and Mediation Internship Pilot Project and describe the methodology used in the present study. Data collection methods were discussed, the purpose of the study clarified and the research design and measures used explained. Bivariate and multi-variate analysis procedures used in the analyses of the data were discussed such as t-tests,

correlations and regression. Issues of reliability and validity, and the level of significance to be used have been described. Research questions and hypotheses were identified. In addition, concepts were clarified and the variables under study were operationally defined.

## Chapter 4 Results

In this section findings from the study are presented. Results were organized according to the five research questions: 1) experiences of men and women during the mediation process; 2) factors pertaining to the mediation process and their relationship with outcome; 3) child adjustment and its relationship with co-parental interaction; 4) child coping and its relationship with co-parental interaction; and 5) co-parental interaction and its relationship with outcome.

### The Experience of Men and Women During the Mediation Process

The first research question was concerned with whether men and women experienced aspects of the mediation process in different ways. As described in Chapter 3, three sets of hypotheses were posed and the prediction of no difference (i.e., the null hypothesis in each case) was based on the weight of evidence in the literature on gender differences with respect to mediation. The three concepts considered were: reported levels of satisfaction with the mediation process; the level of perceived helpfulness of mediation process; and the level of satisfaction with the mediator role. In each case the mean scores for men and women were compared using the t-test for independent samples with a criterion of  $p < .05$  (two-tailed) to determine statistically significant differences.

Satisfaction with the mediation process was measured by several items: the intake process, length of time to wait to start mediation, the content within mediation sessions, the use of two mediators, the number of sessions held, and the overall mediation process.

Mean score results for each item and the combined scale are shown in Part 1 of Table 1 along with results from the t-test comparing average scores for men and women.

Table 1: Respondents Experiences with the Mediation Process

	Mean Scores <sup>1</sup>		Significant Differences <sup>2</sup>
	Men	Women	
<b>Part 1: Satisfaction with Mediation Process</b>			
a) intake process	3.85	4.00	n.s.
b) wait time to start mediation	3.77	3.82	n.s.
c) content of mediation sessions	3.77	4.03	n.s.
d) use of two mediators	4.03	4.27	n.s.
e) number of mediation sessions	3.69	3.66	n.s.
f) overall mediation process	3.92	4.03	n.s.
<b>Satisfaction with Mediation Process</b>	<b>22.56</b>	<b>23.69</b>	n.s.
<b>Part 2: Helpfulness of Mediation</b>			
a) improving communication between both parents	2.74	2.80	n.s.
b) reducing conflict between both parents	2.74	2.74	n.s.
c) working out fair child support	2.72	2.59	n.s.
d) working out fair custody arrangements	2.70	2.73	n.s.
e) dealing with marital property	2.56	2.67	n.s.
f) doing what is best for the children	3.03	3.06	n.s.
g) reducing the financial costs of separation	3.17	3.05	n.s.
<b>Helpfulness of Mediation Process</b>	<b>18.42</b>	<b>18.79</b>	n.s.
<b>Part 3: Mediators' Role</b>			
a) mediators were aware of respondents' needs and concerns	3.26	3.52	p < .05
b) mediators were aware of respondents' former partners' needs and concerns	3.62	3.62	n.s.
c) mediators were unbiased	3.40	3.63	n.s.
d) mediators assisted parents with generating options for settlement	3.33	3.36	n.s.
e) mediators assisted parents in negotiating with each other more easily	3.22	3.31	n.s.
f) mediators assisted parents in understanding details of marital property settlement	2.98	3.16	n.s.
g) mediators assisted parents in understanding details of parenting arrangements	3.13	3.27	n.s.
h) mediators assisted parents in understanding details of child support arrangements	3.09	3.19	n.s.
<b>Perception of Mediator Role</b>	<b>25.06</b>	<b>26.21</b>	n.s.

Notes: <sup>1</sup>Mean scores for Part 1 based on responses of 1=very dissatisfied, 2=dissatisfied, 3=neutral, 4=satisfied, 5=very satisfied. Mean scores for Part 2 based on responses of 1=not at all helpful, 2=marginally helpful, 3=somewhat helpful, 4=very helpful. Mean scores for Part 3 based on responses where 1=not at all true, 2=somewhat true, 3=somewhat untrue, 4=definitely true. Summed scores are shown for scale means.

<sup>2</sup>Statistically significant differences in mean scores between men and women using the independent t-test indicated where applicable; n.s. = not statistically significant at p < .05 (2 tailed).

When the mean scores for men and women on satisfaction with the mediation process were compared, there was no significant difference on any of these variables. These results support the predicted null hypothesis of no difference between men and women on satisfaction with the mediation process. Mean scores indicate that men and women were generally satisfied with the mediation process as scores ranged from 3.66 for 'number of mediation sessions' to 4.27 for 'the use of two mediators' where 3 = a neutral response, 4 = satisfied, and 5 = very satisfied.

The level of perceived helpfulness of the mediation process was measured by several items such as improving communication between both parents, reducing co-parental conflict, assisting with child support arrangements, marital property arrangements and reducing the cost of mediation. Mean score results are shown in Part 2 of Table 1 for individual items and the combined scale. When the mean scores for men and women for these items and the summed scale were compared, no significant difference on any of these variables emerged. These results supports the hypothesis of no difference between men and women on level of perceived mediator helpfulness. Mean scores indicate that men and women were generally satisfied with mediator helpfulness as variable scores ranged from 2.56 for dealing with marital property to 3.17 for reducing costs of separation with 2 = marginally helpful and 3 = somewhat helpful.

Satisfaction with mediator role was measured by several items including mediators' awareness of parents needs and concerns, the mediators' fairness in avoiding bias, and the mediators' assisting parents with negotiating. Mean scores results are shown in Part 3 of Table 1 for individual items and the combined scale. When the mean scores for men and

women were compared on these items, one variable (i.e., whether the mediators were aware of the respondents needs and concerns) resulted in a significant difference at the  $p < .05$  level (i.e., women reported a higher mean score). There was no significant difference in the mean scores of the remaining seven variables. As a result of the analysis, seven variables support the hypothesis of no difference between men and women on satisfaction with the mediator role. Despite evidence of a difference in scores between men and women on one item there is no significant difference in the combined scale scores between men and women for this concept. Thus the weight of evidence supports the predicted hypothesis of no difference between men and women in their perceptions of the roles of mediators. Mean scores indicated that men and women overall were satisfied with the mediator role as variable scores ranged from 2.98 for assisted with marital property to 3.63 for mediators were unbiased with 3 = somewhat true and 4 = definitely true.

With the exception of the variable 'respondent felt the mediators were aware of their needs and concerns', results support the hypothesis that men and women do not experience the mediation process differently in this study. It is also interesting to note that the mean scores on each of the combined scale items were slightly higher for women.

#### Factors Pertaining to the Mediation Process and

#### Their Relationship with Outcome

The second research question explored factors within the mediation process and their association with mediation outcome. Three sets of hypotheses were studied and the

prediction of a positive relationship between variables was based on the literature reviewed and discussed in Chapter 3. The three variables considered were: reported levels of satisfaction with the mediation process; the level of perceived helpfulness of the mediation process and the level of satisfaction with the mediator role. Items included in each of these concepts were identified in the previous section and are listed in Table 2. Mediation outcome was defined in the following way: 1 = no agreement on any issues; 2 = partial agreement on some issues; and 3 = agreement on all issues. Bivariate analysis using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) to determine associations between mediation process, helpfulness of mediation, mediator role and outcome are shown in Table 2.

