

A PROFILE OF YOUTH AND DIVORCE:  
CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARENTS AND EDUCATORS CONCERNING EMOTIONAL  
AND BEHAVIOURAL FRAGILITY AND RESILIENCY

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By

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## A PROFILE OF YOUTH AND DIVORCE

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## ABSTRACT

Within Canada it is becoming increasingly common for children to experience the separation of their parents, an experience always paired with a period of adjustment for both parents and child(ren). This case study explored the behavioural and emotional profiles of a boy from one divorced family.

Using an explanatory sequential mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), the study examined child, parent, and teacher reports of internalizing and externalizing behaviours and explored the degree to which these behaviours were perceived to have increased or decreased following the decision to end the marriage. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative data produced by the Behavior Assessment System for Children, Second Edition (BASC-2), semi-structured interview question, and photovoice , provided a comprehensive view of the externalizing and internalizing behaviours of the youth as he navigated the stressors that accompanied his family post-divorce. Photovoice appeared effective in drawing out the youth participant's perspective without the pressures and anxiety that often accompany a formal interview setting between an adult and a youth.

This study demonstrated a complex emotional response from a twelve year old boy in relation to his parents' divorce. This response indicated that many adjustments are expected of children as they navigate the move from a two-parent household to two parents in separate homes. For this child, the changes included loss of a pet, moving multiple times, and developing new ways of coping to deal with the array of emotions that he was experiencing.

Educators and parents may benefit from a better understanding of the effects of divorce on the emotions and behaviours of children when contemplating certain behavioural motivations as well as the effectiveness of interventions when behaviour is seen as affecting the overall psychological and academic well-being of the youth. In addition, the methods employed in this

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study may serve as a foundation on which to develop brief therapy relationships when working within the time constraints of school counseling.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Significance**

Behaviour and emotional problems in youth are often associated with an array of internalizing and externalizing behaviours that are exemplified in both home and school environments. As a response to opinions on behavioural diagnosis, many studies have begun to look at environmental factors that may play a role in the severity of such behaviours in youth (Swanson, Lerner, & Williams, 1995).

One such response arose from the work of Heckel, Clarke, Barry, McCarthy, & Selikowitz (2009), who investigated the relationship between parental divorce and the psychological well-being of children previously diagnosed with ADHD. This study reported greater symptom severity, more internalizing and externalizing problems, and poorer social adjustment to those children living with parents who were divorced, but ultimately Heckel et al. concluded that more research was necessary to investigate the relationship between divorce and the psychological well-being of the children involved. More recently this call has been answered and much more research has been conducted on the feelings of children of divorce and predictive behaviours that may follow, although most of these studies have been exclusively either qualitative or quantitative in nature.

As families have a powerful influence on behaviour, family dynamics can directly foster positive or maladaptive behavior (Sattler, 2008). As such, divorce can create many adjustment issues for both parents and children (Finley & Schwartz, 2010). Children exposed to the divorce of their parents are likely to feel at least a moderate degree of distress where distress is defined as an emotional response to ongoing stressors, challenges, conflict, and/or demands (Barnett, 2007). A major aim of this study is to explore the feelings and perceptions from a youth's lens, through

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a variety of research media including photovoice, interview, and psychometric behavioural testing, to examine the consistency of fragile and resilient factors available to a specific youth.

It is imperative that the worries and stresses of each child of divorce are recognized as anxiety often influences behaviours related to home and school functioning. On average, children whose parents are at the brink of divorce or separation exhibit higher levels of anxiety, depression and antisocial behaviour than those children whose parents remain married (Strohschein, 2005). Furthermore, Canadian statistics predict that one in two divorces involve children.

In addition, Statistics Canada (2005) reported more prevalence of depression and antisocial behaviours among those children from divorced families. The BASC-2 is an instrument with high psychometric reliability in its capacity to determine the degree of these previously mentioned psychological components (Powell, Lochman, Jackson, Young, & Yaros, 2009; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004) and thus, has been chosen as useful tool for the purpose of this study. Although not all divorce situations can be classed as equal in their implications, the influence of environmental factors is worthy of more study (Kushner, 2009).

### **Purpose, Objectives, and Research Questions**

To give more credence to the voice of the youth in combination with a psychometric assessment of socio-behavioural conduct, I have completed a sequential explanatory design mixed-method research study (Creswell, 2007) that examined behavioural and emotional aspects of one twelve-year-old boy within the bounded system of one divorced family. The explanatory design was used not only to obtain quantitative results, but also to explain the results in more detail, outlining the participant's perspective and situational details that could not be grasped by quantitative measures alone (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In keeping with the purpose of adopting a sequential design, three research questions were explored: 1. How will analysis of the

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Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC-2) Parent Rating Scale (PRS), Teacher Rating Scale (TRS), and Self-Report Scale (SRS) data assist in understanding some of the existing behavioural and emotional challenges facing an individual whose parents have recently divorced? 2. What range of behaviours and emotions are displayed by the individual through the photographs the youth chose to share and the conversations that accompanied them? 3. How will comparing the BASC-2 internalizing and externalizing factors with the exploratory qualitative data relating to a participant's behavioral and emotional adjustment contribute to our understanding of participants' post-divorce levels of adjustment and psychological well-being across both home and school settings?

Potential theme analysis of qualitative data considered the following: Grieving & Loss, Isolation & Loneliness, Anger & Aggression, Anxiety & Sadness, and Adaptive Skills & Outlooks (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006). These themes can be used to better understand the socio-behavioural profiles generated from parent, teacher and child reports and provide insight into how to better deal with children experiencing the separation of their parents within a school and counseling setting.

### **Definitions**

Divorce is a legal dissolution of a marital contract (Cochrane, 2007) that permanently changes the family structure for all members (Emery, 2004). The physical changes that accompany divorce not only affect the previously married partners, but also any offspring that are present (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006) often facilitating an array of emotions that may be exemplified through internalizing and externalizing problematic behaviours, or through positive adaptive coping behaviours. Although literature on internalizing and externalizing behaviours fails to provide one objective definition (Keil & Price, 2005), this literature reveals a general consensus regarding the main components of these problems. That is, externalizing

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behaviours are often manifested in terms of hyperactivity, delinquency, antisocial displays, verbal disruptions, and aggression (Matson, 2010). While externalizing behaviours may be historically explained as ‘under controlled’ behaviours, internalizing behaviours may be regarded as ‘over controlled’ behaviours (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1978). Internalizing behaviours include problematic behaviours aimed at the self (Phares, 2008), and may be characterized by withdrawn behaviour, anxiety, depression, and fearfulness (Duhig, Renk, Epstein, & Phares, 2006). While much academic literature points to the maladaptive behaviours of children following the divorce of their parents, it is important to bear in mind that children and youth possess many adaptive skills that may help them to cope and be resilient to many of the negative impacts of parental divorce (Pedro-Carroll, 2008). For the purpose of this study, adaptive skills refers to one’s ability to care for him or herself, maintain functional communication, and have quality social interactions to better deal with change in his or her life (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004). For the duration of this paper, youth will be defined as the period between childhood and adult age as exemplified by the twelve-year old participant.

### **Researcher**

I am currently a graduate student in the School and Counselling Psychology Master’s program at the University of Saskatchewan studying assessment tools and counseling strategies related to School Psychology, but also working in forensic assessment and counseling through practicum experiences. Prior to entrance into the College, I was employed as an elementary school teacher. As a teacher, I was exposed to many students who were diagnosed with or who were undiagnosed, but exemplified, various internalizing and externalizing behavioral issues. Furthermore, I came to understand that parents and teachers alike had often conflicting opinions on the validity of behavioural diagnoses and interest in possible environmental factors that could contribute to some exemplified behaviors in children. Although my interest in the subject of the

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relationship between behavior and divorce stress in children was reinforced by my teaching experiences, it was originally founded while completing my Bachelor of Education degree. I noticed that a common concern among potential teachers was the seemingly high incidence of medication being prescribed to help control students' behaviour and the implication this incidence may have for children and teachers within the school setting.

Although I have witnessed close friends and family members live through the separation of their parents, I do not have a personal experience of this to draw from. My parents have been married for thirty-five years and together have three grown children. I, myself, have been married for six years and my husband and I have two beautiful daughters. The opinions and bias I bring to this study are based purely on witnessing experiences of divorce, internalizing behavior problems, and externalizing behavior problems and conversing with colleges, friends, and family members about authentic concerns that they have surrounding the integration of these topics. Although I have perused the literature claiming the negative implications of divorce on children, I am well aware that there is an abundance of research that attests to the resilience and remarkable ability of children and youth to adapt in a variety of stressful situations.

My background in Education and interest as a parent combined with my experiences in educational psychology makes me particularly suited to conduct a study that could have practical implications for current educational practices. Upon completion of the School & Counseling Program at the University of Saskatchewan, my tentative plan is to register as a psychologist in the province of Saskatchewan with ambitions to secure a position as a psychologist working in risk assessment.

### **Theoretical Perspectives on Child Adjustment to Divorce**

While it is clear that many factors can be considered when examining the experience of children after the separation of their parents, many theories have also been used to study these

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topics. Amato (1993) examined four major theoretical perspectives that can be called upon when accounting for child adjustment in divorce situations, cumulating in a fifth perspective that more appropriately combines relevant elements of the previous four to account for individual differences in familial situations. These perspectives refer to the child's experience of parental loss, parental adjustment, conflict, economic trials, and stressful life situations.

The parental loss perspective is based on the assumption that the best environment for a child is a two parent household, where the child can receive guidance and nurturing from both parents on an on-going basis (Amato, 1993). When a divorce changes the living arrangements of the family, the child often experiences a decrease in the frequency or quality of time spent with one of his or her parents (Berger, Brown, Joung, Melli & Wimer, 2008; Cashmore, Parkinson & Taylor, 2007). The decline in parental support may account for poorer socialization of the child and amount in problems in areas of academic achievement, self-esteem, and behaviour (Amato, 1993; Bloch, Peleg, Koren, Aner, & Klien, 2007; Duetsch, 2008; Eldar-Avidan, Haj-Yahia, & Greenbaum, 2008). While Amato's definition accounts for the role of the parents, it does not fully account for the feelings of loss experienced by the child following the removal of one parent from the family home (DeLucia-Waack, 2011; Friendly & Grolnick, 2009).

In a similar line of thought, the parental adjustment perspective affirms the belief that parents cannot act in the most beneficial ways towards their children when they are experiencing severe stress in their personal lives (Amato, 2010; Strohschein, 2007). This perspective maintains that the stress of divorce impairs the quality of child-rearing, having a direct result on the well-being of the child (Ackerman & Kravit, 2009; Albertini & Garriga, 2010; Hetherington, 2005). This perspective is generally understood to be at its most severe in the first two years following the separation (Fine & Harvey, 2006).

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The inter-parental conflict perspective asserts that an unhappy home environment is less than an ideal situation for the well-being of the child and exposure to situations of parental conflict has a negative effect on the psychological adjustment of the child (Duetsch, 2008; Koss, George, Bergman, Cummings, Davies & Cicchetti, 2011; Roustit, Renahy, Guernec, Lesieur, Parizot, & Chauvin, 2009). Children react to interparental conflict and hostility in a variety of ways including, but not limited to: fear, anger, and distress (Koss, George, Bergman, Cummings, Davies & Cicchetti, 2011; Rhoades, 2008). Children exposed to interparental conflict often feel forced to take sides, a situation resulting in negative effects related to the quality of the parent-child relationship with one or both parents (Fosco & Grych, 2008; Sarrazin & Cyr, 2007). Although the parental loss perspective would assert that children from a two parent household would be better adjusted, the interparental conflict perspective would conclude that children of single-parent families following the divorce of parents in conflict would thrive more than children being continually exposed to conflict, but living with both parents (Cummings & Davies, 2002; Lansford, 2009; Yu, Pettit, Lansford, Dodge, & Bates, 2010).

The economic hardship perspective assumes that marital discord will, in turn, bring economic trials. It is the decline in standard of living that can account for the majority of problems faced by children of divorce. Economic hardship may negatively affect aspects of life such as nutrition, health, security, and educational opportunities (Ahrons, 2004; Amato, 2008; Cooper, McLanahan, Meadows & Brooks-Gunn, 2009). The economic hardship perspective does not account for poor outcomes of children from divorce where finances are not a problem and may be viewed as out of date in a society where women are less dependent on their spouses to maintain financial stability and where men typically take a more active role in child-rearing responsibilities (Malone, Stewart, Wilson, & Korsching, 2009).



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The final perspective is the most general and can be viewed as incorporating aspects of the previous four to account for overall life stress as a determinant of child's adjustment to divorce. The life stress perspective acknowledges that divorce can be equally as traumatic and worrisome for children as it is for the parents (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006). In addition to worries mentioned in the previous perspectives, divorce is often accompanied by changes such as moving, changing schools, giving up pets, and/or loss of contact with extended family and friends that need to be considered on an individual basis (South, Crowden & Trent, 1998; Thomas & Gibbons, 2009). This perspective does not acknowledge one reason in particular that leads to problems for a child, but rather considers the cumulative nature of negative events surrounding the divorce (Amato, 2010; Finley & Schwartz, 2010; Kushner, 2009). Furthermore, the finalization of the divorce does not necessarily bring an end to problems associated with divorce. Children of divorce are likely to encounter additional stressors if remarriage become an option for either parent (Amato, 2000).

Upon examination of various theories, one can conclude that there is no single theoretical perspective that can be adopted fully. Divorce is a multi-faceted process to which no application of theory is all encompassing (Emery, 1999). Further to these perspectives, many researchers have chosen to adopt other theories on which they base their methodology. Attachment Theory, as originally proposed by Bowlby in 1969, claims that a history of parental availability and responsiveness leads to the secure attachment of the child; in turn, unresponsiveness and unavailability from a parent develops an insecure attachment for the child. Fabricius (2003) adopts Attachment Theory to explain why certain living arrangements following divorce are likely to have predictable negative outcomes due to the limitations on parental involvement. Family Systems Theory ascertains the idea that a family unit is contingent upon each member

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fulfilling a united function and does not account for any member in isolation from the others (Corey, 2009). This theory substantiates the underlying assumption made by Finely and Schwartz (2010) that children's perceptions of their parents are predictive of later outcomes. Family Systems Theory is also used by Beal as far back as 1979 to explain how divorce upsets the balance of attachment within familial relationships; therefore, interventions may be beneficial to help restore the equilibrium of relationships within the new family structure (Corey, 2009; Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008).

As one can see, many theories have been adopted and critiqued to explain the undeniable fact that children often experience undesirable emotions and behaviours following the separation of their parents. When exploring the range of behaviours and emotions exemplified by youth in this post-separation period, it is important to fully explore and clearly understand how various perspectives can be applied to describe and explain children's reactions in order to properly implement empathetic responses to these reactions (Hill, 2010; Pedro-Carroll, 2008).

### **Summary of Methodology**

The case study research (Yin, 2003) I conducted was embedded in the pragmatic paradigm in its use of various perspectives to describe the same set of behaviours in the same situation. This variety in perspective was intensified by the use of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods. Quantitative measures were employed in the form of the Behavioral Assessment System for Children, Second Edition (BASC-2) which integrated the assessment of personality, as well as externalizing and internalizing behaviours in a thorough psychometric evaluation that has proven to have high reliability (Powell et al, 2009). Qualitative data was gathered through the use of photovoice research (Wang & Burris, 1997) and semi-structured interviews with both the youth and the parent participant (Marshall & Rossman,

2011). Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed separately and then considered together through a process of general inductive analysis (Thomas, 2006).

### **Parameters & Limitations**

Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) recognize that discussions of validity in mixed methods research are rather new; therefore, there is little concrete evidence of forms of mixed methods validity to rely on. The most appropriate means of discussing validity is to focus on the strategies that may be used in data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of the results.

The first potential threat to the validity of data collection lies in the selection of appropriate individuals as study participants. The same individuals must be available for the qualitative follow-up as are used for the initial quantitative phase. The data collection procedures utilized in the explanatory design method involve first collecting quantitative data and analyzing it, and then using the results to inform the qualitative data collection topics. In this sense there are two areas of potential threat: first, the selection of a sound psychometric tool to measure the quantitative phase, and second, the quality of the qualitative data questions.

When deciding what quantitative data to follow up on in the qualitative phase of the research, the researcher may choose to include information from several sources: examine the results which are unclear or require further information; examine the statistically significant results; examine the statistically insignificant results; and/or examine key significant predictors and/or distinguishing demographic characteristics. A limitation of these subjective decisions occurs because, depending on which elements of the quantitative results the researcher chooses to explore, some aspects of the case study may be stressed while others are hardly touched upon. During the qualitative phase, the researcher also needs to be sensitive to major themes that may emerge that have not been tested by psychometric means. The researcher needs to be clear about

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the use of the qualitative phase to examine both similarities and differences of the results between quantitative and qualitative measures.

For this study, I have adopted the definition of case study proposed by Yin (2003) which, by nature, is a suitable approach for a mixed-methods study due to the recognition it gives to the value of human subjectivity while still maintaining that there is usefulness to the notion of objectivity (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Stake (1995) encourages the case study researcher to place boundaries on the study to avoid a potential explosion of data. For this study, I created boundaries based on a combination of definition and context (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and time and place (Creswell, 2003). The following boundaries were placed on this single-participant case study:

The youth participant must:

- be between the ages of nine and twelve years
- currently be residing in Saskatoon and attending publicly funded school
- have experienced the divorce of parents within the last two years;
- have parental consent and cooperation to participate in the study
- be willing to participate on a volunteer basis

Although the main goal of case study research is to obtain a thick description of a very particular subject, the use of only one participant leaves this study vulnerable to the criticism that this particular research study lacks rigor. Case study research has been criticized for its potential for researcher bias and avoidance of systemic procedures (Yin, 2009). By maintaining a chain of evidence and exploring rival explanations to the data, a case study researcher may help increase the rigor and trustworthiness of the study. Because case study research involves a small number of participants, generalizability is often not possible. While the objective of qualitative research

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is rarely to provide findings that can be applied to the general population, the lack of transferability in case study research is often viewed as a lack in ability to explain phenomena, casting it as merely an appropriate preliminary or exploratory research method (Yin, 2009).

When interpreting the data, a researcher may run into validity threats if he or she is trying to compare two sets of data when they are intended to build on one another. The threat to this validity is diminished if the researcher is diligent in constantly referring back to the research questions to be answered by the mixed method (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Throughout the study, the validity of the mixed method design is dependent on the fact that more than one phase or stage is used to build upon information that has already been obtained in the previous phase. If each phase is examined and interpreted solely in isolation the full advantage of both sets of data is not recognized.

