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From Their Perspective: How Adolescents and Young Adults Experience and Conceptualize Life and Occupation Surrounding Parental Divorce or Separation

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy

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FROM THEIR PERSPECTIVE: HOW ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS EXPERIENCE AND CONCEPTUALIZE LIFE AND OCCUPATION SURROUNDING PARENTAL DIVORCE OR SEPARATION

(Thesis format: Integrated Article)

by

Laura Rochelle Hartman

Graduate Program in Health and Rehabilitation Sciences

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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Abstract

Parental divorce affects adolescents’ emotions, routines, habits, occupations and relationships. The current body of research indicates that parental divorce leads to many unfavourable social, behavioural, and mental health outcomes for adolescents. This dissertation explores the daily lives and occupations of adolescents and young adults surrounding the transition of a parental divorce or marital separation.

This thesis contains four manuscripts in addition to the introductory and final reflection chapters. The first manuscript explores the current North American literature relating to adolescent life surrounding a parental divorce or marital separation, ranging from 1998 to 2014. The second manuscript provides an overview of visual methodologies allowing for a deeper understanding of the utility of visual methodologies within the field of occupational science. The third manuscript presents the findings of a critical narrative exploration regarding adolescent life surrounding parental divorce or separation. The third manuscript describes a study that is analyzed using an occupational science lens and explores the themes brought forward by the participants. These findings are compared to the current available literature presented in the first manuscript. The final manuscript presents a study that utilizes a visual methodological approach to explore participants’ created visual messages about their experiences of parental divorce or separation. Participants were invited to address their messages to an audience of their choice with the hopes of helping future adolescents experiencing parental divorce navigate the transition and coping processes.

This thesis contributes new knowledge to the growing body of information regarding adolescent life surrounding the transitions related to a parental divorce. It has expanded the limited research that approaches the topic from the frameworks of qualitative research, critical inquiry, asset-based research, and participatory approaches. It also uniquely explores the concept of human occupation as it relates to transition and coping surrounding a parental divorce or separation. This work has implications for the future methodologies and research questions for studies exploring adolescent and young adult life, occupations, and transitions surrounding a parental divorce or marital separation.
Keywords

Parental divorce, parental marital separation, adolescent, young adult, occupational science, narrative inquiry, visual methodology
Co-Authorship Statement

I, Laura Hartman, acknowledge that the four integrated manuscripts included within this thesis all resulted from collaboration with coauthors. In all four manuscripts, the primary intellectual contributions were made by the first author, who: researched and designed the methodologies and methods, conducted literature reviews, sought appropriate ethical approvals, recruited all participants, collected and transcribed all data, led the analysis of all data, and led in the construction and writing of all manuscripts. The primary author was also the primary contact for the publication process.

The contribution of coauthor Dr. Angela Mandich was primarily through her research supervision of the primary author, theoretical guidance, and support in the intellectual and editorial process of creating the work and preparing it for publication.

The contribution of coauthor Dr. Lilian Magalhães was primarily through theoretical and methodological guidance to the primary author, and support in the intellectual and editorial process of creating the work and preparing it for publication.

The contribution of coauthor Dr. Treena Orchard was primarily through her theoretical and methodological guidance of the primary author, and support in the intellectual and editorial process of creating the work and preparing it for publication.
Dedication

To Kizzy, Abigail, Hank, The Fox, Addy and Natalie. Your courage is humbling and your messages are wise. You have inspired me, and so I dedicate this work to you in hopes that I can return a fraction of what you have given me.

“There are two primary choices in life: to accept conditions as they exist, or accept the responsibility for changing them” – Denis Waitley, quoted by Hank.

To my parents. You have demonstrated that loving and strong role models can be divorced parents, a lesson that fated/doomed me to undertake this research. I love you and think that the world should celebrate the way that you care for your children.

To my brothers. It took us a long time to work through our family transition, but you two continue to teach me about the person that I want to be. You are both in my heart, and I dedicate this to you.

To Jeff. You have taught me that to love is to trust. I trust you with my whole heart.
Acknowledgments

While it is my name on the title page of this work, it was born of the efforts and support of so many others. I want to first thank my academic mentor and friend, Dr. Angie Mandich. For some unknown reason, you kept taking chances on me. I hope that at the end of the game, these bets have paid off for you. I am so lucky to have had your guidance and your belief in my abilities. You have provided me with so many opportunities and opened so many doors for me. I cannot thank you enough.

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defending me and celebrating me at every chance. You are a champion for those who cannot
be their own advocates, and have taught me that to help others, derekh eretz, is the only way
to be in this world. You are pensive, calm, and a rock for me. You were both courageous
enough to come through the separation process as stronger, more independent people. You
are the shining example of how people should treat each other following a parental divorce,
and give me hope for future children. I wish there was a word that was stronger than respect,
love and admiration combined. Multiply that word by a million, and you can begin to
understand my feelings for you both. I love you mom and dad, and will never be able to
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# Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. ii  
Co-Authorship Statement ................................................................................................. iv 
Dedication .......................................................................................................................... v 
Acknowledgments ............................................................................................................... vi 
Table of Contents ............................................................................................................... viii 
List of Tables ...................................................................................................................... xii 
List of Figures .................................................................................................................... xiii 
List of Appendices ............................................................................................................ xiv 
Chapter 1 ............................................................................................................................ 1  
1 Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 1  
  1.1 Parental Divorce or Marital Separation in North America ........................................ 1  
    1.1.1 Adolescence and Young Adulthood as Life Stages ............................................ 3  
    1.1.2 Young People’s Interactions With Parental Divorce and Marital Separation .... 5  
1.2 An Occupational Science Issue ................................................................................ 6  
1.3 Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................. 9  
1.4 Methodological Choices ............................................................................................ 11  
    1.4.1 Narrative Methodology .................................................................................. 12  
    1.4.2 Visual Methodology ...................................................................................... 13  
1.5 Situating the Researcher ........................................................................................... 14  
1.6 Plan of Presentation ................................................................................................... 16  
1.7 References .................................................................................................................. 19  
Chapter 2 ............................................................................................................................ 26  
2 What does parental divorce or marital separation mean for adolescents? A scoping review of North American literature ......................................................... 26
2.1 Methods ............................................................................................................................... 27
  2.1.1 Research Question ........................................................................................................ 28
  2.1.2 Identification of Relevant Studies .................................................................................. 28
  2.1.3 Study Selection ................................................................................................................ 28
  2.1.4 Charting the Data ............................................................................................................ 29
  2.1.5 Collating, Summarizing and Reporting the Results ....................................................... 30
2.2 Main Findings ....................................................................................................................... 35
2.3 Discussion ............................................................................................................................ 37
  2.3.1 Themes ............................................................................................................................ 37
  2.3.2 Framing of the Research .................................................................................................. 44
  2.3.3 Study Limitations ........................................................................................................... 46
2.4 Summary and Future Directions ......................................................................................... 46
2.5 References ......................................................................................................................... 48
2.6 Addendum ............................................................................................................................ 55

Chapter 3 .................................................................................................................................. 58

3 How do we see occupations? An examination of visual research methodologies in the study of human occupation .................................................................................................................. 58

  3.1 Photovoice .......................................................................................................................... 60
    3.1.1 Benefits and Limitations of Using Photovoice to Study Occupation ......................... 64
  3.2 Body mapping .................................................................................................................... 68
    3.2.1 Benefits and Limitations of Using Body Mapping to Study Occupation ..................... 70
  3.3 Textual analysis of visual materials .................................................................................... 73
    3.3.1 Benefits and Limitations of Using Textual Analysis of Visual Materials to Study Occupation ................................................................................................................ 76
  3.4 Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 79
  3.5 References .......................................................................................................................... 80

Chapter 4.................................................................................................................................. 84
A narrative exploration of young adults’ experiences of parental divorce or separation during their adolescence ................................................................. 84

4.1 Methods .......................................................................................................................... 86
  4.1.1 Participants ................................................................................................................ 87
  4.1.2 Collecting the Narrative Data .................................................................................... 88
  4.1.3 Constructing the Written Narratives ......................................................................... 89
  4.1.4 Analysis of Narratives ............................................................................................... 92

4.2 Findings ......................................................................................................................... 93
  4.2.1 Global Impressions .................................................................................................... 93
  4.2.2 Themes Across Narratives ........................................................................................ 98

4.3 Discussion ...................................................................................................................... 105

4.4 Methodological Considerations and Future Directions ............................................ 108

4.5 References .................................................................................................................... 110

Chapter 5 .......................................................................................................................... 117

5 Perspectives on divorce: Visually based messages from adolescents and young adults about parental divorce ................................................................. 117

5.1 Methods ......................................................................................................................... 119
  5.1.1 Participants ................................................................................................................ 121
  5.1.2 Data Collection ......................................................................................................... 122
  5.1.3 Data Analysis ........................................................................................................... 124

5.2 Findings ......................................................................................................................... 127
  5.2.1 Kizzy .......................................................................................................................... 129
  5.2.2 Abigail ....................................................................................................................... 132
  5.2.3 Hank .......................................................................................................................... 135
  5.2.4 The Fox ..................................................................................................................... 138
  5.2.5 Addy ........................................................................................................................ 141
  5.2.6 Natalie ...................................................................................................................... 144
List of Tables

Table 1. Summary table of key features of the final literature sample. ........................................ 30

Table 2. Number of articles associated with each theme in final sample ................................. 36

Table 3: Summary Table of Key Features of the Literature Sample, 2009-2014 .................... 55

Table 4. Johnny and Mitchell’s (2006) 7 steps of textual analysis of visual materials. .......... 75

Table 5. Participant demographic information ........................................................................... 88

Table 6. Global impressions of each participant’s narrative ...................................................... 94

Table 7. Themes of each participant’s narrative ........................................................................ 94

Table 8. Participant demographic information ........................................................................ 122

Table 9. Description of criteria in the visual analysis guide used for data analysis ............. 125

Table 10. Description of criteria in the visual analysis guide used for individual panels of a visual message ......................................................................................................................... 126
List of Figures

Figure 1: Body mapping instructional representation, adapted by the authors from Solomon (2006) ................................................................. 69

Figure 2. Kizzy’s Visual Message .......................................................... 129

Figure 3. Abigail’s Visual Message .......................................................... 132

Figure 4. Hank’s Visual Message ............................................................. 135

Figure 5. The Fox’s Visual Message .......................................................... 138

Figure 6. Addy’s Visual Message .............................................................. 141

Figure 7. Natalie’s Visual Message ............................................................ 144
List of Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approval .................................................................................................................. 184

Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer ............................................................................................................... 192

Appendix C: Recruitment Newspaper Advertisement .............................................................................. 193

Appendix D: Letter of Information ......................................................................................................... 194

Appendix E: Consent Form ...................................................................................................................... 197

Appendix F: Crisis Resources .................................................................................................................. 198

Appendix G: Narrative Interview Guide .................................................................................................. 199

Appendix H: Visual Interview Guide ..................................................................................................... 200

Appendix I: Visual Interpretation Guide ................................................................................................ 201

Appendix J: Kizzy’s Story ......................................................................................................................... 204

Appendix K: Abigail’s Story ..................................................................................................................... 219

Appendix L: Hank’s Story ......................................................................................................................... 232

Appendix M: The Fox’s Story .................................................................................................................. 244

Appendix N: Addy’s Story ....................................................................................................................... 259

Appendix O: Natalie’s Story ..................................................................................................................... 274

Appendix P: Copyright Permission for Chapter 2 .................................................................................... 291

Appendix Q: Copyright Permission for Chapter 3 .................................................................................... 293
Chapter 1

1 Introduction

This dissertation presents a qualitative exploration of the experiences and lessons regarding parental divorce and separation shared by Canadian adolescents and young adults through interviews and visual representations. This chapter will begin with a brief introduction of parental divorce as it is conceptualized in North American literature as well as the place of this research within the larger available academic literature. Next, the concept of occupation as it is being applied in this research will be presented. Following this, the purpose of researching young people’s experiences of divorce from a qualitative and critical perspective will be explained, as well as the state of this type of research within occupational science. I will then present myself as the researcher by telling the story of how I came to choose this research area. This chapter will conclude with the plan of presentation of the dissertation.

1.1 Parental Divorce or Marital Separation in North America

Divorce is a prevalent phenomenon in Canadian families (M. Kelly, 2010) and is widely discoursed in health care, policy, and the popular media (Amato, 2000; J. Kelly, 2000; J. Kelly & Emery, 2003). The effects of parental divorce on young people (age 10 to 24) (World Health Organization [WHO], 2011) are generally depicted as negative, or even harmful to them (Amato, 2000; J. Kelly, 2000; J. Kelly & Emery, 2003). Much of the current academic literature mirrors J. Kelly’s observation, and depicts parental divorce as an unfavourable event for children and adolescents, starting them on a flawed life trajectory. With such a significant portion of the young Canadian population being raised in families with divorced or separated parents, it is imperative that research be undertaken to explore the circumstances created by divorce and its associated transitions. The intent of this research was to gain a better understanding of young people’s feelings and reflections on their lives following parental divorce or marital separation. With this information, I have gained insight into the issues they feel should be addressed, how they
have coped, and the resources that they have drawn from to build resilience (Eldar-Avidan, Haj-Yahia, & Greenbaum, 2009; J. Kelly & Emery, 2003; Ungar, 2004).

When exploring divorce or separation, Amato (2000) describes “marital dissolution not as a discrete event, but as a process that begins while the couple lives together and ends long after the legal divorce is concluded” (p. 1271). Through this research, divorce was also framed as a process that included the various physical, geographical, financial, occupational, and emotional transitions surrounding what Amato refers to as the process of uncoupling. When exploring the experience of parental divorce, I included the family context leading up to the divorce, the major transitions associated with the uncoupling process, and the myriad adjustments that follow for adolescents and young adults. Like Amato (2000), I explored the moderators of life surrounding a parental divorce, including protective or detrimental factors that affect adjustment and coping.

This dissertation explored young people’s thoughts and feelings regarding their lives and occupational engagement following a parental divorce. There have recently been a number of studies, such as those conducted by Cartwright and McDowell (2008), Eldar-Avidan et al. (2009) and Stambaugh, Hector, and Carr (2011), that explore adolescents’ experiences of parental divorce that considers their contexts, opinions, and subjective responses. Like them, I intended to gain insight into the participants’ perceptions, as well as the greater contextual factors that contribute to the unfavourable occupational, relational, and emotional issues that the currently available research elucidates. Exploring the lived perspective of a parental divorce has allowed me to understand the factors that assist adolescents and young adults to overcome and address issues associated with the separation and transition process (Amato, 2000; Eldar-Avidan et al., 2009; J. Kelly & Emery, 2003). Particularly, I have focused on their occupational engagement as any interruption to daily life and engagement “requires alteration to the routine, habit, and the taken-for-granted configuration of occupations” (Blair, 2000, p. 232). Occupational changes have not been studied in relation to the changes associated with parental divorce.
1.1.1 Adolescence and Young Adulthood as Life Stages

In order to better understand the reason for focusing specifically on the experiences of young people relating to parental divorce or separation, I will explain the unique life stages encompassed in young personhood, namely, adolescence and young adulthood. Adolescence is often defined by age- or biologically-based parameters. WHO (2010) defines adolescents as persons between the ages of 10 and 19. This group is also often identified by physical and physiological changes associated with growth, puberty, and the transition out of childhood and into young adulthood (Canadian Institute for Health Information [CIHI], 2005; McCauley & Salter, 1995). Health research on adolescent populations has an interesting past. Historically, adolescents have not been a population of great interest in health research, as they are among the physically healthiest members of their communities (Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009; McCauley & Salter, 1995). It is only in recent years that social, cultural, and psychological research with adolescents has increased. The research has been quite problem-focused, as adolescents are portrayed as a problematic population (Furstenberg, 2000; Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009). Furstenberg (2000) explains that we as a research community,

…treat successful adolescents and young adults as escape artists who manage to dodge the hazards of growing up, rather than focusing on the ways that young people acquire and master skills, construct positive identities, and learn how to negotiate social roles simultaneously in the youth culture and adult world. (p. 900)

Adolescents, however, are a population who engage uniquely in occupational endeavours. CIHI (2005) explains that:

Adolescence is a time of changing social roles, relationships, experiences and expectations. It is a time for developing skills for healthy adulthood and of experimentation in activities that may be beneficial or harmful to health. Lifelong behaviour patterns, which can become protective factors against or long-term risk factors for many chronic health conditions, may be established or strengthened. (p. 3)
This lifelong development that occurs during adolescence can be seen through previous research on adolescent populations (Iannelli & Wilding, 2007; Lobo, 1999), as well as through the studies presented in chapters four and five of this dissertation. Through their leisure and productive pursuits, adolescents begin to build skills, passion, and identities that will likely carry into the subsequent stages of their lives. Adolescents’ and young adults’ leisure pursuits often contribute to socializing, creating routine, exploring interests, building amateur or hobby-related skills, building skills and interests that contribute to future careers, and building self-esteem (American Psychological Association [APA], 2005; CIHI, 2005; Lobo, 1999). Engagement in leisure occupations, and therefore the ability to build and hone these interests, is affected by multiple factors such as socioeconomic background, gender, cultural expectations or influences, access to transportation, available funds, or legal prohibitions for participation due to age (such as drinking establishments) (APA, 2005; CIHI, 2005; Lobo, 1999). Regarding productive occupations, adolescents will typically engage in their education (as desired or legally mandated), which will contribute to the procurement of skills as well as the requirements for future job seeking. Additionally, following the completion of their education, engagement in the productive activity of paid employment provides individual with income, structure, helps to define identity, provides social and future work contacts outside of the family or community and imposes goals (APA, 2005; Lobo, 1999). Work activities may be extended to work readiness or work training programs for youth. All of these occupations coupled with the knowledge and skills that they build contribute to later occupational choices in all areas of life, including choice of employment, social justice awareness and activism, and choice of volunteer activities (APA, 2005; Lobo, 1999). Work and other productive occupations cannot only be an end, but also a means. Iannelli and Wilding found that engaging in productive occupations contributes to young people’s growing sense of responsibility, identity, and self-worth through the recognition of their accomplishments.

Adolescence and young adulthood are times of exploration, experimentation, and growth in many aspects of life (APA 2005, CIHI, 2005, Iannelli & Wilding, 2007; Lobo,
1999). It is riddled with expected transitions such as completing grade school, seeking employment, leaving the family home, and more legal allowances, such as drinking or driving. Navigating these transitions is further complicated when supplemented with unanticipated transitions, such as the separation of parents.

1.1.2 Young People’s Interactions With Parental Divorce and Marital Separation

Discussion on adolescent life following a parental divorce can be found in many areas of our culture, including academic literature, practice guides for professionals, self-help material, and popular culture (Amato, 2000; J. Kelly, 2000; J. Kelly & Emery, 2003). The messages are quite varied and lead to varied observations, conclusions and recommendations. There is a notable lack of information collected directly from adolescents, guided by their opinions and their stated needs. The research included in this dissertation focuses directly on the adolescents’ personal views on how their lives and occupational engagement have changed following parental divorce.

As will be outlined in chapter two, I conducted a scoping literature review in order to gain insight into the available research regarding young people and parental divorce in North America. The 53 identified articles along with 11 subsequently published studies highlighted 6 themes that all related to difficulty with coping in varying forms and to varying degrees during the transitions surrounding parental divorce. These studies present insights into the issues faced by adolescents following a parental divorce or separation. These studies were mainly quantitative and collected through large-scale survey data, which may not be a forum that allows for participant opinion or other contextual information. Additionally, the questions being posed tended to focus on the issues faced by adolescents following parental divorce, rather than the multifaceted experience.

In contrast to the abovementioned issues, I have designed the studies included in this dissertation to provide space for participants to voice what was important to them regarding their coping process and the concurrent occupational engagement that helped to shape their coping and transition through parental divorce. I sought to move beyond
identifying the problems faced by the participants and identify how the adolescents and young adults live with, overcome, or struggle with their issues and the resources and services available to them in this process.

1.2 An Occupational Science Issue

Occupations, along with the varied and nuanced meanings that they hold for individuals, provided an alternative way to explore both changes in the daily activities and routines of adolescents following parental divorce, as well as how the meanings behind these occupations change (Asaba, Blanche, Jonsson, Laliberte Rudman, & Wicks, 2007; Blair, 2000; Hammell, 2004; Lee & Kirsh, 2006; Reed, Hocking, & Smythe, 2010). Rudman et al. (2008) explain that multiple definitions of occupation and occupational science coexist due to the complicated and nuanced nature of human occupation:

We also propose that various working definitions of occupation are required in order to explore the breadth and importance of this phenomenon within a variety of contexts. Each definition enables a view of particular aspects of occupation, and there is a need to individually and collectively reflect upon questions that highlight the things that particular definitions promote and exclude. (p. 139)

In this study, occupation is explored on two levels. The first involves the specific activities, tasks, rituals and habits that bring meaning and purpose to people’s lives (Asaba et al., 2007, Rudman et al., 2008; Reed et al., 2010, Yerxa et al., 1990). This level of occupation is illustrated through one of the earliest definitions of occupation in the occupational science literature:

*Occupation* refers to specific “chunks” of activity within the ongoing stream of human behaviour which are named in the lexicon of culture… These daily pursuits are self-initiated, goal-directed (purposeful), and socially sanctioned. They are constituted of adaptive skills which are organized and are optimally, thought not always personally satisfying. (Yerxa et al., 1990, p. 5)
This definition has dominated the occupational science research and is often the way in which occupations are analyzed and measured. Furthermore, Blair (2000) explains, “occupational scientists put emphasis upon adapting while doing things, with the underlying premise that action facilitates change, personal development and consequent wellbeing” (p. 234). The ‘doing’ is essential to human occupation and its role in overall wellbeing. Understanding the ‘doing’ of activities was the first way that I identified and analyzed adolescent occupations following parental divorce. By exploring what the adolescents ‘did,’ or the meaningful occupations that they chose to engage in, I was able to gain insight into why and how they changed their occupational engagement. I was also able to explore how these occupational endeavours allowed them to navigate the transitions surrounding their parents’ divorces. Examples of this would be engaging in occupations involved in helping their parents with the increased responsibilities associated with a divorce (Amato, 2000; J. Kelly & Emery, 2003) including taking on more household duties, caring for siblings, or contributing financially to the household. Another example would be engaging in occupations that allowed them to escape from the stressful home environment (Afifi, McManus, Hutchinson, & Baker, 2007; Afifi & Schrodt, 2003; Afifi, Afifi, & Coho, 2009; Koerner, Wallace, Lehman, & Raymond, 2002; Koerner, Wallace, Lehman, Lee, & Escalante, 2004; Mandara & Murray, 2000) or disengage from the conflict (Rubinov & Leucken, 2013), such as escaping into schoolwork, social activities, or hobbies.

The second level of understanding occupation is the overarching idea that engaging in everyday activities, tasks, rituals and habits brings meaning and purpose to peoples’ lives (Blair, 2000; Hammell, 2004; Reed et al., 2010; Wilcock, 1998). Hammell (2004) argues:

Engagement in personally meaningful occupations has thus been found to address each of the needs for meaning identified by philosophers: meaning, purpose, choice, self-worth. Further, occupational engagement has been found to contribute to the experience of a life worth living. This provides evidence-based support for the occupational therapists’ belief that
occupation is a source of meaning, purpose and choice and control. (pp. 300-301)

Hammell (2004) and Wilcock (1998) both discuss the extension of occupation beyond ‘doing’ activities, into the larger contexts of one’s life (their being, becoming, and belonging). In their study of meaning in occupation, Reed et al. (2010) state, “what matters most is what we care about and what concerns us. This reveals itself in the occupations we choose or choose not to engage in. The meaning of occupation is therefore at the heart of who we are” (p. 146). The personally and socially derived meanings that we discover through engagement in occupations provide a wider life context of how occupation and its meaning are central to one’s life and functioning.

Through the concept of occupation I explored how specific daily activities, tasks, rituals and habits brought meaning and purpose to the participants’ occupations and their daily lives.

In her exploration of the centrality of occupations during life transitions, Blair (2000) explains that doing is “full of symbolic meaning” (p. 232). Occupations, even those that may be understood by outsiders as undesirable or maladaptive, may serve greater purposes such as protection, growth, or helping to understand one’s role or evolving identity through a transition. She found that “the combination of occupations [engaged in by her participants] permitted gradual adjustment, rhythm and balance to re-enter consciousness and action” (Blair, 2000, p. 232).

In this dissertation I explored the participants’ occupations as they existed and evolved through the transitions surrounding parental divorce, which provide information regarding changes in the structure of their lives on a daily basis. I then evaluated the contextual factors related to their changes in occupational engagement, or the factors that allow them to sustain their engagement. These findings were considered in light of the participants’ stories and contexts, and in consideration of the current knowledge on North American adolescent life following a parental divorce or separation.
1.3 Theoretical Framework

This dissertation comes from a critical social theory background, posing questions that allow for participants to comment on the structures and forces that exert power, as well as ways that they were able to harness power or empower themselves (Crotty, 1998; Freire, 1993; Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011; Walsh, 2007). Critical research is a genre of social inquiry that focuses on the problematization of knowledge (Carspecken, 2008). Knowledge, what we aim to acquire through research, becomes more than explanations of reality or truth, but a way in which we construct relations and understandings of social practices, identities, and power relations (Browne, 2000; Carspecken, 2008). Critical research is based in critical theory, which is based in critique, or “assessment of the current state and the requirement to reach a desired state” (Budd, 2008, p. 175). Critical theory urges the examination beyond just action, but also of motivation (Budd, 2008). Critical theory also assumes that there can be no neutral knowledge, and that all knowledge “fundamentally mediated by socially and historically mediated power relations” (Browne, 2000, p. 39).

Critical social theory specifically focuses on critically exploring power relations and moving knowledge toward emancipatory ideals (Browne, 2000; Jennings, Parra-Medina, Hilfinger Messias, & McLoughlin, 2006; Leonardo, 2004). It puts criticism at the fore of knowledge production (Leonardo, 2004), and critiques ideology and relations of dependence, revealing hidden relations of domination and power inherent in societies’ fundamental structures and ideologies (Browne, 2000). Jennings et al. explain that when applying critical social theory for the empowerment of youth, there are a number of dimensions that should be considered, including a welcoming environment, equitable power sharing, critical reflection, and their meaningful participation in the work.

For this dissertation, a critical social theoretical framework has been used to critique the structures, environments, and institutions in which young people operate during and following a parental divorce or marital separation. When addressing the issue of oppressed populations, Freire (1993) discusses the notion of a culture of silence, whereby the people not only lack a voice, but also are unaware that they should have one. Adolescents may not have the power to address their needs or desires because of barriers
related to access at different points, including the parent-child relationship, peer relationships and influence, the school system, and policies regarding services available to them. Generally, the decision makers who exert power over their living arrangements, finances, access to opportunities, and many other life factors are their parents. Finally, there are larger social, cultural, and media influences on how adolescents understand themselves, their abilities, and their futures in light of being a child of a ‘broken home.’ Adolescents may not even know that they should have a voice in directing their transition or the occupations to which they should have access (Freire, 1993; Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009). My work provided a forum for the participants to voice their concerns and needs, as well as to bring light to the ways in which power imbalances affect adolescent transition and engagement following a parental divorce.

In coping with the transitions associated with parental divorce, adolescents must explore the options available to them, evaluate their participation in occupations that bring meaning to their lives, and access services that will aid them through this life transition. Adolescents, however, operate in a society with power structures that may impede their ability to successfully voice their needs and concerns (Liebenberg, 2009). The participants in the studies conducted for this doctoral research were not only asked to describe their occupations and interactions within their world, but how they see those occupations and interactions, which structures affect occupational engagement, and how they would have liked to engage in their preferred meaningful occupations. Most of the participants were legal minors at the time of their parents’ divorces or separations, and as such were subject to the decisions of their parents in terms of engagement and choices of occupations (Liebenberg, 2009). Adolescents may be unaware of their lack of voice (or lack of choice), as well as what is available to them in order to deal with life following a parental divorce. This research worked with the participants to explore what they had, what they needed, and how they were able to fulfill their needs within their critical structures. This study was not intended to challenge traditional Western parental authority in the parent-adolescent relationship, but did seek to expose adolescents’ search for power.
1.4 Methodological Choices

For the sake of clarity, I will describe the terms ‘methodology’ and ‘method’ as they are applied in this dissertation. Within the realm of qualitative research, research methods refer to the way in which a researcher collects the required data to support their argument (Schensul, 2008b). These methods may include, but are not limited to, participant observation, interviews, documentation, elicitation techniques, group discussion, or providing visual, verbal, or physical descriptions. Schensul (2008b) argues that, “sensemaking through the eyes and lived experience of the people is at the heart of good qualitative research” (p. 522). In this dissertation, methods will be discussed as the steps taken to collect and analyze the data that were carefully chosen in order to answer the proposed research questions.

Qualitative research methods are chosen and carried out within a larger qualitative research methodology. “Research methodology consists of the assumptions, postulates, rules and methods – the blueprint or roadmap – that researchers employ to render their work open to analysis, critique, replication, repetition, and/or adaptation, and to choose research methods” (Schensul, 2008a, p. 517). The contributors to a qualitative research methodology are the guiding paradigms, the research design and methods, the analysis, and the dissemination of research findings (Schensul, 2008a). While guiding theories and research ethics are important in informing one’s methodology, they are not actually considered to be a part of the methodology (Schensul, 2008a). In this dissertation, research methodologies will be discussed as the complex of factors that allow the researcher to explore the proposed research question and allow the reader to understand which decisions were made and for what reasons.

Qualitative research methods allow for in-depth exploration into the adolescent experience of parental divorce and the occupationally related issues that are associated with it (Liebenberg, 2009; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Mitchell, de Lange, Stuart, Molestane, & Buthelezi, 2007; Molineux & Rickard, 2003; Riessman, 2008; Walsh, 2007; Wells, 2011). This dissertation has drawn on two methodologies, narrative and visual, both based in storytelling. By providing space for adolescents to tell their stories and share their lessons with others, insight and understanding into challenges
faced by those living through the transition of a parental divorce and the resources that adolescents draw upon in their transitional process have been discovered. Storytelling allows for the researcher and audience to gain insight into the context of issues regarding transitions following parental divorce previously identified in the literature, such as poor coping, engagement in ‘deviant’ behaviour, or difficulties in the parent-adolescent relationship (Lieblich et al., 1998; Riessman, 2008; Wells, 2011; Wengraf, 2001). Storytelling also allows for the participant to direct the data by deciding what information is pertinent to the questions being asked (Lieblich et al., 1998; Mitchell, 2011; Riessman, 2008; Wells, 2011; Wengraf, 2001), regardless of what the researcher may have previously assumed would be relevant. The use of storytelling qualitative methodologies have allowed me to better understand the occupational and critical issues faced by the participants of these studies that I would not have been able to anticipate.

1.4.1 Narrative Methodology

For the first study (chapter four) I utilized a narrative methodology that was designed and analyzed using a critical social theoretical perspective as well as an occupation-based perspective. Narrative research was selected because storytelling is a primary way that people can make sense of their experiences, particularly difficult, transitional, or traumatic experiences (Lieblich et al., 1998; Riessman, 2008; Wells, 2011). It allows participants to present their stories as they experienced them, inviting them to provide unique insights into their contexts, their experiences, and the consequences of their choices and actions (Riessman, 2008; Wells, 2011) when discussing parental divorce. The goal was to understand the contexts, issues, and accessibility of desired occupational engagement for our participants in the time surrounding their parents’ divorces.

Narrative methodologies have been used to explore human occupation in a number of contexts. In Lee and Kirsh’s (2006) exploration of women who divorced a spouse with alcoholism, they explain that their participants “could not consider their occupational journeys in isolation of their past occupational and life experiences” (p. 140). Jonsson, Staffan, and Kielhofner (2000) utilized a longitudinal narrative methodology to understand the experience of transitioning into the retirement process,
and found that narratives helped to illuminate processes related to meaning and motivation. In their exploration, the presence or absence of occupational engagement, and therefore of meaningful engagement, was a major determinant of positive life experiences following the retirement transition (Jonsson et al., 2000). Wiseman and Whiteford (2007) used life history, a specific form of narrative inquiry, as a tool to understand occupation, identity, and context, and found that outside influences and factors will impact choices relating to occupational engagement. Their findings indicated that one’s life context affects the skills and resources that are available to them in building their profiles of occupations that they can experience and will be familiar with throughout their lives. Occupation cannot be extracted from the contexts in which they occur, as changing the context would alter the meaning, availability, and performance of an occupation. Specific information on the methods used for the narrative study is presented in chapter four.

1.4.2 Visual Methodology

For the second study (chapter five), I utilized a visual methodology to elicit messages that participants wanted to share regarding their experiences with parental divorce. The methodology that I designed was based on critical visual methodology practise (Mitchell, 2008; Mitchell et al, 2007; Mitchell, Theron, Stuart, Smith, & Campbell, 2011; Rose, 2007; Solomon, 2008) that explores how participants see and interact with their world using visual media as a way to uncover meaning. This study involved participants creating a visual message, and through the creative process, reflecting upon the lessons that they feel stand to be learned from their experiences (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Gauntlet & Holzwarth, 2006; Kindler, 2003; Mitchell, 2008; Solomon, 2006). The benefit of the process of participants creating a visual message is twofold. First, the process of conceptualizing the visual message and the act of creating it allows the participants time to reflect on what their message means to them and what it will mean to others (Gauntlet & Holzwarth, 2006; Kindler, 2003; Mitchell, 2008; Solomon, 2006). The process of actively choosing each image, each symbol, each word, and each colour requires reflection and consideration for what it means to the visual message’s overall meaning. The second benefit of the process of creating a visual message is the message that the participants send. Participants choose a message that they think others
should know, and this helps to understand the areas that they think should receive more attention in the future from both researchers and consumers of the research (Mitchell et al., 2007, Mitchell et al., 2011, Walsh, 2007). The participants’ full visual message can then be shared with audiences along with the researcher’s description of the intent of the message and the process of creating the message, which allows audiences to connect with the material and with the participants’ messages (Mitchell et al., 2011; Stuart, 2007; Walsh, 2007). For specific information regarding the visual methods used in this study, refer to chapter five.

1.5 Situating the Researcher

Kincheloe et al. (2011) state “critical pedagogical researchers enter into an investigation with their assumptions on the table, so no one is confused concerning the epistemological and political baggage they bring with them to the research site” (p. 167). As such, I am presenting my story here. I will explain my personal and professional interests in the topic, so that readers may understand the views with which I entered into the research process.

My interest in this research stems from a quite personal place. My parents separated when I was 10 years old and my brothers were 12 and 6 years old. This event led to many transitions in my daily occupations, in my access to activities, in ability to maintain structure and routines, in my relationships and in my emotions more broadly. In the years that followed I had a number of confusing and ultimately unpleasant interactions with both counselling professionals and community members, but I could not quite identify why they were so unsettling. I repeatedly experienced family members, community members, professionals, and the media telling me how I should feel and what I should do, carelessly highlighting their perceptions of my future limitations.

Conversely, others told me that my experiences were not generalizable – not ‘true’ reflections of parental divorce – because my parents had a “good divorce.” Consistently, outsiders reinforced the concept that my family’s difficulties and transitions were ‘less than’ those of others, that I could not understand what a real divorce was like,
and that my family and I had no real reason to complain (whether we were actually ‘complaining’ or not).

Nevertheless, I was put in positions where I felt that I was (unfoundedly) being treated like a pseudo-expert on parental divorce. From as young as 10 years old, I found that children were told to speak to me about life after parental divorce, as though I would have some sort of explanation, advice, or even comforting sentiments.

I did not, but I decided that I wanted to.

While I was pursuing my undergraduate studies, I discovered the way that I would contribute to the lives of children whose parents had separated. I decided that as a researcher I would like to be able to create knowledge, uncover answers, and maybe even create some hope for other adolescents with divorced parents. I was accepted into the Graduate Program in Health and Rehabilitation Sciences Program in the field of Occupational Science. Having been educated primarily in quantitative research methods, I initially proposed a study exploring changes in physical activity following a major life event in adolescents and young adults, given that physical engagement was one occupation that changed for me during the transition of my parents’ separation. Upon meeting my supervisor, Dr. Mandich, I nervously fumbled through my explanation of the project and awaited her response. She looked at me sceptically for a moment, and then asked the brilliantly simple question of, “Okay, but what do you really want to study?” Befuddled, I tried to pull my thoughts together. I took a deep breath and explained that I wanted to know what changed after a parental divorce or separation, and why it changed. I wanted to know if there were others like me, and if they had also defied the stereotype of being “damaged” in so many ways by their “broken homes”. And what do you know? She liked the idea!

As I began my foray into the existing research on adolescent life following a parental divorce or marital separation (see Chapter 2), I grew curious and frustrated. Why was this research so negatively framed? Why must we only explore what is wrong with children? Who is asking what life is like and what the context of these issues is? Who is looking into what can be done? Who will value the strategies that adolescents are already
using to cope? I realized that it was me. I was researching these topics, and I was going
to make this difference. And so I began to seek out stories and gain insight into the context
of life following parental divorce. I explored changes in engagement and the elements
that affect access and choice of engagement in occupations. I delved into the meanings
behind the occupational choices.

Little did my 10-year-old self know that my parents’ divorce would define so
many important aspects of my growth and maturity, both positively and negatively. I am
overwhelmed by the generosity of my participants in their willingness to share their
stories.

1.6 Plan of Presentation

This dissertation is presented in an integrated article thesis format. The chapters
are presented as independently publishable manuscripts. As such, it is worth noting that
there will be some level of repetition throughout the chapters. This was done
intentionally, and serves the larger purpose of each manuscript being able to stand alone
outside of this compiled dissertation.

In order to set the stage for this research, this introductory chapter has briefly
explained current trends in academic literature pertaining to adolescent and young adult
life following parental divorce in North America as well as the need for a body of
research that includes more qualitative, critical work. It has also given readers a better
understanding of the values and intentions with which I approached this research, so that
my ‘biases’ could be identified, as they exist throughout the construction and analysis of
this work.

Chapter two is a scoping literature review of North American academic research
on parental divorce or marital separation as it relates to adolescents (age 10-19, WHO,
2010). This review covers the years 1998 through 2010, with an addendum updating the
information until the year 2014. This chapter outlines the themes within the body of
research literature and highlights areas that are not being addressed. At the end of this
manuscript, suggestions for areas of continued research are presented, and set the stage
for the original research conducted to fulfil the requirements of this dissertation. While this scoping review briefly discusses the topic’s relation to occupational science, it does not specifically frame the work within the realm of occupational science. This was done in order to provide a broad understanding of the topic before specifically focusing on the occupational issues.

In Chapter three, a methodologically driven paper outlining the role of visual methodologies within occupational science is presented. While the chapter does not discuss parental divorce or marital separation, it was included in the dissertation for two reasons. First, visual methodologies had not been widely explored as they relate to the study of human occupation. In order to substantialize my use of a visual methodology in the study of adolescent occupational interactions with parental divorce or marital separation, I first had to bring the argument for visual methodologies to my community of peers. The article has been well received, and in its published form, it was one of the Journal of Occupational Science’s most viewed papers in 2011. The second reason for including this manuscript was to demonstrate my ability as a doctoral candidate to recognize a methodological gap within my field of research, and to address that gap. This article is an example of my ability to speak to the needs of my peers, and address those needs in a way that they positively responded to. It also demonstrates my ability to identify, understand, critique, and publish about new and complex methodological issues within my field of occupational science.

Chapter four presents the first of two studies conducted for this dissertation. It explores the narratives provided by the six participants regarding their stories of occupational engagement and transitions surrounding parental divorce or separation. The methods used to collect and analyze participants’ narratives are presented in more depth in that chapter. The chapter presents information on the individual stories, as well as themes that run through the stories. Finally, the contributions of this research as well as the implications for future research and practice are presented. The narratives that were constructed from the interview are available as Appendices J to O.
Chapter five is a manuscript presenting the second of two studies conducted for this dissertation. In this study, the six participants constructed visual messages that they would like to send to an audience of their choosing regarding life surrounding parental divorce or separation. The chapter includes the participants’ visual messages, as well as discussion of themes that were identified through the visual messages. The relationships between the participants’ messages and the current academic discourse regarding parental divorce and separation are explored. Implications for the research as well as future directions for research in the area are presented.

The final considerations section presents concluding messages regarding the implications of our findings for future research. This chapter also includes limitations and methodological constraints of the studies. I present the measures used to maintain the quality of this research throughout the research process for the reader’s consideration. I close this study with final reflections on the process involved in all areas of the design, collection and compilation of the data.
1.7 References


Chapter 2

2 What does parental divorce or marital separation mean for adolescents? A scoping review of North American literature

Discussion of divorce is often accompanied by fear, anger, disapproval, and disappointment at the loss of the ‘wholesome’ and traditional family structure that our society values so highly. As Kelly (2000) relates, “Divorced families often have been viewed by the media, public, and mental health professionals as seriously flawed structures and environments, whereas the married or intact family was characteristically seen as a more positive and nurturing environment for children” (p. 963). While the validity of these views remain questionable, divorce and marital separation are phenomena that are not disappearing in North America in the near future, and researchers must therefore seek to understand the effects of this ‘flawed environment’ on the children and adolescents who experience them, especially when compared with young people from the seemingly more nurturing environment of intact families. There is still much to be learned about the ways that adolescents experience the dissolution of their traditional family unit. This review is intended to contextualize the current views on divorce based on available research as well as identify knowledge-gaps in the existing literature.

This paper assesses the ways in which different health-related research fields are evaluating adolescents who have experienced a parental divorce or marital separation (PDMS). This analysis is limited to North American English language studies because of culturally dependent factors involved in the study of PDMS and family structure. Limiting the review to this geographical, data-rich area will decrease the number of confounding variables that arise from cultural divergences. The acquisition of articles is

limited to 3 search engines commonly used by medical or health-related researchers and practitioners.

This paper uses Arksey and O’Mally’s (2005) literature scoping processes. The steps of the scoping process include initial identification of the research question followed by acquisition of appropriate materials. From the attained relevant materials, each study is reviewed for pertinence to the research question, and those meeting the criteria are read in full to confirm their significance. The studies that apply to the review’s research question are “charted,” a process further defined within the methods section whereby the data are entered into a chart and sorted based upon multiple relevance criteria. Finally, in the collation, summary and reporting of the results, all studies are presented and discussed in terms of themes and contributions to the body of research (Arksey & O’Mally, 2005). This scoping process will be applied to literature regarding adolescents and their interactions with PDMS.

2.1 Methods

The reason for using a broad scoping review on adolescents and PDMS is best described by Arksey and O’Mally (2005):

A key strength of the scoping study is that it can provide a rigorous and transparent method for mapping areas of research… reviewers are in a position to illustrate the field of interest in terms of the volume, nature and characteristics of the primary research. This analysis in turn makes it possible to identify the gaps in the evidence base, as well as summarizing and disseminating research findings. By presenting the results in an accessible and summarized format, policy makers, practitioners and consumers are better placed to make effective use of the findings (p. 30)

This review will identify gaps in the currently available health-related literature pertaining to adolescents and PDMS.
2.1.1 Research Question

The aim of this review is to identify trends in the past decade’s worth of peer reviewed health-related research regarding adolescents and their interaction with PDMS. ‘Divorce’ is defined by governing bodies and varies across countries and even provinces and states. ‘Marital separation’ varies by study, usually entailing a decision to live apart for reasons of marital breakdown. This review will consider studies pertaining to both parental divorce and marital separation without distinction. ‘Adolescence’ is also a term with varying definitions. This review will use the World Health Organization’s (WHO) definition of adolescence, which ranges from ages 10 to 19 (WHO, n.d.).

According to the scoping review process, this study does not discriminate the nature of the studies being evaluated, fields of health research from which the literature originates, methodology, or types of effects they anticipate PDMS having on the adolescents, be they physical, mental, social, or any other type. The purpose is to gain a broad and holistic perspective on how PDMS affects adolescents in many areas of their lives.

2.1.2 Identification of Relevant Studies

Three databases were selected: CINAHL (Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature), Scopus, and PubMed as three examples of databases that are accessed by healthcare professionals. The terms “adolescent” and “divorce” were searched in each database. The initial search of the three databases produced 1540 results (22 from CINAHL, 467 from PubMed, and 1051 from Scopus). The studies were evaluated for relevance and pared down.

2.1.3 Study Selection

Due to the overwhelming volume of results on the search engines, inclusion criteria were devised to ensure that the studies were relevant, accessible and manageable. The inclusion criteria required that the studies: (1) be written in English; (2) be conducted in North America; (3) be peer reviewed studies; (4) be published between 1998-2009; (5) be research papers (no reviews, analyses or editorials); (6) have participants who are
adolescents at the time of the study; (7) relate to the adolescents’ interactions with their parents’ divorce and/or marital separation; and (8) focus on PDMS, and evaluate it independently of other health issues, life transitions or possible confounding factors.

Studies were first sorted through in an initial screening of titles and abstracts, eliminating 1369 items. The remaining articles were then read in full, and either discarded based on the aforementioned inclusion criteria (121 items), or their information was charted (53 items total: 4 CINAHL, 9 PubMed, 40 Scopus). The content of these 53 articles will be elaborated upon in the proceeding section. Four studies could not be accessed through the university’s resources, and were excluded from the final evaluation.

2.1.4 Charting the Data

“Charting,” as described Arksy and O’Malley (2005) is, “a technique for synthesizing and interpreting qualitative data by sifting, charting and sorting material according to key issues and themes” (p. 26). Initial charting was conducted using Microsoft Excel, and an abridged version of this chart is included as Table 1. The original categories included: title, bibliographic information, database of origin, research aim/purpose, methods used to study adolescents, main findings, geographic location, setting/recruitment, population, study limitations, qualitative/quantitative research, and additional notes.

These categories were created to organize the data in a way that would make trends easily identifiable within the literature. ‘Category’ refers to what have been deemed important pieces of information that can be easily derived from each study. The categories included both general information on each study, such as its bibliographic information, and information that is more specific to each study, such as research aims, methodology and population. The mixture of general and specific information makes the charted data useful both to the authors of this study as well as to this paper’s readers for their own purposes. Through the combination of the original 12 categories, the themes were derived. ‘Theme’ refers to common foci or findings centred on a topic found in one or more study and that have been considered important to the overall subject of adolescents experiencing PDMS. The themes acted as important components in the later
literature analysis. The charted data were used to summarize and report the results of the scoping study, as discussed in the next section.

2.1.5 Collating, Summarizing and Reporting the Results

The final sample contained 3 Canadian and 50 American studies. Four of the studies used qualitative methods of inquiry, 43 used quantitative methods, and 6 used mixed methods designs. It should be noted that the sixth inclusion criteria, participants being adolescents at the time of the study, was overlooked in 5 cases. There were 2 studies where the sample’s ages ranged below age 10 by a maximum of 1 year (Dawson-McClure, Sandler, Wolchik, & Millsap, 2004; Johnston, 2003) and 3 studies where participants ranged above age 19 by a maximum of 4 years (Afifi & Schrodt, 2003; Ge, Natsuaki, & Conger, 2006; Reese-Weber & Kahn, 2005). These studies were included in the final sample despite the fact that the participants fell slightly outside of the age range of inclusion because the average age of the sample was within the adolescent age range, and the information was relevant to the review.