When variables identifying satisfaction with the mediation process were correlated with outcome (Part 1 in Table 2), the prediction of a positive relationship between variables was supported for all items. Five of the six individual variables were associated at the statistically significant level of  $p < .01$  while one relationship was significant at the  $p < .05$  level. The seven item scale measuring satisfaction with the mediation process was significant at the  $p < .01$  level. Five of the six individual variables indicate a weak association with outcome with strength ranging from  $r = .252$  to  $r = .343$ . One individual variable and the scale measuring satisfaction with the mediation process indicated a moderate association with outcome ( $r = .439$  to  $r = .493$ ). Results support the hypothesis that variables measuring the mediation process are positively associated with outcome, however, this association was weak to moderate.

When variables identifying helpfulness of the mediation process were correlated with outcome, the prediction of a positive relationship between variables was supported for all

Table 2: Inter-Correlations of Mediation Process Variables and Outcome

	<u>Pearson's Correlation Coefficient (r)</u>
<b>Part 1: Satisfaction with Mediation Process</b>	
a) intake process	.252**
b) wait time to start mediation	.314**
c) session content	.343**
d) use of two mediators	.216*
e) number of mediation sessions	.342**
f) overall mediation process	.493**
<b>Satisfaction with Mediation Process Scale</b>	<b>.439**</b>
<b>Part 2: Helpfulness of Mediation</b>	
a) improving communication between both parents	.504**
b) reducing conflict between both parents	.483**
c) working out fair child support	.587**
d) working out fair custody arrangements	.593**
e) dealing with marital property	.503**
f) doing what is best for the children	.578**
g) reducing the financial costs of separation	.598**
<b>Helpfulness of Mediation Process Scale</b>	<b>.647**</b>
<b>Part 3: Mediators' Role</b>	
a) mediators were aware of their needs and concerns	.278**
b) mediators were aware of their former partners needs and concerns	.108
c) mediators were unbiased	.228**
d) mediators assisted them with generating options for settlement	.285**
e) mediators assisted both parents in negotiating with each other more easily	.462**
f) mediators assisted them in understanding details of marital property settlement	.370**
g) mediators assisted them in understanding details of parenting arrangements	.422**
h) mediators assisted them in understanding details of child support arrangements	.473**
<b>Perception of Mediator Role Scale</b>	<b>.445**</b>

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

items. Each association was statistically significant at the  $p < .01$  level. Each of the seven individual variables suggests an association with outcome in the moderate strength range

( $r = .483$  to  $r = .598$ ) while the seven item scale identifying helpfulness of the mediation process resulted in a strong association at  $r = .647$ . Results support the hypothesis that variables measuring the helpfulness of the mediation process are positively associated with outcome and the strength of this association is moderate to strong.

When variables identifying mediator role were correlated with outcome, seven of the eight individual items and the eight item scale identifying perception of the mediator role resulted in statistically significant associations at the  $p < .01$  level. One variable 'the mediators were aware of respondent's former partners needs and concerns' was not statistically significant. Five associations were considered weak ( $r = .108$  to  $r = .370$ ) while four associations, including the scale identifying perception of the mediator role were of moderate strength ( $r = .422$  to  $r = .473$ ). Results support the hypothesis that variables measuring the perception of mediator role are positively related with outcome, but the strength of association was weak to moderate.

#### The Regression of Mediation Process Variables on Outcome

As correlation describes the strength of an association between two variables, and the correlation is symmetrical, further analysis using the regression equation was done to determine a better summary of the relationship of variables. Regression helps us to understand how multiple factors may predict certain results (in this case the outcome of mediation) by comparing how variances in independent variables (predictors) are associated with the variance (or changes) in the dependent variable. Specifically, regression allows us to use predictors to predict outcome. Stepwise entry of variables in a

regression equation allows the variables explaining the greatest amount of variance in the dependent variable to be entered first. Then other variables, which explain a significant amount of the variance in the dependent variable, are entered into the equation from strongest to weakest. Of course, the amount of variance explained is limited to the variables that have been measured in the study and it is always possible that unmeasured factors could have explained a greater amount of the variance than those available to the researcher. The selection of variables included in this study were based on results just reported and previous research as the literature supports the importance of some of these factors as predictors of mediation outcome. The use of regression requires interval data, and technically, the data obtained in this study is not interval level data. This is particularly true for the outcome variable. However, as noted in Chapter 3, there is some support for treating ordinal data as interval level data for analytical purposes, and exploratory analysis using regression is based on this argument. However, the limitation of the data available in assessing outcome is noted and caution in the interpretation of these results is therefore recommended.

The results of the summed scale scores of satisfaction with mediation process, helpfulness of mediation process and perception of mediator role all showed a moderate to strong positive correlation with mediation outcome. Therefore, these variables were used as the predictor variables on the dependent variable of outcome. Based on this information, the exploratory regression equation is:  $\text{outcome} = \text{satisfaction with mediation process} + \text{helpfulness of mediation process} + \text{perception of mediator role} + (\text{unknown influences})$ . The stepwise regression procedure was used in this analysis and results are

shown in Table 3.

Results indicate that 41.9% of the variance in outcome is explained by helpfulness of mediation process. When the second variable 'satisfaction with the mediation process' was introduced, 44.9% of the variance in outcome was explained by these two predictor variables. 'Helpfulness of the mediation process' had the greatest influence on outcome (beta = .563) followed by satisfaction with the mediation process (beta = .193). The direction of influence was positive for both variables. Helpfulness of the mediation process appeared to be the most influential predictor variable on the dependent variable outcome. The predictor variable 'perception of mediator role' was not a significant predictor when entered into this regression equation.

Table 3: Regression of Mediation Process Variables on Outcome

<u>Predictor Variables</u>	<u>R<sup>2</sup></u>
a) helpfulness of mediation process	.419**
b) satisfaction with mediation process	.449*
c) perception of mediator role	.000

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\* F < .05

\*\* F < .01

#### Factors Pertaining to Co-Parental Interaction and

#### Their Relationship with Child Adjustment

The third research question explored factors pertaining to co-parental interaction and their associations with child adjustment. Analyses exploring these relationships were

based on data from two phases of the mediation process, the first, at the beginning of mediation, and the second at the follow up stage. In the first set of hypotheses the prediction of a negative relationship between co-parental conflict variables and child adjustment was based on the literature reviewed and discussed in Chapter 3. The three variables considered were: conflict related to issues resulting from the separation, negative co-parental communication and interaction that places the children in the middle of co-parental conflict. Items included in each of these concepts were identified in Chapter 3 and are listed in Table 4. The global measure of child adjustment for the oldest child was defined in the following way: 1 = very poorly, 2 = poorly, 3 = adequately, 4 = well, and 5 = very well. Bivariate analysis using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) to determine associations between co-parental conflict and child adjustment are shown in Table 4. Pre-mediation variable correlations are presented first in this section followed by the results of variable correlations at follow up.