### **Summary**

The outcomes of this study may help to determine or refine the predictor variables, such as parent-child relationship during interfamily conflict, which may impact the behavioural and emotional composites that can be quantitatively measured in youth. The information gathered from this study can be used to help parents and educators consider the ramifications that stressors, such as divorce, have on youth, particularly related to behavioural concerns at the time of adjustment in family dynamics. Implications of this study may impact the evolution of new behavioural interventions and therapies as well as the timing of these supports. As shown in evidence-based psychological practice, specifically targeted forms of intervention could lead to more positive outcomes for individuals and families and prevent escalating behavioral and emotional challenges in affected children and youth.

CHAPTER 2  
LITERATURE REVIEW

**Behavioural and Emotional Problems in Schools**

In 2011, the Canadian Mental Health Association stated that approximately 5% of male youth and 12% of female youth, age 12 to 19, have experienced a major depressive episode, with the total number of 12-19 year olds in Canada at risk for developing depression a staggering 3.2 million (CMHA, 2011). These astounding statistics demand attention and further inquiry into the factors that may lead to such widespread emotional problems for young people. Sadly, depressive symptoms only account for a fraction of youth living with behavioural and/or emotional disorders. Alongside Depression, Egger & Angold (2006) reported attention deficit hyperactivity disorders, oppositional defiant and conduct disorders, and anxiety disorders as the most common groups of childhood psychiatric disorders. The National Research Council & Institute of Medicine of the National Academies estimates that between 14 and 20 percent of youth have a mental, emotional, or behavioural disorder and that most disorders ultimately are rooted in childhood (O'Connell, Boat, & Warner, 2009).

On average, students with emotional or behavioral disorders display both academic and behavioral deficits, creating a difficult situation for teachers attempting to provide effective instruction (Kauffman, 2005; Sutherland & Snyder, 2007). Furthermore, the externalizing behaviours of these students often are not received well in a classroom setting and overtly inhibit teachers' attempts to provide instruction (Wehby, Symons, Canale, & Go, 1998). Behaviours such as talking out of turn, acting aggressively towards others, not listening attentively to others' contributions, and lacking motivation to complete tasks do not bode well for the development of meaningful social relations or academic success. Not surprisingly, as students with behavioural problems advance in school, they often do not progress academically at a rate equal to that of

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their peers (Anderson, Kutash, & Duchnowski, 2001; Sutherland & Snyder, 2007). Sutherland & Snyder (2007) reported on two studies, one of which concluded that the percentage of children with emotional and behavioural disorders who were reading below grade level increased from 54% to 85% across a 7-year span, and the other which demonstrated that 83% of their study's sample of children scored below the norm group on a standardized measure of reading skill.

In the past few decades, the prevalence of diagnostics for behavioural and emotional problems has increased dramatically, often leading to inquiry over the validity of diagnosis criteria (Egger & Angold, 2006; Mandell, Thompson, Weintraub, DeStefano, & Blank, 2005). Egger & Angold (2006) outline a variety of questions that have been the topic of much conversation regarding childhood diagnosis including:

How are these young children being diagnosed? What criteria are being applied? Are the criteria developmentally sensitive? Do they account for age appropriate variation during this period of rapid cognitive, social, emotional and behavioral development? How do we distinguish between normative individual differences, temperamental variation, and clinically significant behaviors and emotions? (p. 313)

For the diagnosis of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder specifically, Mandell et al (2005) conducted research that examined association of increased prevalence of diagnosis with both environmental factors and the possibility of over diagnosis, citing a study by Kelleher and colleagues in 2000 that “found that pediatricians identified attention problems such as ADHD among 1.4 percent of children in 1979 and 9.2 percent of children in 1996, an increase of 657 percent” (p.56).

While it could be argued that diagnosis is often a means to attain necessary educational placement, the vast majority of children with emotional or behavioural disorders are integrated

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into the general classroom environment. In recent years, the call for promoting inclusive learning environments has led to most children being taught within the walls of a general classroom, sometimes with the help of an instructional aid and sometimes without. At the core of this decision related to inclusion were two main arguments: children have the right to be included in mainstream education and the suggestion that inclusive education is more effective (Lindsay, 2007). While there is little doubt that a concern for children's basic rights is upheld by this decision, there are mixed opinions on the effectiveness of inclusion as far as optimal learning conditions (Lindsay, 2007; McLeskey & Waldron, 2011). Obviously, a consideration of many emotional, behavioural, and academic needs within one classroom creates a complicated scenario for teachers seeking to provide effective instruction and to promote optimum learning. While teachers do their best to accommodate all kinds of learners, the increase in diagnoses over the past few decades combined with the actualization of inclusive classrooms has left many teachers feeling overwhelmed and lacking in enough time and resources to give each child the individual attention he or she may need (Freeman, Freeman, & Ramirez, 2008; Lange, 2009; McLeskey & Waldron, 2011).

Clearly, the presence of behavioural or emotional problems in a child has personal, family, and societal costs. The presence of many emotional and behavioural disorders interferes with the child's ability to accomplish normal developmental tasks such as establishing healthy relationships, experiencing school success, and eventually even transitioning into the workforce (O'Connell et al, 2009).

### **The Medication Controversy**

Currently, of the approximately 8% of youth diagnosed with ADHD, 4.5% are using stimulant medication to manage the disorder (Mayes, Bagwell, & Erkulwater, 2008). The high number of prescription medications being utilized by youth begs the question of necessity in the



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minds of the general public, mainly teachers and parents (Angold, Erkanli, Egger, & Costello, 2000; Evans, Morill, & Parente, 2010; Miller & Gold, 2010; Snider, Busch, & Arrowood, 2003). Not only are behaviour and conduct disorders, such as ADHD, hard to diagnose due to the fact that there is no objective biomedical test for them (Miller & Gold, 2010), but diagnosis is often made by a family physician lacking consultation with a mental health professional (Morely, 2010; Safer & Malever, 2000). In the wake of such a dramatic increase in psycho-stimulant prescriptions for youth (Pescosolido, Perry, Martin, McLeod, & Jensen, 2007; Zito, Safer, dosReis, Gardner, & Lynch, 2000), it is fair for the public to be questioning a possible issue of over-diagnosis (Evans, Morill, & Parente, 2010; Kube, Petersen, & Palmer, 2002). It is understandable that parents would be wary of formal diagnostic assessment tools that could lead to medicating their child, especially when the side effects can be severe including insomnia, stomachache, dizziness, headaches (Ahmann, Waltonen, Theye, Olson, & Van Erem, 1993; Buitelaar & Medori, 2010), and increase in heart rate and blood pressure (Nissen, 2006). Although there is plenty of literature that claims that psycho-stimulant medication is an effective and safe way to manage behaviour and conduct disorders (Biederman, Seidman, Petty, Fried, Doyle, Cohen, Kenealy, & Farone, 2008; Brown & Daly, 2009), it remains necessary to consider the often controversial implications of medicating children who are exemplifying behavior difficulties.

### **Children and Divorce**

*For adults a divorce may offer advantages - pursuit of a new career, a new hobby, a new spouse, or a new lover. For them, the divorce, although painful, can be a net gain. But children see no benefit in divorce. The end of their parents' marriage is a complete loss, turning their lives upside down. (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006, p.106)*

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North America has one of the highest divorce rates in the world (Marsick, 2010) with nearly half of all marriages predicted to end in divorce (Amato & Soblewski, 2001). While some researchers suggest that these staggering rates have allowed divorce to be normalized and, thus, the effects on children are lessened (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999), the vast majority of research concludes that children emerging from a divorce situation exhibit, on average, a lower degree of general well-being than those from intact two parent families (Amato, 2000; Brown, 2006; Huppert, 2009; Magnuson & Berger, 2009; Potter, 2010). There are, however, split schools of thought on the factors that are to be attributed. A considerable portion of the literature claims that separation poses negative effects on children due to the influence it has on their academic and social competence (Amato, 2000; Lansford, 2009; Yongmin & Yuanzhang, 2009) as well as their emotional and mental stability (Deutsch, 2008; Kushner, 2009; Sandler, Miles, Cookston, & Braver, 2008). The opponents to this stance state that exposure to parental conflict, socioeconomic issues, and parenting issues are more at fault for the negative outcomes of parental separation on children (Bing, Nelson, and Wesolowski, 2009; Duetsch, 2008; Roustit, Renahy, Guernec, Lesieur, Parizot, & Chauvin, 2009).

Finely and Schwartz (2010) explain that divorce creates a “divided world” for the child(ren) involved leading to long term adjustment problems. The “divided world” conjecture takes into account the amount of nurturance and involvement of the parents with various child outcomes related to self-esteem, life satisfaction, friendship quality, and academic performance, as well as the negative outcomes of distress and behavioural troubles (Cui & Conger, 2008; Finely & Schwartz, 2010; Kelly, 2007; King, Stamps-Mitchell, & Hawkins, 2010). Heckel, Clarke, Barry, McCarthy, and Selikowitz (2009) found that parental divorce is directly associated with greater internalizing and externalizing problems and poorer social and academic

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functioning specifically in children previously diagnosed with ADHD, questioning the need for a psychological component to be addressed when assessing behavioural disorders.

Regardless of the perspective adopted to address the impact of divorce on children, the same conclusions have been reached: “divorce is now part of everyday American life” (Whitehead, 1998, p.3) that causes over 1,000,000 children per year (Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blakeslee, 2000) to be subjected to a situation that causes potentially damaging feelings of loss, loneliness, anger, and anxiety (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006). Children’s response to such feelings can easily be misunderstood as bad behaviour and lack of motivation in the eyes of parents, teachers, coaches, and friends (Amato & Cheadle, 2008; Douglas, 2007; Venter, 2006).

### **Developmental Theories of Emotional and Behavioural Outcomes**

As mentioned previously, the stress of divorce on the child can often be manifested in emotional and behavioural responses, formally labeled internalizing and externalizing behaviours and/or symptoms. Developmental theorists have put forth many suggestions to help better understand the predictive behaviours that may be exhibited when a child is exposed to divorce at a certain age. For the purpose of this study, the primary focus was on the predictive responses of an individual in middle childhood, approximately aged seven to thirteen. As such, a twelve year old boy was chosen as the primary participant.

According to popular developmental theories, one of the main predictors of emotional and behavioural response is the individual’s developmental age: infancy, preschool, middle childhood, adolescence, young adult, and adult (Feldman, 2001; Thulien, 2007). Depending on the stage of the child, his/her cognitive and physical abilities, and his/her unique personality and means of socialization will influence the impact of the divorce and the mechanisms utilized to cope with it will be different.

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Piaget's developmental theory expresses that each stage represents unique abilities and underlying mental structures, built upon previously acquired skills (Piaget, 1983). By the time developmental growth has proceeded well into the concrete operational stage seen in children of middle childhood, many skills have been acquired and many mental processes are quite refined. Although children in the stage may seem as capable as many adults in hypothetical decision-making situations (Caufman & Steinberg, 2000; Schlam & Wood, 2000), their brains have not developed to the point of formal operational thinking, leaving them incapable of processing information and experiences in shades of gray as an adult can (Piaget, 1983). When divorce occurs at this stage, their cognitive ability could leave the children more vulnerable to incorporating themselves into the behaviours of the parent(s) than even a younger counterpart (Thulien, 2007). Furthermore, when coupled with a major stress situation, children cannot be expected to act to their most refined ability in cognitive, emotional, or behavioural elements. According to the suggestions of Piaget, it may be concluded that children of divorced parents should be considered as children who think in concrete, black and white terms related to the here and now and not as tiny adults who are capable of conceptualizing the divorce from various perspectives and advocating for themselves. While Piaget's theory places much emphasis on the cognitive advancement of a child to make his or her own decisions, Garber (2011) maintains that early access to, and continuation of, secure attachment is more predictive of a child's ability to speak out for his or her own needs in a divorce situation than what could be inferred by proposals related to stages of development (Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2009).

Erikson, a theorist from the psychoanalytic discipline, produced an eight-stage lifespan theory of development that attempts to explain many adaptive and maladaptive tendencies (Miller, 2002). With focus on the emotional and behavioural reactions to divorce of individuals

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in middle childhood, much of the physical and cognitive reactions will only be touched on briefly. Erikson placed children from approximately age six to puberty in his fourth stage, entitled *Middle Childhood*. It is at this stage that children enter into a world of new learning where they are defined by how successful they are at learning. Children utilize the trust, autonomy, and initiative that they have acquired in previous stages to navigate their new environment and gain either industry or inferiority (Thulien, 2007). If, in this stage, the child experiences success and competence, he or she will gain a sense of industry. If, however, the child experiences failure, he or she can be left with a sense of inadequacy and inferiority. The problem for children experiencing divorce at this point in their development is that the child may become more focused on the stress of the divorce than on experiencing their new environment, developing friendships, and mastering social play (Thulien 2007; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 2003); this shift in attention can manifest in worry or anger.

### **Protective Variables Regarding Children of Divorce**

#### **Maintaining Parent-Child Relationships**

While there remains much debate over which post-divorce adjustment factor is the most damaging to children, there is very little argument over what aids a child most in making a healthy transition: a good relationship between custodial parents and the child (Thulien, 2007).

Bowlby (1969) defined attachment as the ability of human beings to make strong affectional bonds to others. It has been highly hypothesized that life events, including divorce, can disrupt the stability of attachment either through loss of the physical presence of the parent or through loss of the ability to fully rely on the support of the parent in the same way (Amato, 1993; Nair & Murray, 2005). That being said, Wolchik, Wilcox, Tein, & Sandler (2000) found that a positive mother/child relationship could act as a buffer to divorce stress. Furthermore, consistent discipline alongside a good relationship accounted for reduced levels of internalizing

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and externalizing problems (Vélez, Wolchik, Tein, & Sandler, 2011). It may be concluded that when children experience consistency in acceptance and discipline they can maintain a greater sense of predictability of their environment and feel more confident in the support they will receive when addressing other stressful issues (Thulien 2007). Furthermore, while positive adjustment is likely to occur when a supportive relationship exists between the child and one parent, the adjustment is increased when the child has a positive and supportive relationship with both parents (Grych & Fincham, 1997; Thulien, 2007).

### **Individual Differences**

Further to a positive parent-child relationship, a variety of resiliency factors have been proposed to explain why some children suffer greatly from the divorce of their parents while others seem to emerge relatively unscathed. Wright and Masten (2005) suggested a number of characteristics that may be predictive of greater success when adjusting to the divorce:

- Demonstrating social and adaptable infantile temperament
- Demonstrating cognitive abilities and problem-solving skills
- Demonstrating effective emotional and behavioural regulation strategies are present
- Demonstrating high self-esteem and self-efficacy
- Demonstrating a generally optimistic outlook
- Demonstrating a strong faith
- Demonstrating characteristics that are valued by society (ie. Talents, humour, attractiveness) (p.24)

It is these cognitive characteristics that may account for the power of individual thinking to overcome adversity and the social/emotional characteristics that may account for a child's ability to attain the needed supports to adapt better. Ahrons (2004) proposed additional individual

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factors that can affect resiliency including temperament, intelligence, age, gender and birth order. As stated previously, middle childhood is also a period of increasing independence and increased ability to understand social contexts outside of the family as well as one's own role within his or her personal social context. During this time, social comparisons and competition with peers begin to emerge and are closely linked to feelings of self-efficacy and self-esteem (Eccles, 1999). When family structure transitions occur during this time, it has the potential to influence these developmental tasks (Magnuson & Berger, 2009).

### **Outside Support Systems**

It may logically be presumed that the greater number of support systems a child can rely on, the more beneficial it will be to him or her when experiencing a time of major life transition. Further to that, the more supported the custodial parent is, the more able he or she may be to successfully parent to the best of his/ her ability, a major factor in the healthy adjustment of the child (Kelly & Emery, 2003; Leon, 2003). Just as the adjustment outcomes increase with the presence of a good parent-child relationship and more so with two good parent-child relationships, so do the positive outcomes continue to increase with the addition of supportive grandparents. Grandparents and other family members can help to maintain a sense of normalcy and predictability in the child's life, while often helping to fill basic needs and provide some extra attention and understanding (Thulien, 2007).

As children get older, they may seek the support of peers and social groups to provide support and encouragement. In this way, schools, sports teams, musical groups, and churches may help to maintain a sense of stability and connection for children experiencing divorce (Ahrns, 2004; Grych & Fincham, 1997). By creating a network of relationships alongside activities that help distract from the stress, children may, in turn, further develop life-long coping

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mechanisms that aid to mitigate the debilitating effects of stressful situations (Sandler, Wolchik, MacKinnon, Ayes, & Roosa, 1997).

### **Parent Behaviours**

As parents are the main influence in their child's life, it is not surprising that parental behaviour is overwhelmingly cited as a positive or negative factor in building resiliency in children (Thulien, 2007; Velez et al, 2011). Many parental behaviours have been cited as helping to make the divorce more bearable for children and assist them in understanding that they are not the cause of the break-up.

Kelly and Emery (2003) suggested that children should be kept informed to avoid feelings of isolation and helplessness. Providing age-appropriate information helps the child cope with the many changes in his or her life initiated by divorce; it establishes a healthy pattern of communication and helps reduce anxiety. When communication of information is avoided, children can end up feeling that they are to blame. In a survey by Grych & Fincham (1997), children reported "being blamed" for the divorce as one of the most stressful aspects of divorce (p.165). However, when children are informed of the changes occurring in their lives, reassured of the support of their parents, advised of the parents unconditional love, and guaranteed repeatedly that they are not to blame, parents can work towards avoiding feelings of rejection, confusion, and helplessness (Kelly & Emery, 2003; Thulien, 2007; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 2003). Dissemination of research results through children's literature is evident in the children's book entitled *We're Getting a Divorce* (Mosley, 2010). This story is a candid look at how confusing the concept of divorce can be to a child and how important it is to help the child understand as much as is reasonable.

While appropriate communication can help offset the negative implications of the divorce, some forms of communication can serve as a negative influence on adjustment. Parental conflict



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is cited as one of the major stressors of children experiencing the divorce of their parents (Kelly & Emery, 2003). The initiation of the divorce is not always the end of parental conflict, often leaving the child feeling as if he or she is caught in the middle. It is important to post-divorce adjustment that children are not exposed to degradation of the other parent, not expected to deliver hostile messages, and not used as a bartering chip to manipulate the other parent (Amato & Booth, 2001; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Sclafani, 2004; Baker, 2005). While it is unlikely that the divorced couple will be lifelong best friends, it is important to the well-being of the child to develop a cooperative relationship with each other, not only to maintain the basic needs of the child but to act as a role model for healthy, responsible adult behaviour (Ahrons, 1999; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Thulien, 2007).