Table 1. Summary table of key features of the final literature sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author (Year) Country</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Key Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afifi &amp; Schrodt (2003), U.S.A.</td>
<td>&quot;Feeling Caught&quot; as a mediator of adolescents' and young adults' avoidance and satisfaction with their parents in divorced and non-divorced households</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Participants from divorced homes: less communication parental competence, more demand-withdrawal patterns, less closeness with parents, more avoidant and dissatisfied with relationships with parents, higher feelings of being caught between parents; avoidance higher in adolescents who still live with parents and are stuck in the situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afifi &amp; Afifi (2009), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Avoidance among adolescents in conversations about their parents' relationship: Applying the Theory of Motivated Information Management</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data/observation</td>
<td>Adolescents do not perceive selves as avoiding discussing parents' relationship or divorce, but do so passively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afifi &amp; McManus (2010), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Divorce disclosures and adolescents' physical and mental health and parental relationship quality.</td>
<td>Mixed: Survey data/ coded interviews</td>
<td>Adolescents felt closer to parents when they shared their feelings, even if they were negative towards the other parent, however the adolescents still feel caught between the two parents and dislike that aspect of the disclosures. Adolescents feel that parents share more negative disclosures than the parents realize.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afifi, Afifi &amp; Coho (2009), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Adolescents' physiological reactions to their parents' negative disclosures about the other parent in divorced and nondivorced families.</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data, skin conductance</td>
<td>Adolescents from divorced families had more self-reported anxiety when discussing relationships, marriage and divorce with parents, but not higher skin conductance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author (Year)</td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Title</td>
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<tr>
<td>Afifi, Afifi, Morse, &amp; Hamrick (2008), U.S.A.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Adolescents' avoidance tendencies and physiological reactions to discussions about their parents' relationship: Implications for post-divorce and non-divorced families</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data, skin conductance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afifi, Huber, &amp; Ohs (2006), U.S.A.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Parents' and adolescents' communication with each other about divorce-related stressors and its impact on their ability to cope positively with the divorce</td>
<td>Mixed: Survey data/ coded interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afifi, McManus, Hutchinson, &amp; Baker (2007), U.S.A.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inappropriate parental divorce disclosure, the factors that prompt them, and their impact on parents' and adolescents' well-being</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burt, Barnes, McGue, &amp; Iacono (2008), U.S.A.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Parental Divorce and Adolescent Delinquency: Ruling out the impact of common genes</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawson-McClure, Sandler, Wolchik, &amp; Millsap (2004), U.S.A.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk as a moderator of the effects of prevention programs for children from divorced families: a six-year longitudinal study</td>
<td>Quantitative: Clinical diagnoses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennison &amp; Koerner (2006), U.S.A.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Post-divorce inter-parental conflict and adolescents' attitudes about marriage: the influence of maternal disclosures and adolescent gender</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennison &amp; Koerner (2008), U.S.A.</td>
<td></td>
<td>A look at hopes and worries about marriage: the views of adolescents following a parental divorce</td>
<td>Qualitative: Written responses to open-ended questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ehrenberg, Stewart, Roche, Pringle, &amp; Bush (2006), Canada.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Adolescents in divorcing families: perceptions of what helps and what hinders</td>
<td>Qualitative: Written responses to open-ended questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedman &amp; Knupp (2003), U.S.A.</td>
<td></td>
<td>The impact of forgiveness on adolescent adjustment to parental divorce</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freeman &amp; Newland (2002), U.S.A.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Family transitions during the adolescent transition: Implications for parenting</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author (Year)</td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Methods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ge, Natsuaki, &amp; Conger (2006), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Trajectories of depressive symptoms and stressful life events among male and female adolescents in divorced and non-divorced families</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Individuals who experience parental divorce in early adolescence are at significantly higher risk for development of depressive symptoms than intact families; time of divorce in an adolescent's life is a predictor of trajectories of depressive symptoms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gould, Shaffer, Fisher &amp; Garfinkel (1998), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Separation/divorce and child and adolescent completed suicide</td>
<td>Quantitative: Interviews/ Psychological assessments</td>
<td>Suicide victims significantly more likely to come from non-intact family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ham (2003), U.S.A.</td>
<td>The effects of divorce on the academic achievement of high school seniors</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Adolescents who come from intact families performed better academically and had better school attendance than those from divorced families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henderson, Hayslip, Sanders, &amp; Louden (2009), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Grandmother-grandchild relationship quality predicts psychological adjustment among youth from divorced families.</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>When adolescents who experienced PMD reported close relationships with grandmothers they showed better adjustment than those who did not report close relationships, and a greater difference in adjustment than those from intact families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermovich &amp; Crano (2009), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Family structure and adolescent drug use: An exploration of single-parent families.</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>National survey data determined that adolescents living primarily with father were most likely to use marijuana, amphetamines and inhalants. Adolescents in intact families less likely to use marijuana and amphetamines than from mother-only households.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeynes (2001), U.S.A.</td>
<td>The effects of recent parental divorce on their children's sexual attitudes and behaviour</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Adolescents from divorced families had more permissive attitudes toward premarital intercourse than adolescents from intact families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeynes (2004), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Does parental involvement eliminate the effects of parental divorce on the academic achievement of adolescents?</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Adolescents from divorced families have lower academic achievement than adolescents from intact families; this effect not buffered by parental involvement levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeynes (2005), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Effects of parental involvement and family structure on the academic achievement of adolescents</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Adolescents from intact families and with higher parental involvement showed higher academic achievement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonston (2003), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Parental alignments and rejection: an empirical study of alienation in children of divorce</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data/observation</td>
<td>Adolescents' feelings towards parents range from positive to negative, with few being either extremely aligned or rejecting; rejection of parents has many contributing factors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenyon &amp; Koerner (2008), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Post-divorce maternal disclosure and the father-adolescent relationship: adolescent emotional autonomy and inter-reactivity as moderators</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Emotional inter-reactivity of boys moderates the association between mother-to-adolescent negative disclosure about father and adolescents' perceptions of the father-adolescent relationship quality; for girls, emotional autonomy and inter-reactivity failed to moderate association between mother-to-adolescent negative disclosures about father.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenyon, Rankin, Koerner, &amp; Dennison (2007), U.S.A.</td>
<td>What makes an adult? Examining descriptions from adolescents of divorce</td>
<td>Qualitative: Written responses to open-ended questions</td>
<td>Interviewing adolescents of divorce families, authors created new categories of adulthood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author (Year)</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>Key Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>King &amp; Sobolewski (2006), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Nonresident fathers' contributions to adolescent well-being</td>
<td>Mixed: Survey data</td>
<td>Strong ties to nonresident father can benefit adolescents' well-being; boys benefited in grades, decreased acting-out in class; mother-child relationship has more consistent and greater effect on adolescents well-being than that of non-resident father.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirby (2002), U.S.A.</td>
<td>The influence of parental separation on smoking initiation in adolescence</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Significantly higher proportion of adolescents from divorced parents began smoking over duration of study than from intact families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koerner, Kenyon &amp; Rankin (2006), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Growing up faster? Post-divorce catalysts in the mother-adolescent relationship</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Mother disclosure regarding financial or employment concerns was associated with adolescents perceiving selves as older than peers; disclosures about personal concerns or negative ones regarding father/ex-husband correlated to greater social involvement/dating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koerner, Wallace, Jacobs Lehman, Lee, &amp; Escalante (2004), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Sensitive mother-to-adolescent disclosures after divorce: is the experience of sons different from that of daughters</td>
<td>Mixed: Survey data/ written answers</td>
<td>Frequent or detailed mother-to-adolescent disclosures related to divorce associated with adolescent adjustment difficulties, especially psychological distress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koerner, Wallace, Lehman, &amp; Raymond (2002), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Mother-to-daughter disclosure after divorce: are there costs and benefits?</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Did not find benefits in mother-to-daughter disclosure regarding difficulties in sensitive areas, only costs to the mother-daughter relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahon, Yarcheski, &amp; Yarcheski (2003), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Anger, anxiety, and depression in early adolescents from intact and divorced families</td>
<td>Quantitative: Clinical diagnoses</td>
<td>Adolescents from divorced families have higher levels of state anger; not shown to have higher levels of anxiety; no difference between levels of depression between adolescents of divorced and intact families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandara &amp; Murray (2000), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Effects of parental marital status, income, and family functioning on African American adolescent self-esteem</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Parental divorce affects African American boys more than girls; boys from divorced families felt lower quality of family functioning; this effect buffered by higher family income; parental divorce led to boys' lower self-esteem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menning (2006), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Nonresident fathering and school failure</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Child support reduces probability of school failure; greater father involvement reduces probability of school dropout; adolescents whose fathers are completely unininvolved experience overall lower risk of failure than peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menning (2008), U.S.A.</td>
<td>&quot;I've kept it that way on purpose&quot;: Adolescents' management of negative parental relationship traits after divorce and separation</td>
<td>Qualitative: Interviews; Grounded Theory</td>
<td>Adolescents from divorced families evaluate parents negatively; present themselves in certain ways to parents to change amount of influence parents have through information control and contact control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menning &amp; Stewart (2008), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Nonresident father involvement, social class, and adolescent weight</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Obesity more likely in adolescents who had relationship with non-resident father, which varied based on father's social class and weight, and adolescent's gender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neher &amp; Short (1998), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Risk and protective factors for children's substance use and antisocial behaviour following parental divorce</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Adolescents from divorced families reported lower use of problem-focused coping, support-focused coping, esteem-focused coping, and social skills, and more substance-using friends, substance use, and anti-social behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author (Year) Country</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>Key Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pelton &amp; Forehand (2001), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Discrepancy between mother and child perceptions of their relationship: I. Consequences for adolescents considered within the context of parental divorce</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Evaluated individual perspectives held by mothers and adolescents concerning their relationship; no support of moderating effect of divorce on association between discrepant views of the relationship and adolescent psychosocial adjustment as a significant interaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peris &amp; Emery (2004), U.S.A.</td>
<td>A prospective study of the consequences of marital disruption for adolescents: Pre-disruption family dynamics and post-disruption adolescent adjustment</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Adolescents in subsequently disrupting homes have higher rates of internalizing and externalizing disorders and need for psychological services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebelon (2002), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Reconsidering the broken homes/delinquency relationship and exploring its mediating mechanism's</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Families who have PMD are responsible for more delinquency than previously thought, and in more violent forms; certain types of changes in family composition appear related to delinquency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reese-Weber &amp; Kahn (2005), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Familial predictors of sibling and romantic-partner conflict resolution: comparing late adolescents from intact and divorced families</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Adolescents from divorced families viewed biological parents' conflict resolution with one another as more negative than adolescents from intact families; romantic relationship conflict resolution mediated by mother-adolescent and sibling conflict resolution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risch, Jodl, &amp; Eccles (2004), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Role of the father-adolescent relationship in shaping adolescents' attitudes toward divorce</td>
<td>Mixed: Survey data/coded interviews</td>
<td>Adolescent boys who felt close to custodial or noncustodial biological father were less likely to anticipate future divorce; boys' closeness to father or stepfather influenced attitudes toward divorce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rodgers &amp; Rose (2002), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Risk and resiliency factors among adolescents who experience marital transitions</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Adolescents in divorced and remarried families more likely to show externalizing symptoms; not buffered by peer support; peer support did buffer internalizing disorders, which was most highly experienced by Caucasian females.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roustit, Chaix, &amp; Chauvin (2007), Canada</td>
<td>Family Breakup and Adolescent' Psychosocial Maladjustment: Public Health Implications of Family Disruption</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Adolescents living in one-biological parent household demonstrated higher risk for internalizing disorders, externalizing disorders, substance abuse and alcohol consumption; parental support had buffering effects; parental violence had negative effects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simons, Lin, Gordon, Conger, &amp; Lorenz (1999), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Explaining the higher incidence of adjustment problems among children of divorce compared with those in two-parent families</td>
<td>Mixed: Survey data/observation</td>
<td>Adolescents from divorced families more likely to experience depression than those from intact families; also experience more externalizing disorders; reasons for the externalizing disorders differs by gender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sintonge, Achille, &amp; Lachance (1998), Canada</td>
<td>The influence of big brothers on the separation-individuation of adolescents from single-parent families</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Big Brother program helped adolescents from divorced mother-custody families in separation-individuation process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun (2001), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Family environment and adolescents' well-being before and after parents' marital disruption: a longitudinal analysis</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Prospective longitudinal study; more academic, psychological, behavioural, and drug-related problems in adolescents from divorced families than those from intact families even before the divorce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun &amp; Li (2007), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Racial and ethnic differences in experiencing parents' marital disruption during late adolescence</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Prospective longitudinal study; fewer pre-disruption differences between Hispanic adolescents from divorced and intact families than African-, European- and Asian-Americans; post-disruption effects in non-Hispanic group at least partially attributable to parental divorce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author (Year)</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>Key Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun &amp; Li (2008), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Parents' marital disruption and its uneven effect on children's academic performance—a simulation model.</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Significant proportion of children who experienced parents' divorce suffered academically; authors recommend counseling or help for children after PMD to minimize effects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun &amp; Li (2009a), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Parental divorce, sibship size, family resources, and children's academic performance</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Divorce's negative effects on academic performance decrease in adolescents with siblings. Varies by number of siblings in the family and school subject.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun &amp; Li (2009b), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Post-divorce family stability and changes in adolescents' academic performance: A growth-curve model.</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>The more familial instability that an adolescent experiences, especially following a PMD, the more likely their grades are to suffer. This differs based on gender and school subject.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videon (2002), U.S.A.</td>
<td>The Effects of parent-adolescent relationships and parental separation on adolescent well-being</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Quality of relationship between adolescent and opposite-sex parent did not effect likelihood of delinquency when later living apart from them; living with the same-sex parent does not significantly effect delinquency; quality of parent-adolescent relationship does not predict depression once the adolescent moves out of that parent's house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolchik, Sandler, Millsap, Plummer, Greene, Anderson… Haine (2002), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Six-Year Follow-up of Preventive Interventions for Children of Divorce: A Randomized Control Trial</td>
<td>Quantitative: Clinical diagnoses</td>
<td>Intervention programs with mother or with mother and adolescents together; targets mother-child relationship; reduced future development of disorder diagnosis and symptom count, externalizing disorders, alcohol and drug use, and number of sexual partners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhou, Sandler, Millsap, Wolchik, &amp; Dawson-McClure (2008), U.S.A.</td>
<td>Mother-child relationship quality and effective discipline as mediators of the 6-year effects of the New Beginnings Program for children from divorced families</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>Involvement in program improved effective maternal discipline, had a positive impact on adolescents' GPA's and improved mother-child relationship quality which lowered adolescent mental health problems in adolescents who initially proved to be at risk.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2.2 Main Findings

Current trends in adolescent and PDMS research can be described through seven themes that were identified in the final literature sample. The themes were extracted from the literature through a process whereby each article was read and briefly summarized and broader themes were identified throughout the texts. Articles that had multiple foci were slotted under all appropriate themes. The themes were used to provide a framework for later analysis of the literature. The themes are presented in no particular order. The first was the adolescents’ academic performance, which was often found to decrease following PDMS. The second theme was deviant behaviour, which included use of drugs,
alcohol and cigarettes, and other behaviours considered to be deviant or delinquent by North American society. The third theme was romantic relationships and addressed either how the adolescents’ romantic/sexual relationships or how their ideal views on such relationship changed post-PDMS. The fourth theme identified throughout the literature was adolescents’ psychosocial wellbeing following PDMS, which was measured in many ways and had a variety of different findings. The fifth theme was the parent-adolescent relationship, which was addressed in various contexts, including the change in this relationship following the PDMS, as well as the parent-adolescent relationship acting as a buffer for negative events in the adolescents’ lives that correlated with the PDMS. The sixth theme explored the adolescents’ coping process following PDMS. Six cases fell into a seventh “other” category. They were the adolescents’ subjective age (Koerner, Kenyon & Rankin, 2006), their views on the nature of adulthood (Kenyon, Rankin, Koerner & Dennison, 2007), adolescents’ relationship with a ‘Big Brother’ (Sintonge, Achille & Lachance, 1998), their relationship with their non-resident father as it relates to their weight (Menning & Stewart, 2008), adolescents’ ability to cope with parental divorce based on race (Sun & Li, 2007), and the effects of the number of siblings on adolescent academic performance (Sun & Li, 2009a). The themes and the number of studies that pertain to each are outlined in Table 2. The themes and individual studies are further discussed in the Discussion section.

Table 2. Number of articles associated with each theme in final sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic performance</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deviant behaviour</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romantic/sexual relationships</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychosocial wellbeing</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-adolescent relationship</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*articles may belong to more than one theme
2.3 Discussion

2.3.1 Themes

The seven themes extracted from the readings reveal the ways that current research portrays adolescents’ interactions with PDMS. The first theme, academic performance, was highlighted in nine papers (Ham, 2003; Jeynes, 2002; Jeynes, 2005; King & Sobolewski, 2006; Menning, 2006; Sun, 2001; Sun & Li, 2008, Sun & Li, 2009a; Sun & Li, 2009b), all of which agree upon the correlation of PDMS and decline in academic achievements among adolescents. This downturn in academic achievement, however, seems to be buffered by parental involvement with the adolescent’s life (Jeynes, 2005; King & Sobolewski, 2006; Menning, 2006). Sun and Li (2009b) found that adolescents’ academic performances declined proportionally to the relative stability of a family, measured by the number of family transitions subsequent to the parental divorce, with daughters being consistently less academically successful in unstable families as compared to sons. Sun and Li (2009a) also found that declines in academic performance were lower for adolescents with siblings. The reasons for the declines are not clear, but reasons including family and social instability as well as financial loss relating to divorce are suggested.

The second theme, deviant behaviour, included the use of illicit drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes, as well as other behaviours considered unacceptable by society. Burt, Barnes, McGue and Iacono (2008) demonstrated that the development of the delinquent behaviour after PDMS was due to environmental factors surrounding the PDMS, with no evidence of a common biological link between a propensity towards divorce and delinquent behaviour. Half of the articles showed adolescents’ levels of deviant behaviour increasing following PDMS (Jeynes, 2001; Kirby, 2002; Neher & Short, 1998; Peris & Emery, 2004; Rebellon, 2002; Simons, Lin, Gordon, Conger & Lorenzo, 1999), however, Dawson-McClure et al. (2004) and Wolchik et al. (2002) both found that the increase in deviant behaviour was diminished in adolescents when they or their parents participated in intervention programs. The reduced rise of deviant behaviour following PDMS associated with participation in the aforementioned programs was particularly prevalent in adolescents who previously tested as high risk for deviant behaviour.
(Dawson-McClure et al., 2004). Similarly, Sun (2001) found that adolescents who experienced PDMS had higher levels of deviant behaviour even before the PDMS officially occurred, possibly due to familial instability preceding divorce. Lastly, Vidoen (2002) found that the development of adolescent delinquency was not affected by the sex of the custodial parent following PDMS, whereas Hermovich and Crano (2009) found that there was significantly greater drug use among children who resided primarily with their father than with their mothers. The literature depicts deviant behaviour as an important issue confronting this adolescent population, indicating a higher risk of developing and demonstrating deviant behaviours following a PDMS. Once further investigation uncovers causes of the increased deviant behaviour, information on preventing this behaviour, such as the research by Wolchik et al. (2002) and Dawson-McClure et al. (2004) may promote more socially acceptable behaviour and positive coping among this adolescent population.

The third theme arising from the literature addressed the adolescents’ views on their own romantic or sexual relationships and, in some cases, how these views changed following PDMS. The trend in these studies was that attitudes towards marriage and sexuality strayed away from the current North American morals following PDMS. Peltz Dennison and Koerner (2006) demonstrated that increased post-parental divorce conflict elevated negative attitudes towards marriage in adolescents. Reese-Weber and Kahn (2005) showed that conflict resolution between family members was worse in families that experience PDMS, a trend that eventually flowed into the adolescents’ own romantic relationships. As well, Koerner et al. (2006) found that a mother’s post-divorce disclosure concerning themselves or their ex-husbands led to increased levels of dating and social involvement in adolescents, which could be attributed to avoidance of their mother or a search for someone to act in the supportive role that their mother previously held, but the socializing may involve them with crowds that tend towards more deviant behaviour. Jeynès (2005) found more permissive attitudes towards premarital sex in adolescents from families of PDMS. Wolchik et al. (2002) found that post-PDMS intervention with adolescents and mothers correlated with a decreased number of sexual partners in adolescents, and Risch, Jodl and Eccles (2004) found that male adolescents who felt closer to their fathers or stepfathers tended to have more positive attitudes
towards marriage and were less likely to anticipate divorce in their future. The theme of adolescents’ views on romantic relationships following a PDMS highlights the importance of family dynamics in this tumultuous time. Many of the unfavourable findings relate to poor communication or support from parent to child, and with family training on supportiveness (Wolchik et al., 2002), or through strong parent-adolescent relationships (Risch et al., 2004), adolescents maintained attitudes towards marriage and romance that fit with North American traditional morals, implied by the researchers who originally carried out the studies.

The fourth theme identified in the literature was adolescents’ psychosocial wellbeing following PDMS, including the onset of disease or maladjustment, or the adolescents’ feelings of general wellbeing. This category differs from the theme of ‘deviant behaviour’ in that deviant behaviours are activities that the adolescents actively partake in following a PDMS, whereas the psychosocial wellbeing, or lack thereof, are not sought out by the adolescents. Eight of the articles showed increased anxiety (Affifi, Affifi, Morse & Hamrick, 2008; Mahon, Yarcheski & Yarcheski, 2003), depression (Ge et al., 2006; Simons et al., 1999), internalizing disorders (Rodgers & Rose, 2002; Roustit, Chaix & Chauvin, 2007), externalizing disorders (Rodgers & Rose, 2002; Roustit et al., 2007; Simons et al., 1999), as well as increased anger (Mahon et al., 2003), decreased self esteem in African American boys (Mandara & Murray, 2000), and the finding that more adolescent suicides occurred in non-intact families (Gould, Shaffer, Fisher & Garfinkel, 1998). As well, Affifi, McManus, Hutchinson and Baker (2007), Affifi, Affifi and Coho (2009), Koerner, Wallace, Lehman and Raymond (2002), and Koerner, Wallace, Lehman, Lee and Escalante (2004), all found that psychological wellbeing declined with increased parental disclosure to adolescents on sensitive topics following PDMS. Some studies demonstrated possible buffering effects to the previously mentioned issues, including parental support buffering against internalizing and externalizing disorders (Roustit et al., 2007); good parent-adolescent relationship buffering against assumed effects of PDMS leading to more positive feelings of adolescent wellbeing (King & Sobolewski, 2006); adolescent-grandmother relationship buffering against psychological symptoms and increasing self-efficacy and competence (Henderson, Hayslip, Sanders, Louden, 2009); and after school programs buffering
against both mental health problems for adolescents at risk (Zhou, Sandler, Millsap, Wolchik & Dawson-McClure, 2008) and the high levels of state that can occur following a divorce (Mahon et al., 2003). Some of the literature does not, however, find a problem with the PDMS itself. Pelton and Forehand (2001) and Videon (2002) found no connection between PDMS and psychosocial wellbeing. Peris and Emery (2004) and Sun (2001) both found that psychosocial maladjustment often attributed to PDMS is present before the marital disruption even occurs and the psychosocial wellbeing of adolescents following PDMS seems to decrease from an already lowered state, but this observation is not conclusive. With studies such as those by Peris and Emery (2004) and Sun (2001), it is not clear whether the decreased psychological wellbeing is due to the PDMS itself or the family dynamics that are in place before PDMS occurs. Once the origins of adolescents’ psychosocial wellbeing become clearer, researchers can continue to work on programs to decrease or prevent the development of hardships or maladjustments experienced by adolescents following PDMS.

The fifth and most prevalent theme in the sample was the study of the parent-adolescent relationship, addressed in varying contexts in 27 of the 53 studies. Many of these studies found PDMS to be detrimental to adolescents in a multitude of ways. PDMS decreased the quality of family functioning (Mandara & Murray, 2000), increased feelings of being caught between parents (Afifi et al., 2008), made adolescents generally more avoidant and dissatisfied with life (Afifi & Afifi, 2009; Afifi & Schrodt, 2003), corresponded with decreased scholastic achievement (Jeynes, 2002), resulted in less favourable attitudes towards marriage in girls (Peltz Dennison & Koerner, 2006), showed increased internalizing and externalizing disorders (Peris & Emery, 2004), and resulted in adolescent manipulation of non-resident parents (Menning, 2008). One prevalent finding was that parental post-divorce disclosure to their adolescents regarding sensitive topics tended to negatively affect the adolescents, resulting in maladjustment (Koerner et al., 2004); decreased coping ability (Afifi, Huber & Ohs, 2006); decreased feelings of wellbeing (Afifi et al., 2007); decreased quality of the father-son relationship (Kenyon & Koerner, 2008) and mother-daughter relationship (Koerner et al., 2002); increased adolescent anxiety (Afifi et al. 2009); adolescents feeling older than their peers (Jeynes, 2002); decreased academic achievement (Jeynes, 2002); and showed no general benefits
for the adolescents (Koerner et al., 2006). Some parental disclosures resulted in adolescents feeling closer to the disclosing parent, with the shared information and open communication bringing them together, but the benefits did not outweigh the adolescents’ avoidance of the topics, feeling caught between their parents, and often acting as a messenger (Afifi & McManus, 2010). The New Beginnings Program (Dawson-McClure et al., 2004; Zhou et al., 2008) benefitted adolescents by improving mother-adolescent communication and increased relationship quality due to better disciplinary practice by the mothers. Studies also found that a good relationship with a non-resident father increased academic performance (King & Sobolewski, 2006; Menning, 2006), decreased incidents of acting out in school for boys (King & Sobolewski, 2006), and that boys who were closer to their biological fathers felt less likely to experience divorce in their own future relationships and showed less need for psychological services (Risch et al., 2004). As well, Henderson et al. (2009) found that an adolescent’s relationship with their maternal grandmother can help decrease psychological symptoms and increase competence and self-efficacy than it does in adolescents from intact families. While some studies reveal detriments to the parent-adolescent relationship following PDMS, and some demonstrate stability or benefit, a few of the articles described no real difference following PDMS. There was little difference in adolescents’ alignment with or rejection of their parents before and after marital disruption (Johnston, 2003), the ability of parents to control adolescents in divorced versus intact families (Freedman & Knupp, 2003) or in the different ways that mothers and adolescents view their relationship preceding and following PDMS (Pelton & Forehand, 2001). All of these factors remained consistent between adolescents of intact and separated or divorced families. Studies also found that the quality of the parent-adolescent relationship did not mediate the adolescents’ ability to cope following PDMS (Afifi et al., 2006), and that the sex of the custodial parent did not change depression onset trajectories (Videon, 2002). There are varying intricate ways in which parents and adolescents interact, and these relations each have the potential to be affected by PDMS. The studies included in this review demonstrate detriments to the parent-adolescent relationship, ways in which these detriments are buffered by different aspects of the parent-adolescent relationship, and ways that the relationship shows little effect on certain aspects of the adolescent’s life.
The sixth theme identified in the literature was the adolescents’ **capacity to cope** following the PDMS. Several articles indicated that adolescents’ abilities to cope following PDMS was decreased by factors such as certain types of parent-child communication (Afifi et al., 2006), and resulted in coping through substance abuse, antisocial behaviour (Neher & Short, 1998), or suicide (Gould et al., 1998). Other studies revealed that the decreased ability to cope could be improved through participation in intervention programs (Dawson-McClure et al., 2004), communicating about their stress related to PDMS (Afifi et al., 2006), seeking help from adult counsellors or professionals, or their friends (Ehrenberg, Pringle, Bush, Stewart & Roche, 2006), or finding a role model, such as a Big Brother, to help overcome the challenges of a family transition (Sintonge et al., 1998). Freedman and Knupp (2003) ran a program to reduce state anger in adolescents who had recently experienced PDMS, which resulted in decreased state anger in the experimental group, however this decrease did not reduce the experimental group’s levels of state anger below those of the control group’s participants. These findings make Freedman and Knupp’s (2003) intervention inconclusive in its effectiveness to reduce overall state anger, but hopeful that research is moving towards effectively reducing state anger in adolescents. The last study associated with this theme, conducted by Sun and Li (2007), observed the differences in coping with PDMS across race, based on U.S. national survey data. It found that adolescents who are European-, African-, and Asian-American tended to cope poorly following PDMS, showing marked differences from their previous lifestyles, whereas Hispanic-American adolescents seemed to demonstrate practices associated with poor coping regardless of parental marital status. The literature inconclusively frames adolescents’ coping abilities following PDMS to be generally below those of comparable adolescents from intact families, but demonstrates that this decreased coping ability can be improved through intervention and outreach.

The final theme, deemed **“other,”** contained important issues pertaining to PDMS in relation to adolescents that did not fit into the previous six categories. Kenyon et al. (2007) re-examined previously determined categories of adulthood from the perspective of adolescents from recently divorced families. Adolescents from divorced families emphasized interdependence and role transitions more than the original study sample,
highlighting unique views on relationships and the inflated role that they play in these adolescents’ lives as compared to their peers from intact families. The next study in this category is Koerner et al.’s (2006) examination the effects of maternal disclosure regarding financial or employment issues to her adolescents, which generally resulted in adolescents perceiving themselves as older than their peers. We agree with the suggestion by Koerner et al. (2006) that adolescents’ rapid development of a sense of maturity or responsibility should be further examined, possibly longitudinally, to determine possible detriments or advantages it holds for the adolescents. The third article is Sintonge et al.’s (1998) study of the Big Brothers program as a tool to help separation-individuation of adolescent boys from single-parent households. Adolescents from single parent homes who were enrolled in the Big Brothers program demonstrated higher self-esteem than those who were not enrolled in the program, and faired similarly to boys from intact families. The researchers propose that the differing levels of self-esteem were not due to the absence of a father in the home, but differed by the degree of conflict experienced by the adolescent. This study illuminates both the adolescents’ need for role models for proper development and the detriments of high-conflict home lives for adolescents. Menning and Stewart (2008) examined the relationship between nonresident father involvement and adolescent weight in divorced and separated homes where the mother is the primary caregiver. They found that increased adolescent involvement with their nonresident father increased likelihood of obesity (but not of becoming overweight). These chances were found to increase when the father had less education, and there are some gender differences in the likelihood of being overweight associated with different family-related factors, including obesity of the father specifically increasing the risk of females being overweight. The final studies in the “other” category were both conducted by Sun and Li. Their 2007 study was previously discussed under the coping theme, and its unique focus on race highlighted that some of the familial instability attributed to divorce may be present prior to the actual PDMS, and may be more prevalent in certain racial groups. The pre-existence of instability in families should direct researchers to uncover the causes of the instability and how to stop the growth of this instability following PDMS. Sun and Li’s 2009 study found that sibship size helped to determine the decrease in academic performance following PDMS. They suggest that larger families
see less decline in academic performance, possibly because they already had less money going to each child, so the financial instability that generally follows a divorce had less effect on each adolescent.

The seven themes discussed here each contribute unique and important information to the literature on adolescents and their lives following PDMS, and they all indicate that there is more information to be uncovered. Each theme illuminates different problems and some strive for solutions, but it is clear that more information is needed to unmask the reasons behind the detriments to adolescents following PDMS and to look for solution or prevention. The literature also questioned whether the problems are due to PDMS at all, or if the issues were due to other confounding life factors that are being mistakenly attributed to PDMS. The vast array of unique literature from varying fields of study demonstrates that one study, one project, or even one field of research cannot solve the issues facing adolescents following PDMS. There are many questions that remain unanswered and much research to be done to help these adolescents overcome the difficult life transition before them.

2.3.2 Framing of the Research

The research pertaining to adolescents’ interactions with PDMS included in this sample is generally framed negatively, meaning that from the outset, the research question seeks unfavourable outcomes of PDMS for the adolescents involved, with few studies seeking positive or unbiased outcomes for adolescents. The trend toward seeking negative outcomes likely stems from the predominant use of problem-based approaches to research that focus on deficiencies in adolescents following PDMS (Townsend & Polatajko, 2007). A move towards asset-based research, an approach that appraises the assets available to the community and directs them to work together to use such assets to alleviate any deficiencies related to the problem (Townsend & Polatajko, 2007), is seen in a few of the studies. The negative framing of research questions may be unintentional and is likely unavoidable as problem-based research is necessary in identifying deficiencies, but asset-based research and program implementation are the next appropriate steps in this body of research.
As was previously mentioned, a majority of studies used exclusively quantitative methods of inquiry. Despite the current imbalance, both qualitatively and quantitatively based research projects are necessary in a well-rounded body of research. Each highlight unique information, point out strengths and weaknesses of one another, and illuminate future directions for one another. Many of the current studies, which use national or large-scale samples, neglect essential information available through qualitative inquiry. Qualitative research can help adolescents voice individual accounts of what they find important about PDMS, what they think should be evaluated, and how they would like to see those issues addressed. A more balanced sample of research would be an asset to the study of PDMS.

In addition to providing new and rich forms of information on the topic of adolescents and PDMS, qualitative research will create an opening for an occupational science perspective in the adolescent PDMS literature. Occupations, in this context, are the meaningful daily tasks and activities that people need and want to engage in. Hocking (2009) points out that in studying occupations, people’s personal occupations are uncovered along with their meanings and purposes, but we also learn about the occupational forms surrounding occupations, the larger social contexts in which occupations are carried out. She later points out the interdisciplinary nature of occupation and its study. Occupational science will allow researchers to marry an interdisciplinary picture of adolescents’ lives following PDMS with the meanings that their new lives hold for them, and the larger social structures and contexts that are impacting their lives and adjustment. An occupational perspective will aid in the layered and rich investigation into adolescent life following PDMS.

It is important to note that established research groups carried out many of the studies that fit this review’s criteria. The greater representation of certain topics within the research does not mean that they are more prevalent or important, only more widely researched or funded. This does not necessarily skew the data, but is important to be aware of.
Future research would benefit from additional qualitative research and neutral researcher perspectives, as well as asset-based research. An occupational science perspective will generate a wider base of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research focusing on the adolescents in their full spectrum of occupations.

2.3.3 Study Limitations

This study is the only one of its kind regarding adolescents and PDMS in the last decade to the best of our knowledge. Despite the use of measures to maintain high levels of rigour in our process, some limitations can be noted. A more holistic picture of adolescent ‘health’ following PDMS would have benefited from the inclusion of social science databases as well. It would have also been beneficial to look at popular media and grey literature. Time limited the ability to evaluate either. Another limitation was the role of the primary author as the sole reviewer of the full texts, which may have led to a biased interpretation of the themes. A larger, transdisciplinary team may have therefore been beneficial in reducing biases in the evaluation process and in the construction of themes.

2.4 Summary and Future Directions

The themes of academic performance, deviant behaviour, romantic or sexual relationships, psychosocial wellbeing, parent-adolescent relationship, coping, and other articles examine different aspects of adolescent life following PDMS, but the findings appear to be quite similar. The parent-adolescent relationship was present in every category in at least one of the two following ways: the parent-adolescent relationship buffering negative outcomes for the adolescent, or the potential detriments of parent-to-adolescent disclosure regarding sensitive topics. Due to the prevalence of material regarding parent-adolescent relationship and communication, the next logical step in the research would be a focus on the parent-adolescent relationship and methods of buffering unfavourable life choices following PDMS. It would also be beneficial to explore the origins of these issues (before or after the point of PDMS) and additional buffering techniques. Finally, research should evaluate potential positive outcomes of PDMS for adolescents, and the favourable ways that their lives were affected.
This study evaluated the past 11 years’ worth of North American English literature regarding adolescents who experience PDMS as it appears on search engines catering to health professionals and practitioners, the first line of help for these adolescents. This body of scholarly work illuminates many issues that arise for adolescents following PDMS, yet offers few solutions and interventions. As was made clear above, an increase in qualitative research and an occupational science focus will move research in new and helpful directions. A focus on asset-based research will decrease the exclusive evaluation of the problems plaguing adolescents, and move towards their resilience and ability to adjust to new contexts. Qualitative research on the topic is found in many social science based search engines, but these findings are rarely made available to the health professionals that are dealing with health-related matters for adolescents experiencing PDMS. A broader picture of adolescent life following PDMS is essential to helping such adolescents navigate their lives with the least amount of conflict.
2.5 References


Rebellon, C. J. (2002). Reconsidering the broken homes/delinquency relationship and exploring its mediating mechanism(s). *Criminology, 40*(1), 103-135.


2.6 Addendum

After publication, additional relevant publications were released. The literature was searched using the same search criteria, spanning from 2009 until 2014. Two thousand and nine was included in this search to account for research published later in 2009, after the data was collected. The initial search of the three databases produced 452 results (108 from CINAHL, 98 from Scopus, and 246 from Pubmed). Applying the same inclusion criteria, the initial reading resulted in 42 articles (13 from CINAHL, nine from Scopus and 20 from Pubmed), of which three were immediately excluded, as they were already included in the original data set (one from each of CINAHL, Scopus, and Pubmed). The final sample included 11 studies (three from CINAHL, three from Scopus and five from Pubmed), and 28 were excluded based on full readings of the articles (three were ‘excluded’ from Scopus for being repetitions of those in Pubmed, not due to lack of fit). Three studies (Carranza, Kilmann, & Vendemia, 2009; Dendon, 2012; Rubinov & Leucken, 2013) were included despite the age ranges extending above the 19 year maximum, as our final research sample also included university-age participants, and we felt that with this knowledge, the data was fitting. The final sample of additional articles is included in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Summary Table of Key Features of the Literature Sample, 2009-2014.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Key Findings</th>
<th>Category(ies)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benson, J. E., &amp; Johnson, M. K. (2009). Adolescent family context and adult identity formation. <em>Journal of Family Issues</em>, 30(9), 1265-1286. [USA]</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>In examining the links between adolescent family context and subjectively seeing oneself as an adult, the researchers found that respondents not living with two biological or adoptive parents were more likely to self-identify as adults.</td>
<td>Other: subjective age/maturity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reference [country]</td>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>Key Findings</td>
<td>Category(ies)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bumpus, M. F., &amp; Rodgers, K. B. (2009). Parental knowledge and its sources: Examining the moderating roles of family structure and race. <em>Journal of Family Issues</em>, 30(10), 1356-1378. [USA]</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>In exploring adolescents' perceptions of parental knowledge and the sources of the knowledge, and considering these items as they relate to race, the researchers found that adolescents' perceived disclosure to their parents correlated with solicitation of advice, perceived parental trust, and perceived parental knowledge. Adolescents from original two-parent families reported higher levels of self-disclosure than those in step-or single-parent families. European American teens report higher levels of self-disclosure and perceived parental trust and knowledge than African American teens.</td>
<td>Parent-adolescent relationship; Other- race differences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carranza, L. V., Kilmann, P. R., Vendemia, J. M. C. (2009). Links between parent characteristics and attachment variables for college students of parental divorce. <em>Adolescence</em>, 44(174), 253-271. [USA]</td>
<td>Quantitative: comparison of standardized test scores</td>
<td>In exploring young adults' attachment patterns in relation to their parents' characteristics, a sample of college students demonstrated that females demonstrate secure attachment patterns when emotionally attached to both parents and fearful patterns when they have poor attachments to both parents. Males demonstrate secure attachment when emotionally attached to mother, preoccupied attachment when they have coalition with mother and emotional attachment with father, and dismissive avoidant attachment patterns when they do not have coalition with mother.</td>
<td>Parent-adolescent relationship; romantic relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dendon, M. L. (2012). Family structure, family disruption, and profiles of adolescent religiosity. <em>Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion</em>, 51(1), 42-64. [USA]</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>When exploring the relationship between family dynamics and the religious trajectories of youth, the researcher found that the event of a parental breakup during adolescence was significantly associated with a religious change in individuals who were observant to some degree, but the changes were not unidirectional.</td>
<td>Other: religious practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donahue, K. L., D’Onofrio, B. M., Bates, J. E., Lansford, J. E., Dodge, K. A., &amp; Pettit, G. S. (2010). Early exposure to parents' relationship instability: Implications for sexual behavior and depression in adolescents. <em>Journal of Adolescent Health</em>, 47(6), 547-554. [USA]</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>The results of this study indicate that experiencing the separation/divorce of biological parents before age 5 may increase the odds of having sexual partners at age 16 and of experiencing a major depressive episode during adolescence. These findings are not explained by parents' perceived knowledge of their adolescents' activities or the number of parental relationship transitions that the adolescents experienced.</td>
<td>Romantic relationships; psychosocial well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heifetz, M., Connolly, J., Pepler, D., &amp; Craig, W. (2010). Family divorce and romantic relationships in early adolescence. <em>Journal of Divorce and Remarriage</em>, 51(6), 366-378. [Canada]</td>
<td>Quantitative: comparison of standardized test scores</td>
<td>This study compared adolescents from intact and divorced families on important aspects of their romantic experiences and found that those from divorced families were more likely to be in a relationship, be at a higher dating stage, and have higher susceptibility to romantic influence.</td>
<td>Romantic relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reference [country]</td>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>Key Findings</td>
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<td>Mitchell, K. S. (2013). Pathways of children's long-term living arrangements: A latent class analysis. <em>Social Science Research, 42</em>(5), 1284-1296. [USA]</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>The authors found 187 unique family structure trajectories for adolescents and categorized them into 5 latent classes of long-term family structures. Of the participants who experienced transitions, the mothers' education, race, having first child as a teenager, coming from a non-intact family, and experience of poverty in youth were predictive of adolescents' long-term trajectories in family structure.</td>
<td>Other: family trajectory and instability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubinov, D. S., &amp; Leucken, L. J. (2013). Family conflict in childhood and adolescence and depressive symptoms in emerging adulthood: Mediation by disengagement coping. <em>Journal of Divorce &amp; Remarriage, 54</em>(7), 676-595. [USA]</td>
<td>Quantitative: comparison of standardized test scores</td>
<td>This article presented 2 related studies regarding engagement and disengagement coping styles. The second study sought to evaluate the role of these coping styles as mediators in the relation between childhood family conflict and depressive symptoms in young adulthood for those whose parents divorced. Findings indicate that higher family conflict related to greater depressive symptoms, particularly when disengagement coping tactics were used. Engagement coping was not a mediator to depression.</td>
<td>Psychosocial well-being; coping process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewart, S. D., &amp; Menning, C. L. (2009). Family structure, nonresident father involvement and adolescent eating patterns. <em>Journal of Adolescent Health, 45</em>(2), 193-201. [USA]</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey data</td>
<td>This research found that adolescents in nontraditional family households were more likely to display unhealthy eating habits and had less parental monitoring during mealtimes. There was no difference demonstrated by single-mother or single-father led households.</td>
<td>Other: nutritional consumption</td>
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Chapter 3

How do we see occupations? An examination of visual research methodologies in the study of human occupation

Occupational scientists often research tacit and commonplace events that participants may have trouble articulating, as certain practices are so engrained in the participants’ everyday occupations. Such data can be difficult to access, as the participants themselves may never have considered, or not be able to articulate the tacit meanings behind their occupations. Eliciting visual responses can promote new, more reflexive ways of thinking about occupations, such as focusing on the specific activities that they engage in, reflecting upon meaning, and addressing barriers and facilitators to occupations to enhance the experience of occupational engagement. As well, it can help researchers access populations with language barriers, low literacy or diverse ability to articulate complex ideas and feelings. Over the past 3 decades, research methods based in visual materials have been steadily gaining popularity and credibility among researchers in a number of disciplines.

This article explores the compatibility of occupational science research and visual research methodologies. We aim to explore the original contribution that visual methodologies provide to the study of occupation. We use the International Society of Occupational Science’s (ISOS) definition of occupation:

ISOS describes occupation broadly as the various everyday activities people do as individuals, in families and with communities to occupy time and bring meaning and purpose to life. Occupations include things people need to, want to

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and are expected to do. (Asaba, Blanche, Jonsson, Laliberte Rudman, & Wicks, 2007, p. 1)

This definition outlines the importance of both occupations and the meanings and purposes that they hold for individuals, all of which will be explored through visual methodologies.

Research that analyzes visual materials has a history in various research communities, with a recent surge in research that is based on both the analysis and creation of visuals materials. According to Cole, Neilsen, Knowles and Luciani (2004), “…arts-informed inquiry can provide a balance between rigour and creativity, imagery and accuracy, the individual and the collective” (p. 148). They argued that visual- and art-based research provide rich information to address research questions through visual representations layered with meaning and metaphor. In this way, visual methodologies and the associated methods provide forums for participants to express complex ideas without needing specific language or phrasing to articulate their point.

Data collected using visual methodologies, however, is not merely a replacement for spoken or written data. By communicating through visual representations, participants must ‘see’ or understand their lives in new ways, associating pictures, representations, colours and metaphors with their strengths and struggles. The creation of a visual representation that characterizes a part of someone can begin a process of reflection and understanding of the situation being explored in new and revelatory ways. Evaluations of found visual materials, as opposed to those created by the researcher or participants, provide a depth of knowledge into the background and context of the topic of the visual material in a way that texts would struggle to due, to time and space.

Researchers who use visual methods must uphold scientific research standards and combat the doubts that have been expressed regarding the rigour and credibility of visual research. Mitchell (2008) and Rose (2007) introduced guidelines for analysis of general visual materials and the International Visual Sociology Association (Papademas, 2009) outlined a code of ethics to be upheld while conducting visual research, as well as principles to be held by visual sociologists. These include professional competence,
integrity, professional and scientific responsibility, respect for people’s rights, dignity and diversity, and social responsibility. As well, specific guidelines for analysis have been developed for some of the more widely used methodologies, including photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997) and visual content analysis (Rose, 2007).

In order to explore the original contribution that visual research methodologies can make to occupational science, we provide examples of visual methodologies and how they might contribute to occupational science research. We chose three specific methodologies that we feel represent a diverse sample of the current innovative visual research literature. We first analyse photovoice as an example of a participatory visual methodology in which participants create a visual representation and use their creations to direct and enact social change. Next, body mapping is presented as a participant driven visual methodology whereby participants use paper and craft materials to explore and share their experiences, focusing on resilience. Finally, the textual analysis of visual materials is explored as an example of a researcher-driven visual methodology in which the researcher critically appraises pre-existing advertisements to derive information about audiencing and intention. Our goal is not to evaluate the merit or procedures of the visual methodologies included, only to introduce them and articulate how they may benefit occupation-based research.

3.1 Photovoice

Photovoice is a photography-based methodology developed in 1997 by Wang and Burris as a more action-based version of their earlier photo novella approach (Wang & Burris, 1994). Photo novella began as a needs assessment tool in which women were asked to photograph their “home, village, or environment in which they work, play, worry, and love” (Wang & Burris, 1994, p. 178). It was a creative way to document issues faced by these women, but Wang and Burris (1994) explained that, “as the term ‘needs assessment’ suggests, women are often in a supplicant position to more powerful authorities and institutions; the purpose of photo novella was to promote a process of women’s participation that would be analytical, proactive, and empowering” (p. 179). Following from that work, Wang and Burris (1997) took their photography-based research in a more critical, participatory, participant-driven direction. In photovoice the
camera, and therefore the direction of the research, is in the hands of the participants as opposed to the hands of the researcher. Photographs taken by the participants represent ways that they ‘see’ the world, and give participants a tangible reference to when reflecting on their lives and situations.

Photovoice has three grounding sources, the first of which involves three theoretical and political perspectives. Wang and Burris used Paulo Freire’s approach to critical education, which posits that every human is capable of viewing the world critically, and with the proper tools, will begin to perceive and interpret their social realities and the contradictions within those realities. They suggest the camera as a useful tool to engage with one’s surroundings and begin to critically analyse one’s realities. Wang and Burris also used feminist theory to describe the power struggles of ‘voice’. Research and history are both moulded by those in positions of power, the ones who have a say (or the voice) in how society is run, how it is depicted to others, and how it is depicted in history. Feminist theorists argue that all people, and not just those in positions of power, deserve to have their voice heard. Wang and Burris attempt to give a voice to unheard populations by putting the camera into their hands. Finally, Wang and Burris make use of community-based documentary photography, in which cameras are given to community members so that they can promote social change by photographing images that they feel represent their community’s struggles. “Their familiarity with their surroundings gives community members a distinct advantage over professionals in their ability to move through the community, portray its strengths and concerns, and use grassroots voices and images to advocate policy” (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001, p. 561).

The second source in the creation of photovoice was the “efforts of the community photographers and participatory educators to challenge assumptions about representation and documentary authorship” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 370). Photography is a powerful means for people to empower themselves by expressing issues that they feel should be addressed, as opposed to what researchers feel should be. As tangible and visual proof of peoples’ situations and experiences, photographs can provide concrete and emotionally stirring examples of community issues and what community members would
like to see done to change it. Photovoice also gives community members an opportunity to demonstrate their strengths and to use those strengths in their plans for community action.

The final influence was Wang and Burris’s (1997) development of photovoice in their work with the Yunnan Women’s Reproductive Health and Development Program. While conducting that project, they were able to see the photovoice process in action, test the aspects that worked best for the community, and solidify their methods to create a participatory, action-based photographic research methodology.

According to Wang and Burris (1997), “photovoice has three main goals: (1) to enable people to record and reflect their community’s strengths and concerns, (2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important community issues through large and small group discussion of photographs, and (3) to reach policymakers” (p. 370). Regarding the first two goals, photovoice projects can provide rare opportunities for some community members to reflect upon community issues and power structures from a critical perspective. Not only does photovoice give community members a reason to critically reflect on their community’s needs and assets, but photography also gives them a new way of approaching their community to discover examples of issues that exist and begin such critical conversations (Wang & Burris, 1997). Photographs can help community members to conceptualize issues by identifying places and objects that represent them. The photographs and discussion may also illuminate issues that were previously unrecognized by the participants, from which they can begin to work towards solutions. Catalani and Minkler (2009) noted that:

The majority of photovoice articles suggested that engaging participants in critical dialogue had a double yield: producing valuable research data in the form of discussion transcripts and serving as an empowerment intervention that had immediate benefits for research participants and their communities. (p. 20)

The critically reflective aspect of photovoice is intended to foster a critical evaluation process through photography, provide insight into community issues relating to power
structures, and empower participants through the creation of a sense of influence and of community.

In their third goal, Wang and Burris (1997) aim for a participatory nature for photovoice research, a feature that sets it apart from other photography-based visual methods. Community-based participatory research actively involves community members in the research process from the outset of identifying the research question, through the community needs assessment, to the application of the study’s findings at community and policy levels (Hergenrather, Rhodes, Cowan, Bardhoshi, & Pula, 2009). This is done with the mindset that community members are the experts on their own lives and experiences, and their expertise should be utilized to inform every step of the research process (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). In doing so, photovoice researchers intend to provide every participant with an opportunity to present and discuss his or her opinion and share these opinions with those in positions of power with the objective of informing and implementing changes (Wang & Burris, 1997). Other forms of photography-based research are quite useful in collecting and assessing information from participants, and should be used if the research will not result in community action, but ‘photovoice’ is a participatory action research methodology with the aim of social change.

The participatory aspect of photovoice extends beyond the projects themselves to the creation of community awareness and bringing issues to the attention of the public and authority figures. Simply raising the issues may affect change. Struken and Cartwright (2009) describe the power of photographs:

The meaning of photographs can thus be seen as somewhat paradoxical in that they can be emotional objects through the punctum, or the emotionally piercing quality, yet they can also, through the effect of the stadium, serve as banal traces of the real documentary evidence of something that simply has happened. (p. 18)

Their mix of emotionality and evidence can make them powerful vehicles of change when presented in community forums and exhibits as early steps in the creation of
community awareness and solution seeking or later when put into action or brought to policy-makers.

3.1.1 Benefits and Limitations of Using Photovoice to Study Occupation

Due to its participatory nature, the ‘voice’ (or whose perspective is being expressed through the research and who decides what to address) in photovoice is largely that of the community member. Darnell (2002) described the multitude of complex cultural, economic and lifestyle barriers to communicating about occupations and their meanings and purposes. Perhaps the addition of photovoice, with its visual artefacts, group discussions, and reflection will lead to new and clearer understandings of how participants view their occupations, the meanings that they hold for the participants, and what action is needed to best facilitate them.

A truly participatory photovoice project, however, can be difficult to facilitate. There are many points at which participant ideas may be swayed by researchers, detracting from the input of the experts - the community members themselves. Researchers may enter the field with pre-determined projects or questions without consulting community members regarding whether it is a concern for them (Catalani & Minkler, 2009). During the training, researchers may give examples of photograph subjects with innocent intentions, which may detract from the instincts and unique views of the participants and lead to an inauthentic representation of participants and their occupations, undermining the participatory goals of photovoice. A later concern presents in the dissemination of the research, as participants choose what is initially photographed and which photographs are chosen for discussion in the group setting, but researchers often decide which photographs are presented to the public (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). None of this is to say that researchers must completely divorce themselves and their rich knowledge on the area of the photovoice project, but any project that does not stem from the photographs, discussions, and themes brought forth by the community members, or that does not end with proposed action would not be considered a traditional photovoice project, and should be considered as another type photography-based visual research.
One important benefit of photovoice is that it does not necessarily require participants’ literacy or language proficiency (Hergenrather et al., 2009), which allows photovoice to reach participants across language, literacy and ability barriers. Photovoice may be useful for those who lack the ability to communicate verbally, write, or fully express themselves through language for reasons including (but not limited to) disability, lack of education, or a disruption in regular social participation. It may also be useful in connecting international and cross-language occupational science communities.

In terms of knowledge generation, Hergenrather et al. (2009) discussed the lack of generalizability in photovoice projects due to typically smaller sample sizes, but do not see this as a lack of utility of the projects, arguing that:

Although the sample size of photovoice studies may prohibit making generalizations, the insights and information gathered may inform researchers about the need for inquiry of the communities addressed. Small sample size allows entry into some communities that would have otherwise been restricted. The data gathered from photovoice studies may identify relevant factors potentially missing in existing models and identify intervention options. (p. 695)

From these smaller, intimate groups, investigators can derive unforeseen strengths and barriers from the community members. The use of smaller more specialised groups works well with the study of occupations, as occupations themselves tend to be quite idiosyncratic due to the multiple levels of meaning associated with them (Hocking, 2000). Small participant sample size is common in qualitative research and promotes more in-depth information on fewer subjects rather than immediately generalizable findings using larger, more surface level data collection techniques. Findings from photovoice research can later be examined for wider application in similar contexts.

Drawing from it’s predecessor, photo novella (Wang & Burris, 1994), photovoice acts partially as a needs assessment, which lends to its ability to identify new issues within the community, while the participatory nature allows participants to take ownership of the needs that they would like to see addressed, rather than what outsiders may suggest as needs within the community. Photovoice projects act as both their own
needs assessments by identifying currently unaddressed issues faced by participants and leads them to find their own solutions to their needs.

Photovoice is not without costs, including the monetary costs of the equipment required. As well, some journals are reluctant to print coloured photos or too many photos at all, which may hinder the information dissemination process. Advances in technology have made photography-based projects more cost-effective and user friendly through drops in equipment costs, rise in photo-friendly analysis software, and an increased commonality in point-and-shoot cameras, which decreases participant training time (Parmeggiani, 2009). Despite wider availability of cameras and decreased photo processing costs, there may be additional expenses specific to common occupational science research populations, for example the adaptation of photographic equipment for use with other assistive technologies and equipment. Regardless of falling costs, photovoice remains more expensive than other visual methodologies that require no technology or processing.

The time invested by researchers, participants, and group facilitators may deter researchers from using photovoice. In their evaluation of photovoice research, Catalani and Minkler (2009) suggested that longer study duration is associated with better participation, more time for participant reflection, greater emphasis on training, group discussion of community issues through the use of photographs, and better collaboration in searching for solutions. Greater time and work commitments require both researchers’ abilities to commit, as well as the time (per session and longitudinally) that the intended participant population will be willing or able to commit.

There are many ethical issues associated with a photovoice methodology. Beyond standard ethical considerations for the participant population, researchers must consider the potentiality of the photographs harming participants and third parties by embarrassing them or exposing opinions or affiliations that could mar them emotionally, socially or professionally. Extra effort is required to protect participants from exposure to harm (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001), especially when investigating private occupations. Photovoice researchers must also consider the rights of the photographs’ subjects. Each
photograph clearly focusing on an individual other than the study’s participant may only be included if signed consent was given by that subject, leading to additional paperwork and training for participants to gain this consent (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001).

Another pertinent ethical issue is the ownership of the photographs, which are the property of those who took them (assuming that they obtained proper consent from all subjects). Researchers must obtain signed permission from the participants to use their photographs when disseminating the research (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). Often, researchers will have an agreement with participants from the outset regarding how the photographs may be used and what will be done with any money raised through the dissemination of the research.

One final consideration when using photovoice as a tool to explore human occupation is whether the proposed research question will result in action. Assuming that photography is the best medium with which to capture the occupations being explored, investigators must decide whether photography is being used to illicit discussion and information as an endpoint, or whether the discussions will result in action. If the occupations are too idiosyncratic to necessitate action on a large scale, then the investigator may choose to use photo elicitation to elicit information from the participants’ photographs, but should shy away from photovoice, which would require action to be taken by the group.

Photovoice is a useful visual methodology to explore a community from the unique perspective of its members and take action to change the issues identified within the community. It promotes critical reflection and promotes the empowerment of its participants through group discussion and being a part of the change that their community sees. While the photovoice process is adaptable to the research context, the photographic and participatory elements of photovoice are not appropriate for all research topics or communities, and cannot capture all occupations or suggest and implement appropriate action for all research questions. Photovoice has the potential to illuminate and critique many occupations, but may not be appropriate for all occupation-based studies, and
researchers should consider the abovementioned criteria to evaluate the congruence between the project and the methodology before undertaking the project.

### 3.2 Body mapping

Body mapping is a process in which the tracing of a participant’s body becomes the template on which he or she documents a physical and emotional journey that his or her embodied self underwent. It fits within a larger scope of visual research methods that collect information from participants through the creation of visual pieces. Such methods have the advantage of eliciting information from participants and populations who might be excluded from research due to lack of literacy, difficulty articulating ideas, or general difficulties in communicating about complex emotions and topics (Huss & Cwikel, 2008). These methods also provide new ways for participants to view their problems, which may lead to new ways for approaching solutions (AIDS and Society Research Unit, Centre for Social Science Research, 2007). We will evaluate one specific method of body mapping, entitled “Living with X”: A Body Mapping Journey in the time of HIV and AIDS (Solomon, 2006). We chose this form of body mapping because it is one of few detailed body-mapping guides that outlines the steps of a body mapping exercise. The method was developed by Jane Solomon and the Regional Psychology Support Initiative (REPSSI) team in East and Southern Africa. Figure 1 presents a representation of the Living with X body mapping process.

When designing Living with X, ‘X’ not only represented HIV/AIDS, ‘X’ also represented the other important qualities of the person, such as courage, love, support, purpose, and passion. ‘X’ helps people in their disease journey as well as in their life journey. Solomon (2006) explained, “[t]hrough body mapping, people who are living with HIV and AIDS can see that the virus is a part of him or herself, but is not the most important part” (p. 2).
1. Participants trace themselves and their partners in a position that says something about their lives. They highlight their body shape in paint.
2. Participants put their hand and foot prints in their outline.
3. Participants write in the names of those who support them in the “support shadow” and then outline that figure in a different color of paint.
4. Participants visualize the point on their body where they draw their power (“power point”) then create a personal symbol to represent them and draw it on the power point.
5. Participants draw a self-portrait on the face of their body tracing.
6. Participants create a personal slogan that symbolizes them and their journey and write it on the map.
7. Participants draw or marks that they have on their skin (physical) and under their skin (physical or emotional) on their body.
8. Participants recall how they found out about their disease/issue and draw a symbol that represents the issue, printing it repeatedly on their body.
9. Participants create a symbol to explain to others what it means for them to live with the disease/issue.
10. Participants draw their treatment path on the map, including how they look after themselves, their message to the general public, and how they are feeling today.
11. Participants decorate the rest of their body map until they are satisfied that it represents them.
12. The body maps are displayed and the participants visit all of the maps and complete the following sentence about each artist, “When I see ___’s body map, I see a person who is living with X and X.” The group then shares their thoughts about each artist in a way that is positive, constructive, and honest.