#### The Relationship of Co-Parental Conflict Variables With Child Adjustment

When variables measuring co-parental conflict in regard to issues resulting from the separation were correlated with child adjustment prior to mediation (Part 1, Table 4), no statistically significant relationships resulted. Based on these findings, the prediction of a negative association between variables is not supported.

When variables identifying negative co-parental communication were correlated with child adjustment (Part 2, Table 4), no statistically significant associations were found. As a result of the analysis, the prediction of a negative relationship between these

variables is not supported.

Table 4: Inter-Correlations of Co-Parental Conflict Variables and Child Adjustment

	<u>Pearson Product Coefficient (r)</u>	
	<u>Pre-Mediation Results</u>	<u>Follow Up Results</u>
<b>Part 1: Conflict Related to Separation</b>		
a) where children will live	-.199	-.222*
b) when children will see each parent	.063	-.083
c) how children will spend time with each parent	.011	-.360**
d) how you make decisions about children's lives	-.071	-.167
<b>Conflict Re: Children Scale</b>	-.055	-.251*
e) child support	.189	-.083
f) spousal support	-.058	-.166
g) use/ownership of family home	.049	-.094
h) use/ownership of other assets	.159	-.043
<b>Conflict Re: Financial Issues Scale</b>	.129	-.029
<b>Combined Conflict Re: Separation Scale</b>	.037	-.171
<b>Part 2: Negative Communication</b>		
a) does an argument result when discussing parenting issues	-.058	-.034
b) is the underlying atmosphere hostile or angry	-.107	-.177
c) is conversation stress or tense w/former partner	.028	-.189
d) are there basic differences of opinion regarding parenting	-.040	-.014
<b>Negative Communication Scale</b>	-.053	-.119
<b>Part 3: Children in the Middle of Conflict</b>		
a) you say things to children other parent wouldn't want them to hear	-.080	-.160
b) other parent says things to children you wouldn't want them to hear	.066	-.238*
c) you try to keep children from seeing other parent	.115	.016
d) other parent tries to keep children from seeing you	-.151	.081
e) you and other parent argue in front of children	-.106	-.168
f) children get caught in the middle of conflicts with other parent	-.141	-.251*
g) children are involved in passing messages between parents	.179	-.163
<b>Children in the Middle Scale</b>	-.075	-.248*

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

When items measuring negative parenting patterns that put children in the middle of conflicts were correlated with child adjustment (Part 3, Table 4), no statistically significant relationships resulted. Again, results provided no evidence to support the prediction of a negative relationship between the identified variables.

As no statistically significant associations resulted, predictions of negative associations between co-parental conflict variables and child adjustment at the pre-mediation stage were not supported.

When variables identifying the level of conflict in regard to issues resulting from the separation were correlated with child adjustment at follow up (Part 1, Table 4), three statistically significant negative associations resulted. Two individual variables and the four item scale identifying conflict in regard to child related issues resulted in statistically significant associations. The individual variable identifying 'conflict related to where the children will live' and the four item scale measuring this concept were significant at the  $p < .05$  level. The individual variable 'how the children will spend time with each parent' was significant at the  $p < .01$  level. As a result of the analysis, three items support the prediction of a negative association between variables identifying conflict in regard to issues resulting from the separation with child adjustment, however, these associations are considered as weak ( $r = .222$  to  $r = .360$ ).

When variables measuring negative co-parental communication were correlated with child adjustment (Part 2, Table 4), no statistically significant relationships resulted. Therefore, based on the analysis, the predicted negative relationship between these variables was not supported.

When variables identifying negative parenting patterns that put children in the middle of co-parental conflicts were correlated with child adjustment (Part 3, Table 4), the prediction of a negative relationship between variables was supported by three variables. Two individual items - 'the other parent says things to the children the respondent wouldn't them to hear' and 'children get caught in the middle of conflicts between parents' - and the combined scale of seven items used to measure this concept were statistically significant at the level of  $p < .05$ . As a result of the analysis, the prediction of a negative association between conflicts which put children in the middle and child adjustment at follow up was supported by three variables, however, the strength of these associations were weak at  $r = .238$  to  $r = .251$ .

When co-parental conflict variables were correlated at follow up with child adjustment, the prediction of a negative association between variables was supported by four individual items and two scale items, however, the association is considered weak. Furthermore, fifteen individual items and three scale items resulted in insignificant associations. As a result of the analysis, the prediction of a negative association between conflict related variables and child adjustment demonstrates only very limited support, and this is evident only at follow up. Co-parental conflict regarding children's issues and co-parental interaction that puts children in the middle of conflicts appear to support the prediction of a negative association more so than negative co-parental communication or conflict related to financial issues resulting from the separation.

### The Relationship of Co-Parental Support Variables With Child Adjustment

A second set of hypotheses, which predicted a positive relationship between variables measuring the level of co-parental support and child adjustment were analyzed. These concepts were based on the literature reviewed and discussed in Chapter 2. The two variables of co-parental support considered were positive co-parental support and positive co-parental communication. Items included in each of these concepts were identified in the previous chapter and are listed in Table 5. Bivariate analysis using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) to determine associations between positive co-parental support, positive co-parental communication and child adjustment are shown in Table 5. Pre-mediation correlation results are presented first followed by the results of correlations at follow up.

When variables identifying the level of co-parental support were correlated with child adjustment (Part 1, Table 5), the prediction of a positive association between variables was supported by one item. The variable measuring 'when the respondent needs help with the children do they seek it from the other parent' was statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level, however this association is considered weak ( $r = .234$ ).

When variables measuring positive co-parental communication were correlated with child adjustment (Part 2, Table 5), the prediction of a positive relationship between variables was supported by three items. The two individual variables, 'respondents former partner is flexible in dealing with issues related to the separation' and 'both parents can

Table 5: Inter-Correlations of Co-Parental Support Variables and Child Adjustment

	Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r)	
	<u>Pre-Mediation Results</u>	<u>Follow Up Results</u>
<b>Part 1: Supportive Parenting</b>		
a) you accommodate changes for other parent	.027	-.038
b) other parent accommodates changes for you	.191	-.068
c) you feel other parent understands your needs as (non) custodial parent	.214	.043
d) when you need help with children do you seek it from other parent	.234*	.196
e) other parent a resource to you in raising the children	.068	.139
f) you are resource to other parent in raising children	.012	.246*
<b>Supportive Parenting Scale</b>	.177	.094
<b>Part 2: Positive Communication</b>		
a) there has been good communication	.202	.126
b) former partner is fair minded about separation	.163	.146
c) former partner is flexible dealing w/separation issues	.238*	.155
d) we can focus on problems without dredging up past	.259*	.128
<b>Positive Communication Scale</b>	.258*	.158

\*  $p < .05$

focus on problems without dredging up the past' along with the four item scale identifying positive co-parental communication were positively correlated with child adjustment at the significance level of  $p < .05$ . However, each of these associations are considered as weak ( $r = .238$  to  $r = .259$ ).