### **Children as Informants**

Until the late 1980's, much of the available research conducted largely equated the words 'individual' and 'person' to the adult. Children were typically reduced to immature human beings on their way to maturity and thus, full personhood (Sommer, Samuelsson, & Hundeide, 2010). At the same time, 'real' and valid research was generally viewed as objective, untainted by researcher influence, and adhering to the often technical and impersonal rules of scientific investigation (Hughes, 2001). These standards manifested themselves in ways that limited the autonomy of research participants and ultimately denied the participant of personal ownership of the results of his or her own personal life story (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Challenges to this type of research have surfaced for quite some time; first, with feminist researchers who argued for a more equitable relationship between researcher and participant (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1983; Karnieli-Miller, Strier, & Peesach, 2009; MacNaughton, Smith, & Davis, 2007); and then from some of the ethnic minority communities (Bishop, 2005; Pritchard & Morgan, 2011). While there were significant gains being made in shaping the nature of qualitative research for the adult

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research participant, the same gains were not being applied to child research participants (MacNaughton et al, 2007). As a response to frustrations that research was minimizing children's experiences of their own world, some researchers began to study children and childhood as conceptually independent categories within society (Sommers et al, 2010). The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child provided a solid foundation on which to justify using the voice of the "real" child in research when is staked the claim that made children's rights legally binding in the same way as other (adult) human rights, including the right for children to have a voice regarding decisions being made about them (MacNaughton et al, 2007).

Although various researchers adopted differing theories about childhood, Qvortrup (2002) suggested that there are some common agreements among most views in that childhood is something that can be experienced, perceived, and documented in the here and now; furthermore, children are important actors in their own society rather than merely objects of socialization. This second point makes a strong case for why one would choose to use a child as the primary informant in research about his or her own experiences. By inviting a child to explain his or her own views, one is granting the child agency- the very thing that makes a human being an active participant in his or her own life.

Despite the differences between adults and children, they are often exposed to the same set of social influences; however, these influences have a very different effect on children and adults (Sommers et al, 2010). For example, both parents and child may experience the splitting of the family through divorce, but in very different ways (Clarke- Stewart & Brentano, 2006; Deutsch, 2008, Finely & Schwartz, 2010). For the adults, they may see the split as an opportunity for new experiences, a needed move, or an escape from unhappiness. The child may see it as a loss of stability, a move away from friends, and a step closer to unhappiness. To gather

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the clearest picture of the child's experience, it is only fair to accept that children are "sophisticated and competent organisms that are mentally capable of processing social and cultural information" (Sommers et al, 2010, p.33), that is, they are capable of comprehending and making sense of their own experiences even if their interpretations seem juvenile to the adult observer.

In the past few decades, much more research has utilized the first-hand experiences of children to inform the research conclusions. Dockett & Perry (2007) conducted a study that examined children's perspectives of what they would encounter as they transitioned through school. Parents and educators were asked to name the categories that came to mind when thinking about children starting school. The children's responses were examined in terms of these categories. Although many of the child answers fit into the broader categories, the actual answer was much more telling of the child's personal experience and expectations apart from what an adult may conceive of. For example, the adult category named was "social adjustment". A child comment that fit into it was, "making sure you don't call the teacher mum" (p.96).

Qvortrup (2002) makes an important statement: "Unless children are given a constructive role in school, i.e. Unless their capacities, intelligence, energies, creativity, etc. are perceived as useful, one would be forced to opine that children only learn and know what has been transferred to them" (p. 57). The previous statement has a parallel in research. Without discounting the role family plays on a child's learned coping abilities, sense of self-efficacy, and emotional regulation, one must recognize that children are still independent beings and are not molded to experience life in the exact same way as the adults close to them. As seen by the contributions of such studies as the one conducted by Dockett & Perry (2007), adults are capable of using their knowledge to generate a fairly accurate portrayal of childhood experiences, but they cannot grasp

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the full perception of the child without going straight to the source. Furthermore, research that actively seeks children's perspectives on their own world is part of honoring a child's right to participate in his or her own story without imposing our own knowledge and categorization before the child has had a chance to pose his or her own questions and hypotheses (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999; MacNaughton et al, 2007).

CHAPTER 3  
METHODS

**Methodology**

The pragmatic paradigm (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) is an idea that emerged from criticism of the mono-paradigm approach traditionally adopted in qualitative and quantitative research. Challengers began to assert that a more practical and pluralistic paradigm was needed to address real life problems in an appropriate way (Armitage, 2007). Creswell (2003) suggests that the pragmatic paradigm is a vital response to these critics that granted approval to study areas that are of interest, incorporate methods that they considered most beneficial, and use these methods in a way that upholds the personal value system of the researcher. The pragmatic paradigm is marked by its unique ability to manage the complexities of our current society and technologies (Reeves, 1996). The design of the pragmatic paradigm indicates an openness to borrow various methods from more traditional paradigms to accumulate information and solve a problem. Within the context of a mixed-methods study, the pragmatic paradigm provides a practical orientation that allows the recognition of multiple perspectives necessary to syndicate information and use it to understand complex experiences.

Fishman (1999) describes the ontology of the pragmatic paradigm in terms of a series of conceptual glasses worn by each individual: as in postmodernist thought, individuals interpret their experiences of reality through 'conceptual glasses'. These conceptual glasses take into account one's personal goals, past experiences, values and attitudes, previous knowledge base, capacity of language, and the trends in the contemporary culture in which he or she lives. It is recognized that it is not possible for one to be purely objective when viewing the world, but it is acceptable to acknowledge that we can remove our conceptual glasses and replace them with other lenses that show other perspectives. In a pragmatic approach there is no problem with

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asserting that there is a single “real world” and that all people have their own interpretations of that world; this inter-subjectivity is a fundamental element of social life (Morgan, 2007).

The nature of the pragmatic paradigm confirms that much of what we contend is reality is socially constructed within a cultural and historical context. It is by focusing on the contextual goals and purposes specific to a group that allows the researcher to properly identify the best methods to utilize in his or her quest to achieve the goals and purpose. The pragmatic paradigm adopts an epistemological orientation that incorporates both the practices and norms of science while still maintaining that the world is interpreted by individuals (Armitage, 2007).

Those who adhere to the pragmatic paradigm prefer to deal with practical problems that have confronted them in their conventional lives. They are rarely concerned with ultimate conceptions of reality, but rather view every problem as unique. Approaches to inquiry are viewed as instruments to better understand and more effectively problem solve. No instrument is more important than the other, but rather, only meaningful within the context it is used (Reeves, 1996). The pragmatic paradigm recognizes that each instrument has its weaknesses and limitations, each researcher is interconnected with his or her participants, and each recommendation that comes out of a study is of a tentative nature, vulnerable to our ever changing contemporary society.

### **Case Study Method**

The case study (Yin, 2003) research I conducted is embedded in the pragmatic paradigm in its use of various perspectives to describe the same set of behaviours in the same situation. This variety in perspective is intensified by the use of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods. Case study data collection is based on two fundamental goals: the first is to seek rich detail in recording events, interviews, and observations and the second is to use of multiple data sources to permit validation during data analysis. Therefore, it is

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important to use multiple techniques when gathering information, making case study research especially appropriate for this mixed methods study.

Within the study, the child, his parent(s) and his classroom teacher reported on the behaviours and emotions of the child in the time surrounding the divorce of his parents. This data was collected using a diagnostic assessment tool, participant-led photography and an interview structure. The data results were analyzed categorically, revealing similarities and discrepancies between child and adult perspectives, as well as similarities and differences between information obtained from a diagnostic assessment tool versus an empathetic counselor perspective on reports of the same behaviours and emotions. This study utilized the information obtained from one case in order to gain a thick description of the emotions and behaviours that resulted from the parental separation.

### **Participants**

#### **Selection**

The child participant was selected on a volunteer basis where the following criteria were met: the child was between the ages of nine and twelve years, was currently residing in Saskatoon and attending publicly funded school, had experienced the divorce of his or her parents within the last two years, and had parental consent and cooperation to participate in the study. Latency age was chosen due to the fact that the child was required to have the linguistic competency to engage in reading and speaking throughout the study, but was still within a concrete operational stage of reasoning and was not expected to have extremely abstract understandings of the divorce. Participation was recruited through poster advertisement and transfer of information through word of mouth. For this study to be most beneficial to education within Saskatchewan urban schools, I chose to limit the study to a child residing within Saskatoon and attending school with other peers, not being home schooled or attending boarding

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school. According to Thulien (2007), “Children are most affected, and show more psychological maladjustment during the first 6 months to 2 years following the divorce; they may be more anxious or depressed, and they may have more episodes of sleep difficulties and phobias”(p.16). Because the feelings are fresh and at the highest intensity, a time frame of two years from the divorce was chosen. The parent participants had joint custody of the child and he resided approximately fifty percent of the time in each household. Both parents participated in the quantitative phase, but only the father participated in the qualitative interview. Because the parent interview data was meant only to substantiate the child interview, both parents participation in the qualitative phase was not considered necessary.

### **Demographic Information**

The primary participant in this study was a twelve year old boy. He currently resides between two homes after the divorce of his parents. The child attends publicly funded Catholic schooling within the city and engages in a number of out of school activities as well. His family would be considered middle class both before and after the divorce, although the divorce mitigated a number of changes in demographics for the child. The thoughts of separation began when this child was in grade two although the divorce was not finalized until he was in grade four. The child is now in grade six and lives with both his mother and his father approximately equal amounts of time. The child has one younger brother sharing the same living arrangements. The mother is currently engaged to be remarried and the father remarried last year. For the purpose of this study, the boy has been given the pseudonym ‘Sam’.

### **Study Design**

#### **Quantitative Measures**

The first phase of this study implemented the quantitative strand. The Behavior Assessment System for Children, Second Edition (BASC-2), integrates the assessment of



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personality, as well as externalizing and internalizing behaviours. Externalizing behaviours can be described as those behaviours that are apparent in the outward actions of an individual. Such behaviour may be recognized as aggressive acts, delinquency, hyperactivity, or attention problems (Liu, 2004). Internalizing problems are the issues that are often harder to observe because they are manifested within the individual. Internalizing problems often take the form of anxiety, depression, sadness, or somatic complaints (Johnson, 2007).

The measures from the BASC-2 that were utilized to offer study triangulation include:

1. Teacher Rating Scale (TRS)- a comprehensive measure of both adaptive and problem behaviours in the school setting.
2. Parent Rating Scale (PRS)- a comprehensive measure of the child's adaptive and problem behaviours in the community and home settings.
3. Self-Report of Personality Scale (SRP) – a personality inventory answered by the child or adolescent.

### **Qualitative Measures**

#### **Photovoice.**

The second, qualitative, phase of the study included youth participant-led photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997) followed by semi-structured interviews comprised of questions adapted for a child of school age from Sattler and Hoge (2006). Early in the study, the first qualitative method, photovoice, was introduced to the youth. In addition to its application with adults, the use of photovoice, a method that incorporates youth's natural allure to technology, is suitable for use with pre-adolescent to adolescent aged youth who may feel too old for play therapy, but may not be fully ready for the demands of talk therapy (Marsick, 2010). Photovoice is typically a participatory action research method that encourages the perspective of individuals whose voice is often left out of decision-making processes by allowing them the opportunity to take

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photographs and discuss the product's importance in relation to the individuals own vision of his or her own life or community (Wang, Burris, & Xiang, 1996). To date, photovoice has been used with a variety of marginalized groups including homeless adults, refugees, persons with disabilities, and youth (Foster-Fishman, Law, Lichty, & Aoun, 2010).

### **Interviews.**

A semi-structured interview with one of the primary caregivers of the youth, the father, was conducted following the quantitative analysis. Questions were based on themes and categories that arose in the previous data collection, but the interview process remained responsive to situations requiring further exploration (Creswell, 2007). Resulting information was utilized to inform areas of potential concern that could be addressed during the child interview.

Following a reasonable time period dedicated to the collection of an appropriate amount of photos (four were used), a semi-structured interview occurred with the child. This interview was initially facilitated by the photographs gathered through the photovoice method. Additional questions were formatted to elicit information about demographics, background and family context, and perception of internalizing and externalizing behaviours of the child with attention paid to the areas of significance determined by the quantitative data analysis, with a focus on anxiety, depression, and school problems. The child participant was free to review his data transcripts prior to inclusion and the parents were debriefed regarding the BASC-2 assessment results.

The data collected from the qualitative phase was analyzed and interpreted to outline a description of the case and a detailed view of aspects of the case in terms of categorical aggregation. These categories were then examined to determine emerging themes among the data (Creswell, 2007). Both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed first separately and then

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together to detect convergent and divergent themes or trends, and were then utilized to make inferences regarding to what extent the qualitative results helped to explain the quantitative results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

### **Data analysis**

In both quantitative and qualitative research, researchers go through steps of preparing the data for analysis, exploring the data, analyzing the data, and interpreting the results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In mixed method research, the researcher must analyze the data of both the quantitative and qualitative phases and then be prepared to integrate the findings into a holistic interpretation.

### **Quantitative Phase**

Utilization of the BASC-2 scoring assist determined the statistical significance between subtests and the externalizing and internalizing factors. In addition, a visual inspection of the data and consideration of the validity of the results helped to offer an explanation of how the results helped to answer the first research question (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011): How will analysis of the Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC-2) Parent Rating Scale (PRS), Teacher Rating Scale (TRS), and Self-Report of Personality (SRP) data assist in understanding some of the existing behavioural and emotional challenges facing an individual whose parents have recently divorced? The results and interpretations of these scores were used to refine the qualitative method questions.

The BASC-2 was originally designed to assist in facilitating the diagnosis and educational classification of a variety of emotional and behavioural disorders of children and to aid with the development of individualized treatment plans (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2003). It is currently used in many schools across Canada and is considered by school psychologists as among the most beneficial behavioural assessment tools available to Saskatchewan schools to

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date. The completed rating scales help to determine clinical significance in a number of areas including:

- (1) Externalizing Problems
- (2) Internalizing Problems
- (3) School Problems
- (4) Behavioral Symptoms
- (5) Adaptive Skills

These areas consider a number of more concise behaviours including, but not limited to, hyperactivity, adaptability, leadership, aggression, social skills, and attention.

The BASC-2 meets high psychometric standards in diagnostic assessment and is useful within the parameters of this study (Powell et al, 2009; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004). The BASC-2 can be scored by hand or using the BASC-2 software programs, the BASC-2 Assist. In this case, the BASC-2 scoring assist was used to determine the statistical significance between subtests and the externalizing and internalizing factors. Each rating scale (TRS, PRS, SRP) was interpreted with reference to both General Sex-matched and Clinical Learning Disorder norms. Two types of normative scores were provided for each scale: T scores and percentiles. T scores indicate the distance of scores from the norm-group mean ( $M=50$ ,  $SD=10$ ). A percentile indicates the percentage of the norm sample scoring below a given raw score. Special indexes are offered to assess the validity of specific answers:

- (1) *F* Index- measures a respondents tendency to be excessively negative
- (2) *L* Index- the “fake good” index; measures a respondents tendency to be excessively positive

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- (3) *V* Index- designed to detect invalid responses due to poor reading comprehension, failure to follow directions, or poor contact with reality (made up of nonsensical questions)
- (4) Response Pattern Index
- (5) Consistency Index

Each scale and composite t-score is qualitatively classified as either very high, high, average, at-risk, or clinically significant. If the participants' answers to the BASC-2 yield clinically significant results in any given area, it can be assumed that the youth exemplifies that specific emotional or behavioural challenge. The results of these scores were used to refine the qualitative method questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) to explore possible roots of the behaviour/emotion, its perceived beginnings, and consistency of the severity of the behaviour/emotion across various perspectives.

### **Qualitative Phase**

In preparing the data for analysis, the documents and visual data were prepared and the oral interview portions were transcribed into usable text. While exploring and reviewing the data, short memos to self were uniquely employed as a sort of qualitative codebook that helped to organize the data while coding by hand (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). While analyzing the data, the coding procedure assigned labels to various segments or passages of the data; these codes were further grouped into themes or categories as the researcher engaged in the most challenging portion of the research (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Once these categories were established and refined they were examined to determine emerging themes among the data (Creswell, 2007). From the literature, possible themes predicted to emerge included: Grieving & Loss, Isolation & Loneliness, Anger & Aggression, Anxiety & Sadness, and Adaptive Skills & Outlooks (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006). The emergent themes were used to answer the

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second research question: What range of behaviours and emotions are displayed by the individual, Sam, through the photographs he chose to share and the conversations that accompanied them?

In this study, the general inductive approach to data analysis proposed by Bryman and Burgess (1994) and again by Thomas (2006) was utilized. The inductive approach is evident in several types of qualitative data analyses, especially grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The product from an inductive analysis is the development of categories into a framework that summarizes the raw data and communicates key themes. Attaining categories rising from the coding, the heart of inductive analysis is generally found as the result of a five-step process as outlined below.

**Table 3-1: The coding process in inductive analysis as proposed by Thomas**

<b>Initial read through of text data</b>	<b>Identify specific segments of information among the categories</b>	<b>Label the segments of information to create categories</b>	<b>Reduce overlap and redundancy</b>	<b>Create a model incorporating most important</b>
<b>Many pages of text</b>	Many segments of text	30-40 Categories	15-20 Categories	3-8 Categories

Note: Taken from Thomas, 2006; Originally adapted from Creswell, 2002, Figure 9.4, p. 266

Bryman and Burgess's five stage model can be summarized as follows:

**Stage one: familiarization.**

The researcher must read the text as a whole and make notes at the end of the reading. While reading, one should look for what the text is about, hone in on major themes, and pay attention to unusual issues and events. Finally, if there is a multitude of cases, one may begin to group cases into types or categories.

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### **Stage two: Identifying a thematic framework.**

The researcher should consider the framework he or she will be working within while completing the data analysis. It may be appropriate to identify the following as a starting point before moving towards indexing the data (Bryman & Burgess, 1994):

*A priori* issues- A priori issues are those informed by the original research questions' aims and are usually introduced into the interview via the topic guide.

*Emergent* issues- Emergent issues are those that are initially raised by the respondent.

*Analytical themes*- Analytical themes will likely arise from reoccurrence or patterning of the participant's views or experiences.

### **Stage three: Indexing.**

The researcher may begin to mark the text, make marginal notes, and begin to design labels for codes. In this stage, key words are highlighted. At the conclusion of this stage, the researcher may be left with many codes or labels that will need to be refined in subsequent stages.

### **Stage four: Charting.**

At this stage, the researcher will have to begin to more systematically mark the text. It is helpful to indicate what various chunks of text are about, in terms of themes, and index them accordingly. Any analytical ideas that may be suggested in the text are drawn out at this point. Furthermore, this stage is meant to refine the breadth of codes and labels and eliminate repetition. This stage can be thought of in terms of grouping the text into more manageable pieces.

### **Stage five: Mapping and interpretation.**

The final stage recognizes that coding is only part of qualitative data analysis (Gibbs & Taylor, 2010). In this stage, the researcher is required to add his or her own interpretation and

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subjectively identify what passages seem particularly significant for the respondents. This stage searches for interconnectedness between codes and eventually makes connections to the outlined research questions and relevant literature to create a more complete picture.