Figure 1: Body mapping instructional representation, adapted by the authors from Solomon (2006).

Body maps come in many forms and serve varying purposes. They have been used to explore participants’ knowledge about and experience of diseases (Solomon, 2006), as a research and educative tool to explore differences in personal practices, folk beliefs, and Western medical views regarding diseases pathology and treatment (Cornwall, 1992), and to explore the embodiment of struggle with diseases (MacGregor, 2009). Body mapping originated as a therapeutic tool to help patients explore their personal journeys and struggles as well as resources they have available to them within
their communities (Solomon, 2006). Its therapeutic background leads body mapping to incorporate thorough introspection on highly influential life events, which tend to involve memories and decisions that were emotionally charged for participants. Facilitators should proceed with patience, include frequent debriefings with participants, and have therapeutic and counselling services readily available in the event that participants require immediate attention in addressing the issues that they are discussing.

3.2.1 Benefits and Limitations of Using Body Mapping to Study Occupation

By exploring their lives through body mapping, participants and researchers can gain unique insights into how they are affected by the different parameters of the topic of interest. This perspective can be particularly useful for the study of occupation in terms of gaining participant perspectives on a problem’s progression and resulting occupational change, disruption or deprivation (Whiteford, 2000). Solomon (2006) used the body mapping process as a way for participants to identify sources of strength, support, and personal power, giving researchers insight beyond the intensifying of the issues or disease progression. This may be useful in providing information on how the participants persevered certain occupations, the reasoning behind which occupations were maintained and which were discontinued, and which occupations support resiliency (Solomon, 2006). Body mapping provides a novel method of exploring occupational changes, which may enlighten researchers and practitioners as to how participants’ occupations contribute to coping and resiliency.

One of the greatest advantages of the Living with X version of body mapping is its benefit to participants. This form of body mapping has been used therapeutically to help patients learn more about themselves, their journeys, and their struggles with their diseases and conditions. The therapeutic and reflective aspects of body mapping will not only help increase participant interest, but will acknowledge them as collaborators in a shared, mutually beneficial project, rather than as participants in someone else’s research. Nevertheless, body mapping’s therapeutic base can be a limitation, as it tends toward questions regarding emotionally sensitive topics, which may trigger emotional reactions that the researcher or the participant him/herself may not be prepared to deal with.
(Solomon, 2006). In addition to remaining aware of participant reactions during the body mapping process and phrasing questions carefully so as to elicit the desired information without causing distress, researchers should be able to provide their participants timely access to mental health services (Papademas, 2009).

Body mapping will contribute to the growing interest in embodiment as it relates to occupational science. Living with X body mapping considers the phenomenological aspect of embodiment, which offers insight into the “condition of being embodied” (Barnacle, 2009, p. 27) or information into living within one’s own body, as opposed to the biological or neuroscientific account of embodiment (Barnacle, 2009), whereby physical and objective information about the body is considered. By asking participants to map out their struggles related to their physicality - describing where on their body they feel their struggles, both inside and on the surface, where they have physically gone to seek support and/or treatment, and where on their body they draw their power from (Solomon, 2006) - we can learn how the ‘doing’ of their occupations is affected, and how they find their ways back to ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ what and who they want (Hammell, 2004). Body mapping is an interactive way of exploring embodiment in occupational engagement.

A benefit of the Living with X version of body mapping is that it conducted as a process with individual steps given sequentially over the course of the project (Solomon, 2006). Though lengthy, the slow process of elicitation allows participants to share their journey one piece at a time allowing researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of many sensitive areas with a decreased risk of participants being overwhelmed by body mapping’s deep reflective process (Solomon, 2006). These on-going activities, however, can be physically demanding on participants. If the body maps are being created on the floor it may be taxing on the knees and backs of the participants and a life-sized body map may require participants to awkwardly or uncomfortably lean or reach to fill it in. Depending on the age and general health of the participants, researchers must factor in time for breaks so that the participants do not overexert themselves, and should regularly check in with the participants regarding how they are mentally, emotionally, and physically handling the process.
A potential limitation of body mapping is the large time and space requirements. Solomon (2006) recommended approximately 30 hours for her version of the full exercise, including the body mapping, discussions, and group analysis. The exercises are also space intensive, requiring enough well lit workspace for each participant with their life-sized body map, as well as a separate area for reflection and group discussion. The spatial demands vary based on the number of participants.

In addition to gathering large amounts of in-depth information, body mapping can elicit a different kind of information than interviews, logs or surveys. Kindler (2003) explores the different cognitive and neurological processes used by the human brain when creating and experiencing visual imagery. As well, Gauntlett and Holzwarth (2006) explained that the creative process associated with the formation of a visual piece allows more time for the participant to reflect on the way that they portray the information than they would have when answering a question on the spot. Gauntlett and Holzwarth (2006) also noted that, “It’s [creative and visual research methods] a different way in, and engages the brain in a different way, drawing a different kind of response” (p. 85). They believe that by asking participants to address problems from a visual perspective, the participants will have to use different parts of the brain to visualize the issue, engaging different pathways of solution-seeking that lead participants toward new solutions.

Finally, while we argued earlier that participant interest would be high because of the potentially therapeutic benefits of body mapping, this only holds true if the population values the benefits of art-based research and therapy. A related concern from the Living with X manual is participants’ doubts regarding their artistic abilities. This issue can be overcome by assuring the participants that, “[t]he central purpose of arts-informed research is knowledge advancement through research – not the production of fine art works. Art is a medium through which research purposes are achieved” (Cole & Knowles, 2008, p. 123).

Body mapping can be useful in gathering information from the perspectives of those who experience occupations or phenomena. Participants provide information on the issue and how it affects their embodied lives, as well as factors in their lives that allow
them to cope and thrive. Body mapping takes participants through a process of formulating a tangible visual representation of an abstract issues in a way that they may have never done before, which can result in new insights into themselves, or unveil burdens that they were previously unaware of. The body mapping process, notably that outlined by Solomon (2006), can provide a new and detailed way of exploring occupations that are difficult to communicate about verbally due to nuances and tacit intricacies of the occupations. The body mapping process has a number of ethical considerations, but if conducted properly with a well fitting project, can produce great rewards for researchers and participants alike.

3.3 **Textual analysis of visual materials**

Analysis of found visual materials can help researchers understand the dominant ideologies of the culture from which they came (Caulfield, 1996). This is especially true when dealing with advertisements, which are, by nature, meant to advise and/or influence the population regarding products, services, politics or other messages. We will evaluate a specific type of analysis of existing visual materials, called ‘visual studies approach to textual analysis’, a method for critically analysing advertisements devised by Johnny and Mitchell (2006). This example was chosen because it is a specific methodical way of evaluating advertisements that accounts for the cultural context from which the advertisements come and analyses them based on set criteria. Struken and Cartwright (2009) explain that visual media and representations can communicate and be interpreted similarly to language systems, because, “[a]lthough these systems of representation are not languages, they are in some ways *like* language systems and therefore can be analysed through methods borrowed from linguistics and semiotics” (p. 12). Johnny and Mitchell’s (2006) methodology is relatively easy to evaluate because it has explicit criteria, but the criteria are open and can be widely applied within occupational science.

The visual studies approach to textual analysis draws from multiple sources of analyses of visual materials and aims to critically evaluate printed campaign materials on their “connotative and denotative properties” (Johnny & Mitchell, 2006, p. 758). We will discuss the utility of this technique for the more general evaluation of advertisements, as they are more prevalent and may apply to a wider range of issues and questions than
campaign posters alone. The images are analysed for their (1) surface meaning, (2) narratives, (3) intended meanings, (4) ideological meanings, (5) oppositional readings, (6) clarity, and (7) unity, which will be discussed shortly (Johnny & Mitchell, 2006, p. 760; Table 4). Multiple readings of the advertisements help researchers understand the different layers of meaning and viewpoints within them. Rose (2007) explained:

Much of this work in visual culture argues that the particular 'audiences' (that might not be the appropriate word) of an image will bring their own interpretations to bear on its meaning and effect. Not all audiences will be able or willing to respond to the way of seeing invited by a particular image and its particular practices of display. (p. 11)

The multiple layers of interpretation from varying perspectives provided by Johnny and Mitchell (2006) uniquely encourages researchers to evaluate the advertisements from ‘outsider’, unintended perspectives in addition to surface level and quality readings of the advertisements.

Lester (1997) pointed out, “the ubiquity of ads and other forms of popular culture endows them with power; the inanity of ads masks their cultural leverage” (p. 32). This ‘cultural leverage’ can be found on many levels within each advertisement, as is explored through Johnny and Mitchell’s (2006) technique. Their method of visual analysis was based on existing methods, but was refined and applied to campaign posters from an AIDS campaign in South Africa. Campaign posters, similar to advertisements, act as a record of the ideals and values held by those in positions of power within a culture at the time of the advertisement’s or campaign’s release.

Table 4 describes the steps involved in Johnny and Mitchell’s (2006) technique, we will therefore only elaborate on a few of them. The first layer of interpretation, surface meaning, helps researchers to identify the target audience of the advertisements, either through specific placement of the ad (Frith, 1997), the demographic of people (age, gender, race) pictured in the ad (Johnny & Mitchell, 2006), or the product being made available and its accessibility (Frith, 1997). The target audience will be able to decipher the narrative being told through the images and text presented in the advertisement in
order to understand the implied message. From the surface reading and the narrative, the audience will gain the intended meaning of the advertisement. These steps should not be overly difficult, as Barthes (1999) points out, “in advertising, the signification of the image is undoubtedly intentional; the signifieds of the advertising message are formed a priori by certain attributes of the product and these signifieds have to be transmitted as clearly as possible” (p. 34).

Table 4. Johnny and Mitchell’s (2006) 7 steps of textual analysis of visual materials.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surface meaning</td>
<td>Overall impressions that one may have from quickly studying an advertisement or visual message. Somewhat shallow. Can be uncovered by simply listing all objects and people in the visual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Story told through the succession of pictures or the frozen scenario that allows the viewer to imagine what has happened to the characters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intended meaning</td>
<td>Expected meaning that the designer intends for the audience to take with them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological meaning</td>
<td>Values that are expressed in a visual text. May be decoded by examining the underlying assumptions and implications that an advertisement or campaign message possesses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppositional reading</td>
<td>Process of uncovering alternative interpretations of a text that differ from the intended or preferred meaning. Depend on the viewer’s background, life experiences, and subject position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity</td>
<td>Ease of interpretation that is associated with the visual image.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity</td>
<td>Compositional value of a picture. Images and words must clearly go together in a comprehensible way for the image to have such unity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By now, researchers will have interpreted what is being outwardly promoted by the advertisement and can investigate the ideological meanings of the ad and whether they stem from didactic, consumeristic, or other motives. It should be noted that the interpretations are presented for the intended audience of the advertisement; however, the researchers may not actually belong to that group. Researchers should be transparent that they will be using their own knowledge and values to evaluate materials intended for a culture that may not share those views. Frith (1997) explained that:

As we begin to analyze ads, you may find yourself disagreeing with some of our interpretations of these ads. This is because not everyone holds the same beliefs. However, in learning how others deconstruct advertising messages we can begin
to realize that advertising only ‘makes sense’ when it resonates with certain deeply held belief systems. (p. 6, emphasis in original)

The oppositional reading (‘alternate reading’, ‘excess reading’ (Phelan, 2003)) is a unique feature of textual analysis of visual materials that provides possible interpretations of the advertisement from the viewpoint of those outside of the intended audience, providing an opportunity to explore the unintended impact of advertisements and how they affect people outside of the desired audience. Johnny and Mitchell (2006) explained that, “it was important for us to use this concept because individuals will frequently read the same image differently depending upon their background, life experiences and subject positions” (p. 760). In doing so, textual analysis of visual materials not only questions the ideals influencing those who fall within the target audience, but also those outside of that audience, acknowledging how they experience what they are exposed to but not invited to participate in (Hooks, 2003). Those outside of the intended audience may feel ignored by or unimportant to the powers that be, or ashamed or angry that they do not fit into the intended or ‘ideal’ audience. This information can illuminate unintended or adverse effects of advertisements on outsider populations, and how this impacts their occupational engagement and desire to participate in occupations or activities not geared towards them. Not all subgroups or outsider perspectives can possibly be accounted for, and researchers will inevitably be seeing through the lens of the outsiders as filtered by their own experiences and views.

Next, the visual message’s clarity is examined, which evaluates the ease of interpretation of the advertisement’s intended message. Finally, the unity of the advertisement is analysed, which examines whether the images and text in the advertisement work together to appropriately convey the intended message.

### 3.3.1 Benefits and Limitations of Using Textual Analysis of Visual Materials to Study Occupation

Human occupation is not only multifaceted, but also individualised and idiosyncratic. This being the case, one may wonder why a culture-wide reading would be appropriate to explore human occupation. By understanding intended and ideological
meanings of ads, we can uncover the values held by the society being examined as well as the potential pressures people may feel to engage in practices and occupations that they may not personally value. Textual analysis of visual materials also ‘re-views’ advertisements (from outside of their normal function) offering perspective on how those outside of the intended audience are affected when exposed to the advertisements (Fuery & Fuery, 2003). These layers of interpretation will provide information on who will be more likely to engage in specific occupations and why they will be more or less inclined. As well, by identifying the power structures that control the image of certain occupations, researchers and activists can work towards challenging the images and their connotations, as well as promoting healthy occupations that are negatively portrayed or stigmatised within certain populations.

Similarly, researchers can begin to identify barriers to engagement in occupations that are considered healthy or beneficial. For example, if occupations are represented as youthful, older populations may be apprehensive to engage in them so as not to be seen as trying to recapture their youth, or that they will not be successful at the occupations because they are simply ‘too old’. Similar issues can present themselves in terms of gender, ethnic, political, or any number of other divides. Once the patterns of advertisements and societal values regarding the occupations in question are identified, researchers can expose the underlying values and work towards critically unpacking those that act as barriers to people engaging in healthy occupations.

Identifying trends in occupations that are geared towards different demographic and geographic groups may not only lead to critical reflection and action, but may also be useful in practice. If patients or clients avoid engaging in therapeutically recommended occupations, it may be useful for practitioners to evaluate whether these occupations are socially acceptable for the population to which the individual belongs. The individual’s interpretations of whether or not an occupation will be appropriate for them can be evaluated in both the ideological meanings of how the intended audience interprets the advertisements and therefore the occupations, and oppositional readings of how unintended audiences are affected by the messages conveyed in the ads. With this information, practitioners and clients can re-evaluate the appropriateness of the
occupation for the client as well as the client’s comfort with the choice of occupation and they can collaboratively choose an occupation that fulfils a similar function and meaning but is more socially acceptable and comfortable for the client.

While textual analysis of visual materials’ claim of providing multiple perspectives provides a critical and unique view, it may actually be one of its shortcomings, as it is not completely feasible. Researchers must be transparent about the impossibility of gathering all possible outsider perspectives clarify whose limited outsider perspectives they are providing. For example, while providing an oppositional reading from the perspective of an ageing population who would be viewing and possibly interpreting an advertisement differently from the target audience, researchers may overlook other perspectives from which unintended audiences might interpret the advertisements, such as youth perspectives, queer perspectives, and perspectives of populations with disabilities. Researchers must clarify their unique backgrounds, and the positions from which they are providing their interpretations and oppositional readings.

Johnny and Mitchell (2006) also do not clearly address their accounting of audience. Audiencing is an important aspect of analysis of visual materials because it directs the researcher toward both the originally intended audience and the unintentional audiences to question how each of them sees and interprets the visual materials (Pink, 2003; Rose, 2007). In the textual analysis of visual materials, the intended meaning addresses the intended audience and the oppositional reading addresses secondary or unintended audiences, but the other steps seem open to debate. This should be clarified in future research using this method.

Using the information that textual analysis of advertisements can provide will enable researchers to understand the social barriers to engaging in certain occupations and the draw towards others. Once researchers understand how occupations of interest are portrayed by those in positions of power, they can work towards changing the ways in which the occupations are portrayed to highlight healthy occupations for wider audiences and make unhealthy occupations less desirable or trendy.
3.4 Conclusion

The intent of this article was to explore the usefulness of visual methodologies in better understanding human occupations. While each method and methodology has unique benefits and limitations to the study of occupation, some common benefits were exploring new ways of processing information by doing so visually (Gauntlett & Holzwarth, 2006), increased accessibility to populations with language and communication barriers, and a longer process leading to more time for reflection and introspection. By asking participants to ‘see’ their occupations, we ask them to provide their insights, their interpretations, and their comparisons. We allow time for reflection and encourage them to really account for what they are ‘doing’ when they enact their occupations, while guiding them to regard what their actions mean in their larger context. By having the researcher ‘see’ the participants and their representations of occupation, the researcher must be critical of the context in which occupations occur, where problems begin, and where solutions and resiliency are found. By visualizing human occupation, we can explore and understand the intricacies of the meanings and purposes of occupation and how these occupations fit into the larger context in which they are performed.
3.5 References


Chapter 4

4 A narrative exploration of young adults’ experiences of parental divorce or separation during their adolescence

Parental divorce is prevalent in North America and has been widely explored in a variety of contexts through research, clinical practice, and popular media (Amato, 2000; Kelly, 2000; Kelly & Emery, 2003). Divorce is framed as a wholly negative experience by many researchers (Amato, 2000; Burt, Barnes, McGue, and Iacono, 2008, Kelly, 2000; Kelly & Emery, 2003). Parents may anticipate difficult emotional, social, occupational, geographical, and financial adjustments related to the transitions that accompany divorce (Amato, 2000; Kelly, 2000). Researchers have discussed the detrimental effects parental divorce or marital separation can have on the life of the child and adolescent (Amato, 2000; Burt et al., 2008; Hartman, Magalhães & Mandich, 2011; Kelly, 2000; Kelly & Emery, 2003). Recently, researchers have also explored the perspectives of adolescents and young adults’ concerning the effects of parental divorce or marital separation on daily life (Cartwright & McDowell 2008; Eldar-Avidan, Haj-Yahia, & Greenbaum 2009; Stambaugh, Hector, & Carr, 2011).

A scoping review of literature surrounding parental divorce and marital separation in North America (Hartman et al., 2011) explored common themes highlighted in the current research. It consisted of 53 studies (43 using quantitative methods, four using qualitative methods, and six using mixed methods) seeking to understand adolescent life following parental divorce. A majority of these studies did not include information on factors regarding their participants’ contexts, such as quality of life pre- and post-divorce, lowered socioeconomic status or emotional distraction of parents when considering the effects of parental divorce on participant life (Amato, 2000, Kelly & Emery, 2003). The findings of the current study regarding parental divorce that are presented through this paper incorporate the participants’ experience and emphasize the importance of context, providing a new perspective that expands the research literature concerning adolescent and young adult life following parental divorce.
This critical narrative study was designed to explore changes in the structure and meaning of occupational engagement (Asaba, Blanche, Jonsson, Laliberte Rudman, & Wicks, 2007; Yerxa et al., 1990) surrounding a parental divorce or marital separation for young people (age 10 to 24) (World Health Organization, 2011). The participants were asked to tell the story of their parents’ separation or divorce, and their life following it, as well as to discuss how their daily life and engagement in preferred activities changed after the separation. A narrative methodology allows the researcher and audience to understand what participants deem as relevant events in their experience of parental divorce beyond what researchers, academic institutions, and funding sources have already deemed relevant to study (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Molineux & Rickard, 2003; Riessman, 1993, 2008; Wells, 2011). Specifically for occupational science, “gathering stories about occupational engagement is beneficial in making sense of what people do, and this can be seen by referring back to the methodological challenges inherent in studying occupation” (Molineux & Rickard, 2003, p. 54).

Understanding the narrative experience of occupational engagement allows researchers to gain insight into the experience of individuals’ occupational engagement, and how they create or derive meaning from their engagement (Molineux & Rickard, 2003).

The study approaches the participants’ narratives and the analysis process from a critical social theory perspective. Liebenberg (2009) explains that young people have been marginalized in their freedom to make decisions and in their representations in Western society. Through this study, I am seeking to understand and confront the hegemony and injustices (Crotty, 1998; Freire, 1993; Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011; Walsh, 2007) that affect young people’s transition, coping, and engagement in occupation surrounding parental divorce or marital separation. Narrative methodology was carefully chosen as a critical methodology, as stories have the power to mobilize others toward action promoting social change (Riessman, 2008). Reissman states, “personal narratives can also encourage others to act; speaking out invites political mobilization and change as evidenced by the ways stories invariably circulate in sites where social movements are forming” (p. 8).
This critical narrative inquiry explores the experience of a parental divorce for young people with a focus on their occupational engagement and the meanings that lie within their occupations. This has yet to be explored in the literature. There are a number of benefits to studying occupational engagement in the context of the transitions associated with parental divorce. The first is that meaningful engagement in occupation is indicative of individuals’ or groups’ access to those occupations, allowing insight into the structures that either enable or disturb their abilities to partake (Laliberte Rudman, 2013). Another is that occupations cannot be extracted from context, and by exploring what the participants did, insight may be gained into what they valued, had access to, and what was meaningful to them (Molineux & Rickard, 2003). Specifically, this study critically examined young people’s storied experiences of life and occupational engagement surrounding parental divorce or marital separation.

4.1 Methods

This study was conducted as part of a larger project exploring young people’s occupations in light of the transitions associated with parental divorce that was being conducted for the purposes of the primary author’s doctoral degree requirements. As such, the primary author conducted all aspects of the study, consulting the other authors at all stages to provide supervision, facilitate reflection and maintain high quality of the research. The article is written in the first person from the perspective of the primary author.

I utilized a narrative methodology that is situated in a critical social theory perspective (Freire, 1993; Kincheloe et al., 2011; Riessman, 2008; Wells, 2011). Narrative research was selected because storytelling is a primary way that people make sense of their experiences, particularly difficult, transitional, or traumatic experiences (Lieblich et al., 1998; Riessman, 1993, 2008; Wells, 2011). By presenting participants’ stories as they experienced them, narrative inquiry uncovers unique insights into their contexts, their experiences, and the consequences of their choices and actions when discussing their past experiences (Lieblich et al., 1998; Riessman, 1993, 2008; Wells, 2011; Wengraf, 2001). Riessman (2008) clarifies, “investigators don’t have access to the “real thing,” only the speaker’s (or writer’s or artist’s) imitation (mimesis)” (p. 22, all
parentheses and emphasis in original). Accordingly, in this study, I am not seeking to understand the historically accurate experiences of young people, but the experiences as they affected their lives and engagement. Riessman (2008) further states:

In a dynamic way then, narrative constitutes past experience at the same time as it provides ways for individuals to make sense of the past. And stories must be considered in context, for storytelling occurs at a historical moment with its circulating discourses and power relations. (p. 8)

Riessman (2008) explains that the narratives provided by participants provide their current constructions or versions of past events, told as situated in their current understanding, including their current social and political understandings of the past occurrences.

4.1.1 Participants

The inclusion criteria for participants of this study required participants to: 1) live in an urban centre in Southern Ontario, Canada; 2) be between ages 10-23; 3) speak English proficiently to conduct the interview; 4) have birth-parents who divorced/separated when he/she was between ages 10-20; and 5) be willing to discuss the experience of parental divorce/separation. For all participants under 19 years of age, parental consent was required in addition to their assent to participate.

Ethical approval was obtained from the university’s Non-Medical Ethics Review Board. Advertisements were placed in the community, around the university, and in local and university newspapers. Word of mouth recruitment was also used. A total of six participants were recruited for this study, all from the university. Qualitative studies commonly contain relatively low numbers of participants due to the great amount of time and concentration that the data collection and analyses require (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The sample size allowed for breadth of information in understanding issues relating to occupation and transition surrounding parental divorce (Lieblich et al., 1998; Wells, 2011), while aiming to keep the amount of data manageable for the primary author.
The six participants ranged from ages 20-23. They were Kizzy, Abigail, Hank, The Fox, Addy, and Natalie. Their parents divorced or separated while they were between ages 10-20. I omitted or changed all potentially identifying information in order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity, and the participants chose their own pseudonyms as well as those of anyone identified in the stories. Participants’ demographic information is presented in Table 5 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Age at time of Divorce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kizzy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hank</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fox</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.2 Collecting the Narrative Data

Data collection for each participant occurred over two sessions. In the first session the participant was informed of the study and consented to participate. They were provided with a list of local crisis management resources for them to use in the event that their participation in the study elicited disturbing or traumatic memories. The narrative interview was then conducted. As Lieblich et al. (1998) explain, “No two interviews are alike, and the uniqueness of narratives is manifested in extremely rich data… the data are influenced by the interaction of the interviewer and the interviewee as well as other contextual factors” (p. 9). As such, the protocol below acted as a template for my interviews, but the storytellers influenced the interactions and ultimately the data collected. The initial narrative interview session ranged between 50 and 145 minutes, depending on the way that the participant told their story and the depth and breadth that they provided.

The initial interview contained two overarching questions that were constructed to be broad so that participants could elaborate on their experiences as they uniquely experienced them, giving them greater control over how the story is told (Lieblich et al., 1998; Riessman, 1993, Wells, 2011; Wengraf, 2001). The questions were, *tell me the*
story of your parents’ divorce/separation and your life surrounding it and tell me about how your daily life and engagement in your preferred activities changed after your parents’ separation. The first question was designed to be clear, open-ended, and elicit how the divorce unfolded for them, not why events or emotions arose (Wells, 2011). The second question was designed to elicit more specific information about occupational engagement within the broader context of parental divorce.

The primary role for the interviewer was an active listener (Lieblich et al., 1998; Wells, 2011). Participants were invited to tell their stories as they wished and not to be constricted by considerations such as chronology (Lieblich et al., 1998; Reissman, 1993; Wells, 2011). It was at this time that the co-construction of participants’ narratives began, as stories are performed with specific audiences in mind (Lieblich et al., 1998; Reissman, 1993; Wells, 2011). The first and most obvious audience was the researcher who was in the room and posing the questions, for whom the participants directly performed their narratives. The narratives were also indirectly performed for the eventual audiences of the research, which includes academics and others interested in the impacts of parental divorce on young people. I only interjected to ask for clarification, elaboration, or to respond to questions form participants as they shared their stories.

Narratives are additionally co-constructed by the setting and social locations of the conversation’s participants (Lieblich et al., 1998; Reissman, 1993; Wells, 2011). As such, I attempted to create a comfortable atmosphere by offering hot beverages, dressing casually, and trying to maintain an appropriately open, calm, understanding, and empathetic space and personal demeanour.

4.1.3 Constructing the Written Narratives

“Developing an interpretation of narratives rather than a simple summary of narratives is a controversial undertaking” (Wells, 2011, p. 43). I transcribed the interviews and created third person co-constructed written narratives (Lieblich et al, Molineux & Rickard, 2003; 1998, Wengraf, 2001), the process for which is outlined in this subsection. Regarding the task of writing the narrative, Molineux and Rickard explain:
The actual words of participants are used to support the narrative and provide examples as necessary. Writing the narrative is a creative endeavour and this is characteristic of the entire process of narrative analysis: it involves a certain level of craftsmanship. (p. 57)

The narratives summarized the research data and also provided the storyline of the participants’ experience along with the themes that served as the cornerstone of the narrative analysis (Lieblich et al., 1998; Molineux & Rickard, 2003; Wells, 2011; Wengraf, 2001). This was done while respecting the integrity of the unique experience that each participant was generous enough to share by using the participants’ own words wherever possible and focusing the story on the issues that the participants indicated were most important to them. In the construction, which is the earliest step in laying out the plot and themes for the analysis of the participants’ narratives (Lieblich et al., 1998; Molineux & Rickard, 2003; Wells, 2011), I immersed myself deeply within the data by reviewing the transcripts, audio recordings, and fieldnotes of the interviews so that I picked up the subtleties and nuanced meanings of my interactions with the participants (Lieblich et al., Riessman, 1993, 2008; Molineux & Rickard, 2003; Wells, 2011; Wengraf, 2001). Additionally, having participants approve of their final co-constructed written narrative allowed me to maintain the accuracy of the construction (as it relates to the experience and messaging intended by the participants) while also having the stories contribute to the evolving analysis (Riessman, 1993; Wells, 2011; Wengraf, 2001).

Lieblich et al.’s (1998) Holistic Content Analysis for narrative research was utilized in this study. The analysis process is iterative, and the stages outlined below were reapplied at different points as themes emerged. I transcribed the interviews verbatim. The co-constructive process continued here. Transcription is in itself an interpretive practice, whereby the transcriptionist chooses how to present the nuances and emotional messaging as they see it through their intention for the transcript and therefore directs the future telling of the story (Lieblich et al., 1998; Riessman, 1993, 2008; Wells, 2011). I reviewed the transcripts and listened to the original recordings multiple times to glean the nuances that cannot be fully captured in the transcription process. The incorporation of
both direct transcripts and original recordings in reviewing participants’ stories was important to capture the participants’ meanings.

I read and listened to each participant’s material along with my fieldnotes until patterns or foci of each story emerged. I then recorded my initial and global impressions of the material. The *global impression* (Lieblich et al., 1998) is the main theme or feeling of the story. It is meant to capture both the content and the emotion of the story, and guides the analysis process. The global impressions evolved as the analysis progressed. Next, a chronological outline of the participant’s narrative was created. This is a necessary step in the analysis of narratives as most storytellers do not speak linearly and tend to jump back and forth through time (Molineux & Rickard, 2003; Riessman, 1993, 2008; Wells, 2011; Wengraf, 2001). Once I had ordered the major events brought forward by the participants in terms of chronology, I created what I called an ‘ordered story’, whereby directly quoted excerpts from the transcript were re-ordered to fit the chronology that I had constructed, and within the chronology were ordered by emerging themes. Once I had participants’ ordered stories, I wrote the participant’s story out in the form of a third person co-constructed narrative. This was done in order to provide a clear plot, challenges, and themes to the participants’ narratives, and served as the first step in analyzing the narrative content of the participants’ stories (Lieblich et al., 1998; Molineux & Rickard, 2003; Wells, 2011). Additionally, the narratives were continually “refined based on repeated reading of them, and reviewing the tapes and transcripts” (Molineux & Rickard, 2003, p. 57). In the co-construction process I considered the voices of the narrator, my own reflexive understanding of how, why, and where I inserted my own interpretations or drew conclusions, and the voice of the theoretical framework that provided the tools for interpretation (Lieblich et al., 1998; Molineux & Rickard, 2003; Riessman, 1993; Wells, 2011). These voices all contributed to the final text for analysis. Knowing that a number of different voices contributed to the construction of the narratives, I returned the stories to the participants for their impressions of the story, as well as changes or additions (Carlson, 2010; Riessman, 1993). Participants were invited to discuss the experience of reading the co-constructed narrative. The sessions in which the participants reviewed their narratives occurred simultaneously with another study within this project, but the reviews and feedback for the narratives themselves ranged
between 29 and 119 minutes. The participants were offered copies of their story at the end of the interview.

4.1.4 Analysis of Narratives

All changes requested by participants were made to the written narrative. Riessman (2008) explains, “Data are interpreted in light of thematics developed by the investigator” (p. 57). I assessed each narrative for its themes (Lieblich et al., 1998; Riessman, 2008). Lieblich et al. suggest beginning with several reviews of the participants’ material until patterns or foci emerge. They encourage researchers to “read or listen carefully, empathically, and with an open mind. Believe in your ability to detect the meanings of the text and it will “speak” to you” (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 62). Lieblich et al. do not provide clear directions for this stage, as the analysis of narratives is an iterative and emergent process. The initial visual and auditory reviews of the transcripts were approached with an open mind and empathic mind to the story, so that the texts could speak for themselves. Riessman, however, contends, “prior theory serves as a resource for interpretation of spoken and written narratives” (p. 73). This was true of my analysis, as the themes that emerged regarding life surrounding the transitions associated with parental divorce were identified in light of previous and emergent theory, the available research, the purpose of my investigation, and the participants’ data among other factors (Riessman, 2008). The parameters for a theme, or “unit of analysis” (Riessman, 2008, p. 54) were ways in which the participants experienced daily life in light of their parents’ divorce or marital separation process. These included emotional reactions, relational changes, or changes in practice, habit or ritual, all relating to occupation.

To identify themes, the first stage is identifying the global impression, as described above. Following this, the researcher must determine the special foci, content, or themes that they will follow through the evolving story (Lieblich et al., 1998; Riessman, 2008). Special focus should be given to elements to which the participant has devoted a greater amount of time, repeated at different points of the story, or elements that deviated from the rest of the story’s mood or message (Lieblich et al., 1998). Again, this was all done in the context of the research question (Riessman, 2008).
Reissman (2008) goes on to discuss analysis across narratives in a study. She explains, “Theorizing across a number of cases by identifying common thematic elements across research participants, the events they report, and the actions they take is an established tradition with a long history in qualitative inquiry” (Riessman, 2008, p. 74). She suggests that, unlike in some qualitative traditions, each theme should be explored within the context of the narrative from which it came and not as a discrete unit of data (Riessman, 2008). For this study, once themes had emerged from each narrative, they were compared to one another in light of their similarities and differences and in light of the critical social theoretical background, available research on parental divorce, and available literature on occupational science. The Findings section presents the global impressions and themes.

4.2 Findings

In this section, I present each participant’s global impression and then share the themes that emerged across the participants’ narratives (Lieblich et al., 1998). To effectively present narrative research, the researcher must both re-persent participant narratives to the audience, allowing the narratives to ‘speak for themselves’, and provide an analytic framework to move research forward (Riessman, 1993; Wells, 2011). As such, a re-presentation of the data is provided along with the global impressions for each participant followed by common themes across the narratives (Lieblich et al., 1998; Riessman, 1993; Wells, 2011).

4.2.1 Global Impressions

The global impression of each narrative is a resounding theme or feeling that characterizes the story (Lieblich et al, 1998). It is within the global impression that the experiences shared by each participant are analyzed as cohesive or outlying from the story’s mood and message. I discuss the unique global impressions of each participant (Table 6) with the goal of allowing the reader to understand the overall feeling of the

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3 The full versions of each participant’s co-constructed written narrative can be found in Appendices J-O
participants’ experiences of parental divorce, and how it affected their experience of parental divorce and their retelling of the experience. Understanding participants’ experiences and outlooks also provides readers with context when reading the themes that have emerged from the narratives. In order to provide a deeper understanding of the themes that emerged from each participant’s narrative, the individual themes are presented in Table 7. Segments of this section are drawn directly from the co-constructed written narratives, and all italicized text represents direct quotations from the participants.

Table 6. Global impressions of each participant’s narrative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Main Theme of Narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kizzy</td>
<td>Importance of truth and information sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>Helping others heal and cope through doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hank</td>
<td>Importance of role model/father figure to learn how to be a man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fox</td>
<td>Becoming the person you want to be through action and activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addy</td>
<td>No one will be there for you, you must make life what you want it to be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>The need and ability to be heard and understood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. Themes of each participant’s narrative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Themes from the narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kizzy</td>
<td>Surprise at parental separation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Truth seeking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Abusive father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caretaking for siblings and mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mental health issues in the family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coping through escape, catastrophization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Food: availability, control, links to physical health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Desire to help others through participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>Questions the institution of marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family emphasis on school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother’s illness, neediness, bitterness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knew something was wrong before they divorced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Receiving and providing support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coping Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being the perfect daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Managing family relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hank</td>
<td>Life changed for parents after he was born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grandmother’s stay influenced Father’s attitude toward women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother’s role in his development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Father as neglectful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Father figures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents’ fighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial concern and responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother hypothesizes conspiracy of divorce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Divorce and emigration decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsibilities after divorce</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| The Fox                  | Abusive biological Father  
|                         | Independence while growing up  
|                         | Being mother’s “partner”  
|                         | The role of adult men  
|                         | Hobbies  
|                         | Discipline and enlightenment  
|                         | Being his own role model  
| Addy                    | Living separate lives  
|                         | Mother as instigator  
|                         | Focus on school  
|                         | Entitlement and questioning authority  
|                         | Independence and self-reliance  
|                         | Role of friendships  
|                         | No one will be there for you  
|                         | Making decisions leading to feeling more in control of life  
| Natalie                 | Family and extended family  
|                         | Verbally abusive father  
|                         | Forbidden from seeking help  
|                         | Mother leaves but doesn’t stay gone  
|                         | Feeling misunderstood  
|                         | Parents’ separation as major life disruption  
|                         | Caretaker of younger brothers  
|                         | Self-initiated coping process  

4.2.1.1 Kizzy.

Kizzy’s story is marked by a continued search for the truth in what others told her, and what they were willing to listen to. At age 11, Kizzy’s mother informed her and her siblings that the parents were divorcing and that their father was and had always been incredibly abusive and controlling. For Kizzy, this came out of the blue. After that, she was definitely brain washed into believing that he was abusive. Nevertheless, Kizzy recalled, “We were being told we were abused so we interpret everything as if it were abusive. My dad could make the wrong food and it was abusive.” She was promised that everything in their lives was going to get better now that their abusive father was gone. With time and reflection, Kizzy has gained a different understanding of the situation, but it was still difficult to go through her adolescence thinking that she was abused. Rather than focusing on being a ‘victim of abuse,’ Kizzy really needed support for issues such as depression, anxiety, and severe school bullying. Instead, she focused on her family’s tendency to catastrophize their issues, trying to one-up each other in whose life was more difficult. She believes it led to these horrible coping mechanisms in which things had to be really wrong for it to actually be wrong, and eventually to a point where things were never really right at all. But no one would listen if things were just a little bit wrong.
Kizzy’s narrative was full of reflection, giving the impression that she was still seeking the truth behind many of the situations as she recalled them today.

4.2.1.2 Abigail.

Abigail’s story spoke of helping others heal and cope through doing. Abigail has always been very quiet and independent. She grew up in a very quiet family who don’t really talk about their feelings. Abigail learned to help her family members through her actions rather than her words. She would help her parents by not being a burden emotionally or financially, and generally trying to be the perfect daughter. She worked throughout high school and paid for her own university and living costs. She did not ask her parents for money, and would pay for items and necessities herself. She would also clean her mother’s house in secret to ease the physical burden on her mother, who suffered from a chronic illness, while simultaneously trying not to imply that she needed her house cleaned. Abigail would also try to ease tensions in her family members’ relationships. For example, she would purposely vet the photos that they took on vacations to make sure that her father’s girlfriend was not in them before showing them to her mother. As a go-between for her parents, Abigail would try to communicate in a way that would make them less angry or bitter with one another. She took a caretaking role for her father to make up for her sister’s lack of love, making an extra effort to have the two get along and seeing that her sister was placated during their visits by sacrificing her own enjoyment. Playing these roles in her family has taught Abigail that you have to be independent and you have to know that you can take care of yourself because you can’t rely on anyone these days.

4.2.1.3 Hank.

Hank’s story spoke of the importance of a positive father figure in learning how to be a man. Hank portrayed his father as lazy and neglectful. He did not care for Hank ever since he was a child. It was a definite loss for Hank to not have a fatherly character in his life while growing up. He would subconsciously try to find a few everywhere he would go because his father was never there and Hank didn’t really know what he should do as a man. How should he behave? What kind of social activities should he engage in? What
kind of hobbies should he get? He would search for father figures from films and movies, which is where he learned how a fatherly figure should be. He wanted a father to push him to play sports, be handy, and even understand the importance of dating in high school. For Hank, his mother was the primary role model for him, and while he adores her and has grown up well, he would have liked a male influence.

4.2.1.4 The Fox.

The Fox’s global impression was to become the person you want to be through your actions. The Fox grew up with a physically and emotionally abusive father. He feared becoming like his father. When his mother removed him from the abusive home situation he began to explore hobbies and interests, new ways of knowing and of being. The Fox filled his time with endless hobbies. His undertakings included many life skills, including self-care practices from quite a young age. He became a self-sufficient person and explained that his need to care for himself from such a young age helped him toward an easy transition into independent living when he eventually went off to college, he had all the skills that most young adults are just beginning to learn at that time. One important practice of The Fox’s was Zen Buddhism, from which he derives his centeredness and calm way of being that gives him the confidence to know that he does not have to end up like his angry, abusive alcoholic father. He has decided that the cycle of abuse and violence ends with him.

4.2.1.5 Addy.

Addy’s global impression was that no one will be there for you, and that you must make life what you want it to be. Her parents, her family, and her friends repeatedly disappointed Addy. Her parents prioritized their drama above her need for parenting as she grew, so Addy learned to care and provide for herself. She grew up with almost a sense of entitlement. If she asked for it she would get it because her parents felt in debt to her for the instability in their home. The sense of entitlement grew, and was reinforced by her lifestyle. She did her own thing, would do her own laundry and make her own food from a young age. By the time she was 15, she was contributing equally to the rent and grocery budgets as well as saving up for school. Addy rebelled against the sense of
authority that her parents tried to put on her. They were not around to discipline her actions, so how could they impose unenforceable rules? Addy learned that she had to make things happen for herself, and began to set goals and make her life the positive one that she wanted.

4.2.1.6 Natalie.

Natalie’s story spoke of the need to be heard and understood. She grew up with a verbally abusive and controlling father. He forbade her and her family members from speaking to friends or even trained professionals about their struggles, insisting that they must maintain the image of the perfect family because their father was so successful. Natalie, however, did speak to friends about the abuse but they’re not trained therapists, so they did not understand the weight of the issues. It made Natalie regret telling them because she felt that they were trivializing what she was going through, that their reaction was disproportionately small and not as supportive as she was hoping for. She also sought help from trained professionals, but none seemed to understand the cycle of abuse and control that she was experiencing. She felt that they were treating her like an immature teenager who needs to stop her temper tantrum and try to speak with her father calmly. Natalie craved understanding of her situation. After her parents finally divorced, Natalie became her own best resource. She began exploring her issues through the use of music, poetry, art, and self-compassion.

4.2.2 Themes Across Narratives

After analyzing each participant’s narrative individually and identifying themes therein, I identified three common themes across the narratives (Lieblich et al., 1998; Molineux & Rickard, 2003; Riessman, 2008). The themes are coping through occupation, changing roles and responsibilities, and available support. Each will be presented as they emerged in the analysis, and further interpretation will be provided later in the Discussion section.
4.2.2.1 Coping through occupation.

Coping through occupation was a prevalent theme throughout the narratives and was enacted in many different ways by each participant. Occupational engagement helped participants to cope with their transitions, and also allowed them to help in others’ coping processes through doing. The Fox and Natalie both found that occupational engagement helped them to cope and find their identities following their parents’ divorces. Through his desire to explore an abundance of leisure occupations following his parents’ separation, The Fox was able to find a calmer way of being. This was quite significant for The Fox, as one of his greatest worries was becoming an abusive man like his father. Through his endless curiosity, regular meditation, and practice of Eastern religions, he has become the man he hoped to be. Natalie was also able to find peace through occupational engagement. Following her parents’ separation she isolated herself, limiting her occupations to school and sleep. Eventually, she began exploring her feelings through poetry, song and visual art, and was able to work through her emotions. This allowed her to move past those emotions, freeing her to engage and enjoy occupations as she previously had.

Kizzy, Abigail, and Addy all discussed engaging in occupations such as schoolwork, employed work, socializing with friends, or listening to music as means of escaping their situation. For example, Kizzy coped by concentrating on school rather than thinking about what was wrong, not admitting it was there, and pretending things were okay. For Addy, when shit got rough at home, she would just stay at school, just study, just put headphones in and read. Participants seemed to expand the purposes of their previously held occupations, turning occupational engagement into a tool for them to escape their difficult situations and provide them temporary reprieve.

Many of the participants discussed engaging in occupations that functioned to help others cope. The Fox, Kizzy and Addy all became major emotional supports for their mothers following divorce. Addy described herself as her mother’s rock, the only person getting her mother through things. The Fox related that he basically became the man of the house at 10 years old. He felt that he replaced the role of the man in her life and stopped filling the child role and became the partner. To this day he feels his mother’s
weird overdependence. They described becoming more mature than their mothers quite quickly. They engaged in occupations of caretaking and of emotional and practical support for their mothers.

Hank, Kizzy, The Fox, Addy and Abigail all described helping their parents with household responsibilities to ease their stress. In Hank’s situation, it’s just him and his mother… so if he does as much as he can to help out, then she doesn’t have to do it. He took more responsibilities by taking care of his share of the house chores and being with her when she needed him. For Abigail, these tasks were more covert. In order to reduce her mother’s stress, Abigail would try to make sure that the house was properly cleaned, but she would try to do it so that her mother didn’t know she was doing it. So if her mother was at work Abigail would try to clean so as not to offend her mother and make her think that she has a dirty house.

Conversely, Addy explained that she would engage in undesirable activities such as staying out past her curfew or skipping school to be with friends in order to establish her independence with her parents. She had her own money, good grades, and volunteered regularly, she could do whatever she wanted to do, nobody could tell her anything. She felt that she was entitled to the little bit of mischief she wanted to get herself into. She used her undesirable or mischievous occupations to assert her role in the family.

Finally, Kizzy and Natalie both spoke of periods of occupational deprivation (Whiteford, 2000) following the divorce, where a lack of occupation affected their coping. Kizzy became so entrenched in family life following parental divorce that she was unable to pursue other interests that may have provided some relief from the difficulties of family life. Kizzy was at that age when she wanted to separate from her family and she never got to do that. Natalie’s deprivation was of her own accord. When her parents divorced, Natalie quit her job. It was just such a disruption in life. It was really almost crippling how much she was affected, just devastated. Not from the separation but from the emotional aspects. Once the split happened, it was just laying in bed all day, and dwelling. When school started again, she went to class but stopped
participating in any extracurricular activities. All she wanted to do was go to class or be alone. This lasted for a year.

### 4.2.2.2 Changing roles and responsibilities.

All of the participants who lived with their parents at the time of the divorce took on more household chores and responsibilities. This involved tasks such as cleaning, dishwashing, laundry, and cooking. Addy, Hank, and Abigail took on additional responsibilities in order to help their parents, who were also adjusting to their new roles. Following her parents’ first separation, Addy explained that her father really worked hard and she did as much as she could, avoiding a ‘woe is me’ attitude. She knew he was doing the best he could, so she was a good kid, just quiet, helped him out, started doing dishes at 7. For Kizzy and The Fox, the additional household responsibilities would likely not have been accomplished without their contribution. The Fox grew up really fast because as a single parent his mother couldn’t be at work and at home in the same time, so when you spend all this time alone, you either learn to cook or you starve.

Kizzy, Abigail, and Natalie took on caretaking roles for their younger siblings. Kizzy felt that her younger siblings relied on her because she was the oldest, and that she had to handle the burden of caring for them. These responsibilities ranged from getting them ready in the morning to providing emotional support for them. This was stressful for Kizzy and she felt that she had to grow up really quickly, because stress does that to kids. She felt that just being the oldest you just feel like there’s more pressure on you, even if others don’t explicitly put extra pressure on you. For Abigail, taking care of her younger sister involved minding her at the expense of her own social endeavours. Abigail’s caretaking role extended to maintaining a peaceful relationship between her younger sister and her father when the three would spend time together. She did this in order to make up for her sister’s lack of love for their father, and continued to strive toward remaining the perfect daughter to her parents. Natalie’s caretaking role for her younger brothers began before the divorce. She and her older sister facilitated their parents’ divorce so that their younger brothers could live in a household with less control and abuse.
All of the participants took on caretaking roles for their parents at points in their narratives. For Natalie and Hank, they began to care for their mothers before the separation. Hank would emotionally support his mother, encouraging her to request a divorce from his father. For Natalie, she and her sister facilitated their mother’s escape from the marriage. Natalie and her sister also assisted in the divorce process by providing affidavits and helping with the court proceedings when their mother needed.

Kizzy, The Fox and Addy all provided emotional support to their parents following the divorce. Addy’s mother would come to her for advice, strength, and courage. In a way she stopped being Addy’s mother and became this person who needs help, and Addy took the vulnerability out of it and did not take anything she says personally. The Fox stepped into the role of partner and emotional support for his mother. She would consult The Fox about the money, about how she’s feeling and how she couldn’t deal with the separation, asking if he thought she did the right thing by leaving his abusive father. The Fox believes that you don’t put those things on a child, so that’s when he had to grow up really quickly to have to deal with that.

There was also an adoption of diplomatic measures in participants’ interactions and roles. Abigail acted as a peacekeeper for her family members by smoothing the relationship between her father and sister, as mentioned above. She also tried to protect her mother from finding out about her father’s girlfriend by leaving information out of stories, and vetting photos of family vacations with him. For Natalie, after a few difficult years of shutting her father out of her life she invited him and his new family in, knowing that he is so important to her younger brothers and that she would need to interact with her father if she wishes to take an active role in their lives.

Finally, participants had become their own caretakers following the divorces. Addy, The Fox and Kizzy quickly took on household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and getting themselves off to school. Abigail learned to keep herself quiet and busy so as not to disturb her mother, while also caring for her sister. Addy and Abigail both felt the need to financially provide for themselves at this time. Addy contributed financially to her own endeavours and the family expenses, whereas Abigail was more interested in not
being a financial burden to her parents in her goal of being the perfect daughter. Addy, The Fox, and Natalie both became their own emotional supports following their parents’ separations, which will be further explored in the following section.

4.2.2.3 Available support.

Participants also discussed various sources from which they received support. Kizzy, Abigail, Addy, and Natalie all reported seeking support from family members. For Kizzy, her mother *claims she was* the family’s biggest support, but Kizzy disagreed. She and her siblings would support each other to a degree, but she felt that she provided more than she received. Natalie and her sister supported each other before, during, and after the divorce. Abigail eventually received support from her older sister, and the two sorted out some of their feelings about the divorce after many years. Similarly, Addy eventually received support from her father, after over a year without communication.

Friends were another important source of support. Abigail relied on her two best friends for support, and they did not disappoint. These friends were *really supportive of everything* and she was *very thankful that she has them to lean on.* It was important for Abigail to be *able to talk to her friends about it.* It was especially helpful that one of them had experienced a parental divorce and could help Abigail through the transition with advice and hope. Similarly, Addy relied on a friend during her parents’ divorce. His parents had been divorced *since he can remember* had already gone through *all the shit that* she was going through. She was able to have *more serious* and *mature conversations* about her home life, her parents’ separation, and how it was affecting her. He was *there for her in a way that she didn’t know she needed someone to be there,* which gave her *a lot of insight* into life with divorced parents.

Kizzy and Natalie, however, found their lack of peer support to be particularly upsetting. For Natalie, *even though she was forbidden from telling people about it,* she *still would tell her friends* about her father’s abuse and eventually, her parents’ separation, but their responses of mild concern were inadequate. *It made Natalie almost regret telling them because she felt that they were trivializing what she was going through,* *that their reaction was disproportionately small and not as supportive as she*
was hoping for. She had to deal with the isolating knowledge that they could not truly understand her. When Kizzy was asked the kinds of support that she wished she had at the time, she responded, “I wish I had friends. I wish I had known I needed support. I wish I’d known that I was eleven, I was not an adult and it was okay to get upset, and it was okay to just be upset my parents were divorcing.” Kizzy was bullied in school and had a difficult home situation. Having friends to open up to would have been helpful.

Hank and The Fox both sought support from male role models. The Fox was drawn towards what he would call father figures, who were often older males such as his Aikido teacher or schoolteachers. But The Fox found that whenever he started to accept somebody as that sort of surrogate older male role that they always end up gone in some way. He wondered what an ideal father figure might look like, sharing that a lot of people don’t get along with their fathers. He recalls one friend who had a really great relationship with his dad, and described it as odd to see. The Fox asked a lot of questions about what the friend and his father do or talk about, and what his dad did when he was angry. He was just trying to find out like what’s a good relationship with a father because, while he’s had these male figures in his life, he’s never had an actual father. Hank had many of the same questions, but learned how a father was supposed to be and how a man was supposed to act from the prototypes in movies and literature.

Natalie and Kizzy also addressed seeking help from professionals. Kizzy mainly had access to abuse counselling, and felt that she had to focus on the abuse rather than other issues regarding her parents’ divorce and her mounting anxiety and depression. For Natalie, she sought professional help with the assistance of her mother, but when her father found out, he forbade her from ever going back to a therapist. She also approached available resources at school, such as her school chaplain and priest. She asked for help, resources, or even someone to talk to. The most that they could do was just nod their heads, give a sad face, and say, “Okay, well, have you tried talking to him?” She found their responses patronizing and unhelpful and left feeling felt more isolated than before.