The prediction of a positive association between variables measuring co-parental support and child adjustment before mediation was supported by three individual variables and one scale score value measuring positive communication. However, these

associations are considered to be generally weak. As a result there is only limited support for the hypotheses posed, and to the extent that there is an association with child adjustment, it appears to be captured by the level of positive communication that exists between parents rather than the presence of supportive co-parenting approaches.

When variables identifying the level of co-parental support were correlated with child adjustment at follow up (Part I, Table 5), the prediction of a positive relationship between variables was supported by one item. The variable measuring whether 'the respondent is a resource to the other parent' was statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level in a positive direction. However, this association is considered weak ( $r = .246$ ).

When variables measuring positive co-parental communication were correlated with child adjustment at follow up (Part 2, Table 5), no relationships were statistically significant. The absence of any significant associations between these variables at follow up contradicts pretest findings of a statistically significant but weak association. When one considers these results in a more general way there appears to be little support for the prediction that supportive parenting styles and positive communication between co-parents are associated with parental perceptions of the adjustment of their oldest child.

#### Factors Pertaining to Co-Parental Interaction and

#### Their Relationship With Child Coping

The fourth research question explored factors pertaining to co-parental interaction and their association with the standardized measure of child coping. Analyses exploring these relationships were completed during two phases of the mediation process, the first, at the

beginning of mediation, and the second at mediation follow up. In the first set of hypotheses the prediction of a negative relationship between co-parental conflict variables and the variable child coping was based on the literature reviewed and discussed in Chapter 3. The three conflict variables considered were conflict related to issues resulting from the separation, negative co-parental communication and interaction that places the children in the middle of co-parental conflict. Items included in each of these concepts were identified in the previous chapter and are listed in Table 6. The measure of child coping used was the summed score of seven individual items in the standardized scale 'child coping' as identified in Chapter 3. The child coping measure was based on responses pertaining to the oldest child affected by the separation. Items such as 'the respondent feels the child understands why their parents separated', 'since separation the child has acted aggressively', 'since separation the child has had difficulties at school' and 'the child has been unable to cope with the separation' were measures used to determine child coping in this study. Bivariate analysis using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) to determine associations between measures of co-parental conflict and child coping are shown in Table 6. Pre-mediation correlations are presented first followed by the results of variable correlations at follow up.

#### The Relationship of Co-Parental Conflict Variables with Child Coping

When variables identifying co-parental conflict in regard to issues resulting from the separation were correlated with child coping prior to mediation (Part 1, Table 6), the prediction of a negative relationship between variables was supported by one item. The

variable measuring 'the level of conflict in regard to spousal support' was statistically significant at the  $p < .01$ . This association is considered as moderate ( $r = .416$ ).

When variables identifying negative co-parental communication were correlated with child coping (Part 2, Table 6), the prediction of a negative relationship between variables was supported by two individual items. The variables asking 'does an argument result when discussing parenting issues' and 'is the underlying atmosphere stressful or tense' were statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level. However, the associations were weak ( $r = .259$  and  $r = .316$ ).

When variables measuring negative parenting patterns that put children in the middle of co-parental conflict were correlated with child coping (Part 3, Table 6), no statistically significant relationships resulted. Therefore, the prediction of a negative relationship between these variables and child coping is not supported.

The prediction of a negative association between co-parental conflict and child coping prior to mediation was supported by three individual items. Two associations were considered weak while one was moderate. In no case was there a statistically significant relationship between the scales that measured aspects of co-parental conflict and the level of child coping for the oldest child of these respondents. As a result of the analysis, the hypothesis predicting a negative relationship between co-parental conflict and child coping pre-mediation has limited support.

Table 6: Inter-Correlations of Co-Parental Conflict Variables and Child Coping

	Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r)	
	Pre-Mediation Results	Follow Up Results
<b>Part 1: Conflict Related to Separation</b>		
a) where children will live	-.146	-.281*
b) when children will see each parent	-.100	-.226*
c) how children will spend time w/each parent	-.121	-.289**
d) how you make decisions about children's lives	-.106	-.353**
<b>Conflict Re: Children Scale</b>	-.144	-.356**
e) child support	-.108	-.108
f) spousal support	-.416**	.118
g) use/ownership of family home	.122	-.040
h) use/ownership of other assets	-.033	-.020
<b>Conflict Re: Financial Issues Scale</b>	-.136	.085
<b>Combined Conflict Re: Separation Scale</b>	-.175	-.164
<b>Part 2: Negative Communication</b>		
a) does an argument result when discussing parenting issues	-.259*	-.294**
b) is the underlying atmosphere hostile or angry	-.316*	-.333**
c) is conversation stress or tense w/former partner	-.106	-.396**
d) are there basic differences of opinion regarding parenting	-.002	-.264*
<b>Negative Communication Scale</b>	-.243	-.366**
<b>Part 3: Children in the Middle of Conflict</b>		
a) you say things to children other parent wouldn't want them to hear	.068	-.518**
b) other parent says things to children you wouldn't want them to hear	-.170	-.595**
c) you try to keep children from seeing other parent	-.153	-.148
d) other parent tries to keep children from seeing you	-.199	-.252*
e) you and other parent argue in front of children	-.074	-.178
f) children get caught in the middle of conflicts with other parent	-.212	-.364**
g) children are involved in passing messages between parents	.136	-.442**
<b>Children in the Middle Scale</b>	-.033	-.523**

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

When variables identifying the level of conflict in regard to issues resulting from the separation were correlated with child coping at follow up (Part 1, Table 7), five statistically significant associations resulted supporting the predicted hypothesis of a negative association. Two individual variables measuring 'where the children will live' and 'when the children will see each parent' were statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level. An additional two individual variables identifying 'how the children will spend time with each parent' and 'how both parents make decisions about the children's lives' were statistically significant at the level of  $p < .01$ . The four item summed scale reporting on conflict regarding the children was significant at the  $p < .01$  level. The association of each of these variables are considered to be weak ( $r = .226$  to  $r = .356$ ).

When variables measuring negative co-parental communication were correlated with child coping (Part 2, Table 6), each of the four individual variables and the summed scale score measuring this concept support the predicted negative relationship with child coping. Three individual variables measuring 'whether an argument results when discussing parenting issues', 'whether the atmosphere with former partner is hostile or angry' and 'whether the conversation between parents is stressful or tense' as well as the summed scale identifying negative communication resulted in a statistically significant association at  $p < .01$ . The variable measuring 'basic differences of opinion regarding parenting' was statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level. All associations between negative communication and child coping are considered to be weak ( $r = .264$  to  $r = .396$ ).

When variables measuring negative parenting patterns that put children in the middle of co-parental conflicts were correlated with child coping (Part 3, Table 6), the prediction of

a negative relationship between variables was supported by five individual variables and the combined scale score. Four individual variables measuring 'respondent says things to the children the other parent wouldn't want them to hear', 'the other parent says things to children the respondent wouldn't want them to hear', 'the children get caught in the middle of conflicts' and 'children are involved in passing messages between parents' as well as the seven item scale measuring this concept were statistically correlated at the significance level of  $p < .01$ . One item, 'the other parent tries to keep the children from seeing the respondent' was significant at the  $p < .05$  level. Two of the individual variables 'the other parent tries to keep the children from seeing the respondent' and 'the children get caught in the middle of co-parental conflicts' suggest a weak association with child coping ( $r = .252$  to  $r = .364$ ), while the remaining four associations, including the scale score measuring this concept are considered to be moderate ( $r = .442$  to  $r = .595$ ).