**Table 3-2: Qualitative Analysis Stages as proposed by Bryman & Burgess (1994)**

Stage One	Stage Two	Stage Three	Stage Four	Stage Five
Familiarization	Identifying a Thematic Framework	Indexing	Charting	Mapping and Interpretation

One of the basic assumptions surrounding the use of a general inductive approach is that, inevitably, the findings will be shaped to some degree by the researcher who codes the data and makes the decisions about what is more and/or less important. According to Thomas (2003), different researchers are likely to produce findings which are not identical and which have non-overlapping components. Therefore, the trustworthiness of findings can be assessed using techniques such as comparison with findings from previous research, comparison of other sources within a project, and feedback from participants in the research. This type of approach is particularly suited to mixed methods research due to the opportunity multiple methods offers to provide data to conclude trustworthiness of the qualitative portion.

### **Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data**

Once qualitative data had been thoroughly analyzed into themes, the quantitative findings were considered in terms of the qualitative categories to answer the third research question: How will comparing the BASC-2 internalizing and externalizing factors with the exploratory qualitative data relating to participants' behavioral and emotional adjustment contribute to our understanding of participants' post-divorce levels of adjustment and psychological well-being across both home and school settings?



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When interpreting the results, both quantitative and qualitative data was analyzed for convergent and divergent themes or trends, and utilized to make inferences regarding to what extent the qualitative results helped to explain the quantitative results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Furthermore, the findings were assessed to consider how well the research questions were answered and then were compared with current literature findings, some of which outlined themes such as Grieving & Loss, Isolation & Loneliness, Anger & Aggression, Anxiety & Sadness, and Adaptive Skills & Outlooks (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006). It remained especially important to note what degree the behaviours and emotions exemplified in the quantitative phase were better understood and facilitated through data gained in the qualitative phase. This understanding assisted in accurately hypothesizing about what role depth of information has when developing intervention plans for students with behaviour problems.

### **Limitations**

Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) recognize that discussions of validity in mixed methods research are rather new; therefore, there is little concrete evidence of forms of mixed methods validity to rely on. The most appropriate means of discussing validity would be to focus on the strategies that may be used in data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of the results. To reduce the threat to validity, the same individuals must be available for the qualitative follow-up as are used for the initial quantitative phase. In this case the child, both parents, and the teacher were contacted for information for the quantitative phase and only the child and father were used in the qualitative phase. While it may have been useful to gather interview data from the mother and teacher as well, the study's focus was meant to remain on the personal experiences of the child. The father's data was only used to add another layer of understanding to the child's statements and to gather additional information from an adult perspective that a child may not have been developmentally able to address or even have access to within the confines of a

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divorce. It is, however, important to recognize that the relationship between the parents may have coloured the viewpoint presented by the father during this phase.

The data collection procedures utilized in the explanatory design method involve first collecting quantitative data and analyzing it, and then using the results to inform the qualitative data collection topics. In this sense there are two areas of potential threat: first, the selection of a sound psychometric tool to measure the quantitative phase, and second, the quality of the qualitative data questions. The BASC-2 was chosen because of its strongly researched psychometric validity. It is used primarily to address issues of diagnostics in emotional and behaviour disorders in children, but it contained many of the predicted outcomes of child reaction to divorce suggested in the literature. In an actual diagnostic setting, the BASC-2 would likely be used in correspondence with other psychometric assessment tools in order to delve deeper into the symptoms that surfaced from the BASC-2 results. For this study, the BASC-2 was used as a lone psychometric tool and the results were utilized to guide the qualitative phase. The questions generated from the BASC-2 mainly revolved around internalizing behaviour, externalizing behaviour, school problems, and adaptive skills. Because the qualitative interview phase was meant to be sensitive to whatever direction the participant chose to go, it was exploratory in nature and attempted to draw out what the participant viewed as most important rather than relying solely on what the quantitative data had suggested. This is both a strength and limitation of the study as it remains respectful towards the ownership of the story, but it can make comparison between phases more difficult.

CHAPTER 4  
RESULTS

**Quantitative Phase Data Analysis**

The Behavioral Assessment for Children, Second Edition (BASC-2) is an instrument designed to consider various viewpoints when assessing behaviour and emotional concerns and identifying personal strengths and adaptive qualities in youth (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004). The Teacher Rating Scales (TRS), Parent Rating Scales (PRS), and Self-Report of Personality (SRP) are measures of numerous behaviours viewed as manifestations of individual traits (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004). Expressions of these behaviours can be perceived differently by teachers, parents, and individuals and can be conveyed in distinctive ways in a variety of settings, which is why it is important to consider a number of viewpoints taken from various settings. To assist in the most beneficial interpretation, the BASC-2 Teacher Rating Scales and Parent Rating Scales are designed to be complementary measures of child behaviour in school, home, and community settings.

**Validity**

One form of test validity that can be utilized with measures of many traits is multitrait-multimethod, which shows correlations between different measures of the same trait (multimethod) as well as correlations between different traits (multitrait). A pattern of correlation observed through this method should be expected to be consistent even when observations are made in different settings and by different raters as is the case with the BASC-2. The TRS and PRS are especially useful for assessing multiple traits because they require different types of respondents (parents and teachers) who rate behaviours observed in different settings (home and school). Many of the scales found in the TRS can also be found in the PRS, which makes comparison amongst similar traits more straightforward.

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In addition, the BASC-2 utilizes a number of validity indexes to assess the reliability of individual respondent's answers. The F-Index assesses the possibility that a respondent answered in an inordinately negative manner. A high score on this scale would indicate that either a significant maladaptive behaviour is present or that the respondent may have responded in a more severe fashion than was warranted. The Response Pattern Index attempts to draw out respondents that may have been inattentive to the content of the questions, while utilizing a patterned response system instead. The Consistency Index identifies cases where the respondent has given differing responses to items that are usually answered similarly.

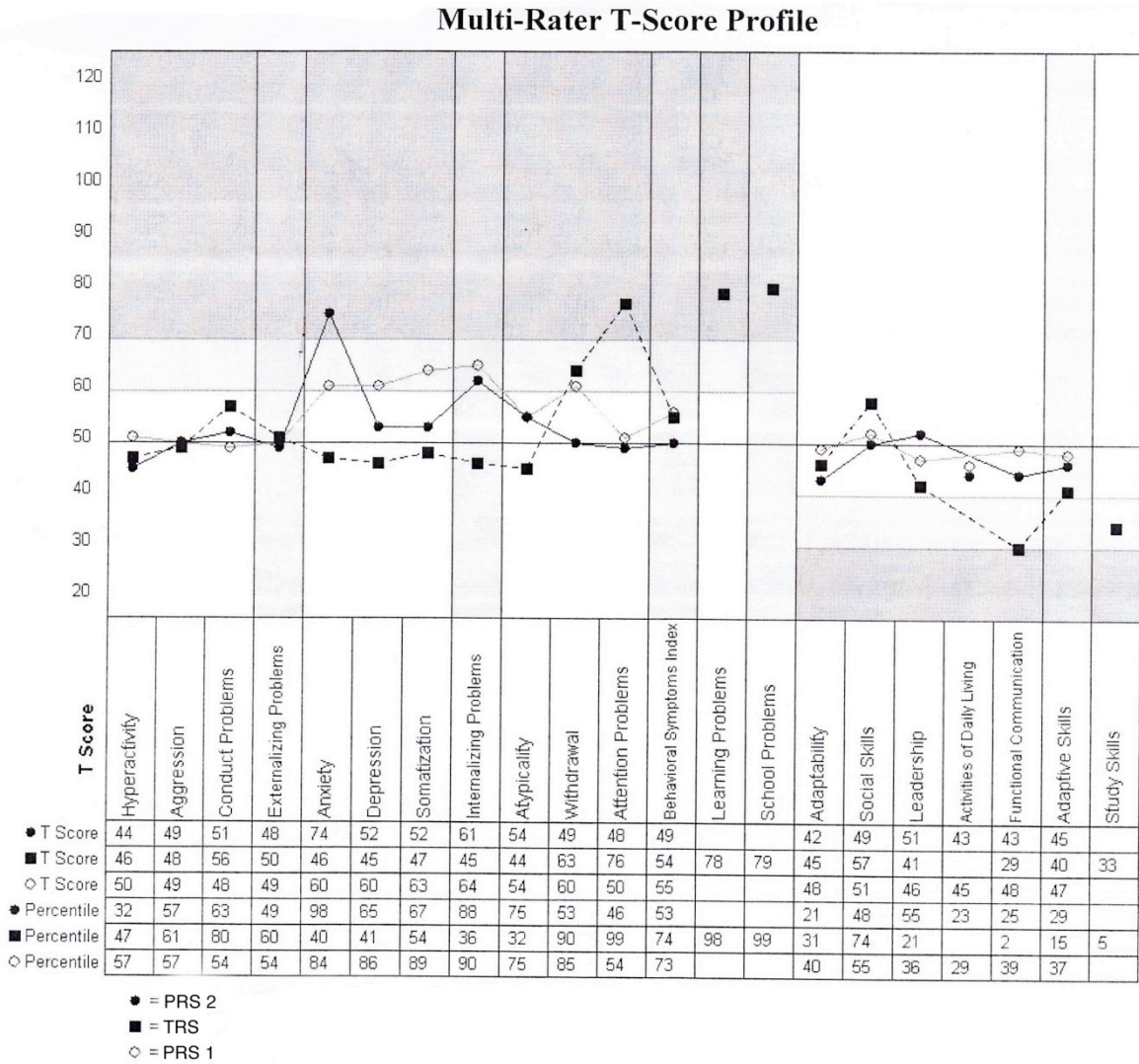
Inconsistencies can occur for a number of reasons and do not necessarily signify intentional spoiling of the items. When considering responses from the TRS and PRS, it is valuable to consider inconsistencies between the results. If the TRS and PRS show similar maladaptive areas, it is likely that the behavioral observation is a valid one. If, however there are vast inconsistencies it would be appropriate to consider two options: one, the response of one, or both, respondents is invalid; or, two, the child behaves vastly different between the two settings. The last check for validity is to consider omitted items. A large number of omitted items significantly compromise the validity of the scales. In the case of the participants for this study's BASC-2 forms (TRS and PRS), all Validity scales were considered Acceptable.

Considering first the PRS and TRS because they are the most similar in response items, it is useful to give a more precise summary of the data in terms of Clinical Scale scores, followed by an explanation of the more broad Composite scores. The Clinical Scales measure maladaptive behaviours. High scores on these scales represent negative or undesirable characteristics that cause impaired functioning at home, school, peer relationships, or community contexts. As a contrast, the Adaptive Scales provide measures of constructs that are indicative of healthy

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## Teacher and Parent Rating Scales

**Figure 4.1 BASC-2 Parent Rating Scales (PRS) and Teacher Rating Scales (TRS) Results**



adjustment. Clinical scores in the 60-69 range are considered At-Risk and scores of 70 or higher are considered Clinically Significant. For the Adaptive scales, scores of 31-40 are considered At-Risk and scores below 30 are considered Clinically Significant. An explanation of the Clinical Scores can be found in Table 4-1. For this study, scales were completed by both parents and will be labeled PRS-1 (father) and PRS-2 (mother) for the purpose of clarity.

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Aggression is defined as the tendency to do physical or emotional harm to others or to people. The TRS and PRS-1 and PRS- 2 reports of Aggression behaviours were all within the normal range for this participant.

**Table 4.1 BASC-2 Definitions\***

Scale	Definition
<b>Activities of Daily Living</b>	The skills associated with performing basic, everyday tasks in an acceptable and safe manner.
<b>Adaptability</b>	The ability to adapt readily to changes in the environment.
<b>Aggression</b>	The tendency to act in a hostile manner (either verbal or physical) that is threatening to others.
<b>Anxiety</b>	The tendency to be nervous, fearful, or worried about real or imagined problems.
<b>Attention Problems</b>	The tendency to be easily distracted and unable to concentrate more than momentarily
<b>Atypicality</b>	The tendency to behave in ways that are considered “odd” or commonly associated with psychosis.
<b>Conduct Problems</b>	The tendency to engage in antisocial and rule-breaking behaviour, including destroying property.
<b>Depression</b>	Feelings of unhappiness, sadness, and stress that may result in the inability to carry out everyday activities or may bring on thoughts of suicide
<b>Functional Communication</b>	The ability to express ideas and communicate in a way others can easily understand.
<b>Hyperactivity</b>	The tendency to be overly active, rush through work or activities, and act without thinking.
<b>Leadership</b>	The skills associated with accomplishing academic, community, or social goals, including the ability to work with others.
<b>Learning Problems</b>	The presence of academic difficulties, particularly understanding or completing homework.
<b>Social Skills</b>	The skills necessary for interacting successfully with peers and adults in home, school, and community settings
<b>Somatization</b>	The tendency to be overly sensitive to and complain about relatively minor physical problems and discomforts.
<b>Study Skills</b>	The skills that are conducive to strong academic performance, including organizational skills and good study habits
<b>Withdrawal</b>	The tendency to evade others to avoid social contact.

\* Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004

Excessive worry is a central characteristic of Anxiety disorders (Straus, 1990). Other symptomatic behaviours of anxiety include fears and phobias, self-deprecation, and nervousness, each of which is measured by the BASC-2 Anxiety scale. While the TRS indicated scores within the normal range for Anxiety, the PRS-1 indicated a score that was within the At-Risk range and the PRS-2 indicated a score within the Clinically Significant range. During the qualitative phase

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of this study, it was identified that the parent corresponding with PRS-2 also demonstrated many of the anxiety associated traits that the son exemplified. It is not inconceivable to consider that individuals with a predisposition to witness situations through a lens of excessive worry would perceive their child's condition in more severe terms. Scores within the At-Risk or Clinically Significant range on this scale should be considered in the presence of the Somatization scale, which can also be at play with many Anxiety disorders. When considering the Somatization scale, again the TRS was within normal range, while the PRS-1 indicated At-Risk responses and the PRS-2 remained within the normal expected range for a boy of this age.

The Attention Problems scale measures an inability to maintain attention and the tendency to be easily distracted from tasks requiring attention. While the PRS-1 and PRS-2 indicated that Attention Problem items were within the Normal range, the TRS placed Attention Problems within the Clinically Significant range noting that the participant almost always does not pay attention to lectures, has a short attention span, and is easily distracted while at school. In addition, the teacher observed that the participant never listens carefully and rarely pays attention. It should be noted that the child was recently diagnosed with a Learning Disability in reading and writing and attempted school interventions are relatively new at this point. It is hopeful that this child will develop new techniques for maintaining attention once he is able to more fully grasp the material being presented to him. Often, a Clinically Significant score on this scale is accompanied by high scores on the Hyperactivity scale if ADHD hyperactive type behaviours are present, although a lack of high scores on the Hyperactivity scale may still be indicative of a primarily inattentive form of ADHD and more closely tied to academic problems (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004). The Hyperactivity scale for this participant was within the

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normal range on all the TRS and PRS forms, although the TRS showed Clinically Significant scores in both Learning Problems and School Problems.

The Learning Problem scale was developed to gather information that can be valuable in screening for academic problems and diagnosing learning disabilities. The Learning Problems scale has shown to be a significant correlate of academic achievement outcomes for children in Elementary school (Oehler-Stinnett & Boykin, 2001). This participant had recently been diagnosed with a Learning Disability. We would thus expect to see some of these characteristics observed; however, even when the scores were scaled against an LD Clinical norm group, this participant still showed scores within the At-Risk range for Learning Problems. While interventions to mitigate the effects of his Learning Disability were being offered, the attempt was rather new. With attention paid to improving his reading levels, this child may be more able to maintain concentration and attention as he is able to more fully comprehend the material. With assistance from home and school, this child can work on specific techniques that help him to organize his work, organize his time, and adopt some functional study habits. Although a negative attitude in school was not identified in the BASC-2 results, the implementation of accommodations specific to this child's disability may help him to achieve academic success and, in turn, foster self-efficacy in his ability to succeed academically. It is vital to school success that this child maintains the necessary accommodations and dedication to his learning for an extended period of time in order to actually see the improvements in school performance.

The Atypicality scale measures a child's tendency to behave in ways that are considered odd or strange. Many of the Atypicality items consider a child's unawareness of his or her own surroundings. The Atypicality score on all the TRS and PRS fell within the normal range. The Conduct Problems scale measures socially deviant or disruptive behaviours such as cheating,



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stealing, truancy, and alcohol and drug use. These scales were within the normal range for both the TRS and PRS.

The Depression scale assesses many of the same diagnostic symptoms found in the DSM-IV including Dysphoric mood, suicidal ideation, withdrawal from others, and self-reproach. High scores on the Depression scale may indicate the presence of maladaptive child cognitions about self, the world, and the future (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004; Beck, 1976). Depressive disorders frequently occur with other disorders such as Anxiety and Conduct Disorder. The TRS and PRS-2 reported observations of Depression within the normal range, although the PRS-1 scores fell within the At Risk range.

The Withdrawal Scale measures a child's tendency to evade others, to avoid social contact, and to lack interest in making contact in social settings. In a mild form, withdrawal may represent a symptom of depression and in a more severe form an indicator of Autism. Withdrawal is also typically associated with feeling neglected or rejected by peers. Although withdrawal may be a sign of Depression, it has also been shown in the research that children can be withdrawn without being depressed (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004). The PRS-2 assessed Withdrawal items as within the normal range. The PRS-1 and TRS indicated that Withdrawal items were of concern, falling within the At-Risk range.

As well as considering maladaptive behaviours, the BASC-2 includes a number of Adaptive Scales aimed at measuring positive behaviours. Unlike the clinical scales, high scores represent desirable characteristics and low scores represent potential problem areas.