Finally, participants sought support and comfort through socially unacceptable activities. Addy turned to her unhealthy relationship with her boyfriend, who had been
with her through her parents’ separation. She eventually realized that the relationship was unhealthy and ended it. Addy continued to get herself into some mischief, feeling that she had earned it by being so otherwise responsible, and that it allowed her to assert her independence from her parents. Kizzy’s family tended to catastrophize situations, knowing that they would not get attention unless their problem was overwhelming. She recalled her mother saying, “you need to be suicidal to get help.” It led to a mindset of negative experiences not being ‘bad enough’ to warrant sympathy, and leading Kizzy to up the ante. This led to multiple suicide attempts by Kizzy as a way to get out of the stress, because she subconsciously learned this coping mechanism to try and get out of things.

4.3 Discussion

The themes identified through this study resound with the current discourse regarding young people’s experiences of parental divorce, as well as add new information and dimension through the inclusion of an occupational science perspective. There are many studies indicating that parents’ communication about their stresses following a parental divorce is negatively associated with children’s coping (Afifi, Huber, & Ohs, 2006; Afifi, McManus, Hutchinson, & Baker, 2007; Koerner, Kenyon & Rankin, 2006; Koerner, Wallace, Lehman, Lee & Escalante, 2004; Koerner, Wallace, Lehman & Raymond, 2002). This finding is mirrored in this study, as parents’ sharing about emotional and financial issues surrounding divorce was difficult for the participants, leaving them subsequently uncomfortable engaging in occupations that would take time, money, or focus away from the family or their parents following the parental divorce. This also relates to the participants’ tendency to assume caretaking roles for their parents, leaving participants feeling that they had to mature quickly. Feeling more mature than peers is not novel to these participants, and has also been found in the works of Benson and Johnson (2009), Kenyon, Rankin, Koerner, and Dennison (2007) and Koerner et al. (2006). Participants’ caretaking roles extended beyond caring for their parents as they adjusted to the increased financial, childcare, household and employment responsibilities that accompany the transition associated with a divorce. Kizzy, Abigail and Natalie also took on caretaking roles for their siblings. Kizzy, Hank, The Fox, and Addy took on
additional self-care and household responsibilities beyond the responsibilities of their peers. The Fox and Addy both described their greater independence and maturity to be beneficial when they moved out of the familial home, giving them an advantage over their peers.

Many authors indicate that communicating about the stresses of parental divorce is beneficial to young people (Bonds, Wolchik, Winslow, Tein, Sandler, & Millsap, 2010; Dawson-McClure, Sandler, Wolchik, & Millsap, 2004; Ehrenberg, Pringle, Bush, Steward, Roche, 2006; Henderson, Hayslip, Sanders, & Louden, 2009; Rodgers & Rose, 2002; Wolchik et al., 2002; Zhou, Sandler, Millsap, Wolchik, & Dawson-McClure, 2008). Addy and Abigail both found that sharing about their situations with friends was extremely helpful. Kizzy and Natalie both desired more peer support. Afifi et al. (2006) found that communicating about the stresses of parental divorce can enhance adolescents’ abilities to positively cope. Rodgers and Rose found that peer support buffered the development of internalizing disorders following parental marital transitions. Similarly, Ehrenberg et al. found that seeking help from friends, adults, or counsellors could help adolescents to cope with parental divorce. In this study, Natalie and Kizzy found formal counselling to be unfocused and unhelpful for their specific issues and had difficulties identifying how or who to ask for help with what they needed. Other adult confidants, however, did prove to be helpful. The Fox found a number of adult role models and father figures to speak to, but generally found that adults would treat him like an underling or like he was less than them. The Fox’s and Hank’s search for positive role models relates to Saintonge, Achille, and Lachance’s (1998) findings of adolescent boys who participated in Big Brother programs following parental divorce finding positive male role models and gaining higher self esteem, but this was not quite achieved by any of this study’s participants.

The current discourse on parental divorce does not focus on ways of coping outside of confiding in others or turning to what North Americans would widely deem deviant behaviour, such as the use of illicit drugs, alcohol, generally unacceptable or mischievous behaviour, (Neher & Short, 1998; Peris & Emery, 2004; Rebellon, 2002; Roustit, Chaix, & Chauvin, 2007; Sun, 2001). In this study, Addy spoke of engaging in
mischievous behaviour in order to enjoy herself and assert her boundaries with her parents. This relates to Menning’s (2008) study in which adolescents presented themselves in certain ways to each parent in order to change the amount of parental influence and control. Kizzy also engaged in socially unacceptable practices with her attempts at suicide meant to help her escape from her troubles at home. Kizzy’s lack of success with her disengagement coping style mirror’s Rubinov and Leucken’s (2013) findings related to disengaged coping styles and the development of depression following parental divorce.

This study has also indicated that occupational engagement assisted the participants to cope with issues surrounding parental divorce, which is not found in the current discourse. Natalie, The Fox, Addy and Abigail all spoke of escaping, coping, or healing through occupation. Natalie and Kizzy both spent time deprived of occupation, and in those times found themselves facing depression or suicidality. While the literature discusses depression, suicidality, and disengagement with the issues that they face (Donahue, D’Onofrio, Bates, Lansford, Dodge, & Petit, 2010; Ge, Natsuaki, & Conger, 2006; Gould, Shaffer, Fisher, & Garfinkel, 1998; Rubinov & Leucken, 2013; Simons, Lin, Gordon, Conger, & Lorenz, 1999), there were no studies that discussed the ways that their disengagement affected their functioning or engagement in their daily meaningful occupations. The ways that Natalie, Kizzy, Addy The Fox and Abigail used their occupational engagement to facilitate their disengagement from the undesirable issues that they faced at home led to them either disengaging from many occupations, as was the case for Natalie and Kizzy, or led to over zealous engagement in occupations that would distract them from the issues that they wished to avoid at home, as was the case for Kizzy, Addy, The Fox and Abigail.

Researchers have identified academic decline and school attrition as consequences of parental separation and divorce (Ham, 2003; Jeynes, 2002, 2005; King & Sobolewski, 2006; Menning, 2006; Sun & Li, 2009). This was in in stark contrast to Abigail’s and The Fox’s stories. They reported maintaining high grades following their parents’ divorces, and Kizzy and Addy, who reported improved grades. These findings have a variety of contributing factors, such as the participants all attending post-
secondary institutions. High academic performance related to many other areas in this study, including the need for current and future independence and the desire to escape the family drama through the productive occupation of school and studying.

4.4 Methodological Considerations and Future Directions

This paper has outlined the analysis of the narrative interviews provided by six young people who experienced parental divorce as an adolescent or young adult. I explored their experiences from their perspective (Lieblich et al., 1998; Molineux & Rickard, 2003; Riessman, 1993, 2008; Wells, 2011). The use of a narrative methodology includes some considerations for the future applicability of the research. The first is not a limitation of the methodology, but a reality of it. As Molineux and Rickard explain, “to rely on personal stories for historical accuracy is probably unwise, but is wholly appropriate if our concern is with how people understand events in the context of their own lives” (p. 57). Exploring the participants’ subjective accounts of the events that affected their lives and functioning was appropriate in addressing the question of their experiences of parental divorce and how it affected their occupational engagement (Lieblich et al., 1998; Riessman, 1993, 2008; Molineux & Rickard, 2003; Wells, 2011; Wengraf, 2001). Specifically regarding research exploring meaningful occupation, Molineux and Rickard explain:

It should also privilege, as much as possible, the subjective experience of the participants so that the meaning and purpose of occupational engagement can be understood… methods which result in a broad understanding and rich description of human occupational engagement have a legitimate place within occupational science. (p. 53)

Another consideration is that the primary author was the sole researcher engaged in study design and data collection and analysis under the supervision of the co-authors at each step of the process. Richards and Morse (2007) suggest that having a single researcher conduct all data collection ensures that the data are of high quality and that any effects of the researcher on the interview or setting can be made explicit. Again,
while this is not a limitation, it is a reality that should be considered by readers when understanding trustworthiness of the research.

Finally, this research is intended to help others who have experienced similar situations, and as such the research must be disseminated in ways that will facilitate this (Kincheloe et al., 2011; Molineux & Rickard, 2003; Riessman, 2008), which has yet to be done.

The results of this study confirm some of the existing research and also expand the current knowledge of experiences of parental divorce. There are many areas of overlap between the information provided by the participants of this study and the findings in the literature, such as the need to cope, children supporting their parents, seeking out understanding and role modelling, and academic performance. The findings of this study, however, add new perspectives to the literature, particularly with the role of occupational engagement in the previously mentioned areas (Asaba et al., 2007; Blair, 2000; Hammell, 2004; Reed, Hocking, & Smythe, 2010; Whiteford, 2000). Engagement in the self-care and productive occupations including housework, caring for self and siblings, school work, and gainful employment all served multiple functions for our participants and helped them through the transition following their parental divorces. These included allowing them to feel that they were supporting their parents and their families through they myriad changes following divorce (Amato, 2000; Kelly, 2000; Kelly & Emery, 2003), and to take responsibility for themselves and their family members who were having difficulties adjusting. Future research must consider the role of occupation as well as more contextual factors affecting why and how adolescents and young adults engage in the way that they do following parental divorce. Continuing research should also incorporate more exploratory research that considers the context and daily struggles of participants and will elucidate the populations’ voices to the body of literature. With this new path of investigation, we will be able to see the available assets to help future adolescents navigate this transition more smoothly and healthfully.
4.5 References


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Chapter 5

5 Perspectives on divorce: Visually based messages from adolescents and young adults about parental divorce

Divorce is a prevalent phenomenon in Canadian families (Kelly, 2010). In 2008, it was estimated that 40.7% of Canadian marriages would end in divorce by the thirtieth wedding anniversary (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2014). The effects of parental divorce on children have been widely discoursed in the media, mental health practice or policy, and research. Specifically in the research literature, life for North American young people (World Health Organization [WHO], 2011) including adolescents and young adults following parental divorce has been studied from a number of perspectives (Amato, 2000; Hartman, Magalhães, & Mandich, 2011; Kelly, 2000; Kelly & Emery, 2003). Adolescence is a time of great transition (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2005; Lobo, 1999), which is only made more complex when combined with the multitude of factors associated with parental divorce (Amato, 2000; Kelly 2000).

Earlier work (Hartman, Magalhães, & Mandich, 2011) examined 53 North American studies relating to adolescent and young adult life and parental divorce or marital separation. The findings indicated six major areas of research regarding adolescent life following parental divorce, (1) declines in academic performance, (2) increase in deviant behaviour, (3) romantic relationships and views on romantic relationships, (4) psychosocial wellbeing, (5) the parent-adolescent relationship, and (6) the coping process. The findings of this review indicated that the literature was largely quantitatively based, primarily drawing on survey data (Hartman, Magalhães, & Mandich, 2011). This literature indicates issues faced by young people in North America following a parental divorce or marital separation, yet there were only a few studies that provided broader contextual information about the participants’ life situations or other factors that could contribute to the specific problems being explored through the study (Afifi, Huber, & Ohs, 2006; Dennison & Koerner, 2008; Kenyon, Rankin, Koerner, & Dennison, 2007; Menning, 2008). Contextual information would allow for a deeper
understanding of the issues that contribute to the six areas of poor coping outlined above by moving beyond identifying what the problems are to why the problems are occurring and affecting young people.

The abovementioned literature begins the exploration of how young people function following the transitions associated with parental divorce as well as some of the protective factors that can buffer potential negative outcomes (Jeynes, 2002; King & Sobolewski, 2006; Mandara & Murray, 2000; Rodgers & Rose, 2002; Roustit, Chaix, & Chauvin, 2007). This study explored participants’ views on life following parental divorce or marital separation from their perspective and based on their lived experiences. They were able to identify the issues that were relevant to them, as well as the strategies that they used to cope.

This study was approached from an occupational science perspective. Occupational science is the study of the ways in which people meaningfully and purposefully occupy their time (Asaba, Blanche, Jonsson, Laliberte Rudman, & Wicks, 2007; Hammell, 2004; Rudman et al., 2008; Reed, Hocking, & Smythe, 2010; Wilcock, 1998; Yerxa et al., 1990). By understanding what young people do, how their engagement in occupations change during the divorce-related transitions, and what the loss, gain, or changes in available occupations means for them (Blair, 2000; Hammell, 2004; Reed et al., 2010; Wilcock, 1998), this study will seek to gain deeper insight into why young people act and react the way that they do following a parental divorce. Through this study I will seek not only to identify the occupations that change, but also why they change, and the meaning that the changes in occupation hold for the participants.

In order to explore changes in meaningful occupational engagement following a parental divorce, this study utilizes a qualitative visual methodology that stems from a critical theoretical background. Previous works, including those by Cartwright and McDowell (2008), Eldar-Avidan, Haj-Yahia, and Greenbaum (2009), and Stambaugh, Hector, and Carr (2011), have explored adolescent and young adult life using qualitative methods. These studies all sought to gain deeper contextual information on the
experience of living through a parental divorce or marital separation. These studies also allowed the participants to share the information that they thought was relevant to their experience of parental divorce or separation, and how that has affected their later choices and transitions. Similarly, through this study I will explore adolescent life and transition surrounding parental divorce in the context of occupational engagement to gain a deeper understanding of how adolescents chose to or were able to engage in meaningful occupational endeavours. The purpose of this study was to understand what adolescents and young adults who have lived through parental divorce or separation think would be important to share with specific audiences of their choosing.

5.1 Methods

This study is a qualitative exploration of messages from young people (ages 10-24) (WHO, 2011) who experienced parental divorce or marital separation during adolescence or early adulthood. It is part of a larger project that critically examines the experiences of young people following a parental divorce or marital separation. Liebenberg (2009) explains “Western constructions of children and youth have marginalized young people, excluding them from decision-making processes that affect their lives” (p. 129). Young people have traditionally been marginalized in both their daily lives and in the representation of them in research. This study comes from a critical social theoretical background (Crotty, 1998; Freire, 1993; Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011; Walsh, 2007) in order to explore the roles of young people in the familial experience of a parental divorce or marital separation. As Kincheloe et al. explain, “inquiry that aspires to the name “critical” must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or public sphere within society” (p. 164). Through this study, as well as the larger project of which it is a part, I focus on adolescent life in light of the power relationships, in which one’s life occurs, “so as to expose the forces of hegemony and injustice” (Crotty, 1998, p. 157). Furthermore, the use of a visual methodology was chosen to facilitate the exploration of critical theoretical issues. Walsh states:

Visual methodologies open up spaces for representation and meaning-making that acknowledge difference, agency and power. The way in which meaning is
formed through practices of representation is increasingly acknowledged as central to the construction of difference and of societal norms. (pp. 242-243)

Through the creation of their visual messages, my participants were able to “investigate friction between unequal actors, while also gaining tangibly from the process of research-as-praxis where research is not only about inquiry but also about making a change in the world” (Walsh, 2007, p. 243).

Visual methodologies provide an effective and appropriate way to explore critically based social issues concerning young people (Cauduro, Birk, & Wachs, 2009; Galvaan, 2007; Hartman, Mandich, Magalhães, & Orchard, 2011; Huss & Cwikel, 2008; Liebenberg, 2009; Mitchell, de Lange, Stuart, Molestane, & Buthelezi, 2007; Walsh, 2007). Examples of visual methodologies used to explore youth issues include Cauduro et al.’s exploration of Brazilian boys’ living conditions and participation in extracurricular activity, Liebenberg’s exploration of the experiences of five coloured teenage mothers in sub-economic communities in South Africa, and Mitchell et al.’s exploration of children’s images regarding stigma, violence, and vulnerability in relation to the AIDS epidemic in affected communities. Similarly to these studies, my research critically explores the experiences of young people who have had a parental divorce or marital separation with the intent of understanding the lessons that they learned when reflecting upon their experiences and what they would like to share with outside audiences.

The techniques used in art-based visual methodologies are not novel in and of themselves. They seem to draw from psychology’s projective techniques (Porr, Mayan, Graffigna, Wall, & Vieira, 2011). Projective tests have been used to access patient emotions or hidden content using visual imagery or visual stimuli in order to communicate subconscious or complex topics (Porr et al., 2011). Methods include but are not limited to associative, constructive, and expressive techniques (Porr et al., 2011). These techniques relate to the ways in which modern visual methodologies are used to draw complex or subconscious feelings or opinions from participants in order to understand their experiences.
The goal of using visual methodologies for this research was twofold. First, I sought to provide a forum for participants to reflect upon their experiences of parental divorce (Gauntlet & Holzwarth, 2006; Hartman, Mandich, Magalhães, & Orchard, 2011; Huss & Cwikel, 2008; Kindler, 2003; Liebenberg, 2009; Pillay & Govinden, 2007; Stuart, 2007; Walsh, 2007) and through their reflections illustrate a visual message about parental divorce. Second, the creation of a critical visual message aids in the dissemination process of the research, as a critical social theoretical position requires the research to contribute to social change (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Liebenberg, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2007; Mitchell, Theron, Stuart, Smith, & Campbell, 2011; Rose, 2007). Visual messages allow for the participants’ messages to be directly shared with the public audience, and are accessible and appealing to audiences at various educational levels and ages (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Liebenberg, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2007; Prosser, 2011; Rose, 2007; Stuart, 2007). Specifically regarding the exploration of human occupation, my earlier work has outlined the benefits and limitations of applying visual methodologies in occupational science, highlighting many benefits, particularly in reflecting upon and communicating about the obvious and tacit meanings behind the engagement in different occupations (Hartman, Mandich, Magalhães, & Orchard, 2011).

5.1.1 Participants

Ethical approval was obtained from the university’s Non-Medical Ethics Review Board. The study included 6 participants who had completed the first study of the larger project, a narrative study described in chapter four. Participants were recruited through advertisements in the community, on the university campus, and in local and university newspapers, as well as by word-of-mouth recruitment.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) explain that small sample sizes are both common and acceptable when conducting qualitative research. The range of participants to be recruited was 5-7, which was determined by considering the amount of time that would be required for each participant’s data collection and analysis for both in-depth narrative and visual message analyses (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Liebenberg, 2009; Prosser 2011). Chase (2005) suggests that the number of participants to be recruited should be provided as a range in order to allow for the emergent nature of visual methodologies. This flexibility
allowed me to recruit further participants until the contextual features of the visual messages began to become more similar in their presentation (Chase, 2005).

The inclusion criteria for the study involved 1) living in an urban centre in Southern Ontario; 2) between the ages of 10 and 23; 3) speak English proficiently enough to conduct the interview; 4) have birth-parents who divorced or separated when he or she was between the ages of 10 and 20; and 5) be willing to discuss the experience of your parents’ divorce or separation for the purposes of the research. Participants under 19 years of age would have required parental consent to participate. Our final sample consisted of 6 participants age 20 to 23 years, whose parents divorced or separated while they were between the ages of 10 and 20 years. Participant information is presented below in Table 8. All participants chose pseudonyms in order to protect their confidentiality and anonymity. Any potentially identifying information has been omitted or changed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Age at time of Divorce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kizzy</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hank</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fox</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
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</table>

5.1.2 Data Collection

The study was designed so that participants constructed and illustrated their visual message after sharing narrative stories of their experiences concerning parental divorce or separation (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Liebenberg, 2009; Prosser, 2011; Solomon, 2006). The significance of having participants construct the visual message after having reflected deeply on their experiences with parental divorce was that the process required them to revisit their experiences and reflect on the meanings that these experiences held for them (Wells, 2011; Wiseman & Whiteford, 2007). Once they had reflected on their experiences, they would be able to thoughtfully consider the message that they wanted to send through their visual, as well as how they would illustrate this message to effectively
communicate it to their audience (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Liebenberg, 2009; Prosser, 2011; Solomon, 2006). I informed participants that their participation in the narrative study did not require them to participate in this study, and that they were free to revoke their participation and consent at any time.

The sessions were audio recorded and I personally transcribed them verbatim. The interview transcripts were essential data and not merely supplementary to the visual data for three reasons. First, the transcripts provided the “contextual meaning” (Liebenberg, 2009, p. 144) or reasoning behind the choice of visual message that the participants chose to convey (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2011; Prosser, 2011; Solomon, 2006). Second, the transcripts presented the explanation of the specific representations and metaphors contained in the visual message (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Johnny & Mitchell 2006; Liebenberg, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2007; Mitchell et al., 2011; Prosser, 2011; Rose, 2007). Finally, the transcripts provided insight into the process of creating the visual messages, including why the participants chose their specific message, why they made the aesthetic and representational choices that they did, and their interactions with their visual piece during the process (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Johnny & Mitchell, 2006; Liebenberg, 2009; Prosser, 2011).

Following the participants’ reflections on their narratives of parental divorce or marital separation, we discussed how they would like to illustrate the message that they were going to send about life surrounding parental divorce, and to whom they would direct the visual message. The discussion was prompted by the following:

Now let’s talk about a part of that story that was meaningful to you. Is there any part of the story that you would like to share with other people who can make a difference in what is available to people who are experiencing similar situations? Think of what you would like to say and who you would like to say it to.

After the participants worked through their ideas and chose a topic, they were asked to use the materials provided (pencils, pens, pencil crayons, markers, rulers, erasers) or their own materials to illustrate their message. I encouraged the use of representations and metaphor in the participants’ visual messages in order to facilitate the participants’
expression of their feelings and complex messages (Gauntlet & Holzwarth, 2006; Liebenberg, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2011; Pillay & Govinden, 2007; Solomon, 2006). Additionally, the use of a visual medium in expressing complex and emotion-laden topics helps to shift the power that is traditionally held by the researcher in directing what is discussed and how it can be shared over to the participant (Liebenberg, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2007; Rose, 2007; Solomon, 2006). In doing this, Liebenberg explains, “asking participants to represent their lives through a powerful visual medium shifts power over the research process to them, allowing participants to establish control over their own stories and representations of their world and experiences,” (p. 132).

Participants were informed that they were able to bring their own creative materials. This did not occur. Four participants made drafts of their work before creating their final copies, all of which were retained by the researcher. Three participants explained their visual as they created it or engaged in friendly conversation with the interviewer, and three worked in silence, waiting until they had finished to explain their work.

Following the construction of the visual message, the participants were asked to explain the drawing and explain how it illustrates their message (Liebenberg, 2009; Mitchell, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2007). They were also asked who the intended audience was (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2007). Finally, participants were asked what the experience of sharing their story and creating the visual message was like for them and what they would take from the experience. Following the interview, I audio-recorded field notes and reflections (Richards & Morse, 2007; Wengraf, 2001) about the creative process, my impressions of the data collection session, and any important points that I thought may not have been captured by the audio recorder, such as gestures, facial expressions, or specifics information about the participants’ drawing processes.

5.1.3 Data Analysis

Mitchell et al. (2011) explain that when using drawing as a research method, there are a variety of ways to analyze the data, if the researchers choose to provide an analysis at all. They contend that, if researchers choose to provide an analysis for the visual texts,
the producers of the texts must contribute to the analysis through their conversation or explanation of the visual and the meaning embedded in the drawing (Mitchell et al., 2011). “This collaboration is vital precisely because the drawing is produced by a specific individual in a particular space and time” (Mitchell et al., 2011, p. 20). This collaborative process will inform the analysis of the drawings as a collective, which can draw on both the drawn contents of the visual texts and the participants’ own interpretations of their visual messages (Mitchell et al., 2011).

In order to organize the visual and verbal data for analysis, I constructed a guide based on the research of Cole and Knowles (2008), Johnny and Mitchell (2006), Mitchell et al. (2007) and Rose (2007). The guide facilitated the analysis of each visual message along 10 criteria that are presented in Table 9 below. First, I wrote a brief description of the visual message using the participant’s words where possible. I then addressed each criterion in the guide using my own descriptions and participant quotations. If the visual message was divided into segments or panels, such as Abigail’s, The Fox’s and Natalie’s, an adapted version of the guide was used in addition to Table 9 to individually analyze each panel, which is presented in Table 10. The two guides allowed me to analyze the relevant criteria outlined by the literature in a consistent, organized manner that was tailored to my specific methods (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Johnny & Mitchell, 2006; Mitchell et al., 2007; Rose, 2007).

Table 9. Description of criteria in the visual analysis guide used for data analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intended meaning</td>
<td>The meaning that the producers intended for the audience to take with them</td>
<td>Johnny &amp; Mitchell, 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audiencing</td>
<td>The intended audience of the image, how the visual engages the intended audience, how the visual will resonate with other audiences</td>
<td>Cole &amp; Knowles, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2007; Rose, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological meaning</td>
<td>The values and underlying assumptions that are expressed in the visual message</td>
<td>Johnny &amp; Mitchell, 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppositional readings</td>
<td>Understanding apparent or likely alternate and unintended interpretations of the visual message for both intended and unintended audiences, as well as the implications for these messages</td>
<td>Johnny &amp; Mitchell, 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity</td>
<td>The ease of interpretation of the visual message</td>
<td>Johnny &amp; Mitchell, 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity</td>
<td>The “compositional value” of the visual messages: do the images and text present the same message? Does the visual</td>
<td>Johnny &amp; Mitchell, 2006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once each visual message was analyzed individually, the participants’ visual messages were considered together in order to identify pervasive themes that ran through the messages (Cauduro et al., 2009; Guillemin & Drew, 2010; Mitchell et al., 2007; Mitchell, 2011; Prosser, 2011). Gauntlet and Holzwarth (2006) and Guillemin and Drew both posit that, while the producer of the visual text in a study based in visual methodology should have a primary role in interpreting their visual text, the researcher
plays a central role in the analysis of the overall analysis of the body of visual texts. “Although the researcher is reliant on the participant to interpret their own image, the researcher is best able to undertake the overall analysis and interpret the data within the context of the other data and the overall theoretical frame” (Guillemin & Drew, 2010, p. 184). I analyzed the visual messages within the context of the visual and interview data from the participants, a critical social theoretical background, and the literature regarding both occupational science and parental divorce. Commonalities and differences were also considered in the context of the narratives that were previously provided by the participants (chapter four). These themes are explored in the findings section below.

5.2 Findings

In this section the participants’ six visual messages and the summaries of my analyses will be presented. I will provide some narrative background for each participant along with the context and key analysis points that they provided for their visual message. The narrative background, specifically the inclusion of narrative interviews as the first portion of this larger research study, was particularly important, as “art is often about stories, of lives and characters with whom an audience can identify. Above all, art can help us (researchers, participants, and interested communities) imagine what it might be like to live that life” (Prosser 2011 p. 488). The visual images emerged from the participants’ lives and broader experiences with parental divorce or marital separation as well as their reflection on those experiences during the narrative process (Lieblich et al, 1998; Riesman, 2008; Wells, 2011; Wengraf, 2001). By seeking information on the participants’ narrative experiences as well as their explanations of their visual messages, I was able to contextualize their messages within the broader experience of parental divorce or marital separation (Mitchell et al., 2011; Stewart, 2007; Walsh, 2007).

The participant’s visual messages are presented in the context of their narratives and their explanation of the visuals both while they were producing them and afterwards. A summary of the analysis of each visual message is then presented based upon the

4 The participants’ full constructed narratives are available in Appendices J-O.
criteria presented in Tables 9 and 10. All italicized writing represents direct quotations from participants. Finally, the key themes that emerged across the visual messages are discussed (Cauduro et al., 2009; Huss & Cwickel, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2011; Stuart, 2007).
5.2.1 Kizzy

Figure 2. Kizzy’s Visual Message
Kizzy chose to participate in this study about her experiences of parental divorce because, while they’re not great experiences, it’s nice to think that they can be useful for somebody and that it helps people. Her parents separated when she was 11 years old. She described the separation as coming out of the blue. One day her mother sat Kizzy and her two younger siblings down and said, “Your father doesn’t love me and he’s leaving.” At this time, her mother also claimed that Kizzy’s father was incredibly abusive and had controlled everything in their lives in the extreme. Kizzy reflects back now on being told her father was abusive, sharing that she is not sure how true all that is, but explains that at the time she was being told that she was being horribly abused by her father from a trusted source, her own mother, and so she believed it. She and her siblings were promised that everything in their lives was going to get better now that their abusive father was out of the picture. The abuse that the family had suffered and continued to suffer from Kizzy’s father (as framed by Kizzy’s mother) became a focus of the family’s daily functioning.

Kizzy shared that she, her brother, and her mother all experienced various psychological issues that she relates to her parents’ marital breakdown and the transitions associated with their separation. Kizzy took on a caretaking role for her siblings and her mother following the divorce, and took on additional housekeeping and childcare responsibilities, as her mother had to return to the workforce. In caring for her siblings, being the oldest, she felt like it was her job to handle the burden. She felt as though the she had to grow up really quickly due to the additional responsibilities, feeling a great deal of pressure to help the family. Kizzy’s personal coping initially involved pretending things were okay. She disengaged from the emotionally difficult home situation by throwing herself into her schoolwork. In addition to extra responsibilities and emotional burdens at home, Kizzy was bullied in school. She was unable to find support from her mother or her siblings, didn’t have friends to turn to, and would not seek support from her father. She developed anxiety, depression, and attempted to commit suicide in order to escape the pressures of her life.

Kizzy has since started to understand her bad coping methods of disengaging, avoiding, internalizing the pressure that she felt was placed upon her, and her attempts to
escape through suicide. She has developed healthier coping strategies and has even been
told by healthcare professionals that she handles difficult situations exceptionally well.
Kizzy’s visual message, presented in Figure 2, is a reflection of the lessons that she has
learned about coping after many years. She sought to send a positive and inspiring
message of building confidence in your abilities to succeed. The message was intended to
allow other adolescents experiencing a similarly difficult family transition to see that they
can get through everything and get what they want, but it’s more about believing that
they can do it. Despite their hardships, Kizzy wanted to illustrate that confidence,
positivity, and belief in oneself will allow him or her to achieve the goals that they set.
The goals depicted (an “A+” and a gold medal) may not align with what the audience
wants to achieve, but Kizzy felt that they were symbols of confidence. Through the
mixture of these symbols of confidence, the bright and happy colours, and the
inspirational sayings, the piece was meant to show the audience that although it may be
difficult to see their strengths in the thick of a difficult family transition, remaining
confident in themselves will allow them to survive anything.

Kizzy shared that the intended audience for her visual was young people
experiencing similar family transitions, but the message was specifically illustrated for
herself as a child. She wished that she could send these messages to her younger self so
that she would have had the confidence to overcome some of the many obstacles that she
could not at the time. Kizzy did not receive the supportive encouragement that she craved
as a child, and she thinks she would have benefitted from it. She explained that the two
statements in the visual message, “all you need to know is “you can do it!”” and “you can
survive anything” are different fingers on the same hand, but people just don’t think
about them as the same. We don’t tend to put as much strength in surviving as we do
getting the top mark. For Kizzy, a lot of effort was spent on simply getting through the
days and caring for her mother and siblings following her parents’ divorce, leaving her
with little time or mental energy to invest in herself or the endeavours that were
meaningful to her. She felt that words of encouragement would have helped her through
that time in her life with less mental anguish and more confidence in herself, so that she
could achieve the goals that she wanted to.
5.2.2 Abigail

Figure 3. Abigail’s Visual Message
Abigail grew up with working class European parents. They were a very quiet family and they did not really talk about their feelings, so it was difficult knowing what was happening in the lives of her parents or siblings. When Abigail was 12, her parents separated and subsequently divorced. She described her parents as quite amicable following the separation, but expressed that there was a lot of bitterness on her mother’s part. She explained that as a single mother, she faces certain problems such as childcare and financial demands that she did not previously have to consider. Additionally, her mother lived with a chronic illness, which made her daily functioning more difficult. Abigail did not seek support from her parents or her siblings at the time of her parents’ separation, but was able to seek support and comfort from her two best friends who were really supportive and she was very thankful that she has them to lean on.

Abigail repeatedly described a drive to be the perfect daughter and make sure she was doing everything right. This involved taking care of her younger sister, helping her mother both emotionally and with her childcare responsibilities, maintaining high grades in school, and making sure that she asked for nothing from her parents. Abigail also employed democratic measures to maintain peace in the relationships between her parents and between her father and younger sister. She thinks that this outlook has made her an independent person, an attribute that she values in herself.

Abigail’s visual message (Figure 3) pertains to her experiences of maintaining peace in her family members’ relationships following her parents’ separation, as well as to the bitterness that she continues to perceive from her mother. Abigail described her visual message as a ‘dos and don’ts guide’ for parents on interacting with their child regarding their divorce. It was not only meant to be instructive, but to explain her feelings regarding the lasting effects of divorce. The first scenario in the top two boxes demonstrates that the child should be the focus of announcing a divorce. The parents should look at the child, manage their own emotions, and be honest with them. Parents should let children know why and be honest with them, because they know more than what parents are telling them, so keeping secrets or wanting to protect them isn’t helpful. Abigail explained that parents should not leave the child with questions of whether they tried to work it out or put effort into salvaging the relationship. The second scenario,
depicted in the bottom two panels, urges parents to act civilly toward one another to avoid tense and unpleasant situations for the child who must then act as a go-between for the parents. Abigail explained that, for example, a mother can be angry with the father, and that can be perfectly reasonable, and perhaps he deserves it, but he is not the child’s husband, he’s their father, and it’s kind of nice to have that, that image of what you want your father to be, and that shouldn’t necessarily be clouded by parental judgments or quabbles [sic]. On a personal note, she recalled that her father didn’t come into the house, he would just wait outside on the step and her mother won’t speak to her father, so she would have to relay messages, which she thought was not fair for her to have to do.

Abigail’s visual message is to parents, and it’s on behalf of the children, indicating how they’re going to be feeling if the parents act as she depicted in each scenarios. Abigail recognized that her message does not account for different familial situations that would preclude couples from following these suggestions, such as abusive situations. The central messages of respecting your child, your former partner, and the right for your child to understand what is happening with his or her family can be valuable throughout divorce-related transitions. Abigail explained that her message is important because there are lasting effects of having children remain trapped listening to parental squabbling after a divorce, and following these lessons may allow children to move on without the divorce being a constant marker of family life. It was also crucial that children not be left with questions of why the divorce occurred because these questions can be all encompassing and effect they view their parents.
5.2.3  Hank

Figure 4. Hank’s Visual Message
Hank was born and raised in Southeast Asia, and permanently moved to Canada with his mother directly following his parents’ divorce. Throughout his narrative, he described his mother as his caretaker and his moral guide, and his father as neglectful and shameful. Hank would look for *fatherly characters everywhere he would go*. He wanted to know how he should behave and what he should do as a man, but did not have a model for this in his life. He would search for *father figures* in *films and movies*, which is where he gained his understanding of *how a fatherly figure should be*. He did not wish to end up like his father, who was inconsistently employed, neglectful of his family, and cheating on Hank’s mother. Eventually, Hank’s mother asked if Hank would *mind* if she *divorced* his father. Hank’s response was, “*He has a girlfriend, he lives away from home now, he picks fights with you all the time, and you’re not really happy with him.*” Hank supported his mother’s decision to seek a divorce, and saw the divorce as *pretty much one-sided.*

When Hank was in the 9th grade, his family’s Canadian immigration papers arrived unexpectedly, which solidified Hank’s mother’s decision to seek a divorce and move herself and Hank to Canada, away from her husband. The divorce process was *expedited*, and Hank and his mother moved shortly after.

Once Hank’s parents divorced and he and his mother moved, he cut ties with his father. Now the two are *separated by an ocean*, and Hank figures he *might as well forget about him*. While *there’s no way you can completely forget about your father*, he’s *out of Hank’s life*. Hank found that he *had much more freedom* because he only had one parent present. Hank also reported having more responsibility, as he had to pick up some of the slack of what his father would be expected to have done at home.

Hank’s describes his visual message (Figure 4) as the story of a child’s inner struggle while watching his father pack to move out of the familial home. The meaning behind his visual message was twofold. First, *the path not taken may not be the path you want and although your parents got a divorce, you could be better off without it.* The second message is that *assuming the child does not want* his parents to have a *divorce, the child should take the risk to speak up and try to change things*. These two messages play on one another, indicating that the children must voice their opinions to their parents.
about the decision to seek a divorce, but must also learn to accept the path that their life takes, as they cannot change it.

The scene is viewed from the perspective of the child, who watches his father pack clothes, pictures and mementoes before moving away from the familial home. Three areas of the drawing are highlighted. The first is the father, who is sweating and looks slightly run-down. The second are the beer bottles under the lamp. These bottles, juxtaposed with the pictures of happy family memories, are meant to convey that he was both a good and a bad father to this child. The third highlighted area is the hand holding the sweater. Hank shares that the child, who is represented by the hand, is holding a sweater that the father had dropped. The sweater is stained with childhood memories of making a mess with paint and food, leaving stains and memories on the sweater. The message of this scene is the child’s dilemma of whether to let his father go, or to at least try to argue that he stay. In the end, Hank shares that maybe life will be better without the father, as it was for Hank, or maybe it will be better for the child in the visual message if the father stays, but you cannot know until you move forward in life. Life will be what it will be and we cannot know but by living it.
5.2.4 The Fox

Figure 5. The Fox’s Visual Message
The Fox grew up in a physically and verbally abusive home environment. His biological father was an alcoholic who was extremely abusive. Most memories, especially going back into about as far back as The Fox can remember, consisted of a lot of shaking in terror, crying, smashed glasses, kicked open cupboards, dogs thrown across the room, stuff like that. One day when The Fox was 10 years old, his mother picked him up from school and took him to a house that was not theirs. She informed him that she had divorced his father and that they would be living in this new house. After they got divorced, The Fox was pretty happy, and for a little while he was like a regular kid. Within 6 months, however, his mother started becoming really dependent on him. She would confide in him about finances, emotions, and her doubt as to whether she should have left The Fox’s father. He basically became the man of the house at 10 years old, acting more as a partner than a child.

The Fox had to grow up really fast. He spent a lot of time alone because as a single parent his mother couldn’t be at work and at home in the same time, and she would also often spend weekends out of town visiting her partner. The Fox explained that when you spend all this time alone, you either learn to cook or you starve. The Fox gained many self-care skills, but he also used his abundant alone time to explore his myriad hobbies and interests. Among them was an interest in the Eastern religions, which helped him to cope. His meditative practices have allowed him to experience his emotions in a way that is acceptable to him, which has helped to quell his fear of becoming angry and an alcoholic, like his father.

The Fox’s visual message (Figure 5) illustrates the way that his meditative practices have helped him to deal with situations that are emotionally difficult for him. The message is intended to inform others that they are more than just what they are feeling at the time, so you can have your anger, you can have your depression, but you’re more than that. The visual message depicts a child who is burning with emotions while watching his parents argue. In the second panel, the child is accompanied by the message, “sometimes they do not realize whom they are hurting.” The crying boy situated in his burning emotions of pain, fear, sadness, and loneliness, which are all written in the flames. Still engulfed in his burning emotions, in the third panel he is transported to a
tranquil place, with the caption, “you may feel consumed by emotion, but inside you have a vast place of stillness larger than any feeling.” The Fox stated that the child is very small in the vast place of peace. In the fourth panel, we are taken back to the child, who is still within the flames of emotion, but now the flames are smaller, he has a small aura around him to separate him from the flames, and a slight hint of a smile. The panel is captioned, “Do not resist your feelings just become aware of your inner stillness.” The final panel, returns to the original setting, but now the child is situated within his aura of stillness and peace rather than the flames of burning emotions. Additionally, his parents are faded and less defined to show that the character has inner stillness of what’s outside of him doesn’t affect his stillness as much. The panel is captioned, “The strength was within you all along, you only had to be still to find it.”

The Fox’s message was inspired by Buddhist teachings. He intended to convey a method of dealing with their feelings, whether it’s directly in the moment of people fighting, or afterwards, or just any time that you feel overwhelmed. This technique is a good way to deal with that and not let it like overtake you and make you break down. He was very adamant that he is not advocating for people to repress emotions, and feared that this was a potential oppositional reading for his piece. The Fox’s message is that you are more than just what you’re feeling at the time, you can have your anger, you can have your depression, upsetness [sic], but you’re more than that. You may be angry now, but you still have the calm within you. By learning to access the greater calm within, children can learn to cope with situations and experience their emotions while understanding that emotions pass and are not definitive. One’s stillness can act as a protective aura that can help children experience their emotions without being overwhelmed by them in difficult times.
5.2.5 Addy

Figure 6. Addy’s Visual Message

Addy’s parents first separated when she was 6 years old, and reunited when she was 10. During the first separation, Addy began taking on responsibility in the household chores and minding herself, because her father was doing the best he could. Addy enjoyed having her mother back in the familial home once her parents reunited, but shortly after, the fights started again. When she would go to bed, she would hear them yell at each other outside the door until she fell asleep. Addy attempted to ignore the
fighting, by engaging in schoolwork, music, reading or being on the computer. She would hang out with friends, sleep over at their houses or stay at their houses after school because she wouldn’t want to go home. Eventually, Addy’s mother kicked her father out of the family home for infidelity. Addy lost contact with him for about a year, explaining that he had a lot of shame because although he was looking for an out of the relationship, the out included leaving her as well. They had been very close, and she was very sad and angry not to have him to help her through the transitions that followed, such as living alone with her mother and the increased financial difficulties.

Following her parents’ separation, she had a number of experiences that led her to understand her need to be mindful of her choices. She fought with her mother and learned how irresponsible her mother could be. She lost all of her friends in high school, and had to navigate the difficulties of home and school alone. She ended her relationship with her boyfriend because she realized that it was not a healthy relationship. Through all of these realizations and choices, she learned to rely on her choices and on herself to be the person she wanted to become. She realized that she had the balls to make the decisions she needed to. That’s when she grew up and started making choices for herself and realized that she’s not going to be the product of her parents’ relationship or of the system. She’s not going to be a product of anybody else’s choices. She is going to be a product of her own choices.

Addy’s visual (Figure 6) is an artful compilation of important phrases drawn from her narrative and inspirational quotes that emphasize her views on making her own choices. Her intention was to let adolescents who are in similar situations know that they are more than the experiences that they have, they are the choices that they subsequently make. They may choose to learn from their experiences, or to fall victim to them, but that is their choice. Addy, said that this is a compilation of two lessons that she learned through her experience of her parental divorce. She quickly found that 1) no one is coming to save you in life, and so 2) she had to learn to rely on herself and be responsible for her own outcomes. For her, the messages are like yin and yang.
Addy portrayed three layers of text in the visual. First is the main message, “I am not the sum of my experiences but the sum of my choices.” This is a compilation of many famous quotations. This is what Addy wants others to know as they transition through a parental divorce. Next, there is the background text that is highlighted in orange, which contains the quotations, “I am the captain of my own ship and the master of my own faith” This quotation is adapted from William Ernest Henley’s poem, Invictus, and “no one is coming to save you” is distilled from her own story. These are the two lessons that led to Addy realizing her main message, each coming from different experiences that she had while adapting to her life following her parents’ divorce. The highlighted text also includes important words that run throughout the other text and indicate the meaningfulness of the excerpts. The final layer of text, the plain text, is a compilation of excerpts from her narrative that she thought were salient to both her experiences and her choices, really highlighting how she came to learn the central message of the visual.
5.2.6 Natalie

Figure 7. Natalie’s Visual Message

I feel like something is really wrong. My dad is verbally abusive. I cry every day because he says awful things to me and nothing I do seems to help. What do I do?
Natalie grew up in a household in which her father was verbally and emotionally abusive to her, her siblings, and her mother. Because her father was somewhat of a public figure, he forbade the family from speaking about their issues with outsiders, such as extended family, friends, or professionals. For Natalie, it led to feelings of extreme isolation because on the inside she felt like she was falling apart, but on the outside she had to present as the perfect family. Despite being forbidden from speaking about her family issues, Natalie reached out to friends, school counselors, her chaplain, and a number of counselors and psychologists. The most that they could do was just nod their heads, give a sad face, and say, “Okay, well, have you tried talking to him?” YES! Of course she had. But because she was so young, they were treating her like an immature teenager whose just a moody bitch who needs to stop her temper tantrum and try to speak with her father calmly. She shared that specifically for victims of verbal abuse, there are not many psychologists who understand the dynamic between the abuser and the abusees and understand that cycle and the emotions.

Natalie was not alone in her anguish. Her siblings and mother were also suffering. Her mother had tried to leave her father a number of times over the years, but never stayed away. Natalie and her siblings wanted their mother to leave, and eventually, she and her older sister facilitated their mother’s exit from the marriage. Natalie and her sister took their mother from the familial home and dropped her and the younger siblings off at Natalie’s uncle’s house. Natalie and her sister then went to their father and explained the situation to him. Natalie and her sister helped their mother with the divorce process and filled out affidavits in order to gain emergency custody of the younger children. The process was such a disruption in life for Natalie. She was lethargic. It was really almost crippling how much she was affected, just devastated. Not from the separation but from the emotional aspects, the changes in relationships and trying to understand what the new life would look like. She was also very angry. These feelings lasted for about a year, when she realized that she was hiding from the world, and that this was not a healthy coping mechanism. She decided to accept what was going on, stop hiding from things, and do the processing and she needed to come to terms with it. She resumed her social activities, and began using poetry, artistic expression, and music to process the emotions that she had been dealing with regarding the divorce and her life surrounding it.
Despite her eventual ability to process her issues surrounding the emotional difficulties related to her parents’ divorce, Natalie still wanted to send her visual message (Figure 7) to people in power who can implement changes in the counselling community. She illustrates a satirical cartoon relating to her experiences of seeking help about issues related to verbal and emotional abuse, as well as transitions surrounding her parents’ divorce. In the visual, the girl tells the counsellor, “I feel like something is really wrong… my dad is verbally abusive. I cry every day because he says awful things to me and nothing I do seems to help! What do I do?!?” To this, the counsellor replies, “Well… have you tried talking to him about how he makes you feel?” Natalie described this as a pretty ridiculous response to the problem. When conceptualizing her visual message, Natalie remembered her own similar experiences as really frustrating, like the people are listening to what is being said through the filter of, ‘this is the teenage person who shouldn’t be taken seriously,’ or that they weren’t hearing what she was actually saying and giving standard advice they would give to everyone, regardless of the problem.

In the visual message, the girl sits alone in a boring and dull room, on a poor stool below the level of the counsellor, while waving her arms in anguish and despair at her situation. She has only a window to the world, but feels isolated from it. On the other side of a solid barrier sits the counsellor with his fancy chair and fancy clothes and smart spectacles, award behind him and his libraries. He is expressionless and unfazed. His room suggests that he sees the world through his books, his research, and his own ego of being the “World’s Best Therapist.” Natalie was communicating that the barrier – in this case a solid physical barrier – that lies between the research community and those who are seeking help is damaging to the therapeutic relationship. The barrier applies to communication, understanding, connection, and support, as well as a barrier in the access to knowledge that the professionals hold and clients seek. Through her message, Natalie wishes to communicate to anyone who provides counselling to adolescents experiencing verbal abuse or a lack of understanding that they must listen openly and validate the emotions and issues being brought to their attention. These may include therapists, teachers, chaplains, priests, guidance counsellors, psychologists, or anyone else in the position to help. She shared that you don’t kick a horse while it’s down by trivializing the issues that these clients bring forward.
5.2.7 Common Themes from the Visual Messages

After analyzing the visual messages individually, I reviewed the analyses for common themes that emerged across the messages (Cauduro et al., 2009; Huss & Cwickel, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2011; Stuart, 2007). Themes emerged from the analysis of each participant’s visual and verbal texts and were based on the messages that they expressed (Mitchell et al., 2011). The themes are (1) messages of resilience for adolescents, (2) perception of parents in the context of divorce, and (3) imbalances of power.

5.2.7.1 Messages of resilience for adolescents.

Kizzy, Hank, The Fox, and Addy all sent direct messages pertaining to strategies that young people can use to cope with the transitions surrounding a parental divorce or marital separation drawn from the wisdom of their personal experiences. Kizzy attempts to inspire her audience with messages of their ability to achieve what they need to, from basic survival of the situations they face to thriving in their new life situation. These were messages that she herself did not receive, and thinks she would have benefitted from. Hank challenges his audience to voice their opinions about divorce and add their voice to the family discussion. He also encourages them to move forward, knowing that in the end, they cannot choose the other path, they can only choose to accept what comes with the one that they are on, whether it is better or worse (which they cannot know). The Fox encourages his audience to find their inner stillness when their emotions run high. For him, it is important for adolescents to learn how to experience emotions without being overtaken by them so that they may learn not to internalize the situations around them. Addy explains that we cannot control the situations that we are place in or the experiences that we must have, we can only control the choices we make. Adolescents can choose to react however they like, to internalize feelings, to become a victim of their circumstances, or they can choose to live a life that they think is best within their context. Addy believes that her audience must learn to recognize when these choices are available, and to learn the consequences of their choices. All of these messages are intended to help adolescents move forward with their lives within their new contexts and take control of their how they perceive and react to the situations that they will encounter.
5.2.7.2 Perception of parents in the context of divorce.

Abigail, Hank, and The Fox included representations of parents within the context of their messages about parental divorce. For Abigail, her message directly centred on parents, urging them to mind how they act in front of their children. Whether interacting with one another or with the child themselves, the way that parents act can impact children’s comfort, feelings of respect toward parents, and feelings of being respected. Hank’s message demonstrated how a parent leaving looks through the eyes of the child. Hank’s message was for the children, and urged them to share how they felt with their parents, rather than sitting idly by and watch the separation happen without speaking their mind. The Fox also provided a message from the child’s perspective, this time while watching his parents argue. The Fox explains that while you cannot control their fighting, you can control your emotional experience of it, and eventually realize that it is not about you. The Fox’s message ends with the parents fighting physically faded into the background after the child has learned how to change his experience of it. While these messages foreground and background parents differently, they all indicate the centrality of parents’ actions and interactions in this emotional transition for children.

5.2.7.3 Imbalance of power.

The visual messages created by Abigail, Hank, The Fox and Natalie all refer to power that is situated externally to the participants in relation to their lives surrounding the parental divorce. Abigail’s message points to parents’ control within the family relationship, particularly how their actions directly affect children’s comfort and perceptions of family members. Hank’s discusses the typically unilateral decision of parents to divorce without consulting their children. His advice is for children to add their own voices to the discussion by providing their thoughts. He also suggests that children must accept the final decision, which ultimately is up to the parents. The Fox demonstrates children cannot control the situations that they find themselves in, especially because they must at times be in proximity to our parents and therefore their parents’ fighting, but they can learn to control their experiences of these situations. The Fox urges others to take control of their emotional reactions so that they can learn to experience emotions in a way that does not overwhelm them or make them feel
powerless. Natalie delved into the power relationship between adolescents who are seeking help and those who have the knowledge, ability, and credibility to help them. Natalie explained that the barrier that exists between clients and counsellors is also a barrier of access to knowledge, services, even simple validation of their feelings for adolescents.

5.3 Discussion

A previous review of the literature regarding young people’s experiences of parental divorce in North America (Hartman, Magalhães, & Mandich, 2011) addresses their coping and ability to move forward in ways that are socially and culturally acceptable. These areas include academic performance, engagement in deviant behaviour, engagement in or views regarding romantic relationships, psychosocial wellbeing, the parent-adolescent relationship and the general coping process. Current literature tends to areas of poor coping or areas that suffer due to poor transition surrounding a parental divorce. This study allowed for the participants to share insights into their coping and factors that either helped or hindered it, but the participants tended to focus on areas of strength in their coping throughout their transitions. Liebenberg and Ungar (2009) explain that one cannot study resilience apart from exploring the sources and effects of risk in a youth population, and so the current literature and this study work together on the path to understanding young people’s positive development. The findings suggest a surprising number of assets that the adolescents found within themselves. Kizzy, Hank, The Fox, and Addy all sent messages of personal lessons that they learned through their coping processes. The messages tended to indicate the development of resiliency, as described by Ungar (2004):

“Resilience is successful negotiation by individuals for health resources, with success depending for its definition on the reciprocity individuals experience between themselves and the social constructions of well-being that shape their interpretations of their health status. Accounts by youth themselves tell us that even individuals labelled delinquent or disordered often maintain surprisingly good mental health.” (p. 352)
In light of their challenges, participants learned to identify what they needed in order to move forward and empower themselves to become who they wished to be. Addy, for example, described enjoying engaging in some mischief such as staying out past her curfew, partying with friends, and lying to her parents about her relationship with her boyfriend. She felt that she was entitled to it considering that she maintained a high grade point average, volunteered in school, was employed, and contributed substantially to the household maintenance and payments. Addy’s exploration of how to transition through this experience and become the person she wanted to be included both the ‘positive’ or culturally acceptable coping mechanisms, as well as the ‘negative’ or culturally unacceptable ones. In the end, she learned the important lesson that we cannot control the experiences that we are exposed to, such as parental divorce, arguments, financial difficulty, and others, but we can control the choices that we make. It is these choices that define our life and our future experiences, and she took ownership of them. By understanding the context of why participants engaged in certain behaviours, be they culturally acceptable or not, we can begin to understand how these actions can be part of their journey toward resiliency within the context of their experiences (Eldar-Avidan et al., 2009; Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009; Ungar, 2004).