Results suggest there is a higher correlation of co-parental conflict variables and child coping at the follow up phase, as thirteen individual items and each of the three scale items support the prediction of a negative relationship between these variables. The strongest association of variables was identified in Part 3 of Table 6 (i.e., children in the middle of co-parental conflict), where the association was moderate. The findings suggest conflict and negative communication, particularly conflict regarding behaviours that put children in the middle, are associated with poor perceptions of the oldest child's coping pattern at follow up even though these relationships were not generally evident at pretest. This may mean that more persistent patterns of conflict are negatively associated with child coping and this finding provides some support for the hypotheses predicting this

type of relationship.

### The Relationship of Co-Parental Support Variables with Child Coping

A second set of hypotheses, predicting a positive relationship between variables measuring the level of co-parental support and child coping were analyzed and these concepts were based on the literature reviewed and discussed in the previous section. The two concepts used to measure the level of co-parental support were positive co-parental support and positive co-parental communication. Items included in each of these concepts were identified in Chapter 3 and are listed in Table 7. Bivariate analysis using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) to determine associations between positive co-parental support, positive co-parental communication and child coping are shown in Table 7. Pre-mediation correlation results are presented first followed by the results of correlations at follow up.

When variables identifying the level of co-parental support were correlated with child coping prior to mediation (Part 1, Table 7), no statistically significant relationships emerged. Based on these results, the prediction of a positive relationship between these concepts is not supported.

When variables measuring positive co-parental communication were correlated with child coping (Part 2, Table 7), no statistically significant associations resulted. Therefore, the prediction of a positive relationship between co-parental communication variables and child coping is not supported.

Table 7: Inter-Correlations of Co-Parental Support Variables and Child Coping

	<u>Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r)</u>	
	<u>Pre-Mediation Results</u>	<u>Follow Up Results</u>
<b>Part 1: Supportive Parenting</b>		
a) you accommodate changes for other parent	-.039	-.004
b) other parent accommodates changes for you	.213	.048
c) you feel other parent understands your needs as a (non) custodial parent	.206	.245*
d) when you need help with children do you seek it from other parent	.099	.264*
e) other parent a resource to you in raising the children	.160	.260*
f) you are resource to other parent in raising children	.220	.269*
<b>Supportive Parenting Scale</b>	.219	.197
<b>Part 2: Positive Communication</b>		
a) there has been good communication	.149	.370**
b) former partner is fair minded about separation	.215	.298**
c) former partner is flexible dealing w/separation issues	.214	.269**
d) we can focus on problems without dredging up past	.241	.138
<b>Positive Communication Scale</b>	.242	.307**

\*  $p < .05$

\*\* $p < .01$

As a result of these analyses, the predicted hypotheses of a positive relationship between co-parental support variables with child coping is not supported. From this study it appears that co-parental support variables measured before mediation have no significant association with child coping at this stage.

When variables identifying the level of co-parental support were correlated with child coping at follow up (Part 1, Table 7), the prediction of a positive relationship between variables was supported by four individual variables. The variables measuring ‘the other

parent understands the respondents' needs as a parent', 'the respondent seeks help with the children from the other parent when needed', 'the other parent is a resource to the respondent in raising the children' and 'the respondent is a resource to the other parent' were statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level. However, all associations are considered as weak ( $r = .245$  to  $r = .269$ ). Interestingly, the six item summed scale was not associated with child coping at a statistically significant level.

When variables measuring positive co-parental communication were correlated with child coping (Part 2, Table 7), the prediction of a positive relationship between variables was supported by three individual items, and the four item summed scale measuring this concept. Individual variables identifying 'there has been good communication', 'former partner is fair-minded about the separation', 'former partner is flexible in dealing with issues related to the separation', and the summed scale measuring positive communication were statistically significant at the  $p < .01$  level. However, all associations with child coping were weak ( $r = .269$  to  $r = .370$ ).

Seven individual items and one scale item support the hypotheses of a positive association between co-parental support and child coping at follow up. As each of the associations are considered weak, there is limited support for this prediction. Nevertheless, there is some evidence from the follow up data that positive coping by the oldest child is associated with the level of co-parental support but this seems to be affected more by the level of communication than activities related to joint parenting. For example, the summed scale measuring positive communication was positively associated with positive child coping whereas there was no statistically significant relationship

between the summed scale measuring supportive parenting and the child coping scale.

Factors Pertaining to Co-Parental Interaction Prior to Mediation  
and Their Relationship With Outcome

Based on previous research by McKenzie & Pedersen (2001), co-parental conflict in regard to issues resulting from the separation, co-parental conflict when communicating and co-parenting conflict (children in the middle) declined between pretest and follow up. Most research indicates that a higher level of co-parental conflict is associated with a lower rate of full agreements (Irving & Benjamin, 2002). Furthermore, Bickerdike and Littlefield (2000) reported outcome was negatively associated with co-parental conflict and positively associated with co-parental support. This leads us to the fifth research question which explored factors pertaining to co-parental interaction prior to mediation and their association with mediation outcome at follow up. The three conflict variables considered were conflict related to issues resulting from the separation, negative co-parental communication and interaction that places children in the middle of co-parental conflict. Items included in each of these concepts were identified in Chapter 3 and are listed in Table 8. Outcome was defined in the following way: 1 = no agreement on any issues, 2 = agreement on some issues, 3 = full agreement on all issues. Bivariate analysis using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) to determine associations between co-parental conflict and outcome are shown in Table 8.

### The Relationship of Pre-Mediation Conflict Variables With Outcome At Follow Up

When variables identifying co-parental conflict in regard to issues resulting from the separation before mediation were correlated with outcome (Part 1, Table 8), the prediction of a negative relationship between variables was statistically supported by five individual items and two scale scores. Individual variables measuring 'where the children will live', 'when the children will see each parent', 'how the children will spend time with each parent', and 'how parents make decisions about the children's lives' were statistically significant at the  $p < .01$  level. One item measuring 'conflict regarding child support' was statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level. There was also an statistically significant negative relationship between outcome and the two scales measuring conflict related to decision-making about the children and the combined scale measuring conflict over financial issues and children's issues. The relationship between these two scales and outcome were statistically significant at  $p < .01$ . Four individual items and the combined scale measuring conflict over financial issues and children's issues indicate weak associations with outcome ( $r = .282$  to  $r = .387$ ). Two associations are considered moderate, the individual item measuring 'when the children will see each parent' ( $r = -.463$ ) and the scale item measuring conflict regarding children's issues ( $r = .451$ ). Interestingly, the scale on conflict regarding the children is more strongly associated with outcome than the combined scale of financial issues and children's issues.