The Activities for Daily living is a scale that is represented only on the PRS. Items on this scale are intended to assess behaviours related to acting in a safe manner, performing simple daily tasks, and organizing tasks. Tasks of daily living are often at the core of successful

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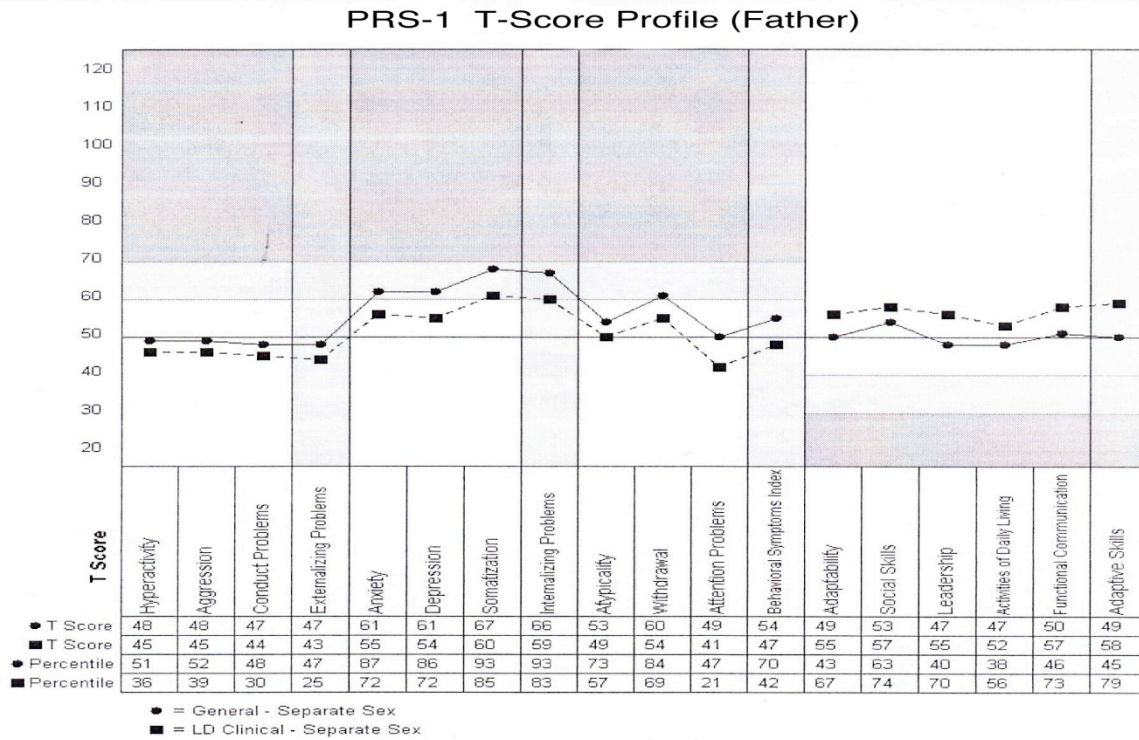
independent functioning in adult life and are developed in childhood. The PRS score for this scale was within the normal range according to both parents, signifying that the participant is on track with learning and adopting these functional skills according to his parent.

The Adaptability scale assesses one's ability to adjust to changes in routine, shift from one task to another, and to share possessions with other children. Adaptability often correlates highly with temperament variables and frequently has implications for early school achievement. Observations noted on both the TRS and two PRSs suggested that the participant is within the normal range in this category.

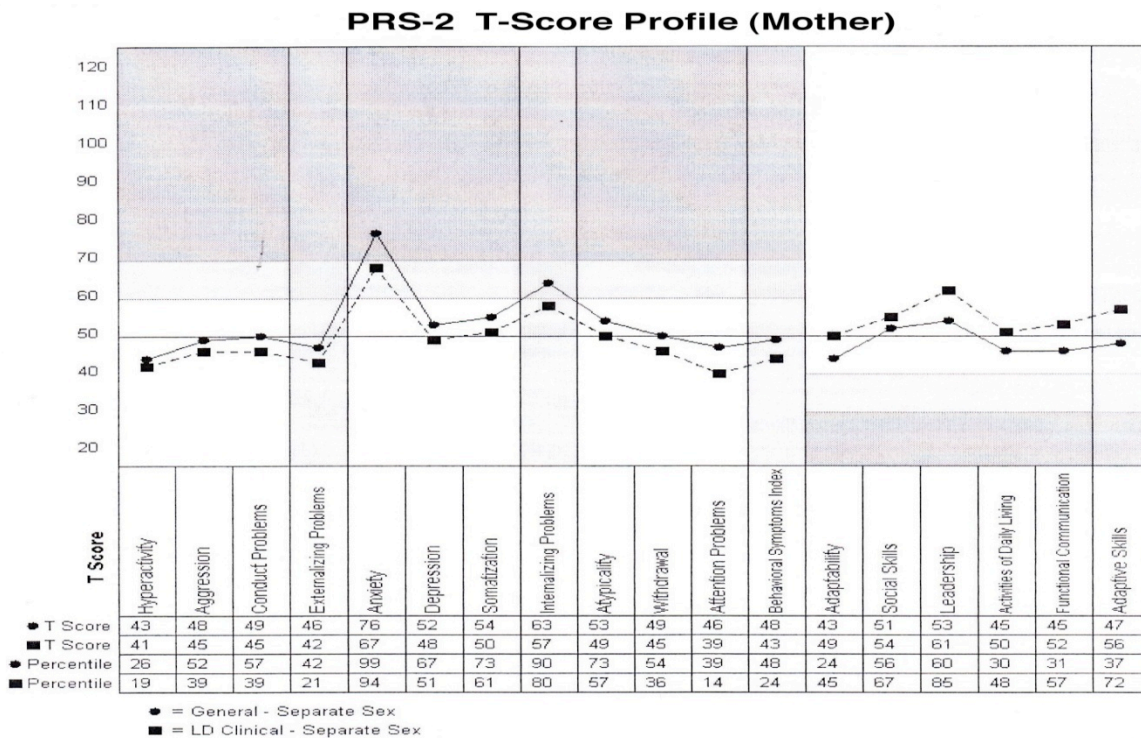
The Functional Communication scale represents the child's ability to express ideas and communicate in ways which others can easily understand. This scale may be best considered in the presence of the Activities for Daily Living and the Social Skills scale scores. Like Activities for daily living, Functional communication is considered among the core competencies for adaptive-behaviour functioning (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004). The TRS score on this scale indicated that the participant fell within the At-Risk range on these items. Some particular areas of concern included the participant's ability to attain information, appropriately track needed information, and articulate clearly when presenting ideas or explaining content. It is important to note that the participant has been diagnosed with a Learning Disability in the areas of reading and writing that may play a significant role in his ability to appropriately use receptive and expressive language appropriately. As suggested, it is wise to look at this scale in tandem with the Social Skills scale. Social Skills have long been considered the most important step towards adequate adaptation; this scale emphasizes the interpersonal aspects of social adaptation. The TRS and PRSs all noted this scale as an area of particular strength for this participant painting a

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## Figure 4.2 Father's BASC-2 Parent Rating Scale (PRS)

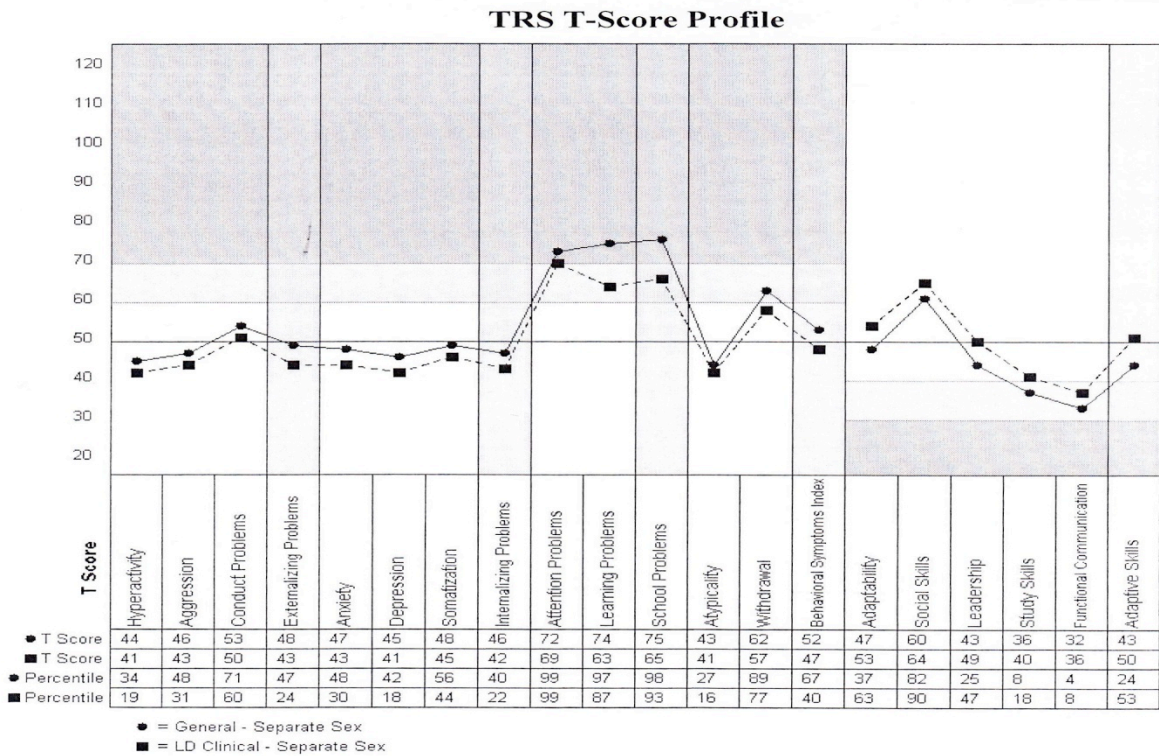


## Figure 4.3 Mother's BASC-2 Parent Rating Scale (PRS)



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**Figure 4.4 BASC-2 Teacher Rating Scale (TRS)**



picture of a child who habitually uses good manners, congratulates and encourages others, and generally brings out the best in the people he is around.

The Leadership scale assesses additional characteristic attributed to positive school and community adaptation and leadership potential. The PRS-1, PRS-2 and TRS all showed scores within the normal range.

The Study Skills scale, available only on the TRS, shows a relationship to the School Problems scale, but looks at the skills derived from research on learning strategies (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004). This scale looks at both the strategies that the child utilizes to complete problems and the way he or she organizes his or her notes, time, and work. The TRS noted that this scale was within the At Risk range when compared with other boys of this age, but within

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the normal range (approaching At Risk range) for boys who have been diagnosed with a Learning Disability.

As a way of summarizing performance and drawing broad conclusions regarding various types of adaptive and maladaptive behaviour, the Composite scales are utilized. The composite scores represent behaviour dimensions that are distinct, but not independent with the rationale that problem behaviours often occur collectively rather than individually. Table 4-2 provides a summary of the scales associated with each Composite.

### **Externalizing problems.**

This composite is characterized by disruptive behaviour problems, typically described as “under-controlled” behaviours. Externalizing Symptoms are generally more obvious than internalizing problems and commonly have a high inter-rater agreement in observations of the same. The TRS, PRS-1 and PRS-2 all signified that this participant is within the normal range in this Composite scale and no areas of particular concern were noted.

**Table 4-2 Composites and Corresponding Clinical and Adaptive Scales\***

	<b>Externalizing Problems</b>	<b>Internalizing Problems</b>	<b>School Problems</b>	<b>Behavioral Symptoms Index</b>	<b>Adaptive Skills</b>
<b>TRS-A</b>	Hyperactivity Aggression Conduct Problems	Anxiety Depression Somatization	Attention Problems Learning Problems	Hyperactivity Aggression Depression Attention Problems Atypicality Withdrawal	Adaptability Social Skills Leadership Study Skills Functional Communication
<b>PRS-A</b>	Hyperactivity Aggression Conduct Problems	Anxiety Depression Somatization		Hyperactivity Aggression Depression Attention Problems Atypicality Withdrawal	Adaptability Social Skills Leadership Activities for Daily Living Functional Communication

\*Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004

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### **Internalizing problems.**

Children with internalizing problems typically are not disruptive to others, but rather are more concerned with monitoring their own actions to excess. Because they are likely to be compliant, their problems may go more easily unnoticed. Although the behaviours are not disruptive, they do have the potential to adversely affect peer relationships (Kamphaus, DiStefano, & Lease, 2003). The TRS relayed scores that were considered within the normal range for this area. Interestingly, the PRS-1 and PRS-2 showed scores compatible with the At-Risk range, noting concerns in all three areas: Anxiety, Depression, and Somatization from the father, and severe worries of anxiety coming from the mother. When the items were examined in more detail, it was clear that the father and mother were observing the same types of behaviour at home, but during the qualitative phase it became clear that the child was showing more tears to his father as well as using excuses such as sore legs and other somatization symptoms in order to facilitate more time with his dad.

### **School problems.**

This Composite reflects academic difficulties, including issues with motivation, attention, and learning and cognition. A high score on this Composite indicated that the teacher perceived behaviours that were very likely to interfere with academic achievement. The TRS indicated a score within the Clinically Significant range on this Composite. This was shown to be an area of particular concern for this participant from the teacher's point of view. To reiterate, the child's diagnosis of a Learning Disability in reading and writing was relatively new. Hopefully, with appropriate and consistent accommodations, these issues will diminish in the future.

### **Adaptive skills.**

This Composite summarizes appropriate emotional control and expression, daily living skills, communication skills, and other adaptive prosocial qualities. These skills assess the core

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characteristics of adaptive behaviour that are most fundamental to adaptive home and school functioning with peers and within the broader community. The TRS and the PRS scores placed this participant within the normal range of functioning compared to other boys of the same age.

### **Behavioral symptoms index.**

The Behavioral Symptoms Index is used to summarize a very general level of functioning and problem behaviour as compared to other individuals of the same age and sex. According to the scores on the TRS and PRS, this participant's general level of functioning was considered to be within the normal expected range.

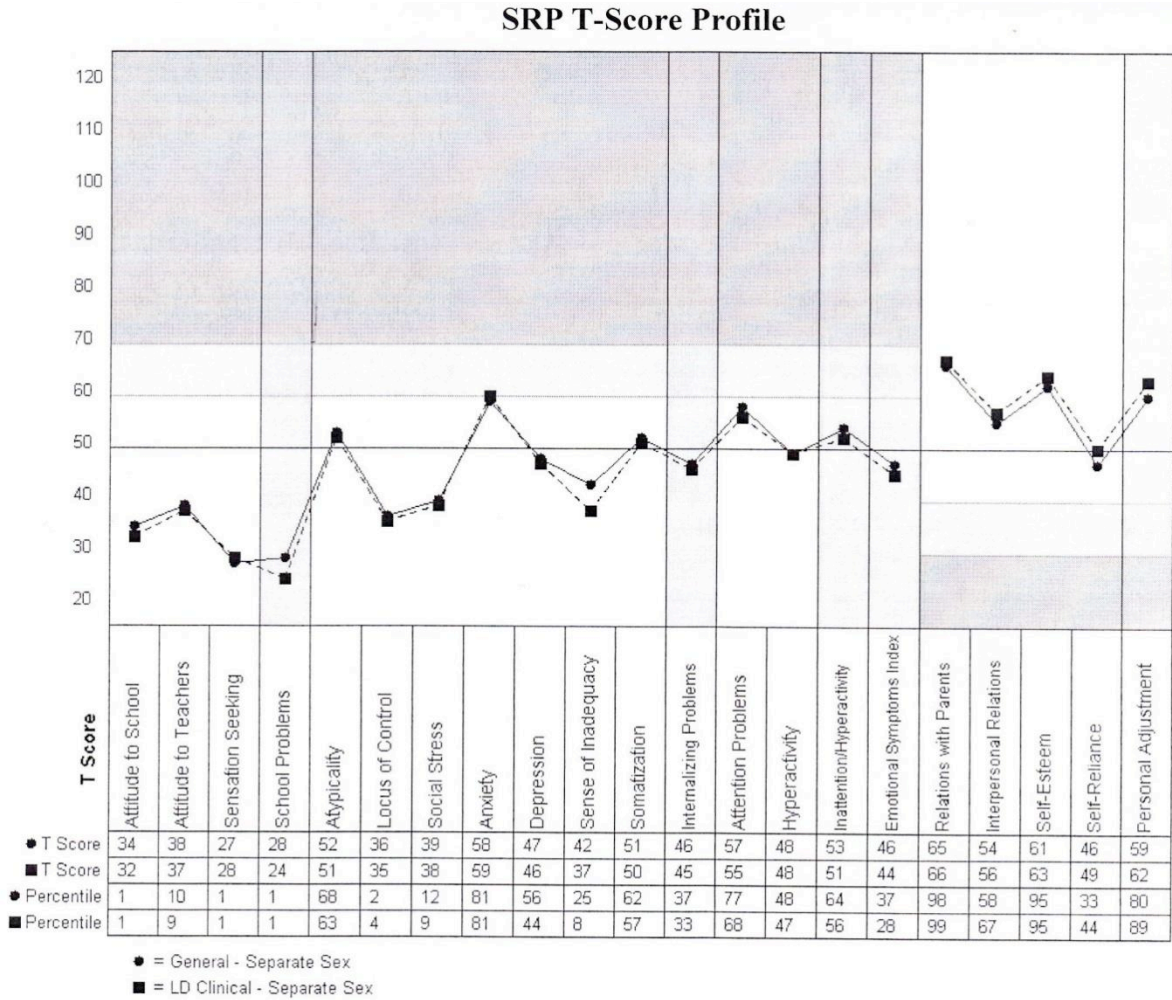
### **Self-Report of Personality**

The Self-Report of Personality is created to assess the personality, affect, and self-perceptions of youth. Like the TRS and PRS, the SRP scales were developed to measure clear *a priori* constructs and well as a sampling of other symptomology typically associated with popular diagnostic nosology.

The validity of the SRP can be compromised for a number of reasons; therefore, a number of validity indexes are considered when looking for a valid profile. In addition to the Indexes previously explained for the TRS and PRS, the SRP also utilizes two additional indexes: the L Index and the V Index. The L-Index is designed to detect a pattern of answers that may be characterized as one of social desirability or "faking good". High scores on this validity index may occur for a number of reasons: A high score may represent a lack of insight on the part of the respondent into his or her own behaviours, or it may represent a respondent who is unwilling to reveal things about himself/herself and is using positive responses to stone-wall the process. If the items that make up an invalid score seem quite random, it is reasonable to consider whether or not the youth had the reading ability to properly understand the questions. The V Index

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**Figure 4.5 Self-Report of Personality (SRP)**



consists of nonsensical questions. Marking these items shows carelessness or a lack of understanding in the respondent, sometimes due to non-cooperation. For this participant, all validity scales were within the Acceptable range.

This participant placed within normal range scores for all items, which is interesting given the TRS, PRS-1, and PRS-2 scores. In particular, his scores on the scales related to school functioning and attitude (Attitude towards school, Attitude to teachers, and Sensation seeking), which make up the School Problems composite, were all very low. In combination with the TRS



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which identified a number of school related concerns, it may be valuable to query this section further to understand whether this participant actually views school as a comfortable, nurturing place or whether he is trying to paint his school experience in a more positive light than may actually be warranted. If his responses to items related to School Problems are a true representation of his perceptions, he would be among less than one percent of boys with a Learning Disability that reported in a similar manner.

Although his scores on the Anxiety clinical scale fell within the normal range, they are elevated to a point that they should not be ignored. The Anxiety scale assesses generalized fears, nervousness, and worries that are irrational and poorly defined in the mind of the individual. Individuals who score high on this scale may be plagued with a feeling of dread or may be troubled with intrusive, bothersome thoughts. When considered in tandem with observations from both parents, it would seem that Anxiety is an area of particular concern for this young man. In particular, he endorses items that refer to worrying all the time, worrying about something bad happening without grounded reason, and being afraid and nervous. With all this worrying occurring, it is not surprising that the teacher is witness to signs of withdrawal and lack of attention while at school, although she did not accurately attribute these signs to anxiety. While it is useful to know the child's current state of functioning, it is also valuable to investigate to what degree the child possessed characteristics indicative of anxiety prior to the divorce of his parents. In the subsequent qualitative phase, we will see that the child always had a propensity to worry, but the symptoms seemed to escalate during the separation and following years of adjustment.