In addition to speaking to the personal coping process and development of resiliency, the participants’ visual messages addressed power that existed within their experiences of parental divorce, as well as how it did and did not affect their agency (Walsh, 2007; Kincheloe et al., 2011). Abigail, Hank, The Fox, and Natalie all directly spoke about power that was held by figures of authority. Kizzy and Addy both spoke about how the power held by others affected their formulation of their messages. Abigail and The Fox expressed that parents hold significant power in the family, and that their actions truly affect the way that adolescents feel about themselves, their parents, and their families in general. Parents hold the power of decisions, finances, and the tone of the family relationship within the household as well as the decision to split the family (Liebenberg, 2009). Abigail urged parents to be mindful of the way that they address each other in front of their children, while The Fox’s visual message implied that parental argument or poor communication will exist.
The literature indicates many negative consequences of familial relationships following parental divorce, such as feelings of being caught between parents (Afifi, Afifi, Morse, & Hamrick, 2008), maladjustment (Koerner, Wallace, Lehman, Lee, & Escalante, 2004), decreased coping (Afifi et al., 2006), decreased feelings of wellbeing (Afifi, McManus, Hutchinshon, & Baker, 2007), and increased anxiety (Afifi, Afifi, & Coho, 2009). This mirrors many of the sentiments expressed by Abigail through her message to parents. For The Fox, the unrest between the two parents does not necessarily affect the way that he feels. For him, he has learned that while he may not have the power within the family’s dynamics, relationships, and what occurs when parents interact or events are unpleasant, he has claimed power over how he experiences them. He can choose to remain engulfed in in his emotions when he sees his parents fight, but, like Addy, he chooses to find stillness and not be defined by his anger. The literature did not address the agency of adolescents to take their coping into their own hands, which speaks to the need for a greater understanding of the development of resilience and the contextualization of how and when adolescents claim power over their experiences.

Natalie’s visual message spoke to the professional community who serve adolescents. Natalie’s message of power is quite significant for the literature, as the literature is often intended to inform the practice professionals who hold the power of counselling, resources, and access to services. The literature provides information on services that help in the coping process, such as the New Beginnings Program (Bonds, Wolchik, Winslow, Tein, Sandler, & Millsap, 2010; Dawson-McLure, Sandler, Wolchik, & Millsap, 2004; Wolchik et al., 2002; Zhou, Sandler, Millsap, Wolchik & Dawson-McClure, 2008), a forgiveness intervention program for adolescents (Freedman & Knupp, 2003) and while not directly related to parental divorce, the Big Brothers Program (Saintonge, Achille, & Lachance, 1998). Natalie’s message was unique, in that the other participants did not seek professional help for their issues surrounding the transitions and coping related to parental divorce. But even for those who do seek counselling from professionals, Natalie expressed that there are great barriers between help seekers and those who are the gatekeepers to knowledge and advice. Natalie felt that the counsellors she sought help from to did not recognize the power that they hold beyond their professional training, through their tone and body language. She did not feel
validated by many professionals, and questioned whether her issues were even important enough to warrant help based on the responses of those who supposedly would know best. Natalie’s message should prompt the professional and research communities to turn the mirror on ourselves and question whether our work is best helping those who seek our assistance (Kincheloe et al., 2011; Mitchell et al., 2011; Walsh, 2007). If not, how can those of us with the privilege of having access to stores of professional and academic knowledge best serve this population?

Additionally, when taken together with my previous work (chapter four) exploring the narratives discussed above, the visual messages highlight the reasons for many of the barriers to engaging in preferred occupations outlined by the participants. The previous study, along with the short narratives above, highlighted the participants’ perceived needs to engage in occupations related to caring for their family members (all participants), taking on additional household duties (Kizzy, Abigail, Hank, The Fox, and Addy), or generally disengaging from occupation in order to escape from their difficult home lives (Kizzy, Addy, and Natalie). In the visual messages above, the participants outline some of the sources of stress in the home that may contribute to their perceived need to engage in these occupations, such as Abigail’s need to be the perfect daughter in order to decrease the stress between her parents, Kizzy’s lack of encouragement and confidence as a child to feel comfortable engaging in desired occupations, and Natalie’s lack of support in processing her issues so that she could return to her regular, preferred occupations. Conversely, The Fox and Addy’s messages about empowering themselves and discovering their agency related to their abilities to engage in the occupations that were meaningful to them. For Addy, this was focusing on her school and enjoying her social time without worrying about the stress of her parents. The Fox had engaged in a variety of occupations before, but through his Zen Buddhist practice, he was able to engage without the experiencing the extreme emotions that he did as a child, being able to fully enjoy his occupations.

Finally, the literature does not largely address messages or lessons specifically intended for young people, providing them insight and tools in how to function through the transitions associated with parental divorce or marital separation. While there are
examples of program reviews, such as The New Beginnings Program (Dawson-McClure et al., 2004) and the helpfulness of participation in the Big Brothers Program (Saintonge et al., 1998), the text speaks to professionals that facilitate these programs, not to the target population themselves. It appears that the heavy problem-focused and quantitatively driven situatedness of the research lends to a focus on measurable outcomes, but the messages presented by our participants points to a need to balance the measurable items with contextual and experiential understanding of the population that we study. If we do not understand the problems of adolescents experiencing parental divorce or separation within the larger context of their needs, goals, and trials (Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009), how can we offer realistic and useful suggestions? This research has led the authors to understand that more information needs to be crafted by and for adolescents themselves, as well as offered directly to them. This would call for more qualitative, and particularly participatory and action based research to both garner information from our population, and provide useful findings to them.

5.4 Study Implications and Future Directions

This study has added the voices of adolescents and young adults who have experienced parental divorce or separation to the larger academic discourse on the matter. Our findings have indicated that adolescents find ways of coping on their own, and think that these messages would be helpful to others in similar situations so that they may benefit from the knowledge born of the participants’ experiences. The study also indicated that there people in positions of power, such as parents and counsellors, must be mindful of how they act toward and in front of adolescents.

This study had a number of limitations. Regarding our participant sample, they were all current university students, and had (or had created) the opportunity to attend higher education, which relates to contextual issues of access to funding, support, and to previous fulfilment of educational requirements. Participants in different professions may have provided different insights. Additionally, all of our participants were young adults and had time to reflect upon the transitions and experiences that they had as adolescents (excluding Natalie, whose transition was relatively recent). An adolescent population or a
limitation in the elapsed time following the parental divorce may have led to different messages and themes among the messages sent.

Regarding the data collection and analysis, the primary author collected, transcribed, and analyzed all data. It allowed for consistency in analysis as well as thorough emersion in the data, but other reviewers may have led to new or different interpretations of the data. This is neither a strength or a limitation of the research, but simply a reality of qualitative data analysis of this sort. The procedure involved the participants’ analyses of their own work along with the researcher’s analysis of all of the messages, which allowed me to understand the meaning behind the visual messages beyond the visual text, so that I would not misinterpret aspects of it.

The next step in this process is to disseminate the messages to the appropriate audiences through means that will be accessible and attractive to them (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2011; Rose, 2007). This will allow us to work toward a more action-based research platform that we advocated for.

The results of this study, when considered within the wider academic discourse surrounding adolescent life and transition related to parental divorce, has implications for future research direction. The indication that more research needs to draw on the life and experiences of adolescents suggests that more exploratory and qualitative research should be conducted to better understand the issues that affect adolescent functioning following parental divorce. We feel that the addition of participatory and action-based research to this area will help to address the issues of understanding the issues that truly face this population, how these issues affect function, and the assets available for adolescents to address the issues that they indicate. This research adds unique and interesting perspective to the existing discourse, and is a step in the direction of a more inclusive and asset-based program of research regarding life following parental divorce or separation.
5.5 References


Chapter 6

6 Final Considerations

This chapter concludes the dissertation, and will highlight the contributions of this dissertation to the areas of young people’s (World Health Organization [WHO], 2011) experiences of parental divorce and marital separation as explored through critical social theory and occupational science lenses. It will also highlight the methodological contributions relating to visual methodologies in the study of human occupation, as explored in chapter three, and practiced in chapter five. The adopted criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of this particular research will then be provided and the methodological constraints of the studies will be discussed. Finally, reflections on the research process will be provided.

6.1 Research Implications

6.1.1 Contributions to Understanding Parental Divorce and Marital Separation

The studies identified in chapter two provided insight into the current foci of North American literature regarding adolescent and young adult life following a parental divorce or marital separation. They allowed me to identify the knowledge gaps that I subsequently addressed, such as adolescent occupational engagement surrounding parental divorce or marital separation, more contextual information on adolescent life at this time, the role of resilience following parental divorce or marital separation, and the critical messages that adolescents wished to send about parental divorce or marital separation. Examining these areas lacking in the literature also helped to determine how to best structure my methodologies for the studies presented in chapters four and five in order to address these absent areas of knowledge.

The questions that followed from my exploration of the research in chapter two were based in critical social theory and occupational science. Critical social theory (Crotty, 1998; Freire, 1993; Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011; Walsh, 2007) was chosen because the voice of young people was not prevalent in the literature regarding
their interactions with parental divorce. Liebenberg and Ungar (2009) and Furstenberg (2000) both argue that adolescents are often marginalized and treated as though they must compete to merely survive the trials of growing up. This problematization of young people’s lives does not allow for a focus on the way that they grow, learn, and build resilience (Furstenberg, 2000; Liebenberg, 2009; Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009; Ungar, 2004). As such, I chose to adopt a theoretical background and associated methodologies that would allow the participants to evaluate the hegemonic forces that act upon their agency in navigating life following a parental divorce or marital separation (Crotty, 1998; Freire, 1993; Kincheloe et al., 2011), as well as allow them to share their perception of the power that is inherent in the research relationship (Kincheloe et al., 2011; Molineux & Rickard, 2003; Riessman, 2008; Walsh, 2007; Wells, 2011).

The use of critical theoretical frameworks in the study of human occupation is appropriate, as meaningful engagement in occupation is indicative of individuals’ or groups’ access to those occupations, allowing insight into the structures that either enable or disturb their abilities to partake (Laliberte Rudman, 2013). By applying the critical social theoretical background to methodologies that promote the construction of meaning, such as narrative and visual methodologies, I encouraged the participants to reflect on and express their understandings of the forces that act upon them, how those forces affected their agency regarding occupational engagement, and how they responded to these power structures and agents (Walsh, 2007).

The exploration of occupation as it relates to the transitions associated with parental divorce or marital separation has been novel. By understanding what the participants had to do, wanted to do, and did do, I was able to gain an understanding of the ways that the changes in routine, habit, responsibilities, relationships and emotions surrounding parental divorce or marital separation affected their daily lives. For example, chapter four discussed participants feeling the need to take on roles such as caring for parents and siblings, being financially aware, and maintaining the house. These are not occupations that the participants wanted to engage in, nor were they occupations that the participants were required to engage in prior to their parents’ divorces or separations, but were taken on for a number of reasons, such as the good of the family unit.
The final theoretical piece that emerged from the research conducted in the studies discussed through chapters four and five was the resilience of the participants. Liebenberg and Ungar (2009) state, “The experience of health under stress, and the dynamic processes that contribute to positive development, have come to be known as resilience” (p. 3). They go on to explain that it can be studied by looking at “young people’s developmental pathways to well-being” (Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009, p. 3). The participants crafted their stories and visual messages presented in chapters four and five respectively, and in doing so related their pathways toward resilience and the ways that they successfully negotiated their definitions of well-being within their available health resources (Ungar, 2004).

Specific contributions the literature regarding young people’s experiences of parental divorce or marital separation will now be addressed. There were many confirmatory findings from this research. The first was the parent-child relationship affecting the transition process. In chapter four, participants described themselves as becoming caretakers to their parents emotionally, financially, or through providing support in the daily care of the family or home. The literature discusses the negative associations between adolescents’ coping and parental communication about their personal stresses following a divorce or separation (Afifi, Huber, & Ohs, 2006; Afifi, McManus, Hutchinson, & Baker, 2007; Koerner, Kenyon & Rankin, 2006; Koerner, Wallace, Lehman, Lee & Escalante, 2004; Koerner, Wallace, Lehman & Raymond, 2002). This also related to finding that both our participants and participants of previous studies perceived themselves to be ‘older’ or more mature than their peers (Benson & Johnson, 2009; Kenyon, Rankin, Koerner, & Dennison, 2007; Koerner et al., 2006). For the participants in my studies, their increased maturity and skills were not described as a wholly positive or negative experience, but one that limited their opportunities at times, and afforded them advantages at others.

Another area of relation between the available literature and my participants was the benefits of sharing with peers (Afifi et al., 2006; K. Rodgers & Rose, 2002). Abigail and Addy both shared that they were able to rely on friends to understand and support them through the difficulties and transitions associated with marital unrest and parental
separation. Kizzy and Natalie both wished that they had peer support, feeling that they would have benefitted from it.

Chapter four also highlighted the issue of engaging in behaviour that indicates poor coping such as ‘deviant’ behaviour or psychological difficulties. The research literature has portrayed these behaviours as largely negative (Peris & Emery, 2004; Neher & Short, 1998; Rebellon, 2002; Roustit, Chaix, & Chauvin, 2007; Sun, 2001). My participants spoke to having difficulties, but described them in the greater context of their transition process. Kizzy explained that she struggled with depression and anxiety related to her unstable and undesirable home life and lack of support at school. She engaged in suicidal behaviours (cutting, suicide attempts) as functions of escaping. Once she was able to leave the family home, she described her mental state and her overall resilience in the face of difficulties to have increased tremendously. Similarly, Addy described deserving a little mischief in her life to offset her extremely responsible nature in the other areas of her life. For her, ‘deviant’ behaviour functioned to help her assert her independence with her parents and to explore interests that did not carry the weight of responsibility as so many other areas of her life did.

Beyond confirming the available research, the studies presented in chapters four and five expand on the current knowledge in the area of young people’s experiences of parental divorce or marital separation. The first finding is a point of direct divergence from the available research and was the area of academic achievement. While the trend in the literature was that academic achievement dropped (Ham, 2003; Jeynes, 2002, 2005; King & Sobolewski, 2006; Menning, 2006; Sun & Li, 2009), whereas our participants described their achievement as either improved (Kizzy, Addy), consistent (Abigail, The Fox), or did not discuss it at all (Hank, Natalie). This may relate to a number of factors, including the contextual issues that the academic decline is attributed to in the existing literature, such as inconsistent school attendance, increased instability in the home, and lack of support for the children. In my studies, the instability in the home seemed to have the reverse effect, leading to participants throwing themselves into an occupation that was consistent and controllable such as school. It allowed them reprieve from the instability in their home lives (Rubinov & Leucken, 2013). Another factor that may have
affected my participants’ higher affinity for school achievement as compared to the other populations studied was having participants who attend post-secondary education, and therefore must have some inherent value of education.

Another finding of note was the attitudes toward professional support. Hank, Addy, Abigail, and The Fox did not seek professional support, and communicated that they did not see the need for it. Kizzy sought support specifically related to abuse, but did not feel that she was able to address the issues surrounding her family relationships and transitions that followed her parents’ divorce. Natalie specifically provided examples in both chapters four and five of feeling invalidated after reaching out to peers, authority figures, and professionals for help. She communicating feeling worse after trying, and had to learn to support herself.

Finally, I would like to address two critically based issues, power and injustice. First, the participants communicated perceiving a lack of agency surrounding decisions relating to their parents’ divorce. It has not been widely discussed in the existing literature, but the transition and resilience processes require young people to make choices, try new things, and sometimes requires access to professional help or services. If children do not have access to coping mechanisms, or do not have a voice to ask for the help that they need, they will find other ways to adjust to the situation. This could be through engagement in undesirable behaviours, as discussed in the previous section, that act as tools for their exploration, learning, and growth through doing in their transition process (Blair, 2000). For my participants, there was another significant shift in the transition and coping process following parental divorce relating to the power differentials. Chapter five highlighted the participants’ need to empower themselves in order to move past the issues that they faced regarding their parents’ divorces. Participants learned how to recognize the assets that they had and utilize them in order to claim power over the choices that they made and the way that they viewed their situations.

Through analysis of the data, there appears to be multiple levels of injustice relating to how young people are able to navigate their lives following a parental divorce
or separation. The first is a macro-level injustice in the policies and literature or research available to help them. While parental divorce is quite widely recognized as an issue for young people, there are few funds, programs, or policies in place that protect them or their interests following a parental divorce. Second is a meso-level injustice relating to services directly available to young people within their communities, as well as knowledge that is immediately accessible to them. If they cannot access resources to know what is available to help them, it will be much more difficult for them to find help in navigating and adjusting to their new situation. The third level of injustice is the emotional demands that are thrust upon them following a parental divorce. All of the participants in these studies as well as those in previous ones (Afifi, Huber, & Ohs, 2006; Afifi, McManus, Hutchinson, & Baker, 2007; Koerner, Kenyon & Rankin, 2006; Koerner, Wallace, Lehman, Lee & Escalante, 2004; Koerner, Wallace, Lehman & Raymond, 2002) discussed having parents or siblings who placed great emotional demands on them, making it more difficult for them to adjust following the parental divorce or separation. Having knowledge for parents and families would help young people to not feel oppressed by the emotional demands of others while trying to work out their new situations for themselves. While some of the findings are directly applicable to adolescents, these injustices must be addressed by the greater research, care, and experienced community so that future young people experiencing parental divorce or marital separations may not face these injustices in addition to the other difficulties of a parental divorce or separation.

6.1.2 Contributions to Occupational Science

This research has been constructed and implemented based on the tenets of occupational science, including the understanding of the daily tasks, activities, and rituals that people need and want to do (Asaba, Blanche, Jonsson, Laliberte Rudman, & Wicks, 2007; Blair, 2000; Yerxa et al., 1990), and the belief that occupational engagement holds both meaning and purpose (Blair, 2000; Hammell, 2004; Reed, Hocking, & Smythe, 2010; Wilcock, 1998).

This research has also contributed to the field of occupational science. Chapter three was explicitly written to contribute to the field by providing information on the
utility of visual methodologies for research in human occupation. Chapter three provided information intended to help researchers consider the appropriateness of their choice to use a visual methodology to study human occupation, and what type of methodology would allow them to best address their questions. The chapter also highlights special considerations that go along with various types of visual methodologies relating to ethics, participant understanding and interest, funding, and technological complication.

Regarding the studies conducted in chapters four and five, I have found that they particularly speak to the role of occupational engagement in coping with the transition and emotional changes associated with a major transition in lifestyle, routine, and support structure. First and foremost, it has contributed to the limited but growing body of occupation-based literature regarding transitions in adolescence (Iannelli & Wilding, 2007; Lobo, 1999). It has also further explored the many transitions surrounding divorce, going beyond the uncoupling process and reaching into the emotional, financial, support-based and routine-based changes (Amato, 2000; Kelly, 2000; Kelly & Emery, 2003) that all affect access to occupational engagement. Through understanding what the participants were doing (a central theme in occupational sciences), we were able to explore the changes in their being, becoming, and belonging (Hammell, 2004; Wilcock, 1998). More specifically, by exploring the doing of occupations that have previously been framed as problematic, we are able to understand the function of these tasks and behaviours in forming meaning and navigating the relationship- and routine-based transitions that accompany the parental divorce process. Many participants also described wider contexts that affected their occupational changes or choices, including changes in responsibilities, desire to help family members through their transitions, decreased access to finances, or desires for independence from the family. By exploring the functions and meanings behind the participants’ occupations, I was able to gain a new perspective on why the participants engaged in particular behaviours following their parents’ divorces or separations.

6.1.3 Contributions to Methodology

Chapter two contributed to the growing body of narrative research in the study of occupational science (Jonsson, Staffan, & Kielhofner, 2000; Molineux & Rickard, 2003;
Narratives are a natural fit for understanding occupations, which are inherently contextual and meaning-laden (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Molineux & Rickard, 2003; Riessman, 2008; Wells, 2011). Through the participants’ narratives I was able to gain insight into the changes in the routines, habits, and activities involved in their occupations, as well as the changes in meaning behind the occupations or their intended purposes (Hammell, 2004; Wilcock, 1998).

The contributions of this dissertation to visual methodologies were more substantial. Chapter three’s exploration of the utility of visual methodologies in the study of human occupation provided specific information to those conducting and evaluating studies that utilize visual methodology in occupational science. It also presented more general considerations regarding issues in visual research, such as unique ethical considerations, the role of technology, and how to choose the appropriate type of visual methods to address the question that is being asked. The broader applicability of chapter three beyond the three methods discussed within the chapter is demonstrated through my use of a similar but unique visual methodology in chapter five. I was able to apply the research presented in chapter three and use the principles to implement a drawing-based visual methodology that allowed me to explore critical views on life and occupational engagement in young people surrounding parental divorce or marital separation (Cauduro, Birk, & Wachs, 2009; Galvaan, 2007; Huss & Cwikel, 2008; Liebenberg, 2009; Mitchell, de Lange, Stuart, Molestane, & Buthelezi, 2007; Mitchell, Theron, Stuart, Smith, & Campbell, 2011; Walsh, 2007).

### 6.2 Quality Criteria for this Research

Throughout the research process, I set up practices to help ensure the quality of my studies. The goal of presenting the tools that contributed to the research’s trustworthiness is to demonstrate that my “data were ethically and mindfully collected, analyzed, and reported” (Carlson, 2005, p. 1110). In that vein, the onus of indicating the trustworthiness of research along with the criteria used to uphold the quality has been placed “with the investigator rather than external judges of the completed product” (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002, p. 15). As such, in this section I outline
the criteria that I used throughout the research process to uphold the quality of my studies.

A study’s quality and trustworthiness should be assessed “on the basis of the paradigmatic underpinnings of the research and standards of the discipline” (Morrow, 2005, p. 250). The criteria for evaluating my studies therefore differs from those that would be used to evaluate research using different methodologies and methods, and must account for the practices involved in narrative inquiry and a visual methodological inquiry, a critical paradigm, and based in the study of human occupation.

In their evaluation of verification criteria for qualitative research, Morse et al. (2002) urge researchers to increase the quality of research by using strategies of establishing trustworthiness throughout the study, rather than post hoc measures that will only catch mistakes that have already been made. This will allow the researcher to catch errors and correct analysis-based, theoretical, or methodological flaws while still in the process of collecting the data. They urge researchers to be responsive to new data, concepts, and theories throughout the process, and not blindly stick to their original ideas when the data indicates otherwise (Morse et al., 2002).

I maintained an audit trail (B. Rodgers, 2008) throughout the process. The audit trail includes documentation that allows the research team to track the process and changes common to the iterative processes of qualitative research. The audit trail contained records of the study process that allowed me to track and justify all decisions made regarding the study design and analysis (B. Rodgers, 2008). Documents included study design proposals and procedures, memos about the data collection process and experience, fieldnotes regarding the context and activities of data collection, reflexive journaling throughout the process, as well as methodological notes and progress tracking along the way. By maintaining an audit trail, I have been able to track the major decisions made throughout the process and the reasoning behind them. I have also recorded important realizations or memories from the process that have reminded me why events occurred as they did or the reasons behind my participants’ reactions or intonations not
caught on tape. The audit trail has been an extremely useful practice in the research process.

I employed the use of member-checking (Carlson, 2010) so that the co-constructed written narratives, the cornerstone of my analysis, as interpreted by the researcher truly captured the voice of the participant. Member checking can be potentially detrimental to the research process, as taking final versions of the data back to individual participants can lead to disagreement or lack of relation to the other participants’ data (Morse et al., 2002). With this in mind, I only asked participants to verify their data and the meanings that it held. In this study, the participants were not asked to review their transcripts, but the co-constructed written narrative that was created based on their story. I was not only seeking accuracy in what the participants said, but also what they meant by the stories that they shared and what I understood from those stories. The participants were free to change their messages or wording, and some did. Overall, participants described the experience of reading the story of their life in the third person to be odd, but most agreed that the story captured the messages that they wished to share through this research.

Finally, I employed the use of reflexive practice throughout the research process. As Finlay (1998) explains,

[Reflexivity] encompasses continual evaluation of both our subjective responses (personal reflexivity) and our method of research (methodological reflexivity). Through constantly reflecting on, questioning and evaluating the research process, the researcher attempts to distinguish how subjective and inter-subjective elements have impinged on (and possibly transformed) both the data collection and the analysis. (p. 453)

This is done through the constant reflection on choice, action, and interpretation. It encompasses both the explicit aspects and the abstract or the ambiguous decisions. Finlay (1998) argues that the goal in qualitative research is not to eliminate bias, but to recognize our preconceptions and assumptions, reflect on their meaning and reasoning,
and *use* our inward reflections to gain more insight on our choices as well as the research more generally.

She outlined 4 areas of personal reflexivity. The first relates to the influence of researcher assumptions. As an ‘insider’ of the population of young adults whose parents divorced when they were adolescents, I felt that there were certain experiences that I could easily relate to, and the participants communicated that they assumed a shared understanding between them and myself. I remained cautiously aware of my assumptions of shared experience or understanding, and made sure to probe for clarification when I caught myself assuming shared knowledge. The second area of personal reflexivity outlined by Finlay (1998) related to researcher expectations. I remained aware of my comparisons of participants’ experiences with the current research, with each other’s stories, and with my own experiences. This required monitoring my internal thought process as well as the probing or clarification questions that I asked that might have directed their answers inappropriately. The third area involved researcher behaviour and emotions. Throughout the study design, literature searching, data collection, and data analysis processes, I had many different emotional responses ranging from feelings of validation and understanding to feelings of anger or blame. By reflecting on emotions both in the moment and following the experiences to understand why I was reacting, what they meant for me, what they meant for participants, and if it affected the interview or the information shared, I was able to learn and grow from the experiences. The final area of personal reflexivity addressed by Finlay (1998) was the probing of unconscious responses. This involves recognizing potential points of transference or misattribution of my own personal issues or experiences onto the participants, or reacting negatively to participants who describe situations in which I would act differently. This allowed me to identify issues that were either important to me personally, or that resonated with the research as a whole, or both.

By engaging in reflexivity throughout the process of this research, I was able to identify important points that both contributed to the research and that demonstrated weaknesses in the methods or my own analyses. Reflexivity has proven to be an important tool in the process of appropriately evaluating more subjective research data.
6.3 Methodological Constraints

There were a number of methodological constraints in my research. These are not necessarily limitations of the research, but realities of conducting an in-depth qualitative study for the purposes of a doctoral degree. The first was my recruited sample. My participants were all current university students, and had strived for the opportunity to attend higher education, which relates to contextual issues of access to funding, support, and to previous fulfilment of educational requirements. Participants in different professions or life situations may have provided different insights. Additionally, all of the participants were young adults and had time to reflect upon the transitions and experiences that they had as adolescents (excluding Natalie, whose transition was relatively recent). An adolescent population or a limitation in the elapsed time following the parental divorce may have led to different messages and themes in the data.

Taken together, these considerations relate to the ‘generalizability’ of the research. This research was intended to be exploratory and give voice to the participant population, as well as illuminate strengths and shortcomings of the available research. The goal was therefore not generalizability, but this does affect the reach and applicability of my findings in future research or practice. This research has given a voice to my participants, and while it does not represent the voice of all who experience a parental divorce, it should be able to provide a starting point for future research exploring assets and context for this population.

Regarding the data collection and analysis, I collected, transcribed, and analyzed all of the data. It allowed for consistency in analysis as well as thorough immersion in the data, but other reviewers may have provided new or different interpretations of the data. Once again, this is neither a strength nor a limitation of the research, but simply a reality of qualitative data analysis of this sort (Finlay, 1998). In order to facilitate a quality and trustworthy research product, the tools outlined in the previous section were employed.

The next step in this process is to disseminate the messages to the appropriate audiences through means that will be accessible and attractive to them. This will allow me to work toward a more action-based research platform that we advocated for.
6.4 Final Reflections

This concludes my dissertation regarding adolescent and young adult life and daily occupations surrounding a parental divorce or marital separation. I have been able to contribute new and meaningful information to the body of literature by adding qualitative, critical, and occupation data. I have contributed to the process of infusing the participants’ voices and experiences into the larger body of data, enabling us as a research community to focus on the issues that affect the participants’ functioning and coping as they experience it, and focusing on both the problems and solutions that are relevant and applicable to them.

On a personal note, this research process has required a great deal of personal reflection and exploration of my own experiences with parental divorce. The information shared by the participants has addressed the questions that irked me so greatly. Why is the research so negatively framed? I found that my participants (and upon reflection, my own adolescent self) had many issues that would be troublesome to mental health care professionals. Upon understanding the context and narrative of their experiences, I also found that my participants were able to address these issues, often on their own as part of their growth or coping process. Why must we only explore what is wrong with children? I would imagine that there would be little clinical interest in a study that proposed that parental divorce had no negative consequences or outcomes, but I believe that by understanding the broader context of life and transitions following a parental divorce leads to an understanding of what is ‘wrong,’ as well as how adolescents address the issues. Who is asking what life is like and what the context of these issues is? Who is looking into what can be done? Who will value the strategies that adolescents are already using to cope? As promised in the introductory chapter, it has been I who has addressed these questions. I am honoured to have been able to address these questions and add the voice of adolescents to the greater body of research.

One final and crucial note is that the participants have become my teachers, my mentors, and the stimulators of great personal growth for me. I am fortunate to have become the woman who is completing this thesis, because she is much stronger, wiser, more caring, more confident, and more forgiving than the girl who began it. I move
forward with hope and determination that this research can have some semblance of these effects on others who have experienced a parental separation or divorce as it has had on me.
6.5 References


Rebellon, C. J. (2002). Reconsidering the broken homes/delinquency relationship and exploring its mediating mechanism(s). *Criminology, 40*(1), 103–135.


Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approval

Use of Human Participants - Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Angela Mandich
Review Number: 178748
Review Level: Full Board
Approved Local Adult Participants: 0
Approved Local Minor Participants: 32
Protocol Title: The way they see it: Adolescents’ interactions with parental divorce or marital separation, an occupational perspective using a visual methodology
Department & Institution: Occupational Therapy, University of Western Ontario
Sponsor:
Ethics Approval Date: April 13, 2011
Expiry Date: April 30, 2012

Documents Reviewed & Approved & Documents Received for Information:

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<td>Worker</td>
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<td>Advertisement</td>
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This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB’s periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information. If you require an updated approval notice prior to that time you must request it using the UWO Updated Approval Request Form.

Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREB.

The Chair of the NMREB is Dr. Riley Hinson. The UWO NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

---

Ethics Officer in Contact for Further Information

Evelyn Kelly
elizabeth.waandich@uwo.ca

The University of Western Ontario
Office of Research Ethics
Room 5150, Support Services Building • London, Ontario • CANADA - N6A 3K7
PH: 519-661-3036 • F: 519-850-2466 • ethics@uwo.ca • www.uwo.ca/research/ethics
Use of Human Participants - Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Angela Mandich  
Review Number: 178745  
Review Level: Delegated
Approved Local Adult Participants: 0  
Approved Local Minor Participants: 32  
Protocol Title: The way they see it: Adolescents' interactions with parental divorce or marital separation, an occupational perspective using a visual methodology  
Department & Institution: Occupational Therapy, University of Western Ontario  
Sponsor:  
Ethics Approval Date: May 26, 2011  
Expiration Date: April 30, 2012

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<td>Parents and Guardians</td>
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This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above referenced revision(s) or amendment(s) on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information. If you require an updated approval notice prior to that time you must request it using the UWO Updated Approval Request Form.

Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREB.

The Chair of the NMREB is Dr. Riley Hinson. The UWO NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Grace Kelly (grace.kelly@uwo.ca)  
Janice Sutherland (jusuthr@uwo.ca)

This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.

The University of Western Ontario  
Office of Research Ethics  
Support Services Building Room 5150 • London, Ontario • CANADA – N6A 3K7  
Ph: 519-661-3036 • F: 519-850-2466 • ethics@uwo.ca • www.uwo.ca/research/ethics
Principal Investigator: Dr. Angela Mandich
File Number: 100185
Review Level: Delegated
Approved Local Adult Participants: 0
Approved Local Minor Participants: 32
Protocol Title: The way they see it, Adolescents' interactions with parental divorce or marital separation, an occupational perspective using a visual methodology
178745
Department & Institution: Health Sciences/Occupational Therapy, Western University
Sponsor:
Ethics Approval Date: October 02, 2012 Expiry Date: August 31, 2013

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<td>Revised Study End</td>
<td>The study end date has been extended to August 31, 2013 to allow for continued recruitment.</td>
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This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above referenced revision(s) or amendment(s) on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB’s periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREB.

The Chair of the NMREB is Dr. Riley Hinon. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00003941.

<table>
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<th>Ethics Office to Contact for Further Information</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Grace Kelly (<a href="mailto:grace.kelly@uwo.ca">grace.kelly@uwo.ca</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Janice Sutherland (<a href="mailto:janice.sutherland@uwo.ca">janice.sutherland@uwo.ca</a>)</td>
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This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.

Western University, Support Services Bldg., Rm. 5150
Principal Investigator: Dr. Angela Mandich  
File Number: 100865  
Review Level: Delegated  
Approved Local Adult Participants: 0  
Approved Local Minor Participants: 32  
Protocol Title: The way they see it: Adolescents' interactions with parental divorce or marital separation, an occupational perspective using a visual methodology 178745  
Department & Institution: Health Sciences/Occupational Therapy, Western University  
Sponsor:  
Ethics Approval Date: October 19, 2012  
Expiration Date: August 31, 2013

Documents Reviewed & Approved & Documents Received for Information:

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<td>UWO NMREB revised protocol and letters of information. All changes highlighted in yellow.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Revised Western University Protocol</td>
<td>Revised recruitment advertisement. Changes highlighted in red writing.</td>
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This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above referenced revision(s) or amendment(s) on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB’s periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREB.

The Chair of the NMREB is Dr. Riley Hinson. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

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<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Janice Sutherland</td>
<td><a href="mailto:janices@uwo.ca">janices@uwo.ca</a></td>
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This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.

Western University, Support Services Bldg, Rm. 5150, London, ON, Canada N6A 3K7  
t: 519.661.3036  t: 519.850.2466  www.uwo.ca/research/ethics
Use of Human Participants - Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Aseem Mehra
File Number: 100384
Review Level: Unregulated

Institution: Western University
Program: Recreation, Sport and Exercise Science

Date of Review: April 15, 2013

Document Name | Comments | Version Date
--- | --- | ---
Western University Protocol | 2013/03/01
Recruitment Item | RECRUITMENT EMAIL - REVISED | 2013/01/22
Assent | Consent/Assent Form | 2013/01/22
Other | Ethics Review Committee request | 2013/01/12
Letter of Information | April 12, 2013 - Revised LOI with assessment information included | 2013/01/12

The Ethics Approval for this study will remain valid until the expiry date noted above. A review of the protocols' periodic reports for compliance and reporting is required. If you require an updated approval prior to this time, you must request it using the University of Western Ontario's Updated Approval Request Form.

Members of the INREB who are affiliated with this research project, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussion related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the INREB.

The Chair of the INREB is Dr. Joseph Gilbert. The INREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 0003540.

Western University, Research Support Services Office, 340-344
London, ON, Canada, N6A 5C1, 519-661-3555, 519-661-7085, www.uwo.ca/research/services/ethics
Use of Human Participants - Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Angela Mandich
File Number: 1999-04
Review Level: Targeted
Approved Local Adult Participants: 10
Approved Local Minor Participants: 10
Protocol Title: Transformatio Adolescents: A Peer Teaching Life Skills to Young Adults through a Summer Camp Program
Department & Institution: Health Sciences/Occupational Therapy, Western University
Sponsor:
Ethics Approval Date: May 27, 2013
Expiration Date: August 31, 2015
Documents Reviewed & Approved: 1 Document

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<td>Here is a copy of the revised LOI. The two changes are highlighted in black: 1. Days of camp changed from Monday to Friday to Monday to Thursday 2. UWO phone number and extension added. The voicemail messages will be left on a password protected account in a locked office.</td>
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20130501

This is to notify you that the University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board (REB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, and the Health Sciences/OT Local Clinical Practice Guidelines, has reviewed and granted approval to the above referenced research proposal (RIP) as stated on the approval date noted above. The member(s) of the REB who reviewed the proposal are as follows:

The ethics approval for this study shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above, according to the above-stated and acceptable responses to the HSREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring. If you require an updated approval status prior to that date, you must request it using the University of Western Ontario Updated Approval Request Form.

Members of the HSREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussion related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the HSREB.

The Chair of the HSREB is Dr. Joseph Giesbrecht. The HSREB is approved by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB number #RE0001040.

This is an official document, please refer to the original in your file.
Use of Human Participants - Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Angela Mardich
File Number: 160935
Review Level: Delegated
Approved Local Adult Participants: 0
Approved Local Minor Participants: 0
Protocol Title: Adolescents’ interactions with parental divorce or marital separation: an occupational perspective using a manual methodology
Department: School of Physical Therapy
Institution: Western University
Sponsor: 
Ethics Approval Date: September 27, 2013 Expiry Date: August 31, 2014

Documents Reviewed & Approved: Document Name: Revised Study End Date: Comments: The study end date has been extended to August 31, 2014 to allow for project completion.

This is to notify you that the University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research involving Human Subjects (NRERB) with a registered and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above reference revision(s) or amendment(s) on the approved document above.

The approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above unless timely and acceptable responses to the NRERB’s periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

Members of the NRERB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NRERB.

The Chair of the NRERB is Dr. Rino Hiscot. The NRERB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services under the FHS registration number IRB 00003841.

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information:
Western University, Research, Faculty of Medicine, 3rd Floor, 350 Western Avenue, London, ON, Canada N6A 5K6, 519-661-3458, 519-661-4296, www.uwo.ca/research/services/ethics

This is a scanned document. Please retain the original as your files.
Principal Investigator: Dr. Angela Mandich
File Number:100185
Review Level:Delegated
Approved Local Adult Participants: 0
Approved Local Minor Participants: 32
Protocol Title: The way they see it: Adolescents’ interactions with parental divorce or marital separation, an occupational perspective using a visual methodology 179745
Department & Institution: Health Sciences/Occupational Therapy, Western University
Sponsor:
Ethics Approval Date: October 19, 2012 Expiry Date: August 31, 2013

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<td>This revision seeks to allow for the option of high school volunteer hours to be offered in lieu of an honorarium for participation in the study.</td>
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<td>NMREB form with revisions on pages 14, 22, 24.</td>
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This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above referenced revision(s) or amendment(s) on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB’s periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREB.

The Chair of the NMREB is Dr. Riley Hinson. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000641.

This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.
Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer

Young People and Parental Divorce
Are you between the ages of 13 and 23 and have parents that are divorced or separated?

I am interested in your experiences following your parents’ divorce or separation

What?
2 meetings:
• An interview where you will share your experiences about parental divorce (It will take 1 to 2 hours)
• A second interview to review your story, and reflect through the creation of a comic book (no artistic skills needed!) (It will take about 2 hours)

Who?
People age 13-23
• English speaking
• Your parents divorced or separated between age 10-20
• You want to influence how people’s lives change following divorce/separation

Why?
Your opinion may help influence the services, programs, and policies put in place to help transitioning families, teens, and young adults

Where?
Southwestern Ontario

For information, please contact:
Laura

Thank you!
Appendix C: Recruitment Newspaper Advertisement

Life after Divorce A study out of Western University exploring life of participants age 13-23 whose parents separated/divorced after age 10. Includes 2 interviews and art-based participation. Contact Laura [redacted] or [redacted]
Appendix D: Letter of Information

Study Title: The way they see it: Adolescents’ interactions with parental divorce or marital separation, an occupational perspective using a visual methodology.

Study Researcher: Laura Hartman, PhD Candidate
Health and Rehabilitation Sciences
University of Western Ontario
Phone: [Redacted]
E-mail: [Redacted]

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Angela Mandich
School of Occupational Therapy
University of Western Ontario
Phone: [Redacted]

You are invited to take part in a research study that is exploring the experiences of adolescents and young adults age 13-23 in urban centres Southern Ontario whose parents divorced or separated after age 10. I want you to tell me about your daily life and if/how it has changed following your parents’ divorce or marital separation (PDMS). With this information, I will aim to explore changes in your daily life and activities following PDMS as well as raise awareness so that people who are in your position will be better able to cope with life following a PDMS. I am a doctoral student in the Occupational Science field of the Health and Rehabilitation Sciences program at the University of Western Ontario.

Divorce is a common phenomenon in Canada, and the decision of a couple to part often affects the family members in a number of ways. Current research on the topic of teenagers’ and young adults’ adjustment following PMDS is quite negative and portrays an unfavourable outcome for these people. This research will seek your perspective on life following PDMS, including the ways that life has changed, as well as ways that you wish it would have. We want to understand how your life has been affected, and what you would like to see changed.

To participate in the study, you must: i) live in an urban centre in Southern Ontario; ii) be between the ages of 10 and 23; iii) speak English proficiently; iv) have birth-parents who divorced or separated when you were between ages 10-20, and; v) have an interest in sharing your experiences following your parents’ divorce or separation. You are not required to be artistically skilled.

If you are under 19 years of age, your participation requires your consent or the consent of a legal guardian as well as your assent (agreement to participate).

What will you have to do if you choose to take part?

You will be asked to take part in 2 to 3 interviews with a member of our team. We will ask you to tell us the story of what your life was like around the time of your parents’ divorce or separation, as well as following that time, along with a few other questions. We are not seeking an accurate or
“correct” description of the time, just the way that it felt to you, what you remember most, and what daily life was like for you. Following this we will construct a narrative (story that represents what you said in chronological order and with themes highlighted) of our interview to be reviewed at our second session. In the second session, you will construct a comic book or comic book style panel with a vignette that you feel tells professionals, policy makers, and/or other people in similar situations a message about life following PDMS. This session will last for as long as you would like to talk, with an estimated length of 30-90 minutes. A clarification session may be held in person, over the phone, or electronically via e-mail in order to debrief and share any insights you have following time for reflection. This session will last as long as you would like to talk, with an estimated length of 15-60 minutes. The final session, includes two parts: 1) you will be asked to read and comment on the constructed narrative, and 2) you will construct the artistic representation will be held in person and will last for as long as you like, with an estimated length of 30-90 minutes.

Both sessions will be audio recorded for analysis by the researcher.

Are there any risks or discomforts?

There are no known risks associated with taking part in this research. Some people experience discomfort when they discuss and remember difficult times in their lives. You are free to choose what will and will not be discussed. You are urged to let the researcher know if you are experiencing difficulty during or following your participation, so that she may direct you to the appropriate services. You are free to withdraw your participation at any time.

What are the benefits of taking part?

Your first-hand experience of teenage and young adult life following PDMS is important information that only you have. Information that you share in this study will be presented to others through publications, at conferences, and to local agencies that interact with your population. As a result, your views can help influence the services, programs, and policies that are put in place for teenagers who experience PDMS. Your identity will never be released in any publication or presentation. If you would like, a summary of the study’s results and a copy of your comic book can be forwarded to you at the completion of the study.

What happens to the information that you tell us?

The individual interview will all be audio recorded. What you say will then be typed out by me, the researcher, using codes instead of names to indicate speakers. The only people who will have access to the original recordings will be me (the researcher) and my three thesis supervisors. I will be taking notes about what goes on in the group, as well as collecting any notes you take during the process, and will analyze those along with the audio recordings and the comic books. All identifying information will be removed during analysis, and the identities of you and all other participants will only be known to the researcher and her thesis supervisors.

All audio recordings and identifying information will be locked up at the University of Western Ontario, and will be destroyed after 10 years. All digital files will be password protected. You are free to request that parts of the recording be erased either during or after the sessions. Quotes and the comic books created in the session that you participate in will become a part of the primary
researcher’s completion of a philosophical doctorate (PhD) and in future publications and public presentations and will be identified using code names. Personal details will be changed to protect your anonymity.

**Other information about this study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your future. Information collected prior to withdrawal will be kept, unless you ask to have it removed from the study. **You do not have to be in this study if you do not wish to be.** You do not have to talk about anything in the interviews that you do not want to.

In appreciation of your participation, you are being offered the choice of a small gift or the verification of volunteer participation for high school requirement upon completion of the study.

You will be given a copy of this letter of information and consent form once it has been signed. If you have any questions or want any additional information, you may contact me: Laura Hartman at [lhartma@uwo.ca](mailto:lhartma@uwo.ca), or [519-639-9806](tel:519-639-9806)

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact: the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Western Ontario, 519-661-3036

*This letter is for you to keep.*
Appendix E: Consent Form

Participant or Guardian’s Consent:
I have reviewed the contents of the letter of information, I have had the nature of the study explained to me and I hereby give consent for my child to participate. All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Participant/Guardian:

________________________    ______________________________  ____________________
Signature                  Printed name                         Date

________________________    _________________________    ____________________
Signature of person obtaining consent  Printed name  Date
## Appendix F: Crisis Resources

### Helpline and Crisis Resources

| Student Development Centre (SDC) | 519.661.3031 WSS Rm 4100 | • Individual counselling;  
| | | • Crisis counselling;  
| | | • Support groups for various issues including stress, anxiety and eating disorders.  
| Student Health Services (SHS) | 519.661.3771  
| | 519.661.3030 (urgent concerns)  
| | UCC Rm 11(lower level) | • Multidisciplinary counselling services;  
| | | • Psychiatry and physician counselling for students who are currently on medication  
| | | • Medication consultations  
| Peer Support Centre | Room 38, UCC Building  
| | Monday-Friday  
| | 10 am-6 pm | • A safe space for undergraduate students to seek support and resources, build community, meet other students, and get talking about issues  
| Peer Phoneline | 519-661-DIAL (3425)  
| | Monday-Friday,  
| | 10 am- midnight | • Students can access information and referrals to support services and resources over the phone.  
| 211 | Call 211 | • 211 is a three-digit phone number and website that provides information and referral to community and social services in Ontario.  
| | | • Phone service is open 24 hours a day, every day of the year, and is available in 150 languages.  
| Canadian Mental Health Association CHMA Crisis Services | Crisis Response: 519-433-2023  
| | General Inquiries: 519-434-9191 | • If you are experiencing a mental health crisis please call the crisis line  
| | | • National-wide organization that promotes the mental health of all  
| | | • Supports recovery of people experiencing mental illness.  
| London Distress Centre | 519-667-6711 | • Trained volunteers provide telephone support and problem solving skills 24/7.  
| | | • Crisis line links you with professional resources  

Appendix G: Narrative Interview Guide

Interview #1

(Not all questions need be asked, the participant will guide the discussion)

• Introduce myself
• I want to explain a little bit about what this project is and why I am interested in your story
  o There isn’t a lot of research on adolescents and young adults and divorce that speaks from their own perspective
  o This means that the programs and policies aimed at you and others like you are based on research that focuses issues that someone else has decided are important
  o With this research, I want to know what you think is important for people to know and take care of following their parents’ divorce

This first interview is a narrative interview, which means I will be asking you to tell your story. The questions are broad, but that is because I want you to decide what was important in your experiences.

Please take as much time as you need to address the questions, and remember that you do not have to answer anything that you do not wish to.

• Tell me the story of your parent’s divorce/separation and your life following it.
• Tell me about how your daily life and engagement in preferred activities changed after your parents’ separation.
• Is there anything else that you would like to share now?

(Additional questions and clarifications are meant to be drawn from topics raised throughout the narrative, as per the methodology).

Interview #2

Participant is thanked for returning and asked if they have any questions or reflections from the previous interview. At this time the participant is asked to provide their preferred pseudonym if they have not yet done so.

Participant is asked to read story co-constructed by researcher and share any changes, clarifications or reflections that he or she has. It is made clear that they may contact the researcher

Participant is informed that he or she may keep a copy of the interview and narrative if they like. At this time the interview moves onto the construction of the visual piece.
Appendix H: Visual Interview Guide

Interview begins immediately following the second narrative interview, and so introduction is brief.

(Not all questions need be asked, the participant will guide the discussion)

• Now let’s talk about a part of that story that was meaningful to you. Is there any part of the story that you would like to share with other people who can make a difference in what is available to people who are experiencing similar situations? Think of what you would like to say and who you would like to say it to.

• At this point I am going to ask you to use the materials in front of you to make a comic book style page to illustrate your message. (discussion will continue throughout the creative process).

Following construction:

• Is there anything else that you would like to share now?

• Who do you want your opinions to be shared with? Who will make change with them?

• Did YOU learn anything from this experience?
Appendix I: Visual Interpretation Guide

The Piece:

1. Give a brief description of the story.

2. What is the intended meaning of the piece? (Johnny & Mitchell, 2006)
   The meaning that the producers intended for the audience to take with them (Johnny & Mitchell, 2006).

3. How does the audience (audiencing, audience engagement) come into play in this Piece? (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Mitchell, de Lange, Stuart, Moletsane, & Buthelezi, 2007; Rose, 2007)
   “Who were the original intended audience for this image? How is it being circulated? How is it redisplayed?” (Mitchell et al., 2007, p. 67).
   Cole and Knowles (2008) discuss the ‘centrality of audience engagement’: “The use of the arts in research is not for art’s sake. It is explicitly tied to moral purposes of social responsibility and epistemological equity” (p. 62).
   Rose (2007) explains that ‘audiencing’ goes beyond choosing an intended audience and accounting for how the visual may be interpreted by unintended audiences, and is also a process by which the audience negotiates or rejects the image, stating that “visual imagery is never innocent” (p. 22). Will the piece resonate with the audiences who are exposed to it?

4. What is the ideological meaning of the piece? (Johnny & Mitchell, 2006)
   The values that are expressed in the visual text. “The ideological meaning may be decoded by examining the underlying assumptions and implications that [a visual] possesses” (Johnny & Mitchell, 2006, p. 760). This process will be aided by the fact that we know the context in which the piece was created.

5. Is there an oppositional reading to the piece? (Johnny & Mitchell, 2006)
   “…the process of uncovering alternative interpretations of a text, one that differs from the intended or preferred meaning… individuals will frequently read the same image differently depending upon their background, life experiences and subject positions… permitted us to gauge how different audiences might interpret the [visual] and how the images might send inconsistent messages that unwittingly serve to reproduce… stigma” (Johnny & Mitchell, 2006, p. 760).
   What is this piece portraying to the unintended audiences? Is it perpetuating stigma or negative images of adolescent life post-PDMS? What implications might this have for the population?

6. Briefly address the piece’s clarity (Johnny & Mitchell, 2006).
   “…the ease of interpretation that is associated with the visual image” (Johnny & Mitchell, 2006, p. 760). Clarity should be evaluated in regard to the effectiveness of the use of comic book style or advertisement style of messages as a method.

7. Briefly address the piece’s unity (Johnny & Mitchell, 2006).
   “Unity questions the compositional value of a visual” (Johnny & Mitchell, 2006, p. 760). Do the images match the associated text? Does the visual story match the written story? Does the story match the intended meaning?

8. How does this piece address the research question?
   Does the piece address the research question? Parts of the research question? How effectively?
9. Does this piece lend to research as social change? (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2007)
   
   Does it give voice and agency to young people or inform policy or practice (Mitchell et al., 2007)?
   
   Cole and Knowles (2008) argue that, “[t]ied to moral purpose, [arts-informed research] is also an explicit attempt to make a difference through research, not only in the lives of ordinary citizens but also in the thinking and decisions of policymakers, politicians, legislators, and other key decision makers... part of a broader commitment to shift the dominant paradigmatic view that keeps the academy and community separated: to acknowledge the multiple dimensions that constitute and form the human condition... to connect the work of the academy with the life and lives of communities through research that is accessible, evocative, embodied, empathic, and provocative” (p. 60).
   
   This plays into the use of participatory data collection methods and the involvement of the community in the creation and interpretation of data. Will these be useful tools in changing practice, and eventually policy?

10. How do the messages in the piece relate to the current academic discourse regarding divorce?

11. What are your general impressions of the piece?

Panels: (only applicable if the piece is divided into sections)

12. Give a brief description of the story in this portion of the piece.

13. What is the intended meaning of the panel? (Johnny & Mitchell, 2006)
   
   Is it unique from that of the piece or do they work together?

14. Does the audiencing or style of relating to the audience change between panels in the piece? Why is this done? How does this affect the story or message? (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2007; Rose, 2007)

15. Is this panel interpreted by its creator (through caption or as part of the story line), or is the reader free to interpret it?

16. What makes the panel appealing?

17. Is there a unique ideological meaning for this panel? (Johnny & Mitchell, 2006)

18. Is there a unique oppositional reading for this panel? (Johnny & Mitchell, 2006)
   
   This will relate to (and likely reference) question 14.

19. Briefly address the panel’s clarity, individually and in regard to the piece as a whole (Johnny & Mitchell, 2006).

20. Briefly address the panel’s unity with the rest of the piece (Johnny & Mitchell, 2006).
   
   Address its unity with the rest of the book.

21. How does this panel address the research question? (Mitchell et al., 2007)

22. Researcher’s reflections on the panel and its meaning.
   
   Much like pulling a quotation from a written archive, explain why this panel is useful in emphasizing your point.
References:
Appendix J: Kizzy’s Story

Kizzy and Laura met on a rainy spring day to conduct their narrative interview in an office on campus. This was the first time that the two had met and they made some short introductions before the project was explained to Kizzy. Once Kizzy gave consent to participate, the interview began. Kizzy’s story was difficult for her to share at times, but she explained that, while they’re not great experiences, she would rather help and say everything because it’s nice to think that they can be useful for somebody and that it helps people. Throughout the interview, Kizzy described her parents’ separation and her life following as a weird situation, and reflected that her life has not been easy. Her narrative was marked by reflection on her situation and even incredulous laughter at some of the things she has experienced. The interview ended somewhat abruptly when Kizzy began to feel dizzy and unwell. Accordingly, Kizzy made many clarifications and additions to the story upon her second meeting with Laura.

Life Before Parental Separation

Kizzy began by describing her parents’ divorce as really different. Before her parents split up she didn’t know there was anything wrong and believed that they had the perfect family. She thinks a lot of children believe that everything is perfect before their parents separate. For Kizzy, her parents’ separation occurred out of the blue. Otherwise, Kizzy described her childhood as pretty boring. She never remembers doing a lot as a child, just being bored all the time. They never went on holidays, they never did anything, and they did not have TV or movies. She thinks she just talked all the time! She describes herself as a poor student suffering from really bad learning disabilities.