Table 8: Inter-Correlations of Co-Parental Conflict Variables and Outcome

	<u>Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r)</u>
<b>Part 1: Conflict Related to Separation</b>	
a) where children will live	-.288**
b) when children will see each parent	-.463**
c) how children will spend time with each parent	-.387**
d) how you make decisions about children's lives	-.345**
<b>Conflict Re: Children Scale</b>	-.451**
f) child support	-.282*
g) spousal support	-.094
h) use/ownership of family home	-.081
i) use/ownership of other assets	-.068
<b>Conflict Re: Financial Issues Scale</b>	-.157
<b>Combined Conflict Re: Separation Scale</b>	-.366**
<b>Part 2: Negative Communication</b>	
a) does an argument result when discussing parenting issues	-.194
b) is the underlying atmosphere hostile or angry	-.221*
c) is conversation stress or tense w/former partner	-.210
d) are there basic differences of opinion regarding parenting	-.020
<b>Negative Communication Scale</b>	-.199
<b>Part 3: Children in the Middle of Conflict</b>	
a) respondent says things to children other parent wouldn't want them to hear	-.164
b) other parent says things to children respondent wouldn't want them to hear	-.351**
c) respondent tries to keep children from seeing other parent	-.161
d) other parent tries to keep children from seeing respondent	-.510**
e) both parents argue in front of children	-.137
f) children get caught in the middle of co-parental conflicts	-.284*
g) children are involved in passing messages between parents	-.290*
<b>Children in the Middle Scale</b>	-.358**

\* p < .05

\*\* p < .01

When variables identifying negative co-parental communication were correlated with outcome (Part 2, Table 8), the prediction of a negative relationship between variables was supported by only one item. The variable asking is 'the underlying atmosphere stressful or tense between parents' was statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level with the association being considered as weak ( $r = .221$ ). The four item scale measuring negative communication was not statistically significant and this finding provides little support for the hypothesis regarding this concept.

When variables measuring negative parenting patterns that put children in the middle of co-parental conflict were correlated with outcome (Part 3, Table 8) the prediction of a negative relationship between variables was supported by four individual items and the seven item combined scale. Two individual items measuring 'children are caught in the middle of co-parental conflicts' and 'children are involved in passing messages between parents' were statistically significant at  $p < .05$ . Two individual variables 'the other parent says things to the children the respondent wouldn't want them to hear' and 'the other parent tries to keep the children from seeing the respondent' as well as the seven item combined scale were statistically significant at the  $p < .01$  level. Four associations with outcome, including the scale measuring children in the middle, were considered to be weak as  $r = .284$  to  $r = .358$ , with one association 'the other parent tries to keep the children from seeing the respondent' considered to be moderate ( $r = .510$ ). As a result of the analysis, the prediction of a negative relationship between parental behaviours that put children in the middle of conflict and outcome is supported.

Issues related to pre-mediation co-parental conflict measuring child related issues

appeared to have the strongest associations with mediation outcome whereas the concept of negative co-parental communication before mediation appeared to have little to no association with outcome. The level of conflict, particularly those related to the children have a greater influence on the degree of outcome, and this finding is generally consistent with results reported in the literature.

### The Relationship of Pre-Mediation Support Variables With Outcome At Follow Up

A second set of hypotheses, the prediction of a positive relationship between variables measuring the level of co-parental support and child adjustment were based on the literature reviewed and discussed in Chapter 3. The two support variables considered were positive co-parental support and positive co-parental communication. Items included in each of these concepts were presented in the previous chapter and are listed in Table 9. Bivariate analysis using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) to determine associations between positive co-parental support, positive co-parental communication and outcome are shown in Table 9.

When variables identifying the level of co-parental support before mediation were correlated with outcome (Part 1, Table 9), four statistically significant associations resulted, however, the strength of these association is considered weak ( $r = .222$  to  $r = .331$ ). Two individual items measuring 'the other parent accommodates schedule changes for the respondent' and 'the other parent understands the respondents needs as a parent' are statistically significant at the level of  $p < .01$ . One individual item measuring 'the respondent accommodates schedule changes for the other parent', and the six item scale

Table 9: Inter-Correlations of Co-Parental Support Variables and Outcome

	<u>Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r)</u>
<b>Part 1: Supportive Parenting</b>	
a) you accommodate changes for other parent	.303*
b) other parent accommodates changes for you	.316**
c) you feel other parent understands your needs as (non) custodial parent	.331**
d) when you need help with children do you seek it from other parent	.033
e) other parent a resource to you in raising the children	.164
f) you are resource to other parent in raising children	.138
<b>Supportive Parenting Scale</b>	<b>.222*</b>
<b>Part 2: Positive Communication</b>	
a) there has been good communication	.416**
b) former partner is fair minded about separation	.396**
c) former partner is flexible dealing w/separation issues	.331**
d) we can focus on problems without dredging up past	.122
<b>Positive Communication Scale</b>	<b>.376**</b>

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

measuring supportive parenting are significant at the  $p < .05$  level. Even though not all identified variables statistically supported the positive association with outcome, the scale measuring supportive parenting was statistically significant, although the relationship was relatively weak ( $r = .222$ ). These results provide some support for the prediction of a positive relationship between co-parental support and outcome even though the influence is modest.

When variables measuring positive co-parental communication were correlated with outcome (Part 2, Table 9), three individual items and the four item scale measuring

positive co-parental communication resulted in a statistically significant relationship at the  $p < .01$  level. Individual variables measuring 'there has been good communication', 'former partner was fair-minded about the separation' and 'former partner was flexible in dealing with issues related to the separation' along with the scale measuring positive communication supported the prediction of a positive relationship with outcome.

However, three associations were considered weak, including the five item scale, ( $r = .331$  to  $r = .396$ ), while one association, 'there has been good communication' was moderate at  $r = .416$ .

As a result of the analysis, six individual items and two scale items showed support for the prediction of a positive correlation of pre-mediation co-parental support with outcome. However, only one item was at a moderate level of association, the remaining associations were considered to be weak. The concept of positive communication, in general, appeared to have a stronger association with outcome than supportive parenting behaviours. As negotiating settlement outcome is based on communication it may not be surprising that positive communication between parents is more important than positive parenting behaviours in reaching an agreement during the mediation process.

#### Regression of Co-Parental Interaction and Mediation Process Variables on Outcome

Based on the findings further analysis using regression was done to determine a better summary of the relationship of these variables with outcome. Earlier in this chapter, helpfulness of the mediation process and satisfaction with the mediation process were found to be significant predictor variables of outcome. Results also indicate the summed

scales measuring conflict regarding child issues, the combined scale of conflict regarding child issues and financial issues, children in the middle of conflict, supportive parenting and positive communication are all correlated at a statistically significant level with outcome. Therefore, these summed score scale variables were used as the predictor variables on the dependent variable 'mediation outcome'. Based on this information, the exploratory regression equation is: outcome = satisfaction with the mediation process + helpfulness of the mediation process + the combined scale of conflict regarding child issues and financial issues + children in the middle of conflict + supportive parenting + positive communication + (unknown influences). The stepwise regression procedure was used in this analysis and results are shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Regression of Co-Parental Interaction and Mediation Process Variables on Outcome

<u>Predictor Variables</u>	<u>R<sup>2</sup></u>
a) helpfulness of mediation process	.481**
b) conflict re: child issues and financial issues	.593**
c) satisfaction with the mediation process	.000
d) children in the middle of conflict	.000
e) supportive parenting	.000
f) positive communication	.000

\*\* F < .01

Results indicate that 48.1% of the variance in outcome is explained by helpfulness of the mediation process. When the second variable conflict regarding child issues and financial issues was introduced, 59.3% of the variance in outcome was explained by these two predictor variables. Helpfulness of the mediation process had the greatest influence on outcome (beta = .535) with the direction of influence being positive followed by

conflict regarding child issues (beta =  $-.377$ ) with the direction of influence being negative. The remaining predictor variables were not statistically significant in this equation; that is they were unable to explain significant proportions of additional variance in the dependent variable.