### **Qualitative Phase Data Analysis**

To analyze the qualitative data, Bryman and Burgess's (1994) five Stage model was utilized, as well as influence from Thomas' (2006) general inductive approach to data analysis. Bryman and

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Burgess (1994) suggested a technique that, first, examines the data in terms of descriptive coding and, second, moves beyond the descriptive codes to elicit researcher analytical thinking regarding what is occurring in the data and why it may be happening.

### Photovoice

The child participant was asked to take pictures of non-identifying scenes that he felt represented the most influential changes that occurred in his life as a result of the separation of his parents. He told his own story that was attached to each photo and subsequent interview questions were asked as he moved through each story.

#### Story #1: The weigh scale

(Figure 4-6)



*When the separation started, I was one of the thinnest people in my family. I started eating and it started to comfort me, so then I started gaining weight and gaining weight and gaining weight. I didn't like that, but it just got into a bad*

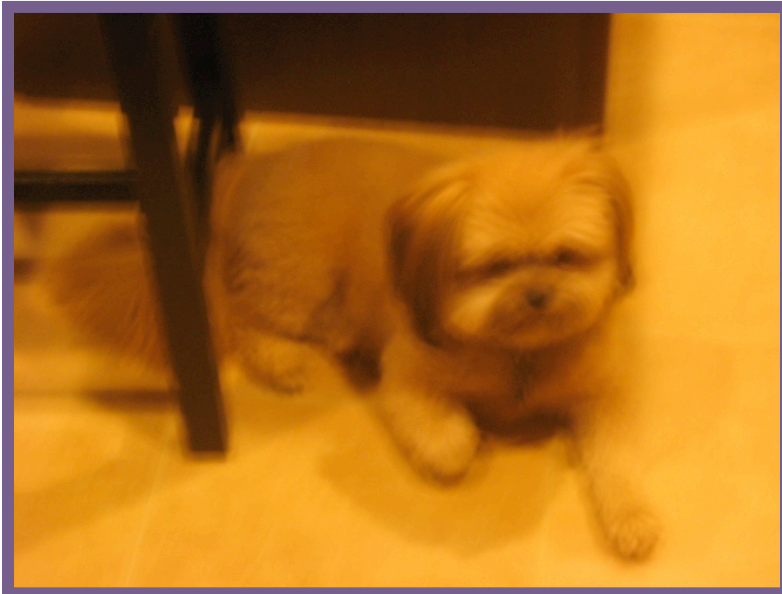
*habit that I couldn't stop. I would feel lonely and then I would go upstairs and I would notice that they were arguing, so then I would go and grab something and then go downstairs and eat it. That just stopped me from thinking about it for a while. Then it just stuck. I would go upstairs to get food so I could listen to the arguments. When they were fighting, they usually wanted us downstairs or in our rooms, so that was my excuse to come out and check out what's going on. It worked for the longest time, but then I started to notice their arguments getting a little more*

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*violent and I stopped listening, but I still couldn't stop going up to get a snack. After my mom moved out, I kept eating. It just kind of became a habit. I tried to stop, but it had become a habit. Whenever my mom had to sleep, I would go and sneak something and eat it. I felt kind of bad and mad with myself in my heart, but my mind was saying, "It tastes good; don't stop doing it". Sometimes my stomach would get an (anxious) knot, like if I was missing my mom or missing my dad then I would feel like I was hungry even though I had just eaten a giant meal. I would go up and try to get something because I thought I was hungry, but I wasn't.*

### **Story #2: Max**

**(Figure 4-7)**



*This is a picture of Max. Max was with us for a long time. We used to have our other dog and during the separation he had to go. That was kind of tough on me and my brother. During the beginning of the separation they tried to get rid of him, but me and my brother got so upset that they got him back, but then after the separation they got rid of him again. I felt upset. He was just a puppy. I liked him. This lady came and said she wanted to buy him from us, so we gave him to her. She said she would pay us when she had the money, but she never paid us. She sold him to another guy which kind of made me upset. I knew that it had to be done because my mom couldn't have a pet and my dad couldn't take care of two pets, so I knew he had to go, but what's really upsetting me is not that we had to get rid of him, but that that lady took him and then just sold him for the*

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*profit. She acted like she loved him but she really didn't. It just made me mad because she just abandoned him and that's why I'm upset. He ended up going to a paramedic and that's a good place because he was really sick, but I felt betrayed by that lady. I think all animals should be treated the same way as a person. She was crying because she wanted him so bad and then she just sold him. It just upset me. I forgave her but it is still upsetting. So now it's a little harder to trust people.*

### Story #3: Moving

(Figure 4-8)



*During the separation they couldn't afford the house we were living in so they had to sell it. Good memories, bad memories sad memories, all sorts of memories from the*

*old house. I miss everything that we put into it: we built a deck, put in grass, put up a fence. I helped do all that stuff; those are good memories. In this house I got to do a lot more, but it is still a lot of adjustments. The old house is with good owners now and that's important. There are some bad memories like the fights and when I sprained my ankle really bad. When mom and dad fought we were in the basement or in the bedroom watching TV. I knew what was going on, but I thought, "Whatever they work out is for the best. They are doing this for us, not for them. Well, partially for them, but more for us than for themselves". I knew they were fighting for us. They would fight about small things. Sometimes they would bring up a bad memory and then it would*

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*turn into a long fight. I think that they separated so that we wouldn't have to listen to them fighting. I think it's good that we're split between them, half and half, equal now. My brother would talk to me and ask what was going on. I would say, "I don't know". I kind of had an idea. Everyone at school supported me, and my family was there for me and my brother too. Most of my friends' parents are splits too, so I got to talk to them. One of my friend's dad found out he had cancer and he only had a year to live. He survived that year, but then his mom separated with him. My friend spent his time with his mom and then about a month later his dad died. In a sense, I'm thankful that that didn't happen. He has more to deal with than me so it helped me realize that things could be a lot worse. We would talk about what it was like to have parents that separated for the first year, but then we stopped. I didn't worry too much about the separation for a while until last year when my dad went on a trip. I got upset and I would spend my nights up all night crying and waking up the house. I was just thinking you never know when might be your last moment with them; things like that. Every day and every night I worried about my dad and mom, but mostly about dad because my friend's dad passed, not his mom. I know he is really safe, but the housing business scares me because there's a chance you could fall through the roof and into the basement and break your neck or into a hole and snap your legs. I don't really worry about it anymore unless there is something bad going on and then I might start worrying about it again for a little while. The new house is amazing, better than all the houses. My mom moved into a condo. It's bigger and I get my own room. Things have been great. Everything is uphill. I feel like things are getting a lot better. It also helps to get my mind off things that I found a hobby: guns and weaponry.*

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### Story #4: Business

(Figure 4-9)



*This is the business vehicle. A lot changed when my dad started his own business.*

*Instead of waking up at 6 in the morning,*

*we woke up at 7:30 which I think helped*

*quite a bit. We never had a truck because we could never really afford one, so we always had a car. When my dad started his own business he bought a truck and I saw that as a good thing.*

*Having his own business meant that he could go to a lot more school events and he could spend more time with us. There are some disadvantages though, like people that don't pay him he has to go to court, but that's none of my concern. I feel lucky now that I have a dad that can take me to school and spend more time with me. I think that's a really good thing.*

### Parent Interview

The text derived from the parent interview described, from a father's perspective, the various challenges his son encountered during the separation, divorce, and remarriage of both his parents. The father often described his own experience first and then related it back to the experience of his son. The father talked about living together as a nuclear family prior to the divorce and the characteristics his young son exemplified at that time. He talked about the challenges that led up to the divorce and the various roles both parents took on during that time. He described his son's reaction to the actual separation as being much like his own, but recognized that the tools that he, as the husband, employed to deal with his grief would not have been particularly helpful for his son to employ. He described many of the ways that he saw the fears and sadness of his son magnified as he was forced to adapt to life in two different

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households. The father credited the few months leading up to his remarriage as the most trying time for his son and explained some of the tools he employed to help his son adapt to these changes. The father expressed great hope that time will continue to help his son heal on a normal positive trajectory.

Major themes inherent throughout the parent interview included loss of stability in relation to a new home and new parental relationships; fear of abandonment, sleepovers, rides, hurting others if he plays too hard, being replaced, his father being hurt or dying, his mother feeling sad and his father feeling sad; parental roles within the family and within co-parenting responsibilities with the father playing a non-traditional role in school field trips, the perception

**Table 4-3 Summary of Parent Interview Themes**

THEME	EXAMPLES
<b>Loss of stability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• new home</li> <li>• new parental relationships</li> </ul>
<b>Fear of abandonment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sleepovers</li> <li>• rides</li> <li>• hurting others if he plays too hard</li> <li>• being replaced</li> <li>• his father being hurt or dying</li> <li>• his mother feeling sad</li> <li>• his father feeling sad</li> </ul>
<b>Parental roles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• co-parenting</li> <li>• father playing a non-traditional role in school field trips</li> <li>• perception of a mother's role as the one who does the school work</li> <li>• addition of step-parents</li> <li>• role of the family unit to empower faith shifted to only the father (change of religion with new relationship)</li> <li>• mother's goal to be a stay at home mom when kids are with her</li> </ul>
<b>Weight-gain and somatic symptoms (leg)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• limited mobility due to sore leg</li> <li>• 20-30lbs weight gain</li> <li>• food being used as a comfort</li> <li>• parental history of weight challenges</li> </ul>

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<b>Quiet demeanor</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• child doesn't talk to friends, grandparents, etc.</li><li>• rather stay home than go out with friends</li><li>• more of a listener than a talker at school</li><li>• stress release is quiet time</li><li>• requires lots of down time</li><li>• when angry he retreats to his room</li></ul>
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of a mother's role as the one who does the school work, addition of step-parents roles, the role of the family unit to empower faith shifted to only the father (change of religion with new relationship), and the mother's goal to be a stay at home mom when kids are there since the finalization of the divorce; weight-gain and somatic symptoms (leg) led to limited mobility as portrayed in a 20-30lbs weight gain with food being used as a comfort alongside a parental history of weight challenges; quiet demeanor exemplified in the fact that the child doesn't talk to friends, grandparents, etc., but would rather stay home than go out with friends. The father classified the child as more of a listener than a talker at school, a child whose stress release is quiet time rather than physical release, requires lots of down time, and when is angry he retreats to his room. A summary of these themes can be found in Table 4-3.

### **Integrated Data Analysis**

Throughout a mixed-methods study, the validity of the mixed-methods design is dependent on the fact that more than one phase of data is used to build upon information that has already been obtained in the previous phase. If each phase is interpreted solely in isolation of the other, the full advantage of the data may not be recognized. The initial quantitative phase of this study aimed to draw out the most pertinent behavioural and emotional concerns of a particular child in his everyday living. The subsequent photovoice method attempted to allow the child to tell his own personal story and for themes to emerge through this telling. Furthermore, the



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questions posed to the child throughout his story-telling helped to refine the genesis and flavor of some emotional concerns recognized in the results of the BASC-2 data analysis as well as explore adaptive qualities and ways of coping. The parent interview aimed to further clarify this data, focusing on a parent perspective of how the child reacts to situations, navigates change, and learns to cope with troubles in his surroundings. For the purpose of this discussion, we will call the child Sam.

The BASC-2 quantitative phase originally suggested a few emotional and behavioural themes that seemed to pertain to this child: Anxiety, Depression, Somatization, and School Problems. Although not all four respondents were in agreement of the severity of each of these themes, it was evident that Sam was displaying behaviours that pointed to an increased score in these scales. This information was used to generate questions for the parent interview and themes to draw out from the child photovoice experience.

### **Theme One: Internalizing Symptoms**

During the parent interview, the previously associated themes were refined and further explained and more themes emerged. The father spoke a lot about the tendency of the child to worry a lot about the well-being of his family, especially his father: *“And then he was scared. He was never scared about (his mom) leaving, but he was scared about what would happen to me. Or if something would happen to me.”* This theme was further explored with Sam, who explained that he habitually stayed up all night crying and worrying about what it would be like if his father was hurt or passed away: *“I know he is really safe, but the housing business scares me because there’s a chance you could fall through the roof and into the basement and break your neck or into a hole and snap your legs. I don’t really worry about it anymore unless there is something bad going on and then I might start worrying about it again for a little while”.*

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Sam's father explained that Sam always had an anxious nature, often fearing carnival rides or doing anything he considered remotely dangerous, but the fear in losing his dad seemed unfounded and severe: *"He would be scared of a lot of stuff. He wouldn't try things very easily... He didn't like to over-exert himself or take any chances if he didn't have to"*. His father believed that the fear was rooted in being replaced, but Sam saw it differently,

*He thought I was going to start a new life and forget about him. That was another one of his huge fears other than me dying: you're going to have a new family, a new wife, and new kids or more kids maybe, so you're going to replace me. I had to reassure him and comfort him.*

Sam explained that his friend had lost his dad to cancer shortly after his own parents had divorced and Sam believed that this event sparked his anxiety to focus on the death of his father as a particularly debilitating thought. Furthermore, the anxiety was compounded by the fact that Sam did not feel that he had control over the amount of time he spent with his father since the arrangement post-divorce spent half his days and night with his mother and half with his father. It would appear that out of the theme of anxiety, originally generated in the quantitative data analysis, came the theme of having control over one's own situation.

The BASC-2 also revealed the internalizing theme of depression, although only in one of the four respondents' answers. This can happen for various reasons, one of which is that the respondent is over-reporting the symptoms and two, that the child is exemplifying a behaviour more prominently in that particular environment. Upon further investigation into what the father considered sadness and depression, it became clear that a lot of the anxiety previously mentioned was being attributed to sadness in the father's perception. From the father's descriptions, it seemed that every time Sam was found crying and upset, he was also experiencing many of the

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symptoms traditionally associated with anxiety. Sam himself explained that when he started to get upset, he would cry, resort to thinking about his fears and worries about losing his family, and then he might begin to hyperventilate or feel his muscles tensing up. Sam's father acknowledged that what he referred to as Sam's "depression" was not often accompanied by lack of interest in activities, lethargy beyond his normal energy level, or social isolation. Although Sam and his father both asserted that Sam tends to retreat to his room when he is feeling particularly sad, he is still willing to talk to his parents and share what he is feeling

*He'll take some time. If he has to go in his room and close his door, even lock his door. Which I let them do as long as they listen when I say let me in right now. But if I say do you need a few minutes (Sam) and he'll say yep or if he's grumpy he'll tell me dad I'm just grumpy right now. Which is great. I love that he can communicate that to me right now.*

### **Theme Two: Somatic Symptoms**

From the theme of Somatization that emerged from the BASC-2 results, questions were generated that focused on Sam's expression of his feelings through physical changes and challenges in his body. This theme struck a chord with both Sam and his father who spoke about the challenges Sam has undergone with weight gain. Sam's father attributed the weight gain to stress and explained that he, himself, tends to overeat when he is stressed or feels bad and may not have been the best influence on his son in that regard: *"Physically it did affect him, he probably put on twenty or thirty pounds. And stress. He's going to follow our lead. Our stress relief is food – his mom and myself. She smokes too, which I won't let him follow that lead...or I hope not!"*. He expressed that he believes that Sam's weight gain is something that still needs to be challenged since it has real-life consequences for social development and physical health.

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Sam's first photo he shared was one of a scale. He explained that food was originally used as a way to eavesdrop on arguments between his parents to gain information that he was not to be privy to. The food became a distraction and comfort as he retreated from the arguments into the basement to eat his snack. Sam was not able to articulate the exact feelings associated with eating when not hungry, but maintained that something that was once used as a tactic just "stuck" as a habit and remains very difficult to break.

Sam's father mentioned another bout of somatic symptoms that occurred at the beginning stages of the separation. Sam had developed a problem with his legs that made it difficult for him to put much weight on them. Upon consultation with a specialist, it was suggested that there was no clear physical reason for the pain and that it may be more of a psychological concern. It may be considered that Sam was searching for ways to spend more time with his parents or asking for the attention that he needed, but did not find it reasonable to vocalize such demands on his already busy and struggling parents. In addition, Sam was able to articulate a number of somatic symptoms that came about when he was experiencing bouts of anxiety. He explained

*During the separation I was just scared about my family passing away, but nothing else. I would try to go to sleep but it would keep me up. I would start sweating then I would take off my sheets and then I would freeze and sweat and it would just keep repeating. I was crying then and it would get hard to breathe. I would get headaches very much and stomach aches. I would get sore muscles and I still do. I think the sore muscles I get just run in the genes; my dad has a bad lower back, my grandpa has a bad lower back. Maybe stress just triggered it early.*

### **Theme Three: School Life**

The Teacher Rating Scale of the BASC-2 is the only scale that specifically addresses a variety of school problems. For Sam, the results were of a lot of concern. When discussed with

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the father, he did recognize the problems with academics that Sam was having, but did not consider it a prominent point of concern. He explained how homework was somewhat ignored in the madness of the divorce and separation, but then focused on more consistently again since the finalization of the divorce. The father seemed to believe that the few months of lost homework compounded with a poor teacher was the reason that Sam fell behind in his reading and writing.

Sam was recently diagnosed with a Learning Disability in reading and writing, but even when considering normed scores for other boys with and LD, the teacher's rating of attention problems and learning problems remained of concern. When Sam was queried on his opinion of his attention at school, he began to speak of daydreaming and losing focus in favor of staring blankly ahead. He expressed that he is very good at math and that his reading and writing are improving a lot. A limitation of this study is that it does not interview the teacher to gain information on exactly what she was seeing, but her report clearly does not add up with the reports of the child and parent.

The picture painted by Sam and his father is of a good-natured boy who has a lot of casual friends at school and a Learning Disability that offers a lot of challenges, especially in reading and writing. Sam receives help from an Educational Assistant within the classroom and some outside learning assistance. Sam and his father both claim that this challenge with learning does not affect his self-esteem or bother him in any way, but instead he understands that this is how God made him. Furthermore, homework is now considered a priority that is being fulfilled and Sam's learning is considered to be improving. While at school, Sam plays football with the other kids and eats lunch with one close friend from the other class.

The TRS paints a picture of a child who is easily distracted from his school work, cannot maintain attention to a task or person, and rarely listens attentively. Although for much of class

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time, he behaves like every typical boy of that age, he has great difficulty keeping up in class. He gets failing grades, doesn't finish tests, and has a lot of problems with reading and spelling. As far as study skills go, he never reads the assigned chapters, takes good notes, or organizes his work. Although his school work is suffering a great deal, he remains respectful to all those around him, including teachers and other children. He seems to strive in bringing out the best in others and encouraging others to do their best. While these two pictures of Sam's school behaviour are not congruent, they do seem to point to a child who, although he struggles academically, is able to find value and positivity in his school surroundings. Further investigation into the reasons behind the discrepancies would likely be valuable to Sam's future learning and academic success.