Kizzy remembers being sick quite often as a child. She estimates having pneumonia like 5 times before. She missed a month of school at one point due to illness. She attributes some of her frequent illness to her poor diet. Growing up, Kizzy’s family were vegetarians, and not allowed to eat preservatives or hotdogs – hotdogs was always a big one (although, oddly enough she remembers eating hotdogs during her childhood). The dietary restrictions went beyond avoiding meat and preservatives; all they ate was potatoes and noodles, including no vegetables, no healthy stuff. She remembers her meals consisting mostly of noodles with ketchup, potatoes with ketchup, and there must have been something else with ketchup!


**Relationship with Parents**

Kizzy does not recall *really seeing much of her parents*. She did not share many memories of her mother prior to the divorce, apart from the fact that she *volunteered* with the *Rainbow Program* prior to her separation from Kizzy’s father. In this role her mother *did counselling for children who had gone through divorce and separation*.

When discussing her father, Kizzy remembers *always getting along really well with him before the divorce*. They *always clicked really well*. Kizzy went on to explain that she *didn't see much of her dad*, because he *worked a lot*. He *was a teacher*, and so she doesn't *know how he worked that much*, but her mom would later remind her that she *wouldn’t see him for a week* at a time *before the divorce*. Kizzy wonders if his long absences contributed to her sense of daily life not changing *as much* following her parents’ separation *as maybe it did for other children*.

*Shortly before Kizzy’s parents did actually split up*, her dad *joined a church*. The church *has now been shut down* by authorities for reasons relating to *rape*, *child sexual assault*, and being deemed a *cult* by *Children’s Aid*, which Kizzy found *pretty intense* to learn about. Kizzy knows *the definition of a cult, and would say it’s closer to being a cult than maybe another thing*, but that it was not *as much of a cult as they necessarily thought it was*, and that *it wasn’t like Jonestown or anything*. Nonetheless, church and her Catholic identity were significant for her as a child. She remembers going to church *every weekend on Saturday nights*. She remembers that *before her parents actually split up* the family *used to make a really big deal of going to church*. Other than church, *all they ever did was hang out as a family*.

**The Separation**

Kizzy was 11 years old when her parents separated and has two siblings, a sister who was 7 years old and a brother who was 4 years old. Initially, when recalling her parents’ divorce, Kizzy describes it as being *so out of the blue*. She *never heard her parents fight*, but then again, she *never really saw much of her parents*. She does however remember catching hints of dissatisfaction in her parents’ relationship. *There wasn’t a lot of things, but there was enough that she knew something was wrong*. She *still thought things were good, but there was enough going on before they did divorce that she could*
tell *something was going to happen*. She would *hear stuff when she was going to sleep*. For her it was *quite the experience*.

Despite the hints of her parents’ unhappiness, Kizzy recalls everything being perfect, or at least being fine, when *all of a sudden one day her mother – it wasn’t both of her parents, it was just her mom – sat down and said, “Your father doesn't love me and he’s leaving.”* For Kizzy, this was all very sudden, going from having the perfect Catholic family to her mom all of a sudden kicking her dad out.

Kizzy shared two different perspectives about how life did and did not change following her parents’ separation. The first and most prevalent one was that *it really didn’t feel like there was a huge change* in her daily life. She does not recall seeing her father much prior to the separation, so she continued to live her daily life as she had before for the most part. She considers that *it could be partly because it’s been so many years, that it might have felt like no change at the time*, but she also felt like everyone was so focused on the abuse that they didn't focus on the changes or problems.

The *‘abuse’* that Kizzy refers to represents the major change that Kizzy did experience following her parents’ separation. In that regard, things quickly changed. Her mother claimed that her father was incredibly abusive, that he had controlled what the family ate, how much money they had, everything in the extreme. Kizzy reflects back now on being told her father was abusive, sharing that she is *not sure how true all that is*, but explains that *at the time she was being told that she was being horribly abused by her father* from a trusted source, her own mother, and so she believed it. She and her siblings were promised that *everything in their lives was going to get better* now that their abusive father was out of the picture. Kizzy became so focused on being abused and having that abuse end that she does not really remember much difference in other areas of her life.

**The Women’s Shelter**

Kizzy describes a significant event following her parents’ separation that helped to shape her experience of the separation. It will now be presented in her words. “So, *about a month after my parents divorced, my dad came back, took all of his stuff back into the house, and I guess apparently he had a key, I didn’t think he still had a key but he did. He brought everything back into the house, set up everything when we were gone. My mom came back, then I came back from soccer practice, and we had to leave. We*
ended up going to the women’s shelter for 10 days. That’s not a fun place to be [laughs, then sighs]. Was there for 10 days, it sucks. The food is really bad [laughs] that’s all I remember! I remember I don’t like bran flakes [Kizzy and Laura both laugh]. I mean it was awful. I remember we had canned peaches and it was like heaven! [Laughs harder than before]. That’s how bad the food was! And, because people give, it’s all donated food, right? People always give stuff they don’t want! I always try to donate good stuff now after that experience. Umm, yeah, but we spent 10 days in the women’s shelter where we were almost, in a sense, it kind of feels like, now looking back on it it feels kind of like I was being told my father was abusive, and I’m not saying all his actions were perfect, but I was continuously being told “your dad’s abusive! Your dad’s abusive!” to the point where I started to believe it. I stared to interpret everything he did as abusive. And, now, there were some things he did, like obviously he shouldn’t have come back and you know, he made his kids live in a shelter for a week and a half, which was not, I realize now where he was coming from and that maybe his actions were [pause] he was trying, but it wasn’t going to work.”

This experience was quite difficult for Kizzy. She refers back to it often throughout her story, and still seems agitated thinking or talking about that period in her life.

**Life After Her Parents’ Separation**

For Kizzy, things actually stayed pretty similar. She obviously saw her dad less, but she really didn’t see tons of him before her parents’ separation. The family had less money, so that obviously makes life more difficult. Otherwise, there honestly isn’t a lot that Kizzy can say about how things changed, other than necessarily like going to the women’s shelter for a bit or going to abuse counselling. Kizzy reflects on some of the smaller changes in her family life, such as remembering to this day that her mother was really happy when she changed the answering machine. She also excitedly recalls that her family stopped going to church after her parents split up, but she didn’t really enjoy that anyway! She thinks that no longer attending church was definitely for the better as she identifies herself as very anti-religion, especially considering her dad’s over involvement in the church he joined.
One change that was more commonly and fondly brought up by Kizzy was that her family *started eating meat* and *eating a lot more things*. Kizzy remembers her mother *claiming that* they were vegetarian *because* her father forced them to eat vegetarian with no preservatives or hotdogs. Hotdogs was always a big one. But she also remembers that all of a sudden at her dad’s house they were able to eat hotdogs, and so it didn’t *make sense to her that he put in all these rules* to control the family’s previous eating habits. Kizzy considered this together with her later knowledge *that her mother was anorexic for thirty years*, and drew new conclusions about the origin of these rules.

Kizzy also noted that she *got sick a lot less after her parents split up*. Again, she recalls her mother *claiming that it was because* the family started eating meat again, but Kizzy thinks that having more *protein* was only part of the reason. She viewed the other contributor to her frequent sickness was the lack of other general nutritional staples in her previous diet in which all they *ate was like potatoes and noodles with ketchup. There was no vegetables, no healthy stuff.*

**Relationship with Her Father**

Kizzy *didn’t talk to her dad for a very long time, probably a year or two* following the separation. When Kizzy did finally speak to her father, she no longer *clicked with him as she used to*. The two have *had a really rocky relationship* since the separation when Kizzy was 11 until about twenty-one, even twenty-two. He’s very *religious still and he lived in a trailer out in the middle of nowhere, so it made things very difficult.*

Kizzy found that each sibling had a different relationship with their father. While her *brother has always gotten along really well with her dad, he didn’t have to hear all of the stuff from her mom when she was a kid*. Contrastingly, her *sister’s relationship with their father was even worse than Kizzy’s.* Kizzy finds that her relationship with her father was influenced by her experience of *being told that everything was his fault* by her mother *so that Kizzy would get mad at him*. She recalls, “*when we did have a relationship we screamed at each other, or I screamed at him, now that I realize really. I was very angry.*” Kizzy admits that his parenting and actions were *maybe not the best at times, but she wouldn’t say they were abusive; rather they were kind of weird or different.*
Now, one thing Kizzy would say her father did horribly was that he got a girlfriend within a few weeks of her parents breaking up. They’re married now and they’ve been together since then. She’s very religious; she’s also very difficult. Kizzy describes her as insecure, not good with people, just really weird! She’s not a bad person, and Kizzy actually does really care about her now, but she’s very difficult. She never had children of her own so she’s so horrible with children. Basically, from when they started dating, the only way Kizzy was allowed to see her dad is if she saw him with his girlfriend/wife, which is probably the worst thing you can possibly do to make a relationship with your children work. So Kizzy and her siblings just stopped seeing him and went a long time without actually seeing their father.

Reflecting back now, Kizzy thinks it would have been nice if she could have maintained a relationship with her father for those 10 years that they basically didn’t have one. Kizzy feels that having both parents’ support would have made things a lot easier. Kizzy realizes that she probably had his support, but at the time she didn’t think she did, and would have benefited from it.

**Relationship with Her Mother**

Following her parents’ separation, Kizzy’s mother became a major player in her story. Kizzy and her two siblings continued to live with their mother in their childhood home. Her mother remained her primary caregiver, and influenced how the family interacted and coped following the separation, particularly by influencing the information that the children received regarding their father and the separation. One of the most salient categories that her mother influenced was Kizzy’s understanding of being abused by her father.

**Abusive Father**

Following her mother’s announcement of her separation from Kizzy’s father, she revealed that he was incredibly abusive and controlling. It was at this time that Kizzy began to understand her relationship with her father in the context of being horribly abused by him. She recalls having a mindset in which if anything was wrong or if anyone in the family cried it was because their dad was awful, because he was evil. She misattributed everything to her evil dad. She was being told she was abused and that things were awful, and when that happens, you start to look for it almost in a sense, or
you almost feel like you become the victim in everything, just because you are being told you are. She explains that if somebody’s telling you you’re abused, well, you’re going to believe it, especially if that person is you trusted mother.

Kizzy would not say that her dad was perfect, or that her mother didn’t have the right to say that maybe there were some things that he did that were inappropriate. She realized, however, that she was definitely brain washed into believing that he was abusive. Every time the children would hang out with their father they would feel as though they had to tell stories or had to say something was wrong when they would return home to their mother. They would find that any piece of information they shared about their time with their father was met by their mother telling them, “He’s using this technique to be abusive towards you.” Nevertheless, Kizzy recalled, “We were being told we were abused so we interpret everything as if it were abusive. My dad could make the wrong food and it was abusive.” With time and reflection, Kizzy has gained a different understanding of the situation, but it was still difficult to go through her adolescence thinking that she was the victim of abuse.

Kizzy recalls that her mother called Children’s Aid on her dad twice, claiming that he was hitting the children. She remembers being pinched once, but never seriously hit or pinched or anything like that. She thinks that he was frustrated, as she and her siblings were not easy, but he was certainly not abusive. When Children’s Aid arrived, Kizzy remembered that the children were laughing during the interview, and even then she realized that they were not abused children.

Kizzy now thinks that it was ridiculous that she and her siblings were required to focus on the alleged abuse that they experienced by their father. She says that it was set up for disaster for them down the road. She was being made to believe that everything negative in her life stemmed from this one problem, so it made her so focused on that. Kizzy feels that she and her siblings were supposed to be upset all the time, were supposed to cry all the time, were supposed to find fault with everything he did. It was almost a constant state of anxiety and stress that the family just lived in, as though they were supposed to have horrible reactions to everything! It was the only way any of them got any attention or validation. It was only bad if you had the worst situation. In hindsight, Kizzy believes that it’s more her mother that caused a lot of the issues that she
later faced rather than the divorce itself. Kizzy attributes a lot of the crappy decisions that she has made to her mother and her mother’s behaviour than to the divorce itself.

Kizzy’s ability to cope and her mental health issues have been affected greatly by her perceived need to catastrophize her daily situations. She feels that she probably should have gone and gotten help when she was a kid because she has had severe anxiety issues since then. But when asking for help, her mother would respond with, “Oh, we’re going to take you to get abuse counselling.” So Kizzy went through all this abuse counselling, when really she should have been having anxiety counselling or depression counselling, or not very happy teenager counselling. She found she was getting women’s shelter counselling when really she should have been getting more intense counselling for her specific issues. She remembers that she used to come home every day and say her life is awful and it was because her dad was horrible, not because there was anything else wrong. Her mother’s response was for Kizzy to just suck it up.

Her father’s abuse, however, did not only affect the children. Even after Kizzy’s father moved out of the family home, and her mom got everything, her mother always claimed she didn’t get enough. Her mother used to come home and be like, “Your dad hurt me again today,” “Your dad did something mean to us today.” Kizzy found out he was cutting off the credit cards – that he was still paying for – and is pretty sure that’s the source of her mother’s abuse claims. Regardless of the reason, Kizzy was constantly being told her father was this abusive and hurtful person.

Kizzy shared, “I have since found out, that my mother was having an affair, that she was anorexic, and so it didn’t make sense that somebody else [Dad] who was never home was able to control everything she ate. I’ve realized since then, like, a lot of these abuse stories are probably not true.”

Mother as Counsellor

Having volunteered with children experiencing parental separation, Kizzy’s mother thought she had all the answers when it came to divorce. She would tell her children, “this is what you’re feeling,” which wasn’t that helpful for Kizzy, who was trying to work through her emotions and issues for herself. Kizzy’s mother seemed to direct the allowable emotions in the household. They couldn’t get angry because anger was not okay in the household and still to this day it’s not okay. If anything was wrong or
if they cried it was because their dad was awful. Kizzy shared, “It was kind of like she thought she had all of the answers, and that we’re going to get angry, we’re going to be mad, and we’re supposed to do this and we’re supposed to do that. And she’d be like, ‘oh, this is what you’re supposed to be feeling’ if you got angry, so it was very, it was weird. I have no other words than it was weird.”

Her mother did, however, try to help the family cope by saying “oh, we’re the best perfect little family the four of us. I think we’ve spent many lives together and we love each other.” Recalling this prompted laughter and an uncomfortable/disgusted noise from Kizzy. She doesn’t think any of the children agreed with that, but felt that they almost had to now become part of this tight knit close family. Kizzy puts in the context of her family life before the separation, recalling that they didn’t get to do a lot before as a family, and she understands that her mother was really trying to help the family cope, but Kizzy was at that age when she wanted to separate from her family. She feels that she never got to do that, and has done it more now in the last couple of years than when she was 11 or 12. And so, for many years Kizzy had to play along with the never-angry perfect little family, unable to demonstrate or understand her own underlying emotions or desires.

**Kizzy as Caretaker**

Kizzy’s mother did go back to work after her divorce. She had stayed home when Kizzy and her siblings were children, until Kizzy was about 11. Kizzy thinks she stopped working because she wanted to be a mom, but doesn’t think that was necessarily the best thing, as Kizzy personally doesn’t understand when people don’t work. Her mother didn’t work nights or weekends, she refused. She only worked dayshifts, but still, she was gone more. Kizzy thought it was kind of good though, because it gave her and siblings more skills, such as cooking. As the oldest sibling, she also had to take care of her younger siblings. There was a while that she was waking them up in the morning, opening the door to let everybody in, and all that sort of stuff.

Kizzy also took on a caretaking role for her mother at this time. One clear example involved her mother having to go for major surgery about a year after the divorce and she had to gain weight for the surgery. This situation was difficult because she was anorexic. She used to eat like 7 scoops of ice cream a day, it was the only way
she could gain weight. She was really sick, but she ended up having major surgery, which is fine and everything worked out. Apart from physically caring for her mother in that episode, Kizzy recalls having to care for her mother’s emotional needs around this time. She would hear all the stuff from her mom about the separation and abusive relationship with Kizzy’s father. When she was a kid, about 12 years old, her mom used to come and sit down on the corner of her bed and cry for hours. While Kizzy’s mother now claims this never happened and that Kizzy must have been having nightmares, Kizzy is certain it happened.

Coping and Support

Kizzy’s daily life did not change drastically following her parents’ separation, so she just kind of handled it. Upon reflection, she realized that she didn’t have the best coping mechanisms, which definitely didn’t help. Kizzy really discusses three main areas related to coping and support. The first was providing support to her siblings, then her personal coping mechanisms, and finally the support that she wished she had received.

Providing Support

While Kizzy was at an age when she wanted to separate from her family, she didn’t get to do that. As previously mentioned, she became not only a caretaker for her younger siblings, but also a support. She always felt that they relied on her because she was the oldest. She recalls, “I guess maybe in a sense we did support each other a bit, but I think being the oldest I felt like it was my job to handle the burden.” While she may have received some support from them, taking care of them was another source of stress that fell upon her. Kizzy felt that she had to take care of the other two, because her brother was four and her sister was about 7. She felt the need to take care of people and to worry about things a little more for sure. It was pretty intense for Kizzy, and she definitely became more of an adult, feeling as though she had to grow up really quickly. She thinks stress does that to kids, and just being the oldest you just feel like there’s more pressure on you, even if others don’t explicitly put extra pressure on you. Caring for her siblings as well as for her mother did put a great deal of pressure on Kizzy. This pressure related to later anxiety and psychiatric issues for Kizzy, which will be explored later in the story.
**Personal Coping**

Kizzy coped a lot by not thinking about what was wrong, not admitting it was there, and pretending things were okay. She admits that she still does this today. One of her major escapes was to focus on her schooling. “I felt like I got so into school, like school became the only thing I did. Like we didn’t even have TV growing up, so school was so much a part of my life, that’s all I focused on.” Before the separation, she had really bad learning disabilities, and so it was surprising when all of a sudden she hit grade 6 and it was like something snapped. Before that she struggled every day to read, and all of a sudden she hit grade 6 and it magically happened. She could do it and it was easy. She thinks that she became so involved and dedicated to school because it was something else to focus on that wasn’t her parents’ divorce.

She explains that she became a bit of a perfectionist. She got so into school and it became a part of her life that received all of her focus. Her marks skyrocketed. She described herself as, “One of those weird people, where like, if I’m stressed, I almost like, do better because I focus on it so much that ignore everything else, which is probably one of my coping mechanisms, but I don’t think necessarily a great coping mechanism.” She describes her high marks, including a 93 average in grade 8. She recalls that despite some bad luck in a few of those years, with the changes in her family life and serious bullying at school, she was ironically getting high 80’s and 90’s in school. She doesn’t know how she did that!

While Kizzy found refuge from her problems in her schoolwork, she still had many issues to deal with. A major issue for her was bullying. This added to her stress and she found it hard not to have friends to talk to. She didn’t really have any friends and didn’t really see people, all she did was homework. She describes the situation as follows: “I grew up with a lot of really stupid people [laughs] which I think a lot of people in university can probably say. I grew up in a small town with a bunch of different social groups that I didn’t fit into because I wasn’t the same race as them – weird, I know, white people discriminating against white people – it was weird, but it was definitely like, I didn’t fit. Now, I was actually one of the few people who actually was still religious when I was younger, so I was definitely not liked for that reason. And I don’t know, I think there was a lot of stress, so it definitely made me, maybe, less social,
but at the same time it was kind of like, I seemed to get along with everybody to their face, was just behind my back everybody would like say all this stuff. It was [pause] I wish I knew." Kizzy’s experiences with bullying left her wanting for support outside of her family and added to the already mounting stress in her life.

Kizzy’s stress was only made worse when viewed through the family’s signature catastrophizing lens. She would pretend nothing was wrong, but if it was wrong it had to be a grandiose problem. A small problem would not garner any support from the family, for example if you said “I’m not having a good day today,” it would prompt a response of “Oh, well my day was worse” from her mother. She believes it led to these horrible coping mechanisms in which things had to be really wrong for it to actually be wrong. It eventually went even further to a point where things were never really right, and they began to view themselves as this horrible struggling family. Kizzy feels that it’s not good for children to have this mindset, it makes you so insecure. In their house it was almost like it was a game, when people try to one-up each other. Kizzy’s family does that all the time. She realized it was from her mother, because her mother would always compare her experiences, and has always ‘had it worse.’ Upon reflecting on her family’s game, Kizzy figures that it’s not surprising that she developed some of the coping and psychiatric problems that she did.

**Seeking Support**

When addressing her experiences of support regarding the challenges that she has faced, Kizzy relates, “my mother claims she was our biggest support, yeah [laughs] yeah, it’s weird, she claims she was like this amazing support system for us.” But with little family close by, there were not a lot of options to seek support. She went for some counselling, but that mostly focused on the abuse that she was (or was not) experiencing. She always looked up to teachers in a weird way, but would not receive a great deal of direct support from them.

When asked if she even knew that she needed support or what to ask for, Kizzy responded that she doesn’t think you do know what to ask for when you’re eleven, that kids definitely just don’t know. When considering what kinds of support she wished she had looking back, she shared the following: “I wish I had friends. I wish I had [pause] I wish I had known I needed support. I wish I’d known that I was eleven, I was not an adult
and it was okay to get upset, and it was okay to just be upset my parents were divorcing. I didn’t have to be upset because I was being abused, I could just be upset because my parents were splitting up. We didn’t even go to church at that time anymore, because I guess for a lot of people religion can be a bit of a support. I wish [pause] I wish I could have like, I don’t know, had somebody telling me my father wasn’t nuts. Takes time, I guess, you need to be an adult to figure those things out. I don’t know, I don’t think there even is a lot of support for children. It’s so common nowadays that it’s like [thought trails off]. Now I hope for most children that they didn’t have my experience. I guess I did go for some counselling, and that probably did help a bit, even just in general, but then again if you go for abuse counselling you think you need to talk about abuse, so... I think it would have been nice if I could have maintained a relationship with my father, because when we did have a relationship we screamed at each other, or I screamed at him, now that I realize really. I was very angry, and I was being told that it was all his fault, so I’d get mad at him. I just, I guess I wish a little bit more could have, I wish we could have maintained a relationship for those 10 years that we basically didn’t have one, I think that would have been, made things a lot easier, and if I could have had both parents’ support. I probably had his support, but at the time I didn’t think I did, I think that would have been nice.” With few friends, little support at home, and no knowledge that she might need to seek some out, Kizzy and her family developed unhealthy outlooks and coping mechanisms that they have carried with them.

Anxiety and Mental Health Issues

Ever since she experienced her parents’ separation as a young adolescent, Kizzy has had severe anxiety issues for which she did not receive proper help. She used to come home every day and say that her life was awful, but could not identify why and did not receive the appropriate type of counselling that she needed. She believes that the stress hasn’t been good on her family in the long term. She does not think its necessarily the divorce, but perhaps more her mother. She’s a very stressful person and just dealing with her and the family was quite difficult. She believes that obviously when there’s stress in a family it’s never good for children. For example, Kizzy’s brother has disorganized type schizophrenia now, and she wonders if maybe some of the stress from her parents’ separation and their difficult mother might have contributed to his now severe
schizophrenic disorder. He was four years old, and Kizzy knows when you’re that young the more stress you get the more likely you are to develop something.

Kizzy also relates that she has had her share of issues, which she thinks were just not handled correctly. When your parents divorce, it definitely doesn’t make anxiety and depression easier. She thinks it kind of shattered her view of how her family and her life should be. It’s crazy for children to go from thinking you have this perfect Catholic family to being a family of divorce. In the context of her Catholic upbringing, it’s evil! And to go from one day where you think your parents have the perfect relationship to the next day when they do not have one at all is confusing and difficult. And then you’re constantly being told one of your parents is awful and abusive and hurting you. It’s very intense. Kizzy did end up developing some psychiatric issues. She thinks after all that, it kind of happens. She has been hospitalized a few times with suicide attempts in her teen years. She thinks that the coping mechanisms that she was taught, particularly after her parents’ divorce, were definitely not helpful. She does not think it was so much the divorce, but the constant catastrophizing that just led to her feeling that there were no appropriate ways to deal with her emotions. Kizzy posited that if proper help had been accessed she would have been alright through the situation. She started hurting herself, and instead of acknowledging there’s something wrong or getting help for Kizzy, her mother’s reaction would be, “oh, just stop doing it. Just stop, you’re going to kill yourself. If you cut you’re going to end up dying, just don’t do it,” (said by Kizzy in a mocking voice that sounded more matter-of-fact than concerned). Kizzy definitely thinks that if her mother had handled things a little better, Kizzy’s issues probably would have not got as bad as they did. She is not trying to blame her mother for all of her problems, but her mother clearly has issues that she has yet to acknowledge and that definitely had a huge effect on Kizzy, especially at that time. Kizzy stated, quite plainly, “Parents do affect their children.”

Moving Forward

Kizzy’s narrative was full of reflection. She gave the impression that she was still seeking the truth behind many of the situations that she remembered. She definitely thinks there were some positives resulting from the separation in the long run as her parents were not good for each other. She can’t say that she chose to engage in things differently
than she would have if here parents had remained together, and she doesn’t know who she would be if her parents didn’t divorce, but muses that that would have been an interesting situation!

She speaks with her mother less frequently now, only a couple times a month. She sees her dad every few months, as they now live in the same city. She describes her relationship with her father as honestly the best it’s ever been, though not great by comparison.

In moving forward, Kizzy is doing great, with no psychiatric issues, and great coping. Once she stated to understand her bad coping and why she did that, she was able to move forward and begin to heal. She feels like she’s not a huge fan of marriage, but she doesn’t think anyone is nowadays! Her past has made her question relationships more and maybe think about things a little harder. Despite this, she is in a great relationship, and describes it as very healthy.
Appendix K: Abigail’s Story

Abigail and Laura met on a sunny spring day during the final exam period of University to conduct the initial narrative interview. The two met in an office on campus. This was the first time that the pair had met, and so short introductions were made. A brief explanation of the study and Laura’s interest in the study were given. The interview began with Abigail being asked to tell her story of her parents’ separation, and so she started at the beginning when her parents first met.

Life Before Parental Separation

Abigail began this story by explaining her family context and her views on marriage as they relate to her parents’ separation. Her mother got married when she was 21, and Abigail is 21 now, there’s no way in hell she wants to get married now – or necessarily at all – one because her mother has made it very vocal that that was a bad idea, and while she does not think that her parents rushed into their marriage, it’s perhaps a different time. Not to age her parents, but they also grew up in a different culture, because they come from a very working class European background, which is kind of different. If she got married she would want it to be for life because she knows the impact it has on the children. As one of those children, Abigail explains how she was impacted by her parents’ separation.

Abigail’s family consists of herself, her mother and father, and two sisters, one 7 years older and the other 8 years younger. The children are first generation Canadians, and her parents are of European descent. Abigail’s father works and often travels for work. Her mother lives with a chronic illness that causes some physical complications, but is still able to function in her daily life.

When describing herself as a child, Abigail explains that she’s always been very quiet and very independent. She remembers often playing with her toys by herself in the basement. She was not sure if this was a result of trying to escape the noise and excitement of family life, or because she simply enjoying being by herself. But Abigail also remembers independent and quiet time being somewhat of a requirement in her household with her mother’s illness, because her mother was often tired, so there was a lot of “you have to be in the basement, you have to be quiet,” because her mother was having a nap in the living room.
Growing up, Abigail remembers school as being one of her family’s values, and a major way that time was spent. *It was always an emphasis on doing your best or getting your homework done, and that never really changed.* Her mother was involved in the school atmosphere a lot, like she was the PTA chair and she still does all that for Abigail’s little sister as well, which puts unnecessary stress on her mother, especially in light of her illness. Abigail also reflected on her participation in sports as a child in relation to her relationship with her father, describing herself as *never very good* at her chosen sport of soccer, but participating because she knew that he likes seeing her in the field and coming to her games.

One particularly salient memory of family togetherness prior to her parents’ separation occurred during Christmas, as *the one memory of her parents really happy.* She remembers sitting in her spot at the kitchen table when her dad walks into the kitchen and kisses her mother. For Abigail, it is *the one image she has of her parents kissing* and what she thinks of when she pictures her parents happy. Remembering it brought tears to her eyes.

**The Separation**

This section will begin with Abigail’s unabridged account of her experience of the ‘moment of divorce,’ or being told about her parents’ separation.

> “I was in grade 8, so like 12/13, and I knew - I’m sure as most people do - you know that things are not good, and things are, umm upsetting, I just, I don’t really remember them ever fighting, but I know that they did and I know that I kind of carried that with me, and I remember because I would always play in the basement and be in the basement, like watch TV and that’s kind of [pause] my safety zone as you could call it, but every time my mom would call me up for dinner or just to come upstairs, I would always secretly pray or wish that, like “please don’t tell me you’re getting a divorce, please don’t tell me you’re getting a divorce”. Like every time I would go upstairs. I obviously knew something was wrong, and then my father started sleeping in the basement in a bed down there, and then one time they did call me upstairs and we sat [pause] we sat at the kitchen table, and they said “we’re getting a divorce, father already has a different house” which he had already moved out, which I guess I wasn’t really paying attention, but it was like, he’s, he’s gone, everything’s changing. And so I immediately burst... I
started crying, because it was just me and my younger sister, who like I said was 5, so I
don’t think she knew what was going on. She got upset because I was obviously upset.
And my older sister, she was in her first year of university, and she had told me that, later
on she had told me that my dad had called her and said, “I think you should come
don down,” and she said she wasn’t going to come down to hear that my parents were getting
a divorce, and so she wasn’t there. And I know my first question after they told me that
they were getting a divorce was “what are we going to do for Easter?” Which I mean, I
don’t really, I guess it’s the things you think about, because it’s not like, we’re not
religious, Easter doesn’t really mean anything other than, oh, you get to eat ham! Which
is exciting, but not really something to keep our family together for. But that was, that
was kind of my initial response. I mean I think they just did the normal things of, “Oh we
both still love you and just because we’re not going to be together doesn’t mean we’re
not a family” Kind of... the things you say, but, yeah. It was... I think I, I come from a
very kind of, we’re a very quiet family and we don’t really talk about our feelings, or
what’s going on, and so I think that was difficult for me not knowing why it was
happening, or, like I knew they were upset and they weren’t happy, but, I don’t know if I
need to know the details and to know any more reasons that... yeah. And so then my
father moved out, and he only moved a couple of blocks away, which is really nice, and in
that sense they’ve had a good divorce, and there was no custody problems [pause] so I
think in that sense I think it was positive, but I think there was a lot of bitterness on my
mother’s part.”

Abigail further describes the idea of her parents’ ‘good divorce’ as quite
amicable, with no discussion of lawyers or custody, or one parent having issues with the
children spending time with the other. But, again, she explains that bitterness is an issue.
She says that it’s obviously perfectly natural to harbour those feelings but... it becomes
harmful when it affects your life and your health, as it did for her mother, and eventually,
for her.

During this time, Abigail sought comfort and support from her other important
relationships. She found that her parents’ separation brought her closer to her friends.
Abigail has two solid friends, Madeline and Rachel, and found that disclosing her
parents’ divorce to them was the first time that the three girls had kind of shared
important personal issues, as opposed to “What are you doing after school?” For her, it was a major sharing moment for them and a bonding moment. At the time, all three girls volunteered in the school office as ‘student secretaries’, and Abigail did not know how she would approach the issue, how to say the phrase “My parents are getting divorced,” as it would be the first time she would say it out loud, and that was difficult for her. She found herself going about telling them in such a roundabout way, and asked her friend, Madeline, how old she was when her parents had divorced. When Madeline replied that she had been five, and inquired as to why Abigail was asking, Abigail replied, “That’s the same age as my sister... and my parents are getting divorced”, and she immediately burst into tears. She then went off to a secluded area of the office where she could cry. Madeline followed her and she was very supportive, offering comforts like “oh, it’s okay, everything is going to be alright” while her other friend, Rachel, just looked completely gobsmacked, and she was just standing there, mouth wide open. It was really enjoyable for Abigail, because it made her laugh the way she was just completely overwhelmed and had no idea how to respond. Abigail thought that it was the perfect response of supportive and just completely overwhelmed, which was just what Abigail needed, an acknowledgement that this was a big deal and overwhelming, but also an opportunity to laugh in the midst of it all. Abigail found these friends to be really supportive of everything and is very thankful that she has them to lean on. It was important for Abigail to be able to talk to her friends about it, knowing that if she wants to talk about it they’re there to talk about it, but if she just wants to talk about anything other than her family then that’s more than alright. Abigail knows that whatever she tells Madeline and Rachel will not be spread as secrets or rumours, and it is important to her that what she tells them will never come back to haunt her as gossip.

Her ability to rely on her friends was crucial at this time. Particularly, being able to speak with Madeline whose parents had divorced 8 years earlier when Madeline was the same age as Abigail’s younger sister. Abigail often uses Madeline’s parents as an example, and held her family as a positive example of divorce throughout the years.

Life After Parental Separation

After the separation, Abigail and her younger sister remained in their family home with their mother, while their father lived close by. She found grade 8 to be the hardest
hit time. She wasn't really happy at home, things were changing, all while puberty sets in, leaving her thinking “oh god, my body, I hate it” and then “oh, my family, I hate it.” Generally overwhelmed, she thankfully had and still has her two best friends to help her cope during this difficult time. Abigail also found that food acted as kind of a coping mechanism, but obviously not a good one. She was unhappy, and again, with puberty hitting, it was not a good time, then with the food, it wasn't the best, but that’s how she coped. She would also isolate herself from her parents and just from the stress that they brought, as she had as a child. She was mostly separating herself from the stress that her mother would give off, which she still does today.

Relationship with Parents

Much of the stress related to the divorce and to Abigail’s relationship with her mother was related to a lot of bitterness on her mother’s part, bitterness that is still there today. Abigail is unsure if it’s just about the divorce, because it’s been like 8 years, but Abigail thinks she went through a depression, and she perhaps still is.

Abigail finds her mother to be a source of stress, for example, because she wants things to be perfect, but when things aren’t or when she’s not able to have control of the situation to make things the way she thinks they should be for Abigail and her sisters and for herself, it’s upsetting, which is upsetting for all of them. Abigail feels that it puts stress on her sisters and herself because they want to make sure their mother is happy. Abigail is frustrated because she and her siblings have clothes on their back and food in their stomach, so that’s really all that matters in their opinions. Despite this, she found that her mother still kind of freaks out about the little things, and that puts unnecessary pressure on the children.

Finances are another major source of stress that Abigail understands to be difficult for her mother. Being a single mother was obviously, like she faces certain problems, but Abigail doesn’t think she should have to worry about that. She does not mean this in an uncaring way, but she doesn’t think she should have sleepless nights because she is worrying about how her mother is going to pay the rent. Another major financial issue that Abigail worries about relating to her mother relates to her mother’s illness. What’s going to happen to her if she falls ill? How are her children going to take care of her if she’s in a wheelchair? There’s no money to hire a caretaker for her or anything like that.
Abigail feels that her frequent worries about this are unnecessary stress that she and all of her sisters have taken on. She feels that her mother could be better at making sure that they don’t have that stress. Abigail feels that some of the stress and worry being downloaded onto her and her sisters is like a by-product of the divorce. A specific example of financial stress for her mother was living in the family home for a long time. Her mother wanted to sell it, and it wasn’t selling because it was obvious that like a family had lived there. This was quite stressful for her mother, and eventually being able to sell the house and moving out of there was good for her.

Additional stress and upset are experienced when Abigail compares the financial situations of her mother and her father. When Abigail and her family would do things as a family, she often felt guilty because they would do things with her father who has more money because he’s not the one taking care of her little sister every day. They would go on vacation with him and Abigail felt bad for bringing home souvenirs or talking about it or showing her mom photos because she doesn’t get to experience that. That was hard.

Abigail tends to look to Madeline’s parents and their separation as an example of one that’s not bitter, and looked at that with hope that one day her family can get to that point. She feels that her family has not yet reached that place, mostly due to her mother. Her father is, not to say fine with it, but he’s much more open about the divorce and his feelings, and he has dated other people, whereas her mother hasn’t, to her knowledge.

Abigail eventually had the opportunity to discuss the divorce with her father. It was an awkward thing for sociology class in grade 12. She had to do a project about marriage and she had to conduct a survey. She got bonus points if she conducted it with someone who was married and someone who was divorced, and so for some reason Abigail decided that she would interview her father about his divorce. The memory of approaching her father to do this makes her laugh. It was all these really objective questions about ‘Why did you get married?’ ‘Why did you get divorced?’ ‘What happened between you and your wife?’ It was incredibly awkward to talk to her father about, but it was also upsetting because the reason he said that they got divorced, which was they fell out of love. Abigail remembers it being a little awkward to, you know, type in a report for her grade 12 teacher, but also being nice to know.
Abigail’s relationships with each of her parents were affected by her interactions with the other, and Abigail had a difficult time negotiating her relationships with each at times. She remembers having to negotiate her time on the holidays, for example, *Christmas*. She *really enjoys Christmas and that was kind of changed forever because her parents are not together and when the children go and bring our stockings to their bed it’s just her mom there and not her dad*. Despite the separation, *they made choices to help ease that transition. Like her dad comes over on Christmas morning and they do the stockings with her mother but then after breakfast they call him and he comes over and he brings his presents for the children and the children open them all again as a family in the same rotation*. Recently, however, Abigail’s *mom hasn’t allowed her father to come for Christmas dinner, which is a little upsetting for Abigail, because she worries, where is he going to go? He has his brother in Canada, but he can’t open presents with his children in the morning and go to see his brother later due to the distance*. Abigail doesn’t know if her mother quite gets the fairness of it, that if the children *spend Christmas with mother one year, then it would only be fair that they spend Christmas with him the next*. But Abigail does not think that they would ever be able to do that because she doesn’t *think her mother could handle being alone and not having the children with her for Christmas*.

Abigail’s negotiation of her relationships with her parents is not limited to holidays or shared family events. She recalls *one upsetting experience* that began when she *didn’t tell her mother that her father had a girlfriend*. One, because she *didn’t think it was her job because he should have told her, but also she just didn’t want to deal with her mother’s potential reactions. Not only did she not tell her mother, but there was a couple of little fibs*. For example, when her mother would ask, *“well where did you stay in [nearby town] when you went out for the weekend with your father?”* To which she replied, *“Oh, we stayed in a hotel,”* which was not true. Her father’s girlfriend came with the family for a couple of vacations, and Abigail would purposely vet the photos that they took to make sure that there was nothing that the girlfriend was in. Abigail’s mother found out and she was upset. Abigail was not sure if her mother was upset that her father *maybe had a girlfriend*, or more so that the children *had lied and hadn’t told her, which makes sense*.
Abigail remembers her mother finding out about her father’s girlfriend in relation to another story. She and her mother were in the car and her mother told Abigail that her dad had cheated on her. Abigail immediately burst out in tears, and it was incredibly upsetting obviously because that had never come up before. Abigail had thought about it, just because her dad travels a lot, and you know, she’s seen episodes of Mad Men, she knows how it goes. It was very difficult because Abigail and her mother were picking up her little sister who was with her father. When she and her mother arrived, Abigail couldn’t look him in the eye for that meeting. Abigail cried a lot about the situation, as it was really upsetting. Abigail later told her older sister and her sister said she didn’t know if she believed it. Abigail reaffirms that her father told her older sister that he didn’t cheat on her when he told her about the divorce and said, it was no one’s fault and there had been no infidelity, as it were. Abigail doesn’t know if that happened, because that would be upsetting if it did, but, is not sure why her mother would lie. Perhaps it’s just another sign of bitterness on her mother’s part. Unfortunately, that wasn’t a question in her sociology survey, “Did you cheat on your wife?” Abigail still wonders about the truth of her mother’s story, but again it’s one of those things where you don’t want it to be true, because you aren’t just cheating on your wife, you’re cheating on your whole family, and that’s upsetting.

Abigail’s Role Within the Family Following Divorce

Abigail values herself as independent and able to take care of herself, but also found herself living with certain limitations just because she had to take care of her little sister. She couldn’t do certain things, and found that there was a lot of, ‘I can’t hang out because I’m taking care of my little sister, I have to do this’. Even when they would go on vacations with their father, she had to make sure the family did what was best for her sister as opposed to herself. For example, when they would go to the amusement park, there were rides she would want to go on, but couldn’t because she didn’t really want to go on by herself but they can’t leave a 7 year old by herself!

In a way, Abigail was not only taking care of her younger sister when she was with her father, but taking care of her father when they were with her younger sister. During the first couple of years, her little sister would kind of freak out when they would have to go see him, and she would burst into tears. Originally he lived just down the
street, he lived in a couple of houses there. But then he moved out of town for work and so Abigail and her little sister would drive down for 4 hours to see him, and Abigail knew that it would upset him that her little sister was upset, because he doesn’t want to have to take his children away from their home or disrupt their lives in that sense, but he wants to see them and it’s not fair that he felt so bad about it. Despite living out of town, her father comes up every other weekend to see my little sister. He’s always up where they live, he obviously makes the effort to see her sister, and to see them both. It’s a little different because the two older siblings are in university, but he tries to see Abigail’s youngest sister a lot.

Abigail feels that she plays the caretaking role for her father to make up for her sister’s lack of love, as it were. Abigail thinks he was kind of painted as the bad guy, especially for her little sister, and still is somewhat now because her little sister’s really close to her mom, and I think she kind of mirrors their mother’s behaviour. Abigail always felt bad because she could tell that during that time he was really upset. She thinks her father is much better now, especially since her little sister’s 13, she’s no longer, as much, bursting to tears at the mere sight of him, the thought of which makes Abigail laugh. Abigail still tries to subtly make sure that her little sister is being nice to their father because now, while it’s not crying, it’s a lot of 13-year-old attitude. Abigail finds herself kind of mothering her in a way when they are out with her father.

In addition to taking care of other members of her family, Abigail finds herself trying really hard to be the perfect daughter and make sure she was doing everything right to ease the tension in the family and take pressure off of other family members. This included making sure she got the best grades. She would freak out if she got a B in elementary school and then when she got to high school, it was like, “I got a 94, like, oh no I have to do better I have to do better,” putting a lot of pressure on herself. Abigail also felt pressure to never need anything. She never asked her parents for money or she would never tell them ‘oh I need these new sneakers.’ If she needed it she felt that she would have to pay for it with her own money. She would hoard onto all of the gift cards for birthdays and Christmas, to like get what she needed. She did this just to make sure that she wasn’t adding to the stress. She would try to take on as much as she could, such as cleaning the house to make sure the house was clean and that she was doing
everything she could to organize that, and just try to be the perfect daughter. She admits, however, that of course you can’t live up to those standards.

While she set her standards above the point that she could live up to, she thinks she still carries onto a lot of those things about being perfect and not asking. She does not ask for any money for University. Her father will ask, “Oh, do you need money for rent?” But Abigail will decline, as she feels she can take care of herself; she’s the one using the money, and she should be taking care of herself. But beyond her desire for independence, she wants to make sure that she’s not adding stress to her parents, specifically, her mother.

To Abigail, having a single mother meant the need for even more independence, and less ability to ask for support, thereby causing stress for her mother. An example of this is when she would come home for the summer from university, she would try to make sure that the house was properly cleaned, but she would try to do it so that her mother didn’t know she was doing it. So if her mother was at work Abigail would try to clean so as not to offend her mother and make her think that she has a dirty house. Abigail’s independence and need to be the perfect daughter extended into an effort not to increase her mother’s financial burdens. This involved knowing that she has to get the scholarship, and that she would have to pay for university by herself, so she would need to make certain decisions to put herself in a position to do that. She worked entire summers. The only thing she ever bought was her iPod, which is like $200, but everything else went to university. She got really good grades and was able to get a scholarship from her university and from her high school. This sense of independence and responsibility came from her upbringing in a single-parent household and also from her European working class background of, nose to the grind and you have to put in the time or you’re not going to get the rewards you want. Her parents raised Abigail and her siblings to be very independent, that you’re not entitled to anything so no one’s going to give you anything. It’s your responsibility to take care of yourself and to put yourself in a position to succeed. Abigail clarified that her parents would agree that they are entitled to some things, such as love and respect, but not to expect handouts. In the end, this sense of independence led Abigail to have paid for university herself, and she is now coming out of university with no debt, so, she’s quite proud of that.
All of these roles that Abigail played in her family have taught her that you have to be independent and you have to know that you can take care of yourself because, not that other people can’t, but you can’t rely on anyone these days. She admits that it’s not the best thing to think of, but you have to make sure you’re okay with yourself and being able to do it on your own. Abigail has also found that these lessons have made her “wary about, this sounds horrible, turning into my mother,” and sees the solution as trying not to be bitter, not to hold on to those feelings. Abigail thinks that she’s very much like her mother in that sense but is very aware that she doesn't want her mother’s life. She sees her mother as incredibly unhappy and depressed, and she doesn’t want that for herself. Abigail sees the solution as putting things in place, making sure that she has the tools and support to make sure that she doesn't ever get to that place.

**Reframing Relationships – Moving to University**

When Abigail moved away from her mother’s home to university, two important family relationships changed for her. The first is that her older sister has become a lot more of a support system, a relationship that Abigail hopes is mutual. Through the growth of this relationship, Abigail learned that during that time of the divorce, and she doesn’t know if the divorce contributed to it because it was also her sister’s first year of university, she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, and so that was a difficult time for her. Abigail doesn’t think she knew any of this was going on, but again, Abigail was 13 she doesn't think her sister would have shared, all the details. Abigail is grateful that she and her sister are at a place now where they can talk more as equals.

The growth of her relationship with her older sister prompted Abigail to reflect on the different experiences that each of the siblings had regarding the separation and with their parents in general. There’s quite a big age difference. There’s 7 years between Abigail’s older sister and herself, and 8 years between herself and her younger sister. Abigail’s older sister has never lived in a house without their mother and their father because she had already moved to university. Abigail felt a responsibility to take care of her little sister and to make sure she was okay. There were a lot of unnecessary burdens that were placed on Abigail and that she placed on herself too to take care of her younger sister because if their mom’s working, someone has to take care of her. Her older sister was gone to university, and would come back occasionally for a weekend. So during that
time of high school, Abigail and her older sister were not very close. This is not seen as a negative thing by Abigail, as her family were not a very traditionally close, ‘talking about our feelings’ kind of family. But the closer relationship that Abigail and her older sister have developed in recent years has allowed them to talk about their own experiences within the divorce, how they had incredibly different experiences and were kind of raised by different parents. Abigail’s older sister spent her entire life with two parents, while Abigail had the arguing, the divorce and the aftermath. Their little sister, she’s only going to remember a single parent household. They’re all going to be very different experiences and very different time periods. Abigail finds it all to be interesting. It’ll be interesting when her younger sister is no longer 13 and a bit more of a human and able to form thoughts and to interact all 3 of them and to compare notes.

The other important relationship that changed as Abigail moved away to university was with her mother. Abigail traditionally coped with the stress that she experiences from interacting with her mother by isolating herself from her mother. She has found that it is now easier to do so as she does not live in her mother’s home, or even in the same city. She doesn’t go home very often. She had a job during the summer back in her home town, but decided last summer that her mental health wasn’t worth the bigger pay cheque, because it’s just stressful being home and she doesn’t need that. She just took a ‘mental health summer,’ that’s what she called it. Abigail got a job in her current city, and found that she really enjoyed being away from home, although shared that the job was not great! She has found isolating herself to be a continued coping mechanism and protective mechanism to help with her stressful relationship with her mother.

**On romantic relationships**

Abigail had developed some strong views on romantic relationships, and these will serve as a closing to the story that she shared at this point in her life. Relationships, she thinks, can be affected by parental separation. For example, it brought her closer to her friends and changed the way she interacted with family members. But it has also helped her to see marriage in a very particular way. Not necessarily in a positive way. She sees it, maybe in even a bit more traditional way, a very sacred union. She knows
that if she got married she would want it to be for life because she knows the impact it has on the children – if you are married with children, she later corrected.

Beyond the impact a marriage would have on children, Abigail explains that, while this sounds horrible, she doesn't really like a lot of people, and sees herself as a kind of judgemental individual. She has never gone on a date or never really fancied anyone, other than someone during that time, during grade 8. She questions if she sort of stunted herself developmentally, but he’s the only guy she’s ever really liked. True to her independent nature, Abigail does not want to go on dates with people she doesn’t like. She is sure you could draw a connection between the divorce and her relationship status as it were.

When considering marriage, Abigail says that marriage is not necessarily an end goal. Abigail says that when she looks to her future, there’s no way she’s getting married any time soon, and if she doesn’t get married, that’s totally fine, she’s not adamant about it. She expresses that ideally she would like to be in a relationship because, you know, everyone wants to have love in their life, but she doesn’t “need a ring on this finga!”

Even if there was a guy in the picture, they would have to be in their late 20’s at the earliest, “And that’s even still like, whoa whoa whoa, calm down.” They’ve got the rest of their lives, so why not wait until they’re a little older? Abigail thinks it’s a big deal. Abigail also explains that during stressful life events, she has the tendency to kind of shut down and become very isolated and independent, and she does not think that would necessarily work within a relationship, so she would kind of want to experience a stressful life event, as horrible as it sounds, within that relationship to make sure that it was right and that they could handle that stress.

Today, Abigail maintains a good relationship with Madeline and Rachel and shares a close relationship with her older sister. She continues to balance the good and the bad of her relationships with her parents and her younger sister. Overall, as an independent young adult, Abigail is quite proud of what she has been able to accomplish with little assistance from others, and has been living her value of knowing that she can take care of herself.
Appendix L: Hank’s Story

Hank and Laura met on campus to conduct the initial narrative interview. The two met on a warm and sunny day and decided to conduct the interview outside. This was the first time that the pair had met, and short introductions were made. A brief explanation of the study and Laura’s interest in the study were given. As Hank read the letter of information for the study, he not only began asking questions about the study, but also began to tell parts of his story. The tape recorder could not be turned on quickly enough for Laura. Hank explained that it would be really nice for Laura to ask specific details that she would like him to explore, as he wouldn’t even remember the details if they are not brought to his attention.

Life Before Parental Separation

Hank’s story begins before his parents even met, clarifying that he doesn’t remember this himself, but bases it on his mother’s statements. Hank was born and raised in Southeast Asia. He explains that his mother was a doctor from a small city (about the size of Detroit or Boston). She was from a better-off family than his father. By the time she was 30 or so, everyone told her, ‘ah, you’re too old you should get married.’ She was then introduced to Hank’s father who was from a small town (about the size of Winnipeg). She thought that he’s not bad, he’s highly educated, and he seems like a sweet guy, so they got married. There was nothing fancy to it.

Baby Hank

Based on accounts from his mother, Hank describes his parents as a sweet family before he was born. When Hank was born, all of his mother’s attention was focused on him. His father wasn’t happy about that, so he started blaming all the stuff on young Hank, everything that he doesn’t like, either with his life or career. Hank explained that babies are generally good excuses for dissatisfaction with life. And that’s the general basis for Hank’s relationship with his father while growing up.

When Hank was just born, his mother wanted to hire a babysitter for him. While she can afford one, she met resistance from their families, who argued that they have extended family members who are unemployed, and this would be a good way to help. Hank’s father decided that since his mother really wanted to see her grandson, wanted to see a small city in general, and wanted to see how her son was doing, he would bring his
mother to the family home to take care of Hank. Unfortunately, as was explained to Hank, she didn’t take care of him. For example, back then, there’s no disposable diapers, you have to wash it. His grandmother would just dry them, she would not wash them so Hank would get very bad rashes. His mother was really pissed off about it, so after work she would be washing them. At this time Hank’s family had no hot water coming to their home, as was common in their country, so even in the winter she would have to wash it by hand in freezing cold water. Additionally, Hank’s grandmother would not cook or clean, and would not tend to the baby when he cried. His grandma’s philosophy on baby care is: feed them and they will grow up just fine on their own. This left those tasks to Hank’s mother to complete after a long day of work. She got really pissed off at the situation and at her husband, like, ‘come on! You brought her here not to let me take care of her, but to let her take care of her grandson, right?’ Hank’s mother truly disagreed with many of her mother-in-law’s child-care practices, which to her seemed archaic, but since that was her mother-in-law, she couldn’t really fire her.

Hank’s father’s attitude changed after his mother came to stay with the family. Before that he was a caring and educated husband. During her stay, Hank’s grandmother told his father, ‘come on, you’re the man of the house now, your wife should be taking care of you. You should not be doing housework. You should not be cooking. She should be taking care of you, that’s what a husband is.’ Hank likens this mindset to practices in India or 100 years ago in Europe before the women’s rights movements. That’s how his dad changed after his mother’s visit. In Hank’s mind, this change in his father is the root of their divorce, it just grew over the years after his father thought it’s normal to treat your woman as if it’s your servant. She commonly said that ‘dad treats our home as a motel.’ Before Hank, he was a model husband, but then his values were transported back to 100 years ago.

**Hank’s Mother’s Role**

Hank explained that you could not find a better mother than his. She has always been supportive of him, and was his primary caretaker for his whole life. He describes his mother as his moral guide. She is very strict with her morals, and she can convince him to follow her rules using only logic. She has never had to beat him to get her point across or out of frustration. She expects him to live by her moral rules because she sets the
example by living by the rules as well. She is a very strong and independent woman, and Hank cares for her deeply. He explained that he would be devastated to lose her.