The Relationship of Child Adjustment and Child Coping With Outcome

It is of interest to consider the relationship between child adjustment and child coping with mediation outcome as we would expect to see a positive relationship. There are limitations in measurement with all three of these variables in this study and this prevents any firm conclusions. However, analysis using correlation produced no significant associations between outcome and child coping or child adjustment at the pretest or follow up stage.

Table 11: Inter-Correlations of Child Adjustment and Child Coping with Outcome

	<u>Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r)</u>	
	<u>Pre Mediation</u>	<u>Follow Up</u>
a) child adjustment	.019	.127
b) child coping	.059	.095

## **Chapter 5 Conclusion**

### Summary of Findings

Predicted null hypotheses between mean responses of men and women in regard to satisfaction with factors associated with the mediation process were substantiated in this study, and these results are consistent with much of the earlier research on this topic (Emery, 1994 & Kelly, 1989). Although mean scores of men and women were generally similar in the findings, the mean scores of women were found to be slightly higher than the mean scores of men on most variables. These results contradict the findings of some researchers (e.g. Edwards, 1997) who have suggested women are less satisfied with the mediation process than men.

Expected positive relationships with the level of satisfaction with the mediation process, the helpfulness of the mediation process, the perception of mediator role, and outcome were also supported by the data. With the exception of one correlation between individual items, all remaining individual variables and the summed scale scores resulted in statistically significant relationships. The variables measuring helpfulness of the mediation process had the strongest association with outcome and this variable was also the strongest predictor variable when these items were regressed on outcome. These findings were consistent with earlier literature and the importance of factors occurring within the mediation process, including the participant - mediator relationship is evident in these results.

Unexpectedly, co-parental conflict variables appeared to have little association with child well-being. Surprisingly, no support for the predicted negative association of co-

parental conflict variables with child adjustment or child coping prior to mediation was found. However, when these co-parental conflict variables were correlated with child adjustment and child coping at follow up, several statistically significant relationships emerged. The scales measuring 'conflict regarding child issues' and 'children in the middle of co-parental conflict' appeared to be the most strongly associated with lower levels of child adjustment and child coping. These findings suggest that levels of co-parental conflict prior to mediation may not be a good predictor of child adjustment at this stage in the separation process. Since research supports a relationship between co-parental conflict and child adjustment (Williams, 2001) the question arises as to why relationships in this study, especially associations prior to mediation, were not more pronounced.

Surprisingly, co-parental support variables measuring supportive parenting and positive communication were not strongly associated with child adjustment or child coping as predicted. Of the two measures, the concept of positive communication appeared to have the most influence on child well-being, as it was significantly correlated with child adjustment before mediation and with child coping at follow up. The supportive parenting scale did not appear to have a strong association with child adjustment or child coping as no significant associations emerged.

Co-parental conflict and co-parental support variables were more influential in predicting mediation outcome than child adjustment or child coping. Predicted negative relationships between co-parental conflict variables and mediation outcome were generally supported by the results. Specifically, higher levels of co-parental conflict regarding issues related to the children were associated with lower numbers of full or

partial agreements. As expected, co-parental factors such as supportive parenting and positive communication were positively associated with mediation outcome with positive communication variables resulting in a stronger association with outcome than supportive parenting variables. This suggests that co-parental communication is an important factor in determining outcome.

The regression equation was used to assist in predicting the level of mediation outcome influenced by the identified variables. As a result of the regression equation of co-parental conflict, co-parental support and mediation process variables on outcome, the helpfulness of the mediation process emerged as the most significant predictor. This is followed by the co-parental conflict scale regarding child and financial issues. These two factors appear to be important areas to consider in predicting the level of mediation outcome.

The model of comprehensive co-mediation itself, may have contributed to the results noted in this study. The mediation process was deemed as an appropriate model of dispute resolution for participants through early screening initially on the telephone and in a follow up interview. Thus participants were selected and not randomly assigned to this process. This model of mediation required parents to attend a parenting program, 'For the Sake of the Children' before beginning mediation and separating couples worked with two co-mediators to negotiate custody, timesharing, and financial issues resulting from the separation. Each of these facets may have had a significant influence on results.

### Implications for the Practice of Mediation

The results indicate the experiences of men and women within the mediation process are generally positive and both genders appear to be satisfied with this method of dispute resolution. Findings also suggest that such alternate methods of dispute resolution provide for flexibility and a consideration of individual circumstances when determining settlements pertaining to post separation parenting. General issues of child support, time sharing, and division of marital property may be discussed, but the details of each parenting plan is specific to the participants.

As well, results from this study suggest certain variables, particularly 'helpfulness of the mediation process' and to a lesser degree 'conflict regarding child and financial issues' and 'satisfaction with the mediation process' can be used to better predict the level of mediation outcome achieved. This study implies that factors within the mediation process itself, as well as factors associated with co-parental interaction are related to mediation outcome. A continuing focus on these issues will be important to the continued success of the Comprehensive Co-Mediation program. It is these results that support the continued operation of the Comprehensive Co-Mediation program.

### Learning Goals

My learning goals for this practicum were achieved through several means: an understanding and expert advisor, ongoing skilled supervision, a supportive learning environment, a knowledgeable committee and my own personal determination. Throughout this practicum my advisor modelled flexibility and patience and provided

direction and knowledge which allowed me to complete this study.

My first goal was to expand my knowledge base in the area of factors that may influence or affect mediation outcome as well as factors that may affect child well-being. This goal was achieved through ongoing discussions with my advisor, reading the research literature on family mediation and feedback from my committee members..

My second goal was to increase my knowledge of data analysis procedures and the interpretation of my findings. I had basic knowledge of simple analytical techniques at the beginning of the practicum. This study implemented more complex methods of analysis such as correlation and regression. The opportunity to build upon basic skills through this application of analysis contributed to my knowledge and understanding for the use and application of each procedure. Feedback from my advisor, reading applicable materials, and direct application of the analyses procedures on the data base, were all factors that led to my increased understanding of these more complex forms of analysis. In addition, I consulted with a statistician to assist with the accuracy of the interpretation of my analysis. Even with all the assistance I received in this area I recognize there remains a great deal to learn about statistics and data analysis. Furthermore, the knowledge I acquired throughout this practicum has provided me with critical insight when reviewing the results of other studies.