### **Theme Four: Adapting and Coping**

In addition to behaviours of concern, the BASC-2 considers adaptive qualities that may help serve to mitigate more negative symptoms in a child. In Sam's case, the BASC-2 showed that Sam is likely the kind of child who has good manners and habitually treats others with respect and affection. He encourages and compliments others on a regular basis and, although he is not a born leader, he is a valuable asset to a group of friends. Sam remains interested in activities that force a group of individuals to work together and is quick to try to help someone who he sees is in need. His father said, of Sam, *"I knew his heart was just a big open heart of love, so it made me proud that he could be there for me and I wanted to limit that time as much as I could."* Because Sam is kind to others, it is likely that people will like him and want to help him when he needs it. During the qualitative interview, Sam often commended his parents, extended family, and teachers on being willing to support him and his brother during the separation and beyond. Sam's father explains the tactics he has used to help Sam learn how to cope with feeling sad and worried,

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*If he's sad, prayer is probably one of the best things for us if he's really hung up in the moment or if it's at night and he calls me and says, "Dad, I really can't sleep" and he's crying, I'll pray with him and remind him of his faith and how I love him and how his mom loves him and how God loves him. And now, he has a step-mom and she loves him and his mom now has a fiancé and he loves him, and just how loved he is and how he has all of these families that love him now. So get him to concentrate on that instead of just thinking of something bad happening to me or the family. It usually works pretty good.*

Sam expressed that he felt he had a wide support system even if he didn't disclose to them very often. He explained that he tried to keep his emotions about the separation bottled up for a while in order to be a good influence and support for his younger brother, but eventually it started seeping out in the form of anxiety. He ended up talking to a counselor and he felt that talking about it really helped to engage his own personal adaptive qualities and help him to heal himself.

*Things are getting better. Talking to people helps a lot. I talked to the school counselor for the longest time during the separation. Then, when I was going through my stage when I stayed up all night, I went to professional counseling. It was only one session and it helped extremely, but it didn't heal me. It had to be something that I found. And now it's like: Cherish the good moments when you have them, and that's how I try to think about it.*

Even when recalling times when he was frustrated and disappointed at his life situation, Sam maintained that he knew his parents were just doing things in his best interest.

### **Theme Five: Regaining Stability**

The final theme that emerged from the qualitative data, independent of what was seen in the quantitative data, revolved around adjusting to co-parenting and moving towards stability.

Sam's father explained,

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*I've thought about how it would be so much easier for all of us just to have one routine. Just to have that stability, especially with (Sam), but then I couldn't tear (Sam) and (his brother) apart because that's the one constant that they have and nor could I ever take (Sam or his brother) away from (their mom) because she is a great mother.*

Out of qualitative interviewing emerged the theme of regaining stability. The father and the child both described the move from the family home, due to the separation, into a variety of living arrangements. Sam described the pain associated with having to leave his old home and especially having to give up his dog. He felt personally betrayed by the lady who took the dog away from him; because she did not love him the way Sam believed he should be loved.

*I felt betrayed by that lady. I think all animals should be treated the same way as a person. She was crying because she wanted him so bad and then she just sold him. It just upset me. I forgave her but it is still upsetting. So now it's a little harder to trust people.*

Sam and his father both discussed the differences between parental homes: the father's household being more focused on outdoor activities and the mother's more content with indoor activities. Sam discussed how, for a long time, he wanted things to change for him. At first he wanted to go back to living as a core family and then he wanted to be able to sleep wherever he wanted, mainly at his dad's house. He explained that, at one point, his mom gave him the choice to go live solely with his dad. At first he thought that was what he wanted, but upon being presented with the option, he realized that he did not want to give up living with his mom either and began a journey to make his current living arrangements work. He explained that the control over his living arrangements and access to his dad was given back to him at that point; therefore, it was his choice to make and he was able to realize that he did not want to sacrifice time with his mom:



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*Before Christmas my mom kind of gave me, in a sense a little bit of fright, but in a sense a little bit of inspiration. She said I could choose to go live full time with my dad if I was going to continue to stay up all night worrying and crying about my dad. I didn't want that, so I smartened up. She thought I wanted to go live with my dad and she said I could go. I felt like she was trying to tell me, "I do everything for you and still you cry and treat me like this". I was treating her worse, and she told me that I could just go if I wanted to. I didn't want that, so I smartened up and I found a way. I felt bad for treating my mom that way and I wanted to change it and I wanted to keep it the way it was and be able to stay with my mom.*

At the time of the interview, Sam felt like things were beginning to look up for him as he gained more stability and routine between the two houses. Both Sam's dad and mom were in new relationships and he liked both of their partners. It seemed that as the parents were becoming more stabilized in their lives, so were the children. Sam explained his current living situation in these terms.

*The new house is amazing, better than all the houses. My mom moved into a condo. It's bigger and I get my own room. Things have been great. Everything is uphill. I feel like things are getting a lot better. It also helps to get my mind off things that I found a hobby: guns and weaponry.*

CHAPTER 5  
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the behavioural and emotional profiles of a youth from one divorced family, where divorce has occurred within the past two years. The study examined one child and incorporated the observations of his parents and teacher in terms of internalizing and externalizing behaviours. Special consideration was given during the interview phase to exploring the degree to which these behaviours were perceived to have increased or decreased following the decision to end the marriage. This study attempted to incorporate data gathered from the point of view of three different methods, both quantitative and qualitative in nature in order to provide a more comprehensive view of the externalizing and internalizing behaviours of the youth when he was faced with the stressors that accompany a shift in family dynamics, namely divorce. To give more credence to the personal voice of the youth in combination with a psychometric assessment of socio-behavioural conduct, a sequential explanatory design mixed-method research study (Creswell, 2007) was chosen to examine behavioural and emotional aspects of one child within the bounded system of one divorced family.

In keeping with the purpose of adopting a sequential design, three research questions were explored to explain (a) how the use of psychometric testing data, namely the Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC-2) (Parent Rating Scale (PRS), Teacher Rating Scale (TRS), and Self-Report Scale (SRS), can assist in understanding some of the existing behavioural and emotional challenges facing an individual whose parents have recently divorced; (b) what range of behaviours and emotions are displayed by the individual through the photographs he chose to share and the conversations that accompanied them; and (c) how comparing the BASC-2 internalizing and externalizing factors with the exploratory qualitative

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data relating to participants' behavioral and emotional adjustment contribute to our understanding of participants' post-divorce levels of adjustment and psychological well-being across both home and school settings in a more comprehensive fashion than just relying on a) preconceived scale questions to inform analysis of observed behaviours or b) interviewing tactics without previously examined direction.

Previous literature composed around the implications of divorce on children identified themes such as Grieving & Loss, Isolation & Loneliness, Anger & Aggression, Anxiety & Sadness, and Adaptive Skills & Outlooks (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006). Although the data analysis themes for this study were meant to be emergent in nature, these themes were those that one might expect to find as a result of a study of this nature. Prior to actual data collection, these themes seemed to be suitable to better understand the socio-behavioural profiles generated from parent, teacher, and child reports and provide insight into how to better deal with children experiencing the separation of their parents within a school and counseling setting. While the qualitative data collected through photovoice and interview methods did shed light on portions of these themes, out of the data emerged five main themes personal to this particular child and his situation: Internalizing Symptoms, Somatic Symptoms, School Problems, Adapting to Change, and Moving towards Stability. The fact that these themes do not correspond with those presented by Clarke-Stewart and Brentano further points to the truth that no divorce situation is alike and the way a child responds to the separation is highly dependent upon a number of factors including both protective and predictive factors.

The results of the Behavioral Analysis System for Children, Second Edition (BASC-2) suggested that it was a favorable tool to employ to better understand the observations of the support system, as a whole, in terms of Sam's behavioural and emotional exemplariness. The

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BASC-2 scales consider a number of symptoms that the research literature has typically associated with children of divorce including depression, anxiety, anger, and acting out behaviours. The basic tenet of associating these behaviours with divorce seems to be that children react in a variety of ways to feelings with which they cannot cope. Some children retreat and submit to depressive symptoms while others swear and scream to deal with the influx of emotion taking place in their bodies. When combined with a traumatic event, these behaviours are typically seen as normal reactions, that is, reactions that any reasonable person might have to similar circumstances. Unfortunately, what parents and other adults often perceive as abnormally severe reactions, children may actually be merely expressing normal emotional responses, but without the developmental coping mechanisms to handle them in a prosocial way. In this way, caregivers become the most important tool a child has to deal with the loss and change that accompanies any separation. Furthermore, Whitehead (1996) explained that the rise in parental separation has caused divorce to become a normal part of everyday life. With this normalization comes desensitization to the affect it has on children. Children are not merely small adults, they experience the divorce in a very different way than adults; a way that does not offer immediate advantage, just loss (Clark-Stewart & Brentano, 2006).

Jarrati (2012) used the descriptor Acute Mourning Phase to label the timeframe directly following the news of a separation. She explained that children go through a number of phases on the road to reorganizing their ability to trust themselves and others again and move forward successfully into a new living situation. The various components of this journey she named: yearning and pining; searching; dealing with sadness, anger, anxiety, guilt, and shame; experiencing disorganization and despair; and finally beginning the job of reorganization. Each helps the child recover from the loss, accept what has happened, and move toward healing

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(Jarrati, 2012). Whether the feelings are mixed or successive, each component of grief must be worked through, and none suppressed.

The child participant in this study, Sam, explained that after being told that his mother was moving out, he was very upset, but shortly after the initial shock he did not react to the separation for a fairly long time, upwards of a year. At that point, he began to pine for his father, for the family to be united again, and for ways to be able to spend more time with his father. At this point, he began to have real anxiety, worrying about the death of his father and the well-being of other family members. He considered this point in time the most devastating time for him. Looking back, it was a time of disorganization in this young man's life: he had moved homes nine times in the previous two years, he had lost his dog the year before, he had gained a significant amount of weight, his father was about to get married again the following summer, his mother was recently engaged, and he was diagnosed with a Learning Disability. As it is, early adolescence is a hard time for youth because of the large amount of flux happening in their bodies and lives, but add on a number of drastic life changes to the mix, and it is not unreasonable to recognize that one would be challenged to deal with it all (Jarrati, 2012).

Potter (2010) conducted a study that looked at the association between psychosocial well-being in children immediately following the divorce of their parents and the child's academic functioning. The results of his study suggested that often the immediate timeframe surrounding the separation is marked by a decrease in academic performance, mainly due to the attention that must be paid to other emotions and changes (Potter, 2010; Amato, 2000). Interestingly enough, the gap that this decrease caused in learning seemed to remain with the child throughout his or her schooling experiences. When considering Sam's academic struggles, it is difficult to point to a fixed cause. Sam's academic life is complicated by the fact that he was recently diagnosed with

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a Learning Disability in reading and writing. His father named the timeframe around the separation as a particularly trying time, academically. Homework was being put to the wayside and Sam's teacher was very little help in communicating with home about the struggles that Sam was encountering. Sam's father also acknowledged that Sam's grade one teacher had noticed some signs that written verbal language may be a problem for Sam. It was unclear whether or not the separation of his parents had much influence on Sam's academic struggles or if his learning may have been just as challenged in a two-parent home. What was known is that Sam was struggling in a number of areas including reading, writing, attention, and organization skills.

The BASC-2 components provided valuable information in this study, drawing out the most pertinent internalizing behaviours that seemed to be of concern to the child, parents, and teachers within a home and/or school setting and using them as a sounding board to generate useful interview questions and themes. In this way, the BASC-2 was successful in facilitating an understanding of some of the existing behavioural and emotional challenges facing an individual whose parents have recently divorced; in this study, namely, the challenges of anxiety, depression, somatization, and school problems that were repeated again in the parent interview and photovoice phases.

Using the BASC-2 clinical scales as a foundation for further exploration, the child participant relayed his own stories through a series of pictures that exemplified his journey through the separation and divorce of his parents. The purpose of the photovoice method was to explore what range of behaviours and emotions were displayed by the individual through the photographs he/she chose to share and the conversations that accompanied them. Sam shared a total of four pictures. The first picture relayed emotions of loneliness and sadness as Sam explained that he began eating to, first, gain access to his parents' arguments while they were

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fighting in the kitchen and, second, to comfort himself and forget about the trouble ensuing upstairs. He explained the sadness that continued to follow him as he guiltily sneaked food while his parents weren't watching in order to comfort the anxious knot in his stomach that he mistook for hunger.

The results of this study suggest that children may encounter increased struggles with coping with new, intense emotions generated from the instability that results from parental conflict and instability within the home. The child participant explained that he became very fearful when his parents began arguing. He explained that the arguing seemed to increase and escalate resulting in parents evicting the kids from the room to avoid exposing them to the animosity. The child explained: *"They were fighting and they usually wanted us downstairs or in our rooms"*.

The father explained that he felt bad that the kids were being ignored at times because he and his wife needed to try to work on their own marriage. What was an attempt to shield the children from disagreements actually became a contributing factor to the fears that Sam internalized due to a loss of stability and support at that time. The father explained,

*They could see stuff wasn't well. We would yell and argue in front of them. There were some times when we had to leave and go talk. At the end it was really hard on (Sam) because he was the oldest, but he would get scared a lot. We even left, walked out of the house. So if he was in grade two, that would put him about eight years old. Maybe we went around the block for ten minutes, but he couldn't see us or find us so he was really scared that we had just left him. So that crushed him. He was hyperventilating and thought that we had left, but we had just walked around the block so we could talk. So that was hard on him during that time, during the separation.*

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Finely & Schwartz (2010) explain that divorce creates a “divided world” for the children, resulting in a diminished amount of nurturance at least for a portion of the time. Parental nurturance and involvement is correlated with a number of child outcomes including self-esteem, friendship quality, and academic problems; as well, the self-efficacy to appropriately cope with the changes he or she is experiencing (Kelly, 2007; Finely & Schwartz, 2010). The stress of divorce can often be manifested in a variety of emotional and behavioural responses. According to prominent literature, there are a number of factors that can be considered to predict the responses a child may have when faced with the divorce of his or her parents. One of the main predictors is the child’s developmental age (Thulien, 2007). The developmental age of a child suggests how much he or she is able to understand and rationalize as well as the degree to which he or she may internalize what is happening as an extension of his or her own behaviour. One of the main theories that Piaget (1983) offered was that children of latency age are quite refined in their ability to concretely understand their surroundings, but not yet capable of processing information in shades of grey the way an adult can. This means that youth at this age are particularly vulnerable to incorporating themselves into the problems of others. The child participant in this study exemplified this behaviour in a number of ways, including his foremost fear of losing his dad to death. He said,

*One of my friend’s dad found out he had cancer and he only had a year to live. He survived that year, but then his mom separated with him. My friend spent his time with his mom and then about a month later his dad dies. In a sense, I’m thankful that that didn’t happen. He has more to deal with than me so it helped me realize that things could be a lot worse. We would talk about what it was like to have parents that separated for the first year, but then we stopped.*



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Sam went on to explain that he had internalized this event as a fear of his own. Many nights he would stay up most of the night worrying, crying, and hyperventilating over thoughts of his father dying or being harmed. At the peak of his anxiety, Sam was calling his father multiple times a night to come and get him or talk him down. Although his father was receptive to talking him through it or picking him up for a drive, Sam's parents eventually had to make a decision to take action against Sam's anxiety. With the help of a professional counselor, Sam's parents stood their ground and refused to let Sam stay up all night calling his father to bail him out. Although Sam and his father both claim this was extremely difficult, Sam was able to access some adaptive skills that lay dormant within him and can now make it through his six day stretches with his mom.

The second photograph that Sam shared was a picture of his dog, Max. The story that accompanied it was not so much about Max, although he did mention that Max is support for him, but rather about losing his other dog during the separation. In this story, Sam was able to articulate the event with real maturity, stating that it was not feasible to keep the dog and offering no blame towards his parents for their decision. It was obvious that Sam was still troubled by the loss of the dog and remembering the timeframe that accompanied it, because his tears flowed freely. The theme of sadness remained prevalent as Sam transitioned into his next picture; a picture of the new house, representing the old house that had to be sold. Sam experienced a lot of loss in a very short amount of time and it was clear that his developmental age had endorsed an attitude that the material things within the old house were an extension of himself and firmly connected to important memories. As Sam continued to explain the things he missed about the old house and the things he loved about the new house, it became clear that it is possible that Sam is on the road to re-organizing his life and attaching meaning to a new environment. Sam

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may be beginning to learn through experience that the physical loss of something does not mean that you lose the memories attached to that object.

Sam's final picture depicts a truck that he explained represents his father's entrepreneurial business. He feels very grateful that his father's work schedule is flexible enough to be a part of school events, and drive the kids to school every day. Sam values his relationship with his father a great deal and they have remained "best buddies" throughout the many transitions they have faced together in the past few years. Sam's mother was also able to arrange her shift work so that she could spend as much time as possible with her children when they were at her house. Sam's parents were wise to recognize that, when at all possible, allowances need to be made to be able to attend to quality parent-child time to aid with a healthy transition for the child.

Parent-child relationships are stressed by divorce, even when the child's well-being is the parents' utmost goal. Even when parents do manage to avoid a tumultuous separation, the child experiences multiple losses of his own during the divorce, not to mention that even the most attentive parents are often distracted and less available as they try to regain their own footing, at least in the first year or two following the divorce (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Sadness and loneliness often result from the inability to maintain the same relationship with parents that the child enjoyed prior to the conflict within the marriage. When parents are in conflict, children subconsciously begin to navigate new relationships with each parent, and learn how to successfully balance the relationship with both parents individually. Sam discusses this desire to remain loyal to both parents when he explains how bad he felt when his mother pointed out that he was treating her badly by always crying to go to his dad, but also recognized that it was up to him to find a way to negotiate a relationship with both parents that still affirmed his own mental

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stability and well-being. Luckily, Sam's parents were available to him and willing to work with him to find a way to give him back the control over his own situation. Sam shared,

*My mom said if I want to go with my dad or call my dad, I could and now I haven't done that in quite a few months. I got some control and it helped very much. I think the thing is that other kids' parents don't give the kids control, it's like, 'You're going to stay with me when it's my time and you're going to go with him when it's his'. I think that's why other kids have a harder time coping with it. I think it was harder for me to cope with it when I thought it was more like that for me. Then I realized that it wasn't like that when I got a little more control. I thank my family for that. Now every night I go into my room and watch an episode or two and then I go to sleep.*

Parenting styles have been linked with a child's ability to adapt post-divorce in an array of studies. To complicate the matter, children in divorced families have two parents; the parents' task is to find a way to raise the children alone and across two households (Emery, 2011). From a psychological point of view, children first and foremost need to know that their feelings and reactions are common and normal to grief, that the return to creative, healthy living involves pain, and that there is no short cut. Unfortunately, in these days of fast food and instant gratification, many adults as well as children have had little experience with tolerating discomfort patiently. This is further compounded by the fact that parents and children experience the loss and the rising out of loss very differently. The father explained how he was able to free himself from the initial grief of the separation, through the help of his counselor and the realization that his desire to reconcile the relationship was neither plausible nor within his control.