From the beginning, Hank describes mother as the parent who would go to work, take care of the house and housework, and take care of him. His mother would cook all the meals, provide tutoring on his classes, and have a full time job too as a doctor. Additionally, for any issues with school, such as parent teacher meetings or if he puked due to his weak stomach in childhood, it would be his mother who goes to the school. She would often have to walk from her work for 15 minutes to his school, take care of his situation, and then would go back to work, all during her lunch break. It’s almost never his father. Even for parks, it would be his mother who takes him. Frankly, she doesn’t like those locations because Hank was a kid, he was running around and she’s in her forties. She not only had to chase him around, but also had to worry about all of the things she had to do with work and home. But still, when the kids have a day off, she felt she should take Hank to a park.

Occasionally Hank’s mother would confront her husband, saying things such as, “Okay, mister you don’t have a good paying job, you’re only studying, I mean you don’t have much to do, why don’t you go pick up the kid from school... when he leaves school? And then, you know, cook some meals? And then get him out of trouble and tutor him since you’re educated too?” He would refuse. Ever since Hank can remember it was his mother who took care of him for basically everything, and his dad not so much. As his mother played a large part in raising him, Hank felt that he did not receive much guidance on how to be a man. Hank learned how to act and what to do largely from his mother, and eventually looked for father figures to guide him toward becoming a man.

A Father’s Role

Hank’s father was an engineer, and lectured engineering at a college. His job is not very good paying, and eventually his college was decommissioned, and so he became a certified accountant. After this, he studied English, then he got his law degree, the equivalent of the bar, so he was basically studying studying studying. All Hank remembers is him with books. Hank remembers him as either out or back tired, lying on his bed, reading his book, then sleep. At one point, his father invest in health products to sell in a pyramid fashion. When Hank’s mother refused to give him money for the initial
investment, he approached Hank to get his savings. Hank’s mother was furious, and Hank describes this behaviour as **bad to do for a father anywhere** in the world.

Additionally, Hank does not remember his father helping out with raising him or around the home. He gives the example of his **weak stomach** in childhood, when he **would puke if he ate something cold, it was really a mess everywhere.** Hank recalls that his mother always cleaned it up, while his dad would be lying on his bed, saying ‘I don’t want to deal with this.’ His dad would eventually look to see that his wife was taking care of it, and simply go back to sleep rather than helping.

To his credit, Hank’s father is **not a drinker, he’s not a smoker either.** But there are few other positive attributes. Hank explains that **he didn’t care for Hank although he didn’t do anything bad to him.** As Hank put it, “he neglected me, but he’s physically present, I guess.” Overall, his **father was never there and Hank really didn’t like him.**

It was a **definite loss for Hank to not have a fatherly character in his life while growing up,** but he would **subconsciously try to find a few everywhere he would go.** He did this because his father **was never there** and Hank didn’t **really know what he should do as a man.** He had questions such as **how should he behave? What kind of social activities should he engage in? What kind of hobbies should he get?** He would search for **father figures from films and movies,** which is where he gained his understanding of **how a fatherly figure should be.**

Hank feels that he had to learn a lot about how to act and what to engage in from his mother, and **that definitely shaped him a lot. For example, a stereotype would be that if your kid is a boy, the father will want to have him engage in sports, right? Well, not so much the case for Hank.** His mother was worried about his poor nutrition and slow weight gain as a child due to his **weak stomach,** and she **wanted him just to eat well and grow some fat,** which was difficult with too much exercise. She also worried that **he will injure himself in sports** and would not push him to take part. But Hank felt that **if he had a father,** it wouldn’t matter if he might **injure himself or if he simply didn’t like them,** because **that’s never an excuse, he should still play.** A father would also **probably take him to see live sports matches teach him how to play these things.** By not having an active father or father figure in his life, Hank feels that he **missed that part** of growing up.

**Relationship with Family**
Hank did not have siblings, but was quite close to his mother’s family who lived in the same city as him. He would visit his grandma every week, and his cousin lived close by. Hank explains that his whole generation is one children [sic] per family. All he had were his cousins, who were like his brothers and sisters. Hank was close with his cousins, but their families are not divorced, and as a child Hank would see that and compare his own family life to theirs. For example, for his second oldest cousin, his dad’s really supportive. He would go to sports and he played basketball. He’s one-hundred and ninety centimetres tall, 20 centimeters taller than Hank because he go to exercise when he was a child, whereas Hank did not. His father made a lot money, they have a brand new house and a car, and Hank really envied them. For his other oldest cousin, although Hank really liked the sense that he has a non-divorced family, Hank still thinks that there is no comparison between his aunt and his mother in terms of how supportive his mother was for him. So Hank does not really envy them, and thinks that he is better off than them because of the support he received from this mother. He does, however, think that his other cousin had some advantages. Her family was better off and she would go to art classes and other activities. Additionally, her father and mother would be taking turns taking care of the family, even though they both go to work. But in Hank’s family, only his mother went to work, she took care of the house and housework, and she took care of him. Hank realized how much his mother had to do when his father could have been helping out.

Daily Life Growing Up

Since childhood, Hank has always been moving from school to school. He went to three elementary schools, and lived in different neighbourhoods with each change. He first lived at his grandma’s place with his parents. The family then moved into their own home and then back to his grandmother’s district again. With each change came another class. Hank did stay in his junior high school for three years, which was nice. There he met the only long-term friends that he ever made. Well not really long term friends, but that’s the longest time he stayed in one place, one school with the same people.

The family was not religious, and his parents were university educated, they were professionals. They were a small family and were not really into big family stuff. Since Hank’s parents had full time jobs, they were really busy and a lot of times they just
ignored the holidays. Unless it’s a day off, if it's a day off, it’s a holiday! If it’s spring break, it’s a holiday! Sometimes Hank would even celebrate his birthday later so he could do it on the weekend! Not a lot of traditions were broken by the divorce. Hank thinks that this made the eventual transition after the divorce so easy.

Hank also had difficulty with his family’s financial situation. Even though his mother was a doctor, the family didn’t have a lot of money. Hank remembers that even his friend whose parents worked in a factory and made way less than his parents made lived in better conditions than he did. They had more pocket money, for example, to go to the corner store. If his friends saw 50-cent candy, they could just buy it, whereas Hank would have to think it over more carefully. It’s 50 cents, and if Hank only had 5 bucks for his lunch, he wouldn’t be able to get it. He was really strict on his spending. That was not to say that he couldn’t get anything, but usually he would go through an acquisition process. He would tell his mother, “Okay this what I want this month,” and she would say, “That’s not reasonable, this is reasonable,” and then when she goes on her shopping trip she would buy it for him. But he still felt that it would be irresponsible to buy things that are not needed and add more financial burden to his mom.

Hank also related that his house was one of the smallest houses of his friends’. It was comparable to his friends’ who lived on minimum wage. His mother explained the reasoning behind it being if his dad were to have a good job and was not thinking about getting a divorce (as she suspected he was), she would definitely buy a bigger house and invest in it. But she refused to buy another house because she believed that if the family had two estates her husband would ask for one when they divorce. She would say, “I’m not giving him a dime, because he never cared a dime for my family.”

In hindsight, Hank’s mother hypothesized that there was a conspiracy right from the beginning of her marriage, that Hank’s dad didn’t really love her. He thought that he could use her as his chance to move from his hometown to this small city and get established. And then after a few more years when he can live and support himself and a family, he would just get divorced and get another woman. While Hank thinks his mother’s hypothesis fits with the evidence that he has heard since then, he knows it’s not as simple as that. But it’s a valid theory. This theory played a role in many decisions that his mother made throughout her marriage.
The idea of Hank’s father conspiring to have a divorce really affected his parents’ relationship. According to his mother, her husband was planning it for years, just waiting for her to bring up the topic so he would get more conditions, more benefits from the divorce. “He’s planning this,” she would whisper. “He’s driving me crazy because he wants me to say that I want a divorce. He’s got patience? Me too!” That was this internal battle going on within his mother every day, day in day out for years. It was not as dramatic as getting into physical fights, but they would fight. It started when Hank was too young to remember, and when they fought Hank would avoid being in the middle of the heated battle.

**Father’s Dating**

Roughly a year or so pre-divorce, Hank remembers his dad chatting online, like Internet dating. There was no clear evidence either to Hank or his mother, it’s just all speculation, but he would do that every night, really late into the night. By that time his parents already lived in two separate rooms because he liked to chat online very late and Hank’s mother had to go to sleep early for work. She asked him not to do that, but he didn’t listen so they ended up in separate rooms. Hank’s mother was particularly disturbed because the light would come into her room and wake her. That lasted for quite a while until the day that the family’s immigration papers to Canada came through.

Receiving their Canadian immigration papers was unexpected. They just handed in their application a few years back and then one day it just came through. The whole family got into the preparation and deciding whether to stay in their home country or go to Canada, and leave their jobs and lives. The Family decided to come to Canada for a few months to just see what it’s like, whether they wanted to stay. It was during that time when Hank’s mother decided that the divorce has to happen. The dilemma facing her was to stay in her home country and provide for the family for a few years until she can retire early, or to resign her job, which would be a big financial loss for a family. At that time, Hank’s father was still a lecturer at a local college. His job did not pay well, so Hank’s mother suggested that he stay in Canada with Hank and get a labourer’s job, which paid comparatively well, probably more than what he would earn back home. He said no, that he was not going to go through all this trouble for his son. So the family went back to their home country and his father continued to date online.
After the family returned from their trial stay in Canada, Hank’s father’s online chatting progressed to him seeing a new girlfriend. He even moved out to stay with her when Hank was in junior high school, probably around grade 8. Hanks mother suggested that Hank go live with his father and the girlfriend for a while. She sent him with the dual missions of finding out who he would want to live with after the divorce, and to scout out what kind of woman her husband was choosing over her. Hank moved there for a few months in the living room. It was closer to his school so he didn’t really mind, but his father doesn't cook well and nor does his girlfriend, and generally the condition is not as good as his home. He also felt that his father does not care for him as much as his mother, so he just moved back to his mother’s house.

After moving out of the family home, Hank’s father would come back and tell Hank’s mother, “I have a new place I don’t have chairs, you can give me some chairs?” And he just took the chairs! They were not so fancy chairs, but he took the chairs when he can just buy new ones. His father also used to have watches that Hank’s mother bought him that he used to despise, and after he got his new girlfriend he came back and demanded the watches. Hank’s mother said that if he didn’t want it back then, she would not give them to him now. Hank saw his father’s actions as shameless.

The Separation

Hank’s mother asked if he would mind if she divorced his father. Hank’s response was, “He has a girlfriend, he lives away from home now, he picks fights with you all the time, and you’re not really happy with him.” Hank supported his mother. He saw the divorce as pretty much one-sided. It was not one of those caring father and mother relationships who deice they’re going to have a divorce. His father did not care for him. He neglected him. So Hank saw it as a pretty logical decision for himself and his mother to agree that if she wants a divorce, so be it. He doesn’t think she’ll be happier with him anyway. Hank’s mother was a professional woman who can support herself. She basically owned everything, including the house. She didn’t really mind if they had a divorce, it’s not like she would go homeless. She was not a housewife who would have to fight a lengthy lawsuit to get support money from him every month. Hank felt that she asked him at a very appropriate time. It seemed just obvious there should be a divorce. They were already separated, so why not divorce? Same thing.
The divorce process was expedited. It could have lasted quite a few years, but the choice of Hank and his mother to move to Canada was their chance of getting away from him forever. His dad proposed that he will not come to Canada and resign from his current job as a lawyer if they were to move to Canada as a family. Hank feels that if they stayed in in their home country, his father may have harassed his mother after the divorce and made her life quite difficult, like in the movies.

After Hank finished ninth grade, he and his mother moved to Canada. This was just a few months before that they signed the divorce papers. Hank wasn’t involved. His father was a lawyer, so it was a quick process with fast signatures, sign sign, done. There was no need to go to court or anything. Hank’s maternal family had a difficult time initially accepting his parents’ decision to divorce. In his home country, you’re really close to your extended family and his mother’s extended family didn’t like the idea of them divorcing. They figured that the couple were fine, and Hank’s mother didn’t come back with bruises or anything. Hank’s father doesn’t drink and he has a job. Why would they divorce? That’s the family’s opinion but they didn’t know the whole story. There was disapproval at first from her sisters and brothers, but then they learned the story, learned how shameless Hank’s father was, and began to understand. Now since he’s not going to Canada with the family, there’s no difference if they’re divorced or not, right? So his uncles and aunts agreed with the decision to divorce. For Hank’s grandmother, that took a little while of his aunts and uncles sort of telling her pieces of the story. Then she’s got the picture and didn’t really mind her daughter’s divorce.

His mother didn’t really mind her family’s disapproval at that time. She figured that she’s going to Canada and will not be around them. Even if she was not moving, she has always been very independent. Her view was, “even if they disagree, if I want to do this, and I think it’s right, so be it. If they don’t see me anymore, so be it.” But she knew it’s not going to be the case forever, and her family would eventually accept her decision.

**Life After Parental Separation**

Once in Canada, Hank’s mother decided that since her husband never provided for them and never cared for them, that he might as well just disappear. This was her attitude, and that’s the attitude that Hank got from staying with her. And so what she did to seal the deal is she simply withheld his permanent residents’ card from him so now he
can’t come to Canada. Now Hank and his father are separated by an ocean. Hank figures he might as well forget about him, which he thinks really made it easy on Hank. Now there’s no means he can contact Hank, he does not know where Hank lives, or his phone number, so Hank hasn’t heard from him besides an e-mail once a year or so. While there’s no way you can completely forget about your father, he’s out of Hank’s life.

Hank described having much more freedom than before, as he is only living with his mother now. It’s only two people in the same apartment instead of two people just to watch over him. That’s the biggest difference. But with this new freedom came more responsibility. His relationship with his mother remained pretty much static, except that Hank had to take care of her now because his dad’s gone, it’s just him and his mother. An analogy would be, you have three people on the same job, now A will think ‘okay B will do it’, B will think C will do it, C will think A will do it. In Hank’s situation, it’s just him and his mother, so anything that Hank won’t do she will have to do. If he does as much as he can then she doesn’t have to do it, so it’s pretty simple. And so he took more responsibilities by taking care of his share of the house chores and being with her when she needed him. Hank gave the example of mealtime, “after you eat the meal, I wouldn’t do the dishes, why would I? There’s my mom, there’s my dad, right? My mom cooked the meal it would be reasonable that my dad would take care of the dishes? And I was just a kid, but now the situation is, okay she just cooked the meal, she’s pretty tired, now, if I don’t get up and take care of that, she will have to get up and take care of that. That will be one example of how the routine changes, but it reflects the whole in a way.”

The decision to take on more responsibility at home not only reflects the need for changed family roles after the divorce and move, but Hank’s feelings toward his father. Because his father was never there and he really didn’t like him, Hank tries to be the exact opposite of what he did and try to be as close to the person that he never was. Hank explained, “He didn’t really care for me and my mother, so I guess I’m really a family man now, as in how this shaped me. Because you will notice things that he didn’t do that you want to do in the future.” One particular area that Hank wishes he had some fatherly advice in was having someone explain the importance of dating in high school. He feels that he is still attempting to figure that out.

Seeking Support
When asked if he sought or needed support after his parents’ separation and his move to Canada, Hank said that his mother has always been supportive of him. Besides his mother, he didn’t really talk about it with anyone. He did not feel that he had emotional issues or needed to see a shrink regarding his parent’s divorce. He felt the situation was all really natural, consisting of very logical decisions. He saw why they happened, and agreed with those reasons, so it just became part of his life. Yes, now his dad’s gone, but he has never been there for Hank so there was little change and it was not dramatic enough for him to realize that he needed help and talk about it with anyone. Hank will usually not even talk about it with friends. If they ask where his father is, Hank will explain that he’s in their home country. If he thinks they will understand his situation, Hank will just tell them that his parents are divorced, but wouldn’t really go into details, and look for a shoulder to cry on. Upon reflection toward the end of the interview, Hank explained that he has never sought support, but maybe by agreeing to tell his story here he is reaching out for some. He wondered why else he would have randomly agreed to participate in the study.

**Career Path**

Hank really enjoyed fixing all the time, and he really likes to help people. For example, if the microwave or the printer breaks down in his house, he wants to fix it. His mother, however, did not support this. She would scold, “no, you’re wasting your time. Let it be. You’ll fix it some other day when you have time.” Hank really missed that part of having a father in his life. Perhaps if he were to have a father that cared for him, Hank might be in the engineer faculty now (like his father) instead of basic medical science (and on the way to medical school like his mother).

When asked what he would do if he could not enter medical school, Hank says, “If everything fails, I’ll go to engineering. Even if I don’t make it very well, I’ll be a happy mechanical engineer and be satisfied.” Hank feels that his path would definitely be different if his father were there to support him and influence him. He shared that if he becomes a father he would want to see his children be really handy. But since his mother was the only parent in the house and did not approve of his handy projects, he was unable to explore his love for mechanics. She was really opposed to Hank doing things like that and urged him to focus on school. Hank has still embraced his future in medicine. Hank is
in the faculty of science en route to medical school *now because* he thinks he *might like it*. He likes his *mother’s lifestyle at least*. But he still muses that *if things were different* he *might be working towards going to NASA now instead of medical school*.

Hank reflected that if he were to be asked *how he wishes it would be different*, or *what he thinks he has missed*, well, he *cannot answer that*. He doesn’t *know how it would have been any other way*. How can you *know the path that you have never taken*, right?
Appendix M: The Fox’s Story

The Fox and Laura met in the evening to conduct the narrative interview in an office on campus. This was the first time that the two had met and so they made some short introductions before the project was explained to The Fox and he gave his consent to participate. The Fox shared his story over tea in the quiet office.

Life Before Parental Separation

The Fox began the story by sharing about his parents’ history. He describes his mom as pretty sweet, a nice lady. She works with children and so she is really good with kids. She was adopted, and recently met her birth mother, who has since passed away. She is not close with her adoptive family and has not other contact with her biological family. He recalls that his mother has been in a couple of abusive relationships, she’s got kind of a history of that kind of stuff. He also affectionately relates that she’s really short and that he was already taller than her shortly after his parents broke up, close to age 10.

When introducing his biological father, The Fox explains that it’s weird to even call him dad. The Fox has always referred to him by his first name, which The Fox recognizes as kind of a distancing thing. His father was an alcoholic, he smoked, he drank, and he was more often drunk than not. The Fox’s father apparently didn’t know his own dad, which The Fox thinks might be a cause of his poor fathering practices. He was very abusive to The Fox and to his mom. Most memories, especially going back into about as far back as The Fox can remember, consisted of a lot of shaking in terror, crying, smashed glasses, kicked open cupboards, dogs thrown across the room, stuff like that. The Fox specified that as far as he can remember there was never any sexual abuse. It was all physical and definitely screaming verbal abuse. He believes it’s why he is so quiet all the time. He really hates being loud, as it reminds him of more chaotic times in his life, and he has devoted himself to a calmer way of being. The Fox describes his father’s family similarly to his father – poorly behaved and having something in that family that just spawns abusive men. He does, however, fondly recall his two great aunts that he remains in touch with. He otherwise avoids his father and his father’s family.

In order to illustrate the abuse and anger in his home growing up, The Fox gave an example of when his father threw the dog across the room. Being a kid, kids don’t really know so they always try and stand up for what they think is right. He asked his
father, “How would you like it if I threw you across the room?” He ended up getting hit a few times for asking that question. Most of the memories involving his father involve that sort of violence in some way. He recalls (and has been told by his mother) that before his parents were divorced, occasionally his mom would go out and he would just beg and scream, “No, don’t leave me alone with him, no! Please!” He would claw at her to stay. Time alone with his father didn’t go very well. Most of it consisted of The Fox shaking and afraid and hoping that his biological father just stayed focused and drunk on the TV and not turn his attention The Fox’s way.

When recalling his occupational engagement as a child, The Fox recalls that he didn’t do very much, and is pretty sure that was some extension of the abuse and the control that his father had over the family. He views his role at the time as that of a child, obviously, because he was a child. In general, he felt just like a burden. He compared it to having a dog, and you can’t go away because of the dog. Like, “Oh, I can’t leave for too long, got to worry about the dog!” It’s kind of like that. He felt that he was something for his mother to worry about. He recalls her saying things such as, “oh, I didn’t have time to do this because I had to make food for you, but don’t feel bad about that.” She would always say something bad and then follow it up with like, “oh, don’t feel bad.” This left The Fox feeling like he was always in the way and really unwanted. These feeling were heightened when he was left alone with his biological father. The Fox describes feeling unable to explain how he felt with his father at the time, saying, “I know I was terrified, but beyond that, I didn’t have, like, as a child I wouldn’t have had the words to describe, like, what a punching bag would feel like, right?”

Close to the time of the divorce, The Fox’s mother was spending a lot of time with the man who would later become her current husband while The Fox’s father and her were still together. The Fox never asked about it, but you can read into that however you want. He was told, “don’t tell your father about [current husband], you can’t say anything.” The Fox remembers slipping up once and letting on to his biological father that his mother may be out with this man, and covered up by saying that it was just a friend of his mother’s. He is not sure what his biological father took from this.
The Fox recalls being about 10 years old at the time of his parents’ separation. It was towards the start of the school year, and he wasn’t told anything about it coming. The Fox’s mother picked him up from school one day and they drove a different way than usual to their home. He asked where they were going, and his mother responded, “Oh, you’ll see, you’ll see.” And then they pulled into a driveway and she said, “We live here now.” The house was in the same town, maybe 5 minutes by car away from his old home. It was a little closer to the school he attended, so he didn’t have to change schools. The Fox was told that his reaction was a happy one. He would never have to see his father again, his dog was at the new house, and he still had a backyard to play in! His mom had 5 or 6 friends help her move so she could do it as quickly as possible. They made sure to set up The Fox’s room first, so his bed was made and the dog was there. It wasn’t particularly stressful for him. Despite the smooth transition, upon reflection The Fox describes it as dramatic and drastic, with no time for him to prepare for the change.

The Fox says that he can see why his mom did it this way, she was probably afraid for her safety. Despite this, he wishes he had been told beforehand that, “You’re not going to live here anymore,” instead of, “now we live here – surprise! Your entire life has changed!” He explains that he was still in the same school with his friends and still kept much of his same routine, which eased the transition for him, but he would have liked to know that this change was coming. He would have preferred time to prepare himself in advance of, maybe not even knowing that they were going to get ‘divorced’, because he doesn’t think a child can really understand the concept of divorce at that age. Perhaps just knowing that he would no longer live with this parent anymore is the most a child can really understand, but it would have been nice to know that he was going to move before it happened. The Fox explains that it is likely different for children whose parents both still want to see them, but for The Fox moving out meant that was it, his father was out of The Fox’s life. He would not have wanted the opportunity to say goodbye to his father, as the relationship The Fox had with him was terror, but he would have liked to prepare himself for the change.
Life After Parental Separation

After they got divorced and The Fox and his mom moved he was pretty happy, and for a little while he would assume he was like a regular kid. Within 6 months, however, his mother started becoming really really dependent on him, and she told him all these things that a child shouldn’t know. For a while there, The Fox was the only man in his mom’s life in a really strange and creepy way that children shouldn’t have to deal with. She used him as an emotional support. She would consult The Fox about the money, about how she’s feeling and how she couldn’t deal with the separation and move. The Fox believes that you don’t put those things on a child, so that’s when he had to grow up really quickly to have to deal with that. He basically became the man of the house at 10 years old. The Fox describes it as follows, “In some weird, really messed up way, I’ll probably tell this to a therapist one day, I kind of replaced the role of the man in her life. That’s really fucked up. Yeah, nothing sexual ever, but just that weird, like, I’ve stopped filling the child role and became the, like, the partner.” To this day The Fox can feel the weird overdependence that his mother has for him, as he was the only man in her life following the separation. She still won’t go 2 days without hearing from The Fox and telling him all of her problems. She has a husband now, and The Fox thinks he needs to fill that role, but that has yet to happen.

One of the most predominant ways that The Fox supported his mother was emotionally. She would regularly ask him for reassurances such as, “Oh, tell me I did the right thing. I just don’t know that I did the right thing,” or, “Oh, [The Fox], I’m so sorry, I wish you had a dad, I should have stayed with him.” The Fox, on the other hand, thought that she probably should have gotten out years earlier from the amount of abuse they both suffered. He doesn’t know why she stayed, but he realizes sometimes people stay in abusive relationships much longer than they should. The two even went to a therapist together for a little while. The Fox felt it was more for her, but she brought him along because she didn’t want to get a babysitter. He did not feel that he needed that type of therapy.

After the fact, The Fox had to grow up really fast. He spent a lot of time alone because as a single parent his mother couldn’t be at work and at home in the same time. The Fox explained that when you spend all this time alone, you either learn to cook or
you starve. You have all these adult things put on you and you either learn to deal with it or you don’t, right? So The Fox kind of grew up really fast. In addition to cooking and caring for himself, he was supporting his mother with all of her problems and her issues and talking about money. It was a lot for The Fox to handle.

The Fox’s newfound alone time proved advantageous for him in some respects. It allowed him to explore new and evolving interests. He would have 4 or 5 hours after school while his mom was at work every day, and when he was around 13 years old, his mom would go away every weekend to be with the man who is currently her husband as well. So he would say goodnight to her on Thursday and then she would leave for work at 5:30 a.m. on Friday, and not come home until she had to go to work at 5:30 on Monday. With a house to himself, The Fox would always have groups of friends over all the time and they would play video games and hang out. He didn’t drink or anything, and was not very mischievous. Beyond this, he had many solo interests.

In spending so much time raising and caring for himself, The Fox commented that he didn’t have any heroes. He explained that everybody seems to idolize somebody, like Jackie Chan. “I didn’t have a hero growing up, and, because I spent so much time alone I had to learn to do a lot of things very quickly, so I, I always said, like, oh, in response to like, oh, who’s your hero? Who do you look up to? And I would say, myself, like, I, I want to be my own man. I’ll raise the man that I’m going to be kind of thing.”

The Fox recalls that he wasn’t the only one in his class in grade school who had divorced parents, and he noticed a few things about the other kids. Many of them would blame everything they did on their parents being divorced. Particularly, one girl would always say, “I’m the product of a broken home.” From The Fox’s perspective, he was a good kid before and he was a good kid after - well behaved, top of the class always - and he had a problem with her blaming everything on her parents’ divorce. His philosophy was that you can choose to let it destroy you or you can kind of move on from it.

**Encounters with His Biological Father**

The Fox’s biological father kept the family house and sold it. His mother told him that it’s been a bitch to get any money out of his biological father, rough even to get child support. They had to bring his biological father to court a couple of times. The Fox recalls that his biological father wanted nothing to do with him basically. They saw each
other a few times at family Christmas gatherings, and a few times The Fox went over to where he was staying when he had moved in with another woman. He went over there a few times, and that would consist of him getting drunk on the couch and then The Fox playing with the woman’s son. The Fox would go because his mother did not want to keep The Fox from his biological father, but any time The Fox went there he would spend no time with his biological father and he would blame The Fox for that, like it was The Fox’s fault. It’s not the fault of a 10 year old. His father later wrote him a guilt-trip card that touched on the fact that they never do anything together when The Fox comes over anyway, again laying blame on his 12 year old son for the state of their relationship.

The Fox recalled his biological father calling him when he was 12 or 13 years old, saying, “Hey buddy, do you want to come over and hang out?” The Fox told himself, “I’m going to say no this time, and if he calls again another time I’ll know that he actually wants to see me, he’s not just, you know, making a front or anything.” He never called The Fox again after that, and they have barely spoken in the last 10 years. The only real contact that the two have had is the one or two times that The Fox has called his house just to tell him to go fuck himself. The Fox explains that he would call, say something like, “Hey, I just wanted to remind you that you’re a piece of shit from the only son you have,” and then hang up and cry for a few minutes. He says it doesn’t really make him feel any better, that he doesn’t really know what he’s trying to do when making those calls, but it’s nice to remind him.

As for his reflections on having a relationship with his father, The Fox says that he wishes that who he is now could be there to defend who he was then. He realizes there’s nothing he can do, he can’t go knock on his biological fathers’ door and beat his face in because it’s not worth the jail time! Oftentimes these things make him feel really helpless. All these things happened to him, and he can’t take any sort of retribution. No legal action was ever taken, The Fox can’t ever hit him back, and while there’s nothing stopping The Fox from going to where he is and seeing him, The Fox does not think it would matter at this point. The Fox feels as though he is just some mistake his biological father hopes to forget. Still, sometimes The Fox would like to know what he thinks and if he remembers, if he wonders about The Fox. Does he care? Or not? Still feeling somewhat helpless today about it, The Fox feels for his younger self, because a child
doesn’t have the words even to defend themselves. He wishes he had the words and the ideas he has now as a child, so he could at least verbally defend himself and tell him what he’s doing was wrong. But he never knew anything different.

The Presence of Men

The Fox commented on his varied relationship with adult men following his parents’ separation. While he has sought out the company of adults for both guidance and to relate to his mature nature, The Fox has found it difficult to be in the presence of agitated people, especially men. He found that if he was yelled at or even in the presence of an angry man, he would start shaking, start crying, he just couldn’t help it. He still has difficulty in the presence of agitated men or when being yelled at, but has recently found the strength to stand up for himself and demand to be treated with respect. The Fox reacts similarly to being brought to anger. As a peaceful and quiet practitioner of Zen Buddhism, The Fox has never raised a hand in anger, and with 13 years of martial arts training, a hand in anger would be very effective, he explained with a laugh. But the few times that he has had to defend himself or protect himself and his girlfriend, afterwards he would find his hands just shake, shake shake shake really bad, and he used to cry whenever he got to that point because he didn’t know what to do. He knows that violence is so wrong, and has chosen not to be a violent person, but what was to be done when there was no way to avoid it?

None of this deterred The Fox from being drawn towards what he would call father figures, who were often older males. He gives examples of his Aikido teacher and teachers throughout grade school and high school, who he was good friends with. But The Fox found that whenever he started to accept somebody as that sort of surrogate older male role that they always end up gone in some way, either health problems, The Fox moving away to school, or other circumstances. The Fox thinks that there is likely some part of him still looking for a father figure.

Consciously, he has always gotten along really well with adults because of his maturity and value for intelligence and learning, an ideal that most young people do not share. Unfortunately, he has always found that adults, they just look at you and they see a kid, they won’t give you that connection, they’ll treat you like an underling or like you’re less than them. That always bothered him when he was young, he didn’t want to be
treated as an inferior. The Fox has always been drawn to somebody who will answer his questions and give him time, and will say, “That’s a really good question,” and then they can discuss and explain. He was looking for a male figure to kind of fill that role as well.

In considering what an ideal father figure might look like, The Fox shares that it seems like a lot of people don’t get along with their fathers. He recalls only one friend in the past that had a really great relationship with his dad, and describes the sight as odd to see. The Fox said, “I’ve found myself asking questions before, like, ‘what do you and your dad do? What do you talk about? What does your dad do when he’s angry?’

Looking back on myself I realize I’m just trying to find out like what’s a good relationship with a father because, while I’ve had these kind of male figures in my life, I’ve never had that, like a father, an actual father.”

The Fox reflected, “I’ve only ever once called one other person Dad, and that took a long time, and the first time it sounded weird to say. It still feels weird. I actually still have trouble saying the word ‘dad’, I don’t know why. Even if I’m not talking about a person, just abstractly, ‘dad’ is, it’s a weird word to say for me. Unfortunately this man that I called dad for a while also is no longer in my life. Kind of just works that way, I guess... it was my ex girlfriend’s father, and he and I were really close. And after we broke up, he came over to my house and he was crying and he gave me a huge hug and he said ‘it’s going to be alright son’, and I hugged him back and like, hugged each other for a few minutes, and that was the last time I saw him.”

The Fox does not consider his mother’s current husband as a father figure. He describes him as “a man right out of the ‘50s. He’s very old school, tough, like shows no feelings, rough around the edges, he’s loud, he’s gruff, he’s really easy to bring to anger. He’s just kind of a tough man in the old sense of the word ‘man’.” The Fox describes them as having nothing in common, as The Fox is more soft-spoken and intellectual in nature. He recalls one particular episode when he slept over at his mother’s current husband’s house because his mom would always give him shit for never coming over. He woke up to an empty house and a list of chores to do for the day, which he did not mind. The Fox completed the list of chores, and his mother’s husband came home first. He began screaming at The Fox, asking what he had done all day, that the house was still a mess and the fireplace was still full of ashes (though it was mid-summer and cleaning the
fireplace was not on the list). The Fox kept his mouth shut because God forbid he upset him (said quite sarcastically). This sarcasm mirrors his mother’s real attitude, as she dances around him. She likes to play the good little housewife so she won’t say a thing to him. The man’s word is his law in that house. As his mother’s husband berated him, he stayed quiet while shaking with anger. The Fox confronted his mother, who claimed that her husband felt really bad, but The Fox heard nothing of it from him. This incident serves as an example of why The Fox does not like the way that his mother’s husband treats her. He does not like seeing her stressed all the time. This was not the type of father figure that The Fox was looking for, and not the type of man he wants for his mother.

Ongoing Relationship with His Mother

The Fox related that, “I always just say I’ve got a small family because it’s really just me and my mom.” The Fox’s narrative really speaks to the two caring for each other as best as they can. He shares many frustrations, including her overdependence on him to act as a partner, a caretaker, and to be involved in the emotional, legal, and financial aspects of the fallout from the separation. He shares his frustration of bearing all of her problems, and her not being a particularly good listener in return. He deals with her calls, texts, and e-mails, even Facebook messages all the time! But despite the difficulties and frustrations, when describing her he can only sigh and call her a sweetheart.

The Fox describes his mother as really caring about him in her kind of weird, over-dependent way. He can sense her love for him in the way that she will help him out financially when he is in real need, or bring over food when she visits. This stands even though the food consists of a half open box of cereal, some shampoo that her husband didn’t like, and a loaf of bread from the bottom of the freezer that’s five years old. The Fox laughs as he reminisces, saying, “She thinks she’s helping, but she’s just a little silly like that.” The Fox shares that a feeling is probably the best explanation for how he understands his mother’s love for him. For example, “She looks at me and she [says], ‘Oh, you’re so handsome my son,’ and like she’ll give me a big hug, and like ‘Oh, I missed you,’ and like, ‘Mom, it’s only been a week.’” He feels her love when she brings him food, even if it’s all half eaten and from the bottom of the freezer. Or when she makes a special effort to buy his favourite mints for Christmas or his birthday, just because she knows that he likes them. Even when money was really tight, when they were
still living together, she would go out of her way to make sure he felt loved by making a special birthday cake or having his friends over, as long as it wouldn’t be expensive.

His mother’s love and good intentions, however, could not always win out. The Fox described a turning point in their relationship surrounding his move away from the family home. He moved out at the end of July, one month before his 18th birthday and his scheduled move to away college. “I moved out at the end of July when I was 17 because she moved in with [husband]… that was kind of painful, like, I don’t know why she couldn’t have waited another month. So I had this weird like one-month transition where I ended up living with a friend, because… I didn’t want to live there,” with his mother’s husband. The Fox was informed of the move similarly to how he was informed of his parents’ separation – one day he came home and his mother announced that she would be moving at the end of the month. She would be moving, not they would be moving. The Fox explained that he thinks it was expected that he would move with his mother, but never offered, and not something that he was interested in. The next day, pretty much everything in the house was on the driveway for a yard sale. His bed, his pillow, his clothing. She didn’t sell very much of it, she threw the rest of it out. When The Fox moved out he had a laptop, and X-Box, a backpack, and maybe a third of his clothes. Everything was taken out from under him. After that he spent a month living with a friend’s parents and the friend, and then he moved to residence at college for 8 months. Then he found his own place with 2 roommates, and ever since then he has been pretty self-sufficient and on his own. This episode led to The Fox and his mother not speaking for about 3 years. Their relationship has mended since then, but this was quite difficult for him.

Curiosity and Hobbies

“I know a little bit about a lot of things, and I know a lot about a few things.” The Fox describes himself as a very curious as a child, and always so interested to learn a new skill or a new hobby. The Fox explains that his curiosity was preoccupying. He describes having a ‘science table’ when he was young – just an old desk with some magnets on it, and a little science book for kids. Once they got the Internet, his knowledge base just exploded. He was able to learn new hobbies and will never find an end to satisfy his knowledge. He shared a story of visiting his mother’s friends and learning that the man was interested in minerals. Down in his safe, he showed The Fox a
really rare geode that he had. His wife said that he’s never opened that safe for anybody before, but The Fox’s enthusiasm and curiosity has always opened a lot of doors for him.

One prominent interest of The Fox’s was Martial Arts. He is pretty sure he was put into Martial Arts solely because his mom thought he needed some kind of output for feelings, but he has stuck with them. He has practiced Aikido, Taekwondo, Ninjutsu, and Tai Chi. He found that Martial Arts made him disciplined, and while he was disciplined to begin with, he really has a good strong respect now.

With so much free time after school and on weekends as a child, The Fox found himself exploring his endless interests. He played with friends all the time and they did what they liked to do. They would play tennis, basketball, soccer and golf. He didn’t do a lot of organized sports, explaining that he likes a good competition, but not really the commitment. He had a couple of really close friends, and The Fox describes himself as introverted, so a small group of close friends is always better than a hundred acquaintances for him. He and his friends loved being in the woods and would often go to a local conservation area where they would at first just walk on the trails, and then they would just walk off the trail at a random point in the woods. The Fox loves being away in nature. In high school, The Fox also became interested in archery, and through his dedication and practice, he was ranked in the top 40 in Ontario. He attributes some of his dedication to Martial Arts, although a lot of that probably goes to having to raise himself. Around that time he also became interested in learning guitar, and eventually teaching guitar to earn a little money. The Fox later taught himself piano as well as the didgeridoo and the Jew’s harp.

Beyond learning new skills, The Fox prized his intelligence and loves to learn everything he can get his hands on, whether by watching documentaries or reading books. He has always loved learning new things, and once he had access to the Internet and to things he never even knew that you could know about, it kind of just snowballed. He explains, “I’m always trying to be better, and I realize, I’m not trying to be better than you, I’m not trying to better than him, I’m just trying to be better than me. So, I’ve always had that attitude. Something I’ve said a lot is “I’ll do better next time.” Like with archery I had, a fairly cheap bow and everybody’s got all these really expensive arrows, and I just go out and do the best I can and turns out I’m in the top 40 in Ontario... I have a
“I have a million hobbies, and I dive into something with all my passion and I learn everything I can about it and I get really good at it, I keep it as a hobby, but I move on to a new one all the time... As far as occupation will go, that’s kind of my process. I get interested in something, I learn everything I can about it, I do it, I love it, I enjoy it, I keep it as a hobby and I move on to a new one.” It is unfortunate that there is not enough room in this story to describe all of the hobbies and interests that The Fox shared in the interview, but they combine to demonstrate the insatiable curiosity that occupies him all of the time.

The Fox’s interests were not limited to his free time and play. He enjoyed school, especially when he was young. He felt, if anything, it was moving too slow. He was top of the class always and has always been the smart one. Unfortunately, after a year at college, The Fox had to drop out of school because he didn’t have enough money, so he had to start working full-time to pay the rent. He explained that until you’re 23, provincial funding sources still take your parents’ income into account, so because The Fox’s mom was living with her current husband and he made a lot of money, they counted that and The Fox was getting jack from provincial funding. He has since applied to university as a mature student and they are not accounting for his parents’ income, so he receives just enough to squeeze by, with 30 bucks a month for food, but he’s lived on less.

**Coping**

When discussing how he coped with his situation both before and after his parents’ separation, The Fox explained that he is very good at intellectualizing things. For example, he knows the divorce had nothing to do with him, he’s not the reason they broke up. It was very clear to him, even as a 10 year old. He would also regularly tell himself, “I will not be defined by - blank.” For example, “I will not be defined by my relationship status.” He thinks that that’s really been a great coping mechanism, because, really, he is so much more than the sum of his parts. “I’m not like the product of a broken home, like yes, my parents are split up, but I can go on the rest of my life going ‘oh, woe is me’ or I can kind of get over it and work to get past it. And I guess that that’s kind of an intellectualizing thing.”

The Fox discusses how his interest in and practice of Eastern religions helped him cope. If you had to put a title on it, The Fox would identify as Zen Buddhist. He has been meditating for a long time, and while it was not his initial intent, he has gotten into
the more seeking enlightenment reasons for practicing. He also mentions the power of a deep breath. “I’d take a few deep breaths, take a minute to calm down and try and realize that I’m not just angry, but kind of like, this is the meditation thing talking, but, I’m experiencing anger,” and he learned to separate his experience of anger from his larger sense of self.

As previously mentioned, sports and Martial Arts helped The Fox to gain the discipline and confidence that he needed to live more comfortably. They helped him stand up for himself and approach those who disrespected him without the overwhelming shaking or crying that he experienced as a younger man. He explained that for the longest time he couldn’t ever look anybody in the eye, and that he still feels uncomfortable doing it now. He doesn’t know if it’s because he didn’t feel worthy to look at anyone. It probably relates to something he doesn’t remember, probably getting beaten for looking his biological father in the eye. But for the longest time he couldn’t look someone in the eye, he had to look away. The Fox is pretty sure that’s related in some way to the confidence thing, probably from never feeling good enough. He has since overcome this.

The Man Today

The Fox explained that he feels a little deficient in that he didn’t have a father, but he didn’t relate that to his parents getting divorced, because his biological father was kind of a piece of shit before. Sometimes he feels that lack of something, a feeling of, “Oh I wish I had a father.” He felt this more prominently when he was younger, a void, that he was missing something. On the other hand, for the longest time he was afraid that he would end up like his biological father. He used to cry sometimes when he got mad because he did not want to be a violent or angry person like his biological father, and experiencing anger made him fearful that he was becoming like his father. To this day he has never smoked a cigarette, and for the longest time he wouldn’t drink. Now he is okay with drinking, but initially he was - and he still is a little bit - afraid that he is going to wind up like his biological father. But really, he has always said that you have to make the choice to end the cycle of abuse and violence, so he has decided that it ends with him.

The Fox’s recent ability to stand up for himself actually surprises him. It was only in the last few years that he really gained a little bit of confidence and was able to stand up for himself, and now he won’t take shit from anyone. He expects to be treated with
This confidence, mixed with his calm and non-violent outlook, can become a little contentious when he thinks about his biological father. Sometimes it still gets to him. He wishes he could do something, but realizes there isn’t anything that he can do. “Well, if there was one person on earth I could be violent towards it would be him. But it wouldn’t be me, because I’ve never, never raised a fist in anger and I never plan on doing it.” This promise really speaks to The Fox’s commitment to be nonviolent and to be better than the day before, while still acknowledging the unresolved feelings that he has for his biological father and their past relationship.

Finally, throughout the narrative, The Fox discussed his current girlfriend with adoration and enthusiasm. She’s so supportive. She’s fantastic! He shared that he is very choosy when it comes to relationships. Initially in relationships he is very guarded, but he does fall into it completely. While he spent quite some time singing his girlfriend’s praises, he also provided insight into his role in a relationship. He describes himself as gentlemanly and said that he does not mess around. He always tries to be a good supportive partner. He is very slow to anger and has never spoken or acted out of anger toward a girlfriend. His parents’ relationship as well as his own past relationships have made him think about what a man should be. He feels that he was raised by the bad example and was taught how not to be a man, so he has his own short list of things that a man should be. “I think a man should be calm and slow to anger. I think a man protects those he cares about. That’s kind of a big one there. I think like a man should take care of the people in his life, and, I guess I kind of covered it all in two points really, like, slow to anger, a man should be dependable, a man should take action when he needs to, and I’ve tried to really kind of model myself after the good qualities I believe that a man should possess. And I think I’ve done pretty well [laughs].” He also possesses qualities such as being a good listener and not being afraid to have emotions or to cry. The Fox shared that he learned a lot by seeing all the things that made him feel terrible from his biological father and vowed to never ever be like that, that he will never propagate that kind of attitude, especially in his own children if he has them one day. The Fox explained that his philosophy on parenting includes being calm, patient and understanding. He will do his best to answer all of their questions and never shout, because children don’t need to be yelled at. If you do a good job raising them, you don’t need to scream at children. If you
have to raise your voice, you’re doing something wrong, it’s not the children doing something wrong.

The Fox was extremely open and willing to share his narrative and his views on life. He is currently working toward a university degree, engaging in his plethora of hobbies, and enjoying time with his girlfriend and dog. He described himself as one of those weird lucky people who just, things always work out in the end, and with his calm, positive outlook, they certainly will.
Appendix N: Addy’s Story

Addy and Laura met on a weekday morning in a busy coffee shop. The two settled down with coffee and made their introductions. The atmosphere was energetic, with music and conversations lending to a comfortable feeling. The sound of the story blended with the lively sounds of the café. Addy and Laura discussed the nature of the project, and informed consent was obtained before beginning the interview. Addy started from the beginning and worked her way through the story.

Life Before Final Parental Separation

Addy presents the whole story from what she can get, pulled together from pieces that she was told and pieces that she remembers. She explains that her parents’ problems started the day she was born. Her parents got married out of rebellion. They married at 21 and 22, just a year after they met. They did it as a ‘screw you, we’re getting married I don’t care what you think,’ to their own parents. Six months later they got pregnant with Addy, so they didn’t even really get to enjoy their marriage without a child. As those stresses associated with having a child came onto their marriage, they realized that they might not be the best people for each other, but felt the need to tough it out because they had Addy. As soon as Addy can remember they were always on interesting terms. They weren’t the big happy dynamic family that you see on TV.

Addy describes her mom as someone who didn’t get to do all of the things she had wanted to. She was born in the West Indies and came to Canada unwillingly at 18 years old. She was shipped here by her parents to live with her sister and make a life for herself. She did not want to be here, and rebelled by partying like crazy, which is how she eventually met Addy’s dad. She had no intentions of really slowing down her partying lifestyle, but got stuck married, with a kid, and with no life.

Addy’s earliest memories are from age 6, when her parents would fight about stupid things. She recalled sitting on the stairs and her dad sitting beside her. Her mom’s standing in front of them with her suitcase, and says, “[Addy], I’m leaving home, but I’m not leaving you, I just need to live somewhere else for a little bit.” Her mom continued explaining in slow and simple terms, but Addy knew exactly what was going on. That was the day she realised her life’s a little bit different than everyone else’s, and that she is older than her age might depict. That was a huge deal.
Addy’s mother moved out, and from that point on it was Addy and her dad. Addy realized that while he didn’t struggle, he really worked hard and she understood that. She did as much as she could, and avoided a ‘woe is me’ attitude. She knew he was doing the best he could, so she was a good kid, just quiet, helped him out, started doing dishes at 7. The two developed a really cool relationship, because she was never really the girly type, so their father-daughter bonding allowed them to rough around, play football, play videogames, or watch Dragonball Z. They developed a really strong relationship at that time. Addy would go to her mom’s house on the weekend, which she described as really weird, because she lived with a friend in an apartment, and she was trying really hard to make their relationship work. Addy could tell that she was trying so hard and just wanted her mother to relax, just be present. While Addy now understands that her mother was trying to make up for everything that had happened, she remembers it being frustrating.

Parents Reunite

When Addy was in grade 4 or 5, her mom and dad started talking again. Then her mom started coming back to sleep over on weekends. The idea of her parents getting back together came back in her head. Her mother eventually moved back in in grade 5. For 3 months it was awesome! Addy recalls feeling ecstatic that, “I have both my parents! Mom is making me lunch! I ain’t got to do anything!” It was really fun until the fights started again. The fights were a lot different this time, more intense. Their yelling became screaming, almost pleading. It was as if they were not yelling at each other anymore, but were just so upset about the situation that they were in and felt helpless that they were just portraying their agony by screaming. Addy remembers nights when she would go to bed at 9, 10 pm, but hear them yell at each other outside the door long after she tried to sleep. They lived in a basement where there is not much space and everything echoes. She was also very conscious of the fact that her cousins lived upstairs, and was so embarrassed that her family upstairs was hearing all this.

After moving back in, her parents always slept in separate rooms. When Addy and her father lived alone, she had her own room, but when her mom came back, she didn’t want to sleep with Addy’s dad in the same bed, so she took Addy’s bedroom and Addy and dad slept in the master bedroom together. Addy saw this as a huge signal that something was different with her parents’ relationship, and knew that bothered her father.
a lot. Her mother also often partied at night, drinking and coming home in the early hours of the morning. She’d want to pick fights with Addy’s dad. She would berate him because he would wait up, which he thought that was the right thing to do, or she would find another reason to argue. Addy recalls one particularly frightening fight when she was pretending to sleep, and her dad comes into the room, just ignoring mom. Frustrated, her mom took the cordless phone and whipped it at him, but missed and it hit the wall right above Addy’s head. It was intense. She was frightened and just pretended to sleep. The cordless phone made a hole in the wall, a hole that will always remind her of that fight and that experience. But night after night, they’d get into a fight again, and then they’d go to sleep the next day it was just more of the same. That was her normal! She didn’t tell anybody because she knew that that wasn’t normal to the outside world and feared that they would think she is freaking out. She just tried to make the best of the situation.

Besides the fighting, the three of them each lived separate lives for the most part.

Separate Lives

By the time Addy reached grade 7, her mother was out playing billiards 3 nights per week, and had lost her job during the recession. She was running off unemployment for a bit and didn’t really want to get another job, which was another huge factor in Addy’s parents’ relationship. She was happy living off unemployment, she had all this free time, she could do whatever the hell she wants, and she still had her own money so she still had her own independence. This bothered Addy’s father, who was busting his ass trying to make ends meat, while his wife was living cosily, siting at home doing nothing. Beyond feeling that his wife was not stepping up to the plate for their family, she would expect him to join her out on the town at night after just working 12 hours, struggling 12 hours. He would tell her, “You need to either understand and go without me, or you need to get a job, and like, balance, but something needs to give.” This left Addy’s father exhausted from the fighting and worried that his young, attractive, flirtatious wife was out without him.

By this time Addy had started to accept the fact that her mom and dad aren’t going to be together forever. She pretended, lying to herself that they would, but she was very aware that her parents weren’t going to be together or something’s going to happen. Maybe worse, they’re going to live like this for the rest of their life. Either way, Addy
was going to do her own thing. Additionally, because she is an only child, she didn’t have siblings to lean on, leaving her alone with her schoolwork essentially. Addy explains that she was always pushed into school. When shit got rough at home, she would just stay at school, just study, just put headphones in and read. She would also go on her computer, and would use it to escape, be alone, and pass the time. She joked that she was a pretty smart kid by default, she had nothing else to do but study! She wasn’t into sports or anything, school was kind of the only thing she had going for her, and everyone recognized her for that. So while her parents and extended family knew about her difficult home situation, she was still bringing home 90’s or 80’s, and her teachers are still recognizing her for her outstanding work, so everyone would just push her to do that, thinking that she was ‘alright’ or less affected by the fighting at home.

Addy was involved with her school and studies and would also hang out with friends, sleep over at their houses or stay at their houses after school because she wouldn’t want to go home. “Go home and do what by myself?” She shared that she doesn’t remember much of a lot of those years, just doing school, friends, nothing else. You can’t really do anything else as a kid. Music was a huge thing for her at this time, because it blocked out the sounds and strife of her home. She could put headphones on and not know what’s going on. She could get lost in the music. Much of the music she chose was rebellious. Punk music, like Blink 182, Avril Lavigne, awesome crap like that. In their lyrics she heard the story of her life and now realizes that she was a little rebel at that point. That she did want to say ‘fuck the system’ at that point, and she was only 8 years old! She didn’t know anything about the system! “Kudos to me at 8 years old!”

Music helped Addy to feel things, express things, and escape for a while.

Addy’s rebellious streak was not limited to her musical choices. She recalled that events like Halloween would come around and she would want to stay out until 12 o’clock in the morning. Her parents would say no on account of her being 14 years old. She would respond by saying, “Why? Like you guys are going to be home and up waiting for me anyways? What the hell is the point?” She felt as though she was living in her own world, confused by the sense of authority that they tried to put on her. As soon as she hit 14, she decided that she was going to do her own thing, despite her parents’ attempts at imposing rules upon her. Who’s going to enforce it? She explained that, “I’m going to
come home and then you guys are going to get into a fight and then you’re going to wish I wasn’t there anyways, so what the hell is the point?” While she would never say these things directly, she would imply it in different ways. She found this made it hurtful for them to even try to enforce the rules and ‘parent’ her, because she would retaliate and they’d see the repercussions of what their actions were doing to her, and they’d feel bad about it. She and her parents chose to just avoid those situations altogether.

Despite their largely separate lives, Addy described the time she spent with each parent. She and her father would bond on music, Dragonball Z, and golf. Their relationship still remained close from the time they lived alone together, and although he was working long hours, he did the most he could. They just enjoyed spending time together. Addy’s relationship with her mother also mirrored their earlier one, in that her mom would buy her any and everything that she possibly could, like she was trying to make up for something. She feels that she was spoiled because she was an only child, but spoiled in a different way. Addy would take it because she could see straight through the reasoning behind her mother spoiling her and feels that she grew up with almost a sense of entitlement. If she asked for it she would get it because they felt in debt to her for whatever reason. The sense of entitlement started to grow, and was reinforced by her lifestyle. She did her own thing, was self-grown, would do her own laundry and make her own food. What more could anyone ask? She felt that her parents couldn't tell her anything at that point, as she was largely in charge of her life and her decisions.