Completing this practicum study provided me with the opportunity to identify some of the limitations associated with research and suggest ways to strengthen future studies. For example, in this study, respondents were self selected and not randomly assigned to the mediation process. The ability to randomly assign participants to these programs is

difficult, however, the use of a control group would strengthen the design of the study and provide further insight through the results. Data in the study was collected through a survey form and this measure may not be an accurate overall account of the situation. This is of particular interest in the measures of child adjustment and child coping. The measure of child adjustment is a global question and based on a single response, while the measure of child coping is the summed score of a seven item scale. Since child coping is a more encompassing concept than child adjustment, the implication of a more accurate measure through its application emerges. Furthermore, the time frame of this study is of short duration, as follow up results were obtained four to six months after the conclusion of the mediation process. By extending the duration of this study, more clarity in behaviours such as child coping and co-parental interaction may emerge. The interpretation of ordinal data as interval data in correlations and regression procedures was another shortcoming identified within this study, but as mentioned in Chapter 2, this is a practice that is becoming more commonplace and more accepted, especially in the area of social research.

As well, completing this study has provided me with an awareness of how challenging the process of research can be. I have an increased appreciation of the importance of precision when collecting data and the necessity of clarity and comprehension when interpreting results and outcomes. Despite the challenges associated with completing this practicum I have increased my confidence level in the area of research, and this will enable me to participate more fully in future research studies.

The final goal of this study was to suggest further areas of research. This practicum has

explored experiences of men and women within the mediation process, variables that may influence mediation outcome, and the relationship of co-parental conflict and co-parental support with child adjustment, child coping and outcome. Additional studies may identify factors not included within this study that influence or affect mediation outcome, child adjustment or child coping. As discussed earlier, the use of a control group and a longer time period of study would strengthen the study design. Some exploratory questions for future research may be:

- (a) Is there a relationship between age of child, co-parental conflict, co-parental support and child coping?
- (b) Is there a relationship between age of child, child coping and mediation outcome?
- (c) Is there a relationship between the frequency of parent-child contact, child coping and mediation outcome?
- (d) Is there a relationship between frequency of co-parental contact, co-parental conflict, mediation outcome and child coping?
- (e) Is there a relationship between length of time separated, co-parental conflict, child coping and mediation outcome?

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## Appendix

### Questions from Pre, Post and Follow Up Comprehensive Co-Mediation Questionnaires

## Selected Questions from Comprehensive Co-Mediation Questionnaires

1. At the present time, how much conflict is there between you and the other parent with respect to the following.

Issue	None	A Little	Some	A Great Deal
a) Where the children will live	1	2	3	4
b) When the children will see each parent	1	2	3	4
c) How the children spend time with the other parent	1	2	3	4
d) How you will make decisions about the children's lives	1	2	3	4
e) Child support	1	2	3	4
f) Spousal support	1	2	3	4
g) Use or ownership of family home	1	2	3	4
h) Use or ownership of other assets	1	2	3	4

2. Since you separated, how would you describe the relationship with your former partner.

Statement	Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Neither Nor Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree Strongly
a) There is good communication	1	2	3	4	5	5
b) My former partner is fair minded about the separation	1	2	3	4	5	5
c) My former partner is flexible in dealing with issues regarding the separation	1	2	3	4	5	5
d) We are able to focus on problems without dredging up the past	1	2	3	4	5	5

3. How well do you feel each of your children is adjusting to the separation?

Child	Very Poorly	Poorly	Adequately	Well	Very Well
a) Oldest child	1	2	3	4	5
b) Next oldest child	1	2	3	4	5
c) Next oldest child	1	2	3	4	5
d) Next oldest child	1	2	3	4	5

4. Please circle the most appropriate response to each of the following statements regarding your oldest child.

Statement	Disagree Strongly	Disagree Somewhat	Unsure	Agree Somewhat	Agree Strongly
a) I feel as if the children understand why my former partner and I separated.	1	2	3	4	5
b) I think that sometimes our children feel as it were somehow their fault we separated.	1	2	3	4	5
c) I think that our children understand the separation does not mean either of us loves them less.	1	2	3	4	5
d) Since the separation our children have acted aggressively towards parents, siblings or peers.	1	2	3	4	5
e) Since the separation our children have had problems at school.	1	2	3	4	5
f) Overall, I think the separation caused a lot of emotional problems for our children.	1	2	3	4	5
g) Overall, our children have been unable to cope with our separation.	1	2	3	4	5

5. What was the outcome of the mediation process?

- Full Agreement
- Partial Agreement
- No Agreement
- Other (specify)

6. The following ask about current communication patterns between you and the other parent.

Question	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
a) How often is the underlying atmosphere one of hostility or anger?	1	2	3	4	5
b) How often is the conversation stressful or tense?	1	2	3	4	5
c) Do you and the other parent have different opinions about child rearing?	1	2	3	4	5
d) How often do you argue in front of the children?	1	2	3	4	5
e) If other parent needed to make a schedule change, do you try to accommodate?	1	2	3	4	5
f) Does the other parent try to accommodate schedule change for you?	1	2	3	4	5
g) Do you feel other parent understands your needs as (non) custodial parent?	1	2	3	4	5
h) When you seek help regarding children is it from other parent?	1	2	3	4	5
i) Would you say other parent is a resource to you regarding the children?	1	2	3	4	5
j) Would you say you are a resource to the other parent re: children?	1	2	3	4	5
k) How often do you say things to children other parent wouldn't want them to hear?	1	2	3	4	5
l) How often does the other parent say things to the children you wouldn't want them to hear?	1	2	3	4	5
m) How often do you try to keep the children from seeing the other parent?	1	2	3	4	5
n) How often does the other parent try to keep the children from seeing you?	1	2	3	4	5
o) How often do you and the other parent argue in front of the children?	1	2	3	4	5
p) How often do children get caught in the middle of conflicts between you and other parent?	1	2	3	4	5
q) How often are children involved in passing messages between parents?	1	2	3	4	5

7. How helpful do you feel the mediation process was in addressing the following issues?

Statement	Not at all Helpful	Marginally Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Very Helpful
a) Improving communication with former partner	1	2	3	4
b) Reducing the conflict between me and former partner	1	2	3	4
c) Working out a system of fair child support	1	2	3	4
d) Working out fair custody arrangements	1	2	3	4
e) Dealing with marital property	1	2	3	4
f) Doing what is best for the children	1	2	3	4
g) Reducing the financial costs of separation	1	2	3	4

8. How satisfied are you with the following statements.

Statement	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Dissatisfied Nor Satisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
a) the intake process	1	2	3	4	5
b) wait time to start mediation	1	2	3	4	5
c) session content	1	2	3	4	5
d) use of two mediators	1	2	3	4	5
e) number of mediation sessions	1	2	3	4	5
f) overall mediation process	1	2	3	4	5

9. How do you feel about the following statements?

Statement	Not at All True	Somewhat Untrue	Somewhat True	Definitely True
a) the mediators were aware of your needs and concerns	1	2	3	4
b) the mediators were aware of former partners needs and concerns	1	2	3	4
c) the mediators were unbiased	1	2	3	4
d) the mediators assisted in generating options for settlement	1	2	3	4
e) the mediators assisted you and your former partner in negotiating more reasonably with each other	1	2	3	4
f) the mediators assisted you in understanding details about marital property settlement	1	2	3	4
g) the mediators assisted you in understanding details about the parenting arrangements	1	2	3	4
h) the mediators assisted you in understanding details about child support	1	2	3	4