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*For two months following was when it was the hardest on me, because I was still trying to do everything I could to get her to come back but she wouldn't come back. And then (Sam) saw that the whole time too, so it crushed him. It was affecting me and he saw that... I wanted to limit that time as much as I could. I knew I needed to get over it. (His mom) and I had talked too, because she wanted to help me through it as well. She knew just coming back or just trying to be part of my life here or there wouldn't work, so I talked to friends and they would help me through it. My friends would say, "Hey, you can't lead each other on especially if it's over. You have to sever all the ties and go your separate ways". So when I realized that...and the point personally when I realized that was when I found out that... she was already with other men and I wasn't. I was still waiting to be with her again. As soon as I found out she was with other men, the switch went off. Instantly, overnight, my prayers were answered in that aspect of being able to get over her. I would pray. I was hoping it would work out and it didn't and then, on the other side, the clarity was there that she doesn't love me; she doesn't want to be with me, it's time to get over that and concentrate on the rest of my life. And that was such an awakening for me; it was unbelievable. Everything went from the worst depression I have ever felt, almost overnight, to joy and clarity which was great. Now my son obviously didn't go through that same transformation and we're into our third year now and he's still dealing with it. He's accepted the fact...and when I remarried last summer that was probably the height of his fear and depression through the separation. I don't know if that's what you want to call it. He thought I was going to start a new life and forget about him.*

While the father was able to articulate a firm reason why he was able to move forward, his son did not have that same experience. He obviously still loved his mother and wanted to be with her. These parents had found a way to see the separation as an opportunity for moving towards a better life, a life where a more enjoyable love could be found, but the child was not able to experience the same advantage. He no longer had a partner to share in his grief.

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An implicative that emerged during the qualitative portion of this study revolved around the idea of how to create stability for the children when two people are parenting from two different settings. The children are almost expected to accept a kind of duality in their lives, where rules and norms apply to one space, but not the other. In addition, expectations and responsibilities may differ from week to week, and supports systems can be accessed more readily at some time than others. For children, change can be a very difficult thing. Living in two different homes demands drastic changes in one's surrounding to occur on a regular basis. How children adapt to this change depends on many factors including their personality, their ability to organize themselves between two homes, and their ability to find support in more than one caregiver.

When a child has made it through the separation of his parents still feeling loved, supported, and thriving in relationship, the parents are to be commended. In a trying time of struggling to pick up the pieces of their own lives, Sam's parents still managed to be attentive to the needs of the child and support him enough to learn and grow through his emotions in order to reorganize his life. While there is still much debate about the most troubling aspects of divorce in regards to a child, there is an overwhelming agreement that a good relationship between parents and child is the most important factor towards a healthy transition (Thulien, 2007). When children are met with acceptance of their feelings and support from their parents, they regain the confidence to take risks to learn how to move through the upset, knowing that they have someone to fall back on if needed.

Developmental theorists point to the concrete operational stage as the most important stage to be able to take risks and grow from the results of those risks, making this, at times, the most vulnerable age for children to experience the separation of their parents. Of course, all

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children are different and will rely on a variety of other factors to help them transition and feel supported. Wright & Masten (2005) point to other factors that may help to protect children from the negative implications of divorce. Although Sam did have very committed and loving parents, he also had a number of other protective factors to use to his advantage. Sam's BASC-2 scores as well as parent reports, showed that Sam was a sociable child. His father explained that Sam was a calm and affable baby; infantile temperament has been shown to be predictive of ability to adjust later in life. Sam seemed to have a very healthy self-esteem. Even with the presence of weight gain and academic challenges, Sam was able to accept his challenges as being external to who he was as a person. An optimistic outlook has been seen to protect a child from self-blaming and internalizing the divorce as one's own fault. Sam was able to clearly state that, whatever the feeling he was having, he always knew that his parents were looking out for the best interests of him and his younger brother. Finally, Sam had a deep sense of faith. He believed in God and put his trust in the idea that God would support him and provide for him when needed. Tausch, Marks, Brown, Cherry, Frias, McWilliams, Melancon and Sasser (2011) assert that people with a strong sense of faith can be assured that they can still handle what they have to deal with because God would never give them more than they can manage. Sam and his father talked a lot about using prayer to cope with sorrow. God remained Sam's one sided counselor throughout the divorce, even when others weren't there to provide a listening ear.

The use of, firstly, a psychometric psychological tool to bring out the big picture from multiple points of view and secondly, a qualitative portion of study to achieve a thick description of the personal story of one youth as he transitioned through the separation of his parents was able to put focus on the issues that were of core concern for Sam and his family. The BASC-2 not only extracted some very core themes in the realm of internalizing behaviours and adaptive

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skills, but also put the child and parent in the right frame of mind for the purpose of the study before venturing further. The BASC-2 allowed multiple players in this child's life to contribute to the breadth of knowledge about how Sam was being observed in his home, school, and community. To have relied on results from the BASC-2 alone, however, would have left us with many unanswered questions including the genesis and development of presenting emotions and behaviours and the methods incorporated to cope with them. Often, when preconceived questions are asked, it does not leave a lot of room for the respondent to explain the situation or the behaviour. As we know, context often plays a very important role in understanding one's actions and reactions. Too often, we rely on purely psychometric measures to guide our decisions in the school context. If a child's behaviour is of concern, the foremost goal is to get it under control so that the child and his peers are receiving the best environment for learning possible. Unfortunately, if we fail to recognize context for these emotions and behaviours, we are taking the risk to be misguided in our approach to intervention.

Working together, the quantitative and qualitative phases of this study helped to paint a more accurate picture of this child's post-divorce adjustment and well-being. While he did need to learn to cope with a tremendous amount of change and loss in the move to a divided family, the process was mitigated by caring, supportive parents that helped Sam to tap into his own adaptive coping mechanisms. Sam's levels of anxiety still seemed to plague him in everyday life, but he was becoming more effective at using the tools he has learnt to calm him down, namely self-talk and reaching out for external support. Sam continued to struggle with school problems and will need to continue to work hard, in tandem with his parents and teachers to deal with the implications of both a Learning Disability and a self-proclaimed gap in attention to school caused by the separation. Sam has managed to keep an optimistic outlook and a healthy self-

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esteem throughout his various transitions that will likely serve him well into his future. Sam was a likeable boy with many positive social skills that helped him to set a firm foundation of support people whom he could turn to when needed. Sam was well on the road to being a well-adjusted child, although fearful in personality.

### **My Research Journey**

As a current graduate student in the School and Counselling Psychology Master's program at the University of Saskatchewan, I have been exposed to many theories of risk and resiliency. As a counseling student, I have tried to live by the idea that not everyone's problems are equal in their severity, but they are nonetheless very real and important to the person experiencing them. Prior to entrance into the College, I was employed as an elementary school teacher. As a teacher, I was challenged by many students who were diagnosed with or who were undiagnosed, but exemplified, various internalizing and externalizing behavioral issues. Through staff room talks and parent and teacher friends, I came to understand that parents and teachers alike had often conflicting opinions on the validity of behavioural diagnosis and interest in possible environmental factors that could contribute to some exemplified behaviors in children. While considering areas for research, I began to think back to these discussions.

Externalizing behaviours are often on the forefront of teachers' minds due to the disruption negative behaviour causes to the class as a whole and the energy it requires to challenge. There are entire courses dedicated to classroom management and it is often thought to be the most imperative skill a teacher can possess. As it was a hot topic, I began my research inquiry looking into the experiences of parents and teachers dealing with a child diagnosed with ADHD. Many people offered helpful tools, but many more offered insight into the invalidity of a diagnosis when environmental context had not been fully explored. As I know now, assessment tools such as the BASC-2 do attempt to incorporate an interview portion into their assessment



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protocols, but the outcry from parents was suggested that this was not being expressed to them, or possibly, not being used at all. One of the associations between behavioural disorders and environment suggested that stressful events or change may play a role in the severity or even genesis of extreme externalizing behaviours, including stressors such as the separation or divorce of one's parents.

Although I have witnessed close friends and family members living through the separation of their parents, I do not have a personal experience of this to draw from. My parents have been married for thirty-five years and have three grown children together. I, myself, have been married for seven years and have two beautiful daughters. The opinions and bias I bring to this study are based purely on witnessing experiences of divorce, internalizing behavior problems, and externalizing behavior problems and conversing with colleges, friends, and family members about authentic concerns that they have surrounding the integration of these topics.

While studying various assessment tools as a student of school psychology, I began to recognize two things: (1) Previous literature has been generally designed to fit into one paradigm or the other, qualitative or quantitative. Scientists seem to value the quantitative realm in order to draw broad conclusions, and humanists seem to look at the qualitative, drawing from personal experiences in context. I have never liked to exile ideas to one box or another but I do appreciate organized tables, so naturally I wanted to do both. Luckily, I wasn't the first person with this kind of personality and the mixed-methods design was beginning to gain credence in the world of academics. Although it suited my preference, mixed-methods remained a challenging methodology to adopt due to its relatively recent development and the lack of a concrete way to understand the approach. (2) The psychometric behavioural tools, such as the BASC-2, that we were learning had the same themes as the predictive and protective factors outlined in the healthy

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transition of children during divorce that I had been reading so much about. I began to think that this would be a great tool to use to study children of divorce and their experiences. But, then again, it doesn't really get at the context of the issues, which I felt was important. Luckily, there was still mixed methods.

I began my quest into the literature looking at all the negative implications of divorce on children, but as my searches broadened so did the literature that explained the resilience and remarkable ability of children and youth to adapt in a variety of stressful situations. I was forced to consider why I was searching for literature on the hurt that children face. What was the point of my study? To say that divorce is hard on kids? Everyone already knew that. Instead, I began to refine my purpose. I wanted to delve into this topic to be able to make suggestions, as a counselor, when parents and teachers asked me what they should be paying attention to in their child's behaviour and how they could help the child transition in a healthy, self-affirming way. I wanted to discover a method of approaching children and families during their separation that would affirm the child's voice, make the child comfortable talking, and give the parents an idea of how the child is magnifying his grief in both internalizing and externalizing symptoms. Furthermore, I desired a method that allowed for recognition of the child's adaptive strengths and insight into the ways the family has taught the child to cope thus far. I worked hard to conceive a group of research methods that would do all that and still be manageable for use by counselors in a school setting. I was naturally attracted to the photovoice method in particular due to positive experiences using photography and story-telling together as a teaching method in the past. I feel that my background in Education and interest as a parent combined with continuing education in educational psychology made me aware of the confines of a school

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setting, cognizant of the risk the parents took by disclosing their parenting habits in a very challenging time, and sensitive to the needs of the child as he shared very personal memories.

Deciding what quantitative data to follow up on in the qualitative phase of the research is largely a subjective decision made by the researcher. In this case, I felt it would be most beneficial to use the child's stories as a basis for what themes to stress the most, since it is his story and the purpose of the study was to express the child's perspective. From that, I integrated the information from the parents and teacher in order to create a richer understanding of the situational context and emotion the child was expressing through them. That being said, the parents and teachers may have a different take on the implications these situations had on the child and it may have been interesting to include all opinions before drawing any conclusions. Realistically, that would be a different study all together.

This study adopted the definition of case study proposed by Yin (2003) which, by nature, is a suitable approach for a mixed-methods study due to the recognition it gives to the value of human subjectivity while still maintaining that there is usefulness to the notion of objectivity (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Although the main goal of case study research is to obtain a thick description of a very particular subject, the use of only one case leaves this study vulnerable to the criticism that case study research lacks rigor and the possibility of generalization. From a teaching perspective, it only takes one successful lesson to recognize that the method is sound and can be used again. In that way, although the results are not generalizable, the method used to obtain the results in a time effective and comfortable manner certainly was. The limitations of choosing case study research in this situation is that it cannot help to predict how the next child will react to the separation of his or her parents; therefore, it cannot make any concrete predictions about the best way to help the child. There is no formula that states how one is

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supposed to react to change or loss and there is no checklist that will guarantee a healthy transition. The BASC-2 proved very useful in drawing out the main observed symptoms and the photovoice proved useful in gathering information from the child's point of view on what he believed were his greatest struggles as a result of the divorce. I believe these tools, used together would be an appropriate starting point for any counselor working with a child of divorce.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

Due to the qualitative nature of the photovoice and interview methods, the decision of what to follow up on lies primarily in the hands of the researcher. The most obvious road not taken in this study revolved around the integration of more indepth information from all parties involved, including both parents, the teacher and perhaps even the sibling. It would be very interesting to see how behaviours and emotions are perceived through many people's stories as well as the similarities and differences between the two brothers' stories.

One of the topics that I questioned Sam and his father about was the extent to which Sam elicited outside support to talk about his feelings about the separation. I was interested to learn that, outside of a few friends for a brief period of time, Sam did not discuss his feelings with grandparents, teachers, or family friends at all. Sam indicated that he saw a school counselor for a few months and he found talking about his experiences very helpful. It made me question how aware schools are of the impact divorce has on children and, if so, how often psychological resources are being offered in a timely and useful manner. Out of this pondering, I believe two areas of further research evolved: (1) Research that explores the ways that other adults can help a child through the divorce of his or her parents and the most appropriate ways to utilize that child contact time, and (2) How schools and parents are working together to keep one another informed about, not only academic struggles, but also of emotional struggles that may play a vital role on the child's learning and socialization.

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As a single case study, this research granted an in depth look at one child. It would be a valuable and fascinating investigation to compile a large breadth of children's stories and photographs and compare the pictures and stories of children with similar behaviour and emotional profiles.

This study was conducted using a mixed-methods design, but it certainly could have been a purely qualitative study or a purely quantitative study with a larger sample of participants. Future work in the area of children and divorce will no doubt continue to take place as long as we view our children as our greatest commodity. As the world around us changes and evolves so quickly, we will have to continue to look for creative, evidence-based ways of helping our children to navigate times of stress and learn how to transition through change in a healthy manner.

### **Clinical Implications**

What does all this mean for a school counselor dealing with students who have recently experienced the divorce of their parents? Firstly, it is important to recognize that, while divorce may be becoming a part of everyday life, it certainly is NOT a part of that individual child's everyday life. It is a very sizable change and it comes with a lot of emotions that force one to re-evaluate many things that he or she has come to believe since birth about the role of parents and family. When working in counseling with a federally incarcerated population, I found it interesting how many men cited the divorce of their parents as the single most upsetting event in their lives. These are men who have lived through traumatic abuse and have been convicted of multiple serious crimes. Counselors and parents alike must remember that children should have the right to feel whatever is authentic to them and not be stifled or rebuked for reacting in a dramatic way. Secondly, while counselors and other adults may have a role to play in healthy transition and support, the primary caregivers are the most important protection a child has

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against the negative implications of the divorce. Be aware that children need love, reassurance, and clear communication especially when their lives are in turmoil. While still respecting the confidentiality of the child, counselors may need to become the linkage between the professional world and the family to help facilitate the best interests of the child. Parents generally want to know how to help their children. If that means linking a parent to counseling of his own so he is better able to be attentive to the needs of the child, it is good help for the child. Thirdly, the model of obtaining information used in this study may be a viable option for school counselors who are often pressed for time, but are working with a vulnerable population who need to feel comfortable. The use of the BASC-2 quickly pointed out areas of particular concern, where the photovoice method created a nice, easy conversation where the child was in charge of the initial direction. Lastly, every last child is different. Children come in all kinds of personalities, abilities, and looks and to further complicate the matter, they are raised by all kinds of people in all kinds of environments. Working with children is a difficult business that relies on empathy, relationship, and intuition. While arming oneself with knowledge about the implications and resiliency factors associated with children and divorce is of much value, so is the ability to create a safe space for children to share, grow, and learn while in the process of reorganizing the lives that shifted from underneath their feet.

### **Conclusion**

When parents decide to divorce or separate, their children are faced with several stressors. Just knowing that things are going to be different after a divorce, but not knowing exactly how can be fear-provoking for the majority of children. During a separation, children have to learn to cope with many changes in their family including access to parents, physical location moves, and loss of objects that they have learned to attach meaning and comfort to. Because parents are often dealing with their own suffering and the more pragmatic issues

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associated with divorce, they often are less available to the children, at least for a portion of the time. In this regard, children have more responsibility placed on them to seek out the supports they need and deal with the disturbances in their physical and emotional worlds. Often, children initially focus on these immediate negative effects of the family breaking up, and do not find comfort in knowing that other families that have divorced eventually do okay (Foulkes-Jamison, 2001).

The role of the parents is important to children as parents try to navigate the shift from parenting as a united two-parent front to raising children alone and across two households (Emery, 2011). The quality of the parent-child relationship before, throughout, and after the separation has long been coincided with positive outcomes for the child in terms of self-esteem, ability to generate adaptive coping methods, and be able to find reassurance in the fact that things will get better. Throughout this often tumultuous time, children need constant reassurance that they are loved, supported, and important. Children are particularly vulnerable to attaching guilt and blame to this transition, especially when they are exposed to parental conflict revolving around the issue of “the children”.

While some children express their emotions by acting out and externalizing their grief, others retreat into solitary or express the stress through anxiety and/or depressive symptoms. Each child is different and each child reacts to change in a different manner. The goal of the parents is to remain supportive and consistent in terms of discipline and establishing a predictable routine for the child. Much of what is frightening about change, is the inability to predict what is going to happen next. This study clearly recognized that a child’s ability to advocate for his own well-being may be directly related to what degree he/she can accurately predict and control his or her own environment.

## A PROFILE OF YOUTH AND DIVORCE

Since school is where a child spends the majority of his wakeful hours, it may be appropriate to arm school psychologists and social workers with the tools and information they require to recognize and respond to the various needs of children facing the separation of their parents. Schools have, on hand, a variety of professional people who may help to bridge the gap between school and home, but also between families and professional help to provide an appropriate amount of support to parents to help their children adjust in the healthiest way possible. While research will no doubt continue to generate new and important contributions to this topic, there already exists a wide breadth of literature and personal experience to draw from when attempting to remain informed about how one can best reach out to a child in need.

Parents, teachers, and mental health professionals working within the school system need to remain aware that objective psychometric testing can only take us so far. Before accepting assessment results at face value, it is imperative to delve deeper into the context of a particular emotion or behaviour being displayed. We often lose sight of how much our external world can play on our emotional stability in search of an easy answer to a problem. To ensure the well-being of our children and the validity of emotional and behavioural diagnosis, we must be certain that we are allowing our children to feel and express their reactive emotions freely without casting a label on the behaviour too quickly. With support and time many children are able to access their own intrinsic coping mechanisms in times of trouble and develop a sense of self-efficacy from the growth that comes from that experience.



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