**Dad Meets New Woman**

The major precipitating event to Addy’s parents’ separation began when Addy was in grade 8. When her mom would go out, her dad would pretend like he’s going to go to sleep. Her mom would leave and all of a sudden, her dad has his clothes one and he’s gone now too. Addy was intrigued by the situation, observing but not saying anything to anyone. This was going on for a couple of months. Addy learned the patterns of when each parent would leave and return home, and she would sneak out to see her friends.

Addy vividly remembers being at home with her father one afternoon, and overhearing him on the phone, which was out of character for him. She knew it wasn’t a guy by the way he was speaking. What caught her off guard was that he had a smile on his face. She started paying attention, but decided to leave it there. This is not her life,
she had her own thing going on. She continued to monitor this situation, and noticed that the phone calls continued. Suddenly, he wouldn’t go out much, or if he went out he would talk to this person before. Sometimes he wouldn’t go out, but as soon as Addy’s mom would leave he’d talk to this person.

Eventually, Addy started hearing her mom talking to other people about the fact that dad was going out without her. Addy was eavesdropping on everybody’s conversations, like a fly on the wall in every part of this situation and probably the only one that really knew what was going on at that point because she had both sides of the story. Addy’s mom was getting upset and confronted him about it while Addy was in the bedroom, door ajar. Her dad denied the suspicions, in turn accusing his wife of infidelities. It was an interesting conversation because she shut up, and she doesn’t shut up. Addy realized just how much everyone’s doing their own thing in her household, how much her parents were changing. Her dad was a passive and loving man, but now he’s got attitude, and Addy knew that someone else was feeding him this attitude.

The Separation

When Addy’s mom found out the details of the relationship, she got pissed and literally didn’t talk to her father for a week. One day Addy’s dad came home from work to his wife telling him to, “pack your shit, you’re getting the fuck out of this house!” Addy was at home and realized that the shit hit the fan! She recalls that her father didn’t even care at this point because he was with his girlfriend and he was almost waiting for this to happen. He wasn’t going to be the one to tell his wife, but he was just waiting for her to find out so he can get the hell out of that household and that situation.

Addy’s father went to his parents’ house for a little while, and then transitioned to his girlfriend’s house. This time was particularly difficult for her mother, who was very angry and very depressed. Addy was able to confide in her core group of friends. They would ask how she was doing, and she would tell them that she was alright. While this was not necessarily true, what else could she say? One friend in particular, Rob, whose parents had been divorced since he can remember had already gone through all the shit that she was going through. She was able to have more serious and mature conversations about her home life, her parents’ separation, and how it was affecting her. He was really there for her in a way that she didn’t know she needed someone to be there, which is
really cool, and gave her a lot of insight into life with divorced parents. Rob was there to hang out, do her homework, or just distract her – whatever she needed. He gave advice on what was going to happen and how she was going to feel, followed by telling her not to bother, because it’s not going to change anything. He told her to just deal with it. So that’s what she did, and that got her through a lot of it. He played a really important role in this transition for her. Rob was really the only friend she opened up to about this part of her life and was the only one that really knew her and knew what she needed. They remain friends to this day, and continue to support each other in dealing with their families and navigating the complexities of divorced parents.

Following her father leaving, he and Addy lost touch. She believes that he had a lot of shame because although he was looking for an out of the relationship, the out included leaving her. As crappy as that was, he was very aware what Addy had to go through subsequently. He couldn’t talk to her, almost couldn’t look her in the face because of this shame, that’s why he was absent. When he left, he and Addy didn’t talk for almost a year. She would call him sometimes, but it was always awkward and she didn’t like dealing with awkwardness, so she’d rather just not call. “If you don’t call me why am I calling you?” But if she left it up to him sometimes he wouldn’t call for a month. Addy was angry. She is his only daughter, what the fuck?

In his absence, Addy’s mom started telling her stories about Addy’s father’s girlfriend, who has 2 daughters and one of them’s close to Addy’s age. She would plant these seeds about how he’s choosing their family over Addy, trying to get her daughter on her side. It bothered Addy that her mother brought her into this mix of shit but Addy fell for it. She was young and vulnerable, and her father wasn’t calling her! She and her father had always had that stronger relationship because the time that they lived together, while her mom was always just her friend. Her dad was a father and a friend. So all of this shit was going on and she lost the one parent she respected, the one parent that’s authority she would actually listen to. She lost the one parent that was solid and consistent, and didn’t play emotional games. She missed him. He was missing her growing up, entering high school, and other important events. She was hurt and did not understand why he had to leave her.

Life After Parental Separation
In the years following her parent’s separation, three major events occurred in her life that really shaped her. The first was the death of her maternal uncle. While she cannot remember meeting him, he left a substantial amount of money to Addy and her mother. Her mom couldn’t put that in her bank account due to her own issues with finances and government, so at 14 years old, Addy opened up a bank account in her name with 75 thousand dollars in it. With a sense of incredulity, Addy recalls that she and her mom blew that in 8 months. They got it in February and by December they were down to a couple thousand dollars. At only 14 she was spending money on getting her nails done every week, going out to the bars with her mom, alcohol, phones, clothes, a whole bunch of boat cruises. She even remembers their grocery bill every week being $150, just because they could. “It was bad, but you don’t realize until you don’t have that money anymore, and you’re like, where the hell did all that go?’”

That’s when Addy grew up and realized what the hell was going on. That’s when she realized who her mother was and who her father was. She realized that she would have to pay for university and no longer had the money to pay for it. And so, at 15 Addy got a job. Eventually, she ended up working at a dentist’s office and was paid well while enjoying the work and the atmosphere. While she worked toward building the finances that she would need for her education, she fostered a great deal of resentment toward her mother for letting them squander away her nest egg. This resentment played a large role in their relationship for many years.

The next major event that played a factor in her life was the loss of her best friends in grade 10. One day, without explanation, her three friends just decided that they were going to stop talking to her. The whole school stopped talking to her that day too. She wondered if she was going crazy until eventually someone confirmed that nobody was going to talk to her. It was kind of shitty because she lost the people she thought would be in her life forever, and then her parents just separated just a couple of years before. Her relationship with her dad was nearly nonexistent. Her relationship with her mom was quite rocky, and her mom remained depressed and in her own world. Between being angry and mad and sad, Addy didn’t see her mother, she was in her room and wouldn’t come out for weeks. She was literally at home by herself most of the time, and felt that she was really on her own now without any friends, not knowing what she was
going to do. She would just go to school, come home, go to work, come home, that’s it. The event still evokes a great deal of emotion from Addy when recounting it today.

The final major life change following the separation was Addy’s relationship with her boyfriend. She was infatuated. He was the male attention she needed to know that she was wanted by somebody. The beginning of their relationship was exciting. Her boyfriend went to another school, so they would skip school to see each other at lunchtime and lie to her parents about it. She would also make up excuses to stay out late to spend time with him. At lunchtimes, he would come to her house and her cousins who lived upstairs would report this to her mother, getting her into trouble.

Addy’s mother became worried that the relationship was unhealthy. Addy was lying and skipping school. Her mother thought that she was doing it out of rebellion of her parents’ separation. True to the nature of a rebellious teenager, she denied being rebellious, stating that she was doing this because she wants to be with her boyfriend. Her mother’s disapproval just made her lie and hide even more. At this point, her mother realized that she started to lose control over Addy, and needed help. She called in Addy’s father to intervene. Her father tried to reach out, but was met with painful accusations, such as, “Why are you here? You all of a sudden want to be father of the year now? No... go back to your family.” Eventually her parents would hold more formal ‘interventions’, as her mother liked to call it. Addy would come home from school to find her mom and dad sitting there waiting. They’d sit her down and ask her to stop lying. She would agree just to get rid of them, but would start lying again by the next week.

Her parents’ worries grew. The only thing after the separation they knew about her was that she was going down this bad path with this guy. They pleaded, “We don’t know how you feel, we don’t even know if you know how you feel, and we don’t know the repercussions of that. So you need to let go of him and think about it. If you’re feeling upset, you need to feel upset, if you’re upset at me, you need to feel upset at me, you can’t just go and see this guy.” But that’s what she did. Her parents did not want to end the relationship, they just wanted her to stop lying about it because that’s what’s scary to them. As much as Addy felt the interventions were full of shit, they did open her mind to the fact that she is making choices that are really hurting her parents. She was also starting to lose the little bit of friends that she did have at that point by not spending time
with them. She had to explore if she really liked her boyfriend, or just what he represented for her. Did she want him or just someone who gave her attention and stood by her following her parents’ separation?

As Addy explored her feelings for her boyfriend, she ended up sharing intimate moments with two other boys. She did not really enjoy either, but they served as a catalyst for her decision to end the relationship. She realised that if she is doing this shit, she obviously doesn’t feel for her boyfriend anymore. There’s a problem and she is not dealing with it, so she is doing all this other stuff, and that’s not right. In her mind she had already broken up with him, so she told him what had happened with the other boys. He flipped his shit, and he hit her. The two were alone in Addy’s house, and it was weird, he asked if he could hit her. She asked why, and he said he just wanted to see something. She didn’t really know what was going to happen, if it was going to be in her arm, if he was going to punch her or slap her, but he slapped her. Addy freaked out and crawled into foetal position in the corner of the room as far as she could from him. She let him know that that was not okay. Nothing good was going to happen from that, and there’s no reason why he needed to do that. While he may be angry, and she may be in debt to him because she did something bad to him, that doesn’t mean he can do that to her. That’s not okay. Somehow they forgave each other. Addy joked that she just pretended it didn't happen, because she was very good at pretending things didn’t happen. They tried to get passed it, but they couldn’t. She was made to feel continually guilty, and he would be reminded of her indiscretion every time he looked at her. He became different, rougher.

While it was difficult for both of them, Addy ended the relationship with her boyfriend about a month later. He did not want to let her go. Their relationship was very significant for both of them, but she knew it had to end. For Addy, she was letting go of the person she was attached to while all of this shit with her parents and her friends at school was going on. Now she doesn’t have that person, now she just kind of has herself. Her dad’s there with his new family, her mom is in her own world, and Addy is alone. Addy would encourage herself by saying, “You have your job, you have your school, let’s just keep doing that and let’s see how that goes!”

Renegotiating Relationships with Parents
Just Before Addy and her boyfriend ended their relationship, the two got into a lot of trouble and Addy’s mother was at the end of her rope. She could not deal with Addy any longer, and after catching Addy and her boyfriend sneaking off one day, she called Addy’s father to step in. The situation was very confusing for Addy, as she did not know what to expect from her father. How was the man she had not had a significant relationship with for years going to punish her?

His plan was not to punish her at all. He took her to the home he shared with his girlfriend and her family. Addy was freaking out. Not only did she just get in trouble, but she didn’t get punished, she just got sent off to this woman’s house! This is so weird! Even worse, she had never met her father’s girlfriend or her family, so now they’re meeting her because she got in trouble and her mom sent her over as a punishment. She didn’t know what to do. Her dad wasn’t even mad at her. He was just being a good host because she was over for the first time. It was all so weird.

Addy’s weird punishment did have a silver lining. She met her stepsister. The two were the same age and ended up kicking off instantly. She got a chance to forget what was going on, forget the awkward situation she was in. Her dad clued in to the girls’ connection and decided to utilize that and have Addy come over now every couple of weekends and see her stepsister. He figured that this was a great solution. Addy would be off her mom’s back and have something constructive to do on weekends. Addy agreed, especially since she had just broken up with her boyfriend and had nothing else to do. As she spent more time at the house, she developed a relationship with her dad’s girlfriend. Not a mother relationship but a positive one, which was odd considering all the shit Addy’s mom put in her head about this woman. Her relationship with her father remained awkward, but at least they had contact and minimal conversations.

Her mother felt a lot of stress that Addy was spending so much time with her father and stepfamily. What started off as a punishment had grown into something that Addy really enjoyed and needed. Addy and her stepsister were friends in a time that she didn’t have anybody else. Addy’s mother worried that she was losing her daughter to the woman she had already lost her husband to. Addy’s mother had a boyfriend at the time, and decided that she wanted Addy to also spend time at his house. The issue was that Addy didn’t like him from day 1. She went to her father’s place because she liked being
there and had a friend there. She did not enjoy time with her mother’s boyfriend or his son, but her mother didn’t understand why things didn’t spark as quickly with her boyfriend’s family as they did with her dad’s family. This created more tension in their relationship.

During this time, Addy was working during the week, going to school, and was head of yearbook, so she was really busy, which she loved. But then on the weekends, it was like either she was going to her dad’s house or going over to her mom’s boyfriend’s house (even though she didn’t really like her mom and her boyfriend’s house), and had little time for herself. Addy worked it out so that she could balance weekends at her dad’s house, weekends with her mother and her boyfriend, and weekends that she would have the house to herself. She got into some mischief, sneaking out, having people come to the house, going out with her stepsister, going out with guys, whatever. She shared, “I had a pretty good life. I loved it! I was utilizing everything. I had my own money, so I could do whatever the hell I wanted to do, nobody could tell me anything. Basically, my mom wasn’t working, so between my mom’s unemployment and my work, I was basically paying for groceries and rent, so it’s like really, nobody could tell me anything. Without me working, without me doing this hard work and plus still getting good grades and plus still volunteering and plus still doing yearbook, it’s like, really? Really? The little bit of mischief I want to get myself into? ... That didn’t settle right with my mom.” Addy did not feel that her mother had a right to complain about the fun that she chose to have. She was so upset because her mom wont even get her ass up and get a job to help Addy be a kid for a bit, instead of having to work 40 hours a week, and having to do all of this stuff. Addy’s way of dealing with her anger was not talking to her mother, and just running her own life.

Addy had a pretty good relationship with her dad now, and realized that when one parent’s bad she would go to the other parent. Now, when she and her mother would fight, she would call her dad and he’d come pick her up. He’d leave work, or he’d come pick her up at 2 o’clock in the morning. He wouldn’t even ask what happened, he didn’t care, he’d just come pick her up. Although he wasn’t there for the last few crucial years, he’s there when she needed him now, and it was pretty good. He knew what she was going through, and that’s when Addy and him got tight. He would coach her through
how to survive a fight with her mother. Addy started to gain insight into what he had lived with in so many years of marriage, and why he left. He felt bad because he couldn’t pull her out of the situation, but he knew what she was going through, which is why he got out. He was left with guilt that he left Addy there to deal with it. These insights helped to bring Addy and her father together, taking their relationship to a new level of closeness and understanding. He became her dad again, which was something she really missed. She could tell that her dad had missed her too, and that he could finally be happy again now that she was back, as his happiness depended on her.

At this time, Addy and her mother were getting into more and more fights. She recalled one fight that was particularly frightening for her. Her mother came home earlier than Addy expected her, and she was really drunk. Addy thought she was just going to go to sleep and not going to bother Addy, so she continued doing what she was doing. Then she came into Addy’s room, and Addy pretended to sleep. Her mother knew she wasn’t sleeping because it was so early. She started speaking in gibberish about not being mad at Addy anymore, but with anger in her voice. Eventually her mother went back into her room. 30 seconds later, she comes back into Addy’s room, but this time she turns on the light. She sat down on the bed, and she’s saying something about how it’s not all Addy’s fault, it’s all her fault, she’s sorry. Addy responded by saying, “Mom, I don’t have time for this, go to sleep.” But her mother insisted that she listen. Addy told her she was not making sense, but it was as if she was talking to herself. She was not looking at Addy, not even seeing her. It’s like she was looking straight through Addy at some other abyss. This was different, scary. Addy realized that her mother was not there, so she had to be very careful now what she says and does, because she doesn’t know what’s going to trip her mother off. Her mother kept repeating whatever she was saying, all the nonsense, to the point where she was holding Addy’s shoulders. Alarm bells went off in Addy’s head, and she knew she needed to get out of her vulnerable position on the bed and be ready for whatever her mother was about to do. Her mother’s ranting grew more frantic and physical, yelling that it was Addy’s father who did this to them. Addy began to yell back. Her mother grew more upset that Addy was not listening to her, and yelled more. Addy moved away from her and demanded her mother stop it! Addy flipped began screaming as well, louder than she had ever screamed before or since. Still on the bed, her mother
started crawling onto the bed and Addy can see that the person in front of her is no longer her mother. She knows that her mother is going to get physical. Addy was terrified and ran around her to get out the room. Her mother chased her, both of them still screaming. Her mother caught her and draped Addy up against one of the basement poles, but Addy got out of it and ran out of the house. She stared screaming for help outside, knowing that her cousins can hear her. She couldn’t understand why anyone would not come help, but not blaming them because why would they want to get involved? She continued to scream, knowing someone’s up, someone’s got to drive by, someone’s got to BE there. Screaming her head off, hoping for help, crying. Nobody comes. Nothing. Dead silence.

She went upstairs and started banging on the door, ringing the doorbell. Finally her mother came outside and asked, “What are you banging their door for? No one’s going to help you.” Addy knew she needed to get her mother back inside the house and so she ran into the basement, hoping her mother would follow. Addy threatened to call the cops, to which her mother responded, “Call the cops. Your father called the cops on me too. It makes no difference if you call the cops on me too. It’ll just be another one of my family members disowning me.” Addy didn’t know what to do, so she called 911. It rang, and she hung up. She realized that she couldn’t call the cops on her mother. The cops showed up because they have to, but Addy said that nothing had happened and that she called by accident. The police were suspicious, but took her word and left. Her mother said that she couldn’t believe Addy would call the cops, and then proceeded to go to bed. Addy, exasperated and exhausted, went to bed as well. The two agreed to pretend that didn’t happen, but Addy knew that they were never going to be the same again.

Addy learned the valuable lesson that she was really on her own. She can’t keep looking for people to help her get out of any situation or looking outside for help. That’s not going to happen. No one’s coming to save you. It’s just her. She worked, she was paying for everything because her mother wouldn’t get a job. She saved money and worked for grades to get her into university. She maintained a social life and volunteered. She did it all because she knew she could only rely on herself to make things happen, and she knew that he had to leave that house, and wanted to go to University out of town.

Addy made going away to university a priority. Her parents were not happy that she would be leaving town, but she convinced them that it was the best choice for her
future. The decision brought her and her father closer together, because the two would discuss universities, education, how everything would work. They had a common goal, a common interest. Her mother, on the other hand, was more worried about how she would survive without her daughter. After their big fight, their relationship changed to one where she would go to Addy for advice, strength, and courage. In a way she stopped being Addy’s mother and became this person who needs help, and Addy took the vulnerability out of it and did not take anything she says personally. Now that Addy was leaving, her mother was losing the only person getting her through things, her rock.

Once Addy got to university, she realized it was the best decision she had made in her entire life, because it was one of the only decision she ever made for herself. It turned out to be everything she needed. She had distance from her mother and her mother’s problems, and could separate herself from them quite effectively, a skill that had begun from an early age, but was made better now by physical separation. She eventually told her mother how angry she was about the blown inheritance. Once she allowed herself to stop blaming her mother for not having the money to do the things she wanted, she could let go and start figuring out ways make this stuff happen anyways.

Final Reflection

Addy continues to set demanding goals for herself, and puts her energy toward achieving them. Whether that be because of her situation or because of the choices she has made, she has a lot of respect for herself. She had the balls to make the decisions she needed to, starting with breaking up with that boyfriend when her parents separated. That was the first choice that she really made for herself, because she could no longer pretend that negative things were not going on, or just compartmentalize. It started there and that’s when she grew up and started making choices for herself and realized that she’s not going to be the product of her parents’ relationship or of the system. She’s not going to be a product of anybody else’s choices. She is going to be a product of her own choices. She has learned to really take charge, make her own decisions, and decide who she will be for herself despite her circumstances and hardships.
Appendix O: Natalie’s Story

Natalie and Laura met on a Fall afternoon on campus. They made their introductions as they walked to a nearby office to conduct the interview. After consent was explained and provided, then interview began. Natalie had previously explained to Laura that her story involves a great deal of changes to the different relationships surrounding the separation of her parents, and so, without hesitation, she began to tell her story by explaining the relationship that began it all, her parents’.

Life Before Parental Separation

Natalie’s parents, Jan and Darryl, were each other’s first everything. They met when they were 14 and 15 years old and dated for 4 or 5 years. Jan’s older sister asked, ‘what are you waiting for? He’s a great guy, just go ahead and marry him,’ putting pressure on Jan to marry him. But they did marry when they were 19 and 20, and then had 2 kids by the time they were 22. Quickly after Nicole (Natalie’s older sister) and Natalie were born, Natalie’s parents started a business together. This venture required a lot of travelling. The head office was in another city and required a 6-hour commute every day for her father, who was the main breadwinner. Her mother remained at home working full-time from there and acting as the primary caretaker of Natalie and Nicole.

Natalie explains that Darryl wasn’t around a lot up to the age of 7 because of the hectic work schedule and long commute. The family moved closer to the company’s head office, which cut her father’s commute to 2 hours per day. This move was good for her father and their family unit, but removed them from their entire extended family, who all live back in their home city. This was difficult for Natalie, as family is a true priority for her. But the business really started taking off and Darryl became a really successful man and climbed the corporate ladder.

When Natalie was about 10 years old, her father started bringing the boss personality home with him, and started treating his family like they were employees rather than family members. He just started telling them what to do. It put a strain on her parents’ marriage, leaving Jan wondering, “What’s going on? This isn’t who you are!” Natalie describes her family as very private, they don’t like to talk to external people outside of their family unit because they are very focused on portraying the image of a perfect family. Natalie’s father made it clear that she, her sister, and her mother were not
allowed to talk to their friends about things that went on in her home. Dealing with her father’s new personality was made exceedingly difficult with no one to talk to. As a consequence, her parents kind of used her older sister as their personal therapist and just started dumping their marital problems on her. Natalie explained that this took a toll on her sister, but she was trying to protect Natalie as much as she could.

Darryl communicated his controlling opinions to each family member in different ways. For Nicole, who is actually a butch lesbian and was a tomboy for her whole life, her father’s comments began at adolescence. When she started coming into her womanly body, Darryl put a lot of pressure on her to start looking feminine. He would say things like, “You know, no guys are going to want you if you don’t look this certain way, and girls want to be friends with pretty girls.” Nicole started dressing in more feminine clothes, styling her hair and wearing makeup, but that just wasn’t who she was. For Natalie, it also began when she hit puberty. She gained the normal amount of weight that girls gain when they hit puberty, but Darryl had a weight problem when he was young and he was teased mercilessly about it. When he saw Natalie gaining weight, he panicked and went overboard, saying, “You need to lose weight, we’ll put you on this regimen, you need to write down everything that you’re eating every day,” and so on. Natalie began to rebel and eat in secret out of spite. At this time, she did put on excessive amounts of weight that she probably wouldn’t have had he not been so hard on her about the weight. This torment continued throughout their teenage years.

The combination of Darryl bringing the boss persona home, harping on her about her weight and harping on her sister about not being feminine enough caused tension between him and Jan. Jan would make a special effort to stick up for her children and defend them, which just always led to explosive fights with her husband. As a way to try to repair their marriage, Natalie’s parents decided to have 2 more kids. David and Ryan are currently 9 and 7 years old. In his attempt to convince Jan to have these children, Darryl promised to be there as a 50% caretaker of the boys so that she would not have to raise them the way she had raised the girls, with him gone all the time. Jan was pretty reluctant to have more kids, but with Darryl’s persistence and Natalie’s excitement about the idea, she eventually agreed. Natalie was still young, around 12 years old, and not fully aware of the marital issues at the time, but was extremely excited to no longer be the
youngest child. When her brothers came along, Darryl was still spending a lot of time at the office in the city because he just kept becoming more and more successful. All the while, the fights and his need to control his family members continued to grow.

Natalie’s parents talked about getting a divorce several times, and her mom actually left for short periods about 5 times before the actual divorce. The first couple of times that Jan left, Natalie and Nicole worried that a divorce would rip their family apart. They eventually realized that the marriage was just getting worse and worse, so after a while the sisters actually started thinking that maybe it would be best if their parents would “call it what it is.” Natalie was disturbed by the 4th and 5th time that Jan said that she had had enough and was leaving only to come back a day or two later. It was difficult for the kids to come to terms with their parents separating, and trying to psychologically prepare themselves for the split, pondering issues such as “okay, it’s going to mean 2 houses, how’s that going to affect school and extra curricular activities?” All this, only to have Jan come back the next day and put her wedding ring back on, leaving Natalie to readjust her psychological stance, knowing that she must look forward to more fights. It came to the point where Natalie’s brothers, who were probably 4 and 5 at the time, started saying, “I have an idea, how about we live in one house and daddy lives in the other house, and that way, when he sees us, he’ll treat us with respect.” That’s when Jan realized that something needs to happen.

High School Years

During that whole period of emotional anguish inside of the internal family, they were so caught up in presenting the image of the perfect family because their father was so successful. He had to look like he had his shit together, right? For Natalie, it led to feelings of extreme isolation because on the inside she felt like she was falling apart, but on the outside she had to present as the perfect family. She not only had to deal with teenage hormones that make you into a crazy person, but on top of that, had to deal with these feelings of loneliness and not being understood.

Even though she was forbidden from telling people about it, she still would tell her friends about events such as, “[Darryl] is making me write an essay on obesity, and he’s making me write down everything that I eat, and he’s making me go for an hour-long run every night.” Their response would be of mild concern, but they’re not trained
therapists, so they would quickly move along to the next topic of, “so, what do you want to do tonight?” It made Natalie almost regret telling them because she felt that they were trivializing what she was going through, that their reaction was disproportionately small and not as supportive as she was hoping for. For Natalie, it hurt that they pretend that it’s nothing, and knowing that they don’t understand her. Unless you experience that kind of controlling, manipulative, horrible abuse, you can’t understand it, and so she did not blame her friends for not knowing what to do, but still had to deal with the isolating knowledge that they could not truly understand her.

Natalie had a few close friends who knew everything that happened. They were her personal verbal diaries. They would sympathise and try to support her, but that’s pretty much all that they could do. To be honest, Natalie does not even know what she would have said to someone who was in her situation had she not gone through it herself. While they could not provide advice or real understanding, they provided her validation by rallying around her when she needed them.

Despite all of this, Natalie wasn’t unpopular by any means. She is a pretty sociable person. The only thing that made high school awful for her was feeling that she couldn’t relate to people, couldn’t bond at the level that others could. She found it difficult to listen to them talk about their mundane problems. Natalie would have loved for drama about dating or parties to be the bad parts of her day, but she had so much more to worry about. Knowing that she just couldn’t relate to anybody her age felt isolating, and led her to begin physically isolating herself to avoid these interactions. Natalie refused to turn to drugs or alcohol as a means of escape, knowing that it doesn’t solve any problems and that it’s only temporary and that it’s super unhealthy. This further isolated her in social situations, where she felt judged for not partaking in drinking or drugs.

**Reaching Out for Help**

Natalie went to a Catholic school. When her familial situation became so much for her to handle, she reached out to her school chaplain and priest. She didn’t know what to do, and asked for help, resources, or even someone to talk to. What she really wanted was for them to swoop in and remove her from this situation. She just wanted to get out. The most that they could do was just nod their heads, give a sad face, and say,
“Okay, well, have you tried talking to him?” YES! Of course she had. But because she was so young, they were treating her like an immature teenager whose just a moody bitch who needs to stop her temper tantrum and try to speak with her father calmly. Surely he will listen. Natalie expressed, “I remember distinctly feeling, like I reached out to my teachers. I reached out to the school counsellor. I reached out to the priest. I reached out to the principle. And I did not receive any kind of support, it was all like, ‘well, just sit him down and have a conversation and tell him how this makes you feel.’ Okay, but what if you do that and you’re not dealing with someone who’s rational and who treats you like you’re a human being? Like, how- what then? What then? I can’t do anything! I can’t just, you know?”

Once again feeling misunderstood and alone, Natalie could not help but know that the situation was so messed up, and so wrong. She was trying to tell people and people were just saying that she was overreacting, that she should have a conversation with him, or try writing him a letter. Natalie now realized that she needed professional help. Her mom was really good and she tried to get Natalie in to counselling a couple of times, beginning around age 17. She reflects that specifically for victims of verbal abuse, there are not many psychologists who understand the dynamic between the abuser and the abusees and understand that cycle and the emotions. A number of the professionals that she met with repeated the same solutions of talking to him, writing a letter, etc., leaving Natalie feeling blamed for the situation, that it was her fault for not communicating her needs and thoughts clearly enough.

Eventually, Natalie found one professional that she could relate to, but was only able to have one session with him. At the time, she was working for her father. She reported that she had to go out for a doctor’s appointment, and Darryl inquired what the doctor’s appointment was for. Natalie told him that it was actually to talk to someone. At that point Darryl took her out of the office, he drove her to a remote parking lot, locked her in the car with him and just proceeded to yell at her and demand that she tell him every single thing that she had told the therapist in their first session. Natalie tried to stick up for herself, saying, “You know, I’m a legal adult, I don’t have to tell you this. This is like, confidentiality, and really, for all you know I could be talking about friends, and issues at school, and peer pressure and my conflicts with drugs and alcohol,” which,
of course, she was not, but that was not his business. In response, her father forbade her from ever going back to a therapist, saying, “You have no rights as an adult, you are my daughter. I don’t care what the law says, you will tell me everything. What happens in this family stays in this family.” So that was that.

The combination of feeling unable to relate to her peers, a verbally abusive home environment, and being unable to seek professional help left Natalie in a bad state. Natalie explained that, while she was never diagnosed (on account of never being allowed to talk to a professional about these things) she knows she was depressed. She describes having suicidal thoughts, no energy, and days when it was all she could do to get out of bed and go to school.

**Family Relationships**

Natalie made it clear throughout her narrative that pretty much family’s number one on her list, it means a lot to her and just fills her with joy to come home and be with family. Beyond her relationship with her parents, two other main family foci emerged in her story of life prior to her parents’ separation. The first was her relationship with her sister. Nicole was the older sibling and she bore the brunt of their parents’ issues. She was their counsellor. Natalie felt like Nicole was trying to protect her from a lot of the fighting and chaos of their parents’ relationships, which placed a barrier between the sisters, a change that was weird and hard for Natalie. An additional strain was placed on their relationship when Nicole came out about being a lesbian when she was probably 14 or 15 years old. Natalie remembers the moment vividly, and intuitively knew before Nicole told her. On the heels of her sister’s announcement came some quick transitions, such as chopping all of her hair so she was bald, and not wearing makeup, not shaving her armpits and not shaving her legs. It made Natalie sort of question, “okay, well now what are the boundaries? Because we used to have showers together, and we used to talk about boys together, and I don’t know if I’m ready to hear about what you do with girls, and like, are you my sister, or are you my brother now? How do I call you? How do I view you?” That was really confusing and pretty painful because family’s so important to Natalie, and now she didn’t know what her relationship with Nicole was. Natalie acknowledges that Nicole didn’t even know who she was, and she was having this whole identity crisis with their father telling her she should be one person, but her believing that
she’s this other person. It was a strained point in their relationship. Additionally, her sister’s of the personality type where she doesn’t like to talk about problems. She’ll listen to you talk about it, but she’s not going to contribute anything, so while Natalie tried to have several conversations with her, the two were just not in sync at that point of their lives to the point that Natalie felt that they were kind of estranged. It was only when Natalie hit 20 years old and went away to university that the sisters really got close again, and now confide in each other all the time.

The other prominent relationship that Natalie discussed was with her mother’s extended family. While she expressed deep love for them, she explained that one of their priorities in life is money, and the fact that Darryl makes a lot of money was really good in their eyes. They were always encouraging Jan to stay with him regardless of what hardships emotionally she was going through. Despite reaching out to them a couple of times and trying to have heart-to-heart conversations about the emotional abuse she was living with, Jan was repeatedly encouraged to stay with Darryl for financial stability. Eventually, she stopped reaching out to her family, realizing that they don’t understand, so she will not have that pointless conversation over and over.

Life at University

The year before her parents separated, Natalie attended her first year of university out of town and away from her family home. When Natalie went to university she was determined that that was the start of a new chapter of her life. She would no longer live under their roof or in the same city as them and felt that this would give her a newfound sense of independence. She thought that the new start in itself would be enough of a change that the rest would just kind of go away, she wouldn’t have to think about it, out of sight out of mind. She involved herself in the theatre arts program, which was a very time-heavy commitment but was a lot of fun and she made a lot of friends there. She also did some volunteering events. She recalls, “I’d just participate in fundraisers, and go to karaoke nights with my friends, just really trying to soak up the university life, and ‘I’m here, this is my time. Let’s just immerse myself in this.’”

While Natalie was exploring her new freedom, the whole first year of university things were building and building at home. Jan had left Darryl at Christmas, she had taken off her wedding rings, they had cancelled the family trip, and when Natalie woke up
the next morning Jan had her wedding rings back on and they were going on the family trip as one last celebration of ‘the good that we had.’ But then, of course, she stayed with him for the next 6 months. It was just this endless cycle. That really sent Natalie reeling again. It made her realize that she can’t hide from this problem. She attempted to seek counselling, but found the services at the university to be ineffective and inaccessible when she needed them most.

**Parental Separation**

Natalie’s parents separated the summer after her first year of university. She recalls that it had gotten to the point where her mom said that she was leaving and her father would threaten to commit suicide. To illustrate her father’s instability, Natalie shared the following anecdote, “For Canada Day I remember this, he said, ‘you know what? For Canada Day we’re going to have a family day. We’re going to go out on the boat. We’re going to spend a week on the boat, and it’ll be great.’ But at that point, he had become so unstable that my sister and I were convinced that my mom wasn’t coming back. Like we were convinced in that moment that he would like throw her overboard and just, it was, yeah. Looking back I get goose bumps because he was just so unstable.”

Natalie and her sister decided that their mom couldn’t leave by herself. Their mom had done research into how to get emergency custody of Natalie’s little brothers. She investigated questions such as, “Can I get to the women’s interval home? What resources do they have there for me? How do I get emergency custody of [David] and [Ryan] and how long does custody stand for? Where do I stay? Can I call the police? What if I try to tell him that we’re leaving and then he gets violent, like, do I call the police? How fast is their response time? And then what can they do? Like can they remove him from the situation? Or, and does that show up on his criminal record?” The process was really overwhelming for her because at that time she was still juggling the lives of a 5 and 6 year old as their primary caretaker on top of her full-time job. Finally Natalie’s older sister decided that it was time for them to take actions into their own hands and help their mom get out of that situation.

Nicole and Natalie rented a car and drove into their home city in a disguise so that no one would recognize her, as their family’s pretty recognizable around town. The sisters hid out in their remote cousin’s house so that their father had no idea that the two
were in town. It was the last day of school for David and Ryan. The plan was to go to school right before the end of the day, pick the brothers up directly from school and take them to their uncle’s house, which they called ‘the safe house.’ For the 2 weeks prior, Jan had been packing her bags and sneaking things out of the house to hide in the safe house so that everything would be ready when the boys arrived.

Natalie suspects that her father knew that something was up. He never went to any of the children’s school parties, any extracurriculars or anything, but he went to that end of the school day party. He was there and foiled that plan, so they couldn’t just sneak the brothers away. Thinking on their toes, the girls altered their plan. The little bothers had a soccer game that night, and Darryl was coaching. Ryan didn’t want to go, so he and their mother ended up staying at the matrimonial home, while David and their father went to go play soccer. While they were at the soccer field, Natalie and Nicole drove to the matrimonial home and picked Ryan and Jan up along with the rest of their things. They then enlisted their maternal uncle to come with them to the soccer field. As Darryl and David didn’t know that Natalie and her sister were in town, the two surprised everyone by coming to the soccer field. David came running up to her, yelling her name. She said, “come on [David], I’ll race you to the car! Let’s go!’ Natalie and David just ran straight to the car before their father even knew that she was there.

Natalie’s sister spoke to her father while her uncle stood close to make sure nothing happened. Nicole said, “[We] just wanted to let you know that we’ve been trying to talk to you for years, and no matter how many conversations we’ve been having, we can’t seem to fix this problem, and so we need to… do this for us, it’s not- we’re not doing it to you, we’re doing it for us.” She left him on the soccer field, while their uncle stayed with him. Nicole then joined the siblings in the car and drove to the safe house. Natalie laughs a little, recalling, “I kidnapped my family to get them to finally separate,” but still describes this caper as the scariest day of her whole life.

That whole week was a jumble. They stayed at their uncle’s house while they were getting everything sorted out. In order to gain emergency custody of her brothers, Natalie, Jan and Nicole had to write affidavits in order to provide proof as to why Darryl is not a good caretaker. Natalie described the process as awkward. She contemplated that on the one hand, you have a loyalty to your family, including your father. You love him,
but at the same time he’s not stable, not capable of taking care of these children. Natalie had to write out in a legal document everything that he’s done in the past that hurt her and that makes him an unfit caretaker. She poured her heart and soul out into this legal document, as did her mom and sister. The worst part of writing the affidavit is that her father reads it. He reads what she said about him and then he gets a chance to write his own affidavit, refuting it. In her affidavit, Natalie wrote about all the times that he commented on her weight, how when she or her brothers cried he would just continue to yell and tell them to suck it up, and he doesn’t validate their feelings, getting them in trouble for things that are trivial.

Darryl read them and in turn wrote his own affidavit. In detail he addressed every point that her mom said, in detail addressed every point that her sister said, and he wrote 1 or 2 lines about Natalie’s. It said something like, “I have never had a problem with any of my children. We have a great relationship,” but it was somehow in response directly to what Natalie said. In those two sentences, he discounted every one of the most traumatic experiences of her life, just pretended like they didn’t happen. That destroyed her.

Life Following Parental Separation

At the time of her parent’s separation, Natalie quit her job. It was just such a disruption in life. She also began reading up on verbal abuse and emotional abuse to better understand what she had been living through. But mostly, she was lethargic. It was really almost crippling how much she was affected, just devastated. Not from the separation but from the emotional aspects, the changes in relationships and trying to understand what the new life would look like. She was trying to get her bearings, fast-forwarding into the future. What is Christmas going to look like? And what’s custody going to look like with the boys? Before, she had a routine of work, rest, socializing, etc., but once the split happened, it was just laying in bed all day, and dwelling. She would only really go out to help her mother with the legal proceedings.

Two months after the separation, school started again. Natalie explains that she cannot remember that much about daily life. She went to class but stopped participating in any extracurricular activities. All she wanted to do was go to class or be alone. Going into University, she had wanted to get involved with a number of clubs and organizations, but she no longer had the drive to go for them. Once again, she was abstaining from
social activity, isolating herself and fearing that she couldn’t relate to anything that others were talking about, or that hearing their little problems of the day would have really upset her like it did in high school, because she felt that her problems are just so much bigger. Natalie was also weary of committing to extracurricular activities in the event that she would be called home to assist with the court proceedings. But for the most part, she was trying to pretend like it wasn’t happening. That was her coping strategy.

What Natalie could not ignore was her anger. She was angry for a lot of reasons. First, she was angry with her father. He didn’t acknowledge anything that he had done to the family. Everything that he refuted in the affidavits, he didn’t acknowledge, he didn’t own up to it, he didn’t take responsibility for it. He didn’t take his punishment. They were punishing him by leaving, and he had to deal with the consequences of his shitty behaviour. But she felt that he just pretended it didn’t happen and then replaced them with a new family, not even mourning the loss of his family. This anger lasted for a long time. Natalie was also quite angry with her mom for having waffled for so long before finally getting out. In retrospect, she understands Jan’s reasons for not being able to truly leave, but still held anger towards her for keeping the family as one toxic unit for so long.

Natalie was also angry at her extended family, who she had previously held so dear. She held them accountable for the number of times that they had seen her mother cry, saw Natalie cry, and did nothing. She had a lot of resentment toward the family for not rescuing them sooner. Where were Jan’s siblings to help her out of that toxic situation? Money is kind of important, but your psychological wellbeing is way more important. From Natalie’s perspective, she was showing physical signs - gaining weight, acne, getting grey hair at such a young age - physical manifestations of things that are just not right. Natalie was really angry at them for not doing anything to get her family out of that situation. The extended family were supportive once Natalie and her family were out, where was that support when they needed it more?

Beyond the people directly in her life, Natalie felt more widespread anger. She questioned religion, her philosophy on whether marriage works as a whole, and many other things. She stated plainly that she hated men. “I did not want a man to look at me. I did not want a man to talk to me. I did not even want a man to check me out, like, appreciatively, if I was looking good that day. Like, no, you do not get to talk to me, you


do not get to look at me, I- I just hated men.” While her hatred toward men quieted after a few months, she continued to be convinced that marriages don’t work. She was even angrier about the notion that people stay in a marriage that is not going to work, reflecting on her own parents’ marriage and why they felt the need to stay together when they were clearly growing apart.

Relationship with Father

Leading up to the split, Natalie’s relationship with her father was very rocky. Up until she was 17 years old, he was still stripping her down to her bra and underwear and pointing out all the fat parts of her body in front of a mirror. Needless to say the two did not have a good relationship. After the split, after pouring her heart and soul out in the affidavit, having him disregard and pretend like it didn’t happen, Natalie could not understand, how she could face that person. For Natalie it was really awful, because you love your father but he hurts you all the time. It’s the cycle of abuse. Natalie researched the cycle of abuse and feels that it describes exactly what happened to her. “It’s great great great great, and then something awful happens, really really awful, and then you’re just like, devastated. But then he promises and makes up and then there’s the honeymoon period, and then it’s great great great great great, and then something awful happens, and then, and that happens like every 3 months or so.”

Following the split, Natalie’s father attempted to reach out to her, but she didn’t answer for the first 6 to 8 months because she had nothing to say to him. This period was made more difficult by the fact that he would say things that she had needed to hear in the past. For example, on her birthday he sent a text reading, “Honey, I’m just so proud of you for everything that you’ve accomplished.” He was finally being the kind of dad that she wanted for the last 5 years. Where was he 2 years ago when Natalie needed this paternal love? Eventually, his attention became too much to handle and Natalie got a restraining order against him. She quickly had to remove it for reasons relating to his business, but only with his promise that he would never try to contact her again.

Natalie also had more widespread anger against her father. She was angry that he had found someone else within 3 months of the separation, and even angrier that he had introduced this woman and her children to David and Ryan. She felt that this happened too quickly, and that her brothers had not even had time to process the separation. She
was also angry that her father was taking his new family to their vacation home for Christmas, where they used to go as a family every year (and even angrier because her mother was still paying for this apartment). She saw this as a huge violation. “It was just such a violation in terms of like chronological time, like you couldn’t wait for a year? Like you couldn’t mourn the loss of your nuclear family for a year? Before replacing us? That feels great!”

Beyond building this new family, Natalie was angry that her father was not paying his child support. During the recent recession, Natalie’s mother took a substantial pay cut in order to help the family business continue to function, figuring that her husband makes more than enough to keep the family going, and that her pay would be returned as soon as it could. She, as 50% owner of the company, still has not had her pay restored, and has not seen child support money from her former husband. Natalie is particularly angry and confused as to why her father has not had to sell any of his substantial assets in order to pay for the daily living costs of his sons.

Natalie has only very recently seen her Father after about 2 years without contact. Natalie explains that, “By that point I had done all of my angry. I spent like a year and a half solid being angry, and being angry is the most exhausting thing a person can think of, like, it drains you of energy... so by the time I met up with him and I saw him, I felt nothing. Like nothing, no anger, not really love... no emotional response.” They met and caught up on each other’s lives. They are still working on rebuilding their relationship. Natalie has never met Darryl’s current wife and stepchildren. Her only reference point is her family’s stories of the woman and the weird experience of accidentally seeing a picture of them at their wedding online. She knows that she will have to meet and be civil with her stepfamily, as she plans to take a continued active role in her brothers’ lives.

Natalie’s minimal relationship with her father, along with her sister’s complete disowning of her father have made maintaining a relationship with their larger paternal family difficult. When her sister contacted their grandparents in hopes of attending the family Christmas gathering, she was met with the response that she should try getting in touch with Darryl and repairing that relationship. That was difficult, as family is so important to the sisters. It was really hard to understand what the new relationships were with Natalie’s father’s side of the family. Things were made more difficult by the fact that
half of her dad’s side of the family works at their family business. Her dad’s their boss, so not only do they have the familial loyalty to him, but they also work for him. Natalie believes that Darryl made it clear that they were not to offer any support, particularly to Jan. Jan had been in that family since she was 14 years old, for 25 years. That’s her family! Despite this, Natalie felt that her father also treats his side of the family kind of the way he was treating his immediate family, so a lot of them are actually on her side. Her father was likely monitoring their phones, but they would find little ways of letting Natalie know that they’re thinking of Natalie and her family.

Healing through Doing

In her third year of university, Natalie realized that she was hiding from the world, and that this was not a healthy coping mechanism. She decided to accept what was going on, stop hiding from things, and do the processing and she needed to come to terms with it. She began doing hypnotherapy, and fell asleep listening to audiobooks that helped to build her self-esteem. She felt herself improving over the year. She also made two really good friends in class and started demanding of herself to be more social. She would coach herself, saying, “I know you don’t feel like going out to the bar tonight, but it’s not about going out to the bar, it’s about doing something with your girlfriends, making a memory, being social, and like, you just, you need to do this.” This was just the beginning for Natalie. She grew her network of friends and began getting back into old habits. She found herself feeling happier and happier. She never really went back into a regimented thing where she had to be there every week, as she would still receive phone calls from her mom to come help with legal and family matters, but she was becoming more who she wanted to be.

Natalie explained that creative endeavours helped her to cope with her difficulties and her anger following the divorce, and to move forward. She made use of poetry, nature walks, exercise and art of any kind, just drawing, painting, etc. She reflected, “I’m not a great artist, but somehow just getting it out on paper so you can see what you’re feeling, like even just drawing a girl crying, it’s like, yes. That’s it. And it kind of just purges it and gets it out of your system... that just helped me process.” This process started by making a sad playlist. “I found songs that really spoke to the emotions that I was feeling. So it was kind of, it was anger, but then it was also like this crushing, a
crushing burning feeling in my chest and the reason why I’m smiling when I say these words is because the way that I would cope is that I would listen to music that had these key words in it that would just really describe what I was feeling.” When the playlists became less effective and she was physically weighted down with the emotions, she would just write them out in a journal. Eventually, the lines started coming out as poetry, and so she actively made it a creative process of writing a poem:

I just want the world to go away,
I want real life to not exist,
I’ll create a world of fanciful things
where darkness and pain don’t exist
full of nature and life
laughter and music

She then continued the poem so it described this perfect world:

there’s a bench under a willow tree by a pond
and I can sing and nobody can hear me
so I can sing as loud as I want
and the wind and the willows makes it sound like
it’s singing my song back to me
and I’m walking through fields
and hearing the grass swish and sway
and feeling the cool dirt beneath my feet

It became a meditative process for Natalie. She then recorded herself saying it and made it into an audiobook to listen to over and over again. Whenever she felt that burning feeling in her chest she would allow herself to feel it and acknowledge those feelings, but then would escape away into this perfect world that she created. That was her meditation, how she would change from negative feelings and transition into a better place. The poem continued on to say:

I know I have to go back sometime soon
return to reality
but it’s a comfort to think back to this place
and know that it’s waiting for me

When the effectiveness of the poem started to wear off, she put it to music so that she could hear the wind of the willows, and meditative “bonnngs” in the background. When that stopped working she put pictures to it as well, making a movie for herself. She found that creative process of writing down exactly what she was feeling and putting it
into words, and then transitioning into something that’s positive, it talked her out of her state almost every time. It didn’t take away the feelings by any means, but got her to a place where she could acknowledge that it’s bad, but it’ll get better and she can now deal with the rest of her day. She also described the power of creating of a visual art piece. Sometimes it would just be a candle in a dark room and all you could see was the flame. She could not always recognize what that feeling was or why it had to be expressed, but it was there, and it did need to be expressed. She really benefited from finding an outlet of expressing and processing her private thoughts through these modes.

**Moving Forward**

In closing the interview, Natalie shared a little bit regarding where she is now, and what she would like others to learn from her experiences. Now that she is in a Master’s program and is coming up on 2 and a half years after the divorce, she has joined student council, joined charitable clubs at school, become involved in the autism related activity groups, and has a boyfriend. She is now finding a way to balance academics with extracurriculars with boyfriend with family, so it seems to be balancing out in the end, but it was long process for her.

Regarding her family, her concern for her little brothers has definitely played a big part in her life and daily decisions. For example, she chose her current university over others for her Master’s program, because it is closer to home, so if anything happens she can be there in an instant. If her little brothers need her for just a night because they had a bad night with their dad, she wants to be there. Concern for your younger siblings and people who are close to you and what they’re going through in this whole divorce process and getting used to this new life definitely plays a big role in major life decisions. She feels that their wellbeing will always be a huge factor in every decision she makes.

Finally, Natalie shared that she was burning for people to understand what she had been through. Part of it was for others to look at the shit that she has been through, and look how successful she is in spite of it. It’s possible to rise above. People who face adversity and conflict are still able to rise above it and achieve their goals. You’ve got to have the right attitude and resources, but she was just desperate for people to understand the struggles and triumphs. She thinks that may be one reason why this project’s
Participants were all eager to tell their story, like, “Yes! We’ll tell you our story! Get it out to the public! Let them know!”
Appendix P: Copyright Permission for Chapter 2

From publishers Taylor & Francis:

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Clare

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I am currently writing my dissertation at the University of Western Ontario in Canada and was hoping to gain permission to include the Journal of Occupational Science article that I co-authored with Dr. Mandich, Dr. Magalhaes and Dr. Orchard (I have already gained their permission):


No version of the paper or dissertation will be published or circulated commercially, and there will be an explicit acknowledgement to the paper’s prior publication in the Journal of Occupational Science (as required by Taylor & Francis as well as by the University). Would you please either reply to confirm the permission or let me know the steps to take in order to gain permission to include this paper?

Sincerely,

Laura R. Hartman
Curriculum Vitae
Laura Rochelle Hartman, PhD candidate, OT Reg. (Ont.)

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND DEGREES

Doctorate of Philosophy  
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Title: The way they see it: Adolescents’ experiences with parental divorce or marital separation (Defense April 17, 2014)  
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Advisors: Dr. Lilian Magalhães, Dr. Jan Miller Polgar  
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2011 - 2013

Bachelor of Health Sciences  
Honours Specialization in Health Sciences with Biology  
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2004 - 2008

SCHOLARSHIPS AND ACADEMIC HONOURS

Valedictorian, Western School of Occupational Therapy, Class of 2013  
November 2013

Marilyn Ernest Scholarship, Western School of Occupational Therapy (excellence in academic and clinical performance) valued at $1,000  
December 2012

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Doctoral Award valued at $20,000  
2012-2013

4th Annual Health and Rehabilitation Sciences Graduate Research Forum Best Oral Presentation Award valued at $100  
February 2011

Ontario Graduate Scholarship in Science and Technology valued at $10,000  
2010-2011

23rd Annual Western Research Forum Social Science Poster Presentation Award valued at $50  
March 2010

3rd Annual Health and Rehabilitation Sciences Graduate Research Forum Doctoral Student Poster Award valued at $50  
February 2010
RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

Publications


PRESENTATIONS


*Paper Presentation*: Hartman, L. R., & Mandich A. (October 20, 2011). Learning, growing, and navigating occupations in the face of divorce: Adolescents’ daily occupations and meaningfulness following a parental divorce or marital separation. *SSO:USA National Conference*, Park City, Utah, U.S.A.


RELATED EXPERIENCE

Research Assistant: Women’s Circles: A community building occupation (Dr. Angela Mandich). School of Occupational Therapy, The University of Western Ontario. Roles Include: literature review; exploratory interviewing with knowledgeable community members; proposal, grant, and ethics approval submissions; data collection (ongoing); data analysis (ongoing). Dates: 2010 - present

Course Assistant: OT9613: Consolidation of Practice (Mary Beth Bezzina, MSc, OT Reg (Ont)), School of Occupational Therapy, The University of Western Ontario. Roles include: Online classroom facilitation, ‘WIMBA classroom’ proficiency, assessment construction, assignment construction, initial contact for students, marking. Dates: June – July 2011

**Teaching Assistant:** OT9631: Occupational Therapy: Practice in Context I (Sandra Hobson, MAEd, OTR), School of Occupational Therapy, The University of Western Ontario.

*Roles include:* Lab setup, group facilitation, assistance in lab, quiz and assignment construction and marking, final examination construction.

*Dates:* September – December 2010


**Teaching Assistant:** OT9641: Enabling Occupation through Assistive Technology and Environmental Adaptation (Sandra Hobson, MAEd OTR), School of Occupational Therapy, The University of Western Ontario.

*Roles include:* Lab setup, group facilitation, assistance in lab, quiz and assignment construction and marking.

*Dates:* September – December 2010


**Teaching Assistant:** HS2600: Introduction to Ethics in Health (Dr. Kenneth Kirkwood), School of Health Studies, The University of Western Ontario.

*Roles include:* Running weekly tutorials, facilitating class discussion, marking of final papers, answering student questions.

*Dates:* January – April 2010

**Teaching Assistant:** HS3700: Health Issues in Childhood and Adolescence (Dr. Treena Orchard), School of Health Studies, The University of Western Ontario.

*Roles include:* Running weekly tutorials, facilitating class discussion, participation in construction and marking of assignments, participation in writing of exams, answering student questions.

*Dates:* September – December 2008

**CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCHOLARLY COMMUNITY**

- Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy Reviewer 2013 – Present
- Occupational Therapy Now Magazine Co-Editor of Student Perspectives Column 2012 - Present
- Canadian Society of Occupational Scientists Board of Directors, Member-At-Large 2012 – Present