I, Tara Gwen McManus, hereby submit this work as part of the requirements for the degree of:

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Dealing With Tensions: Managing Relational Dialectics in the Post-Divorce Parent-Child Relationship

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Dealing With Tension: Managing Relational Dialectics in the Post-Divorce Parent-Child Relationship

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Abstract

This study examined the management strategies parents and children employ to negotiate the dialectical tensions existing in the parent-child relationship while the family was intact, during parental divorce, and post-divorce. The four research questions addressed how parents and how children manage the openness-closedness, autonomy-connection, and predictability-novelty dialectics in terms of selection, separation, neutralization, and reformulation. Survey respondents (N=27) were asked to describe their relationship with their parent/child while the parents were married, during parental divorce, and post-divorce. Findings show that while the family is intact and during the divorce, the parent group and the child group tend to manage the dialectical tensions similarly, but post-divorce, autonomy-connection and predictability-novelty are managed differently by the parent group and the child group. Selection was used by both parents and children primarily regarding open-closedness before parental divorce while selection and separation were both used during and post-divorce. Separation was used by parents post-divorce to manage autonomy-connection while the children reported using reformulation. Predictability-novelty was overwhelmingly managed through selection while the family was intact, but post-divorce children continued managing the dialectic through selection while parents reported all four management strategies.
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Chapter 1: Literature

American families have evolved in recent years. No longer is the ideal, first marriage, nuclear family as common as it once was; we now frequently see never married, single parent families and post-divorce, binuclear families. The most recent study by the Department of Health and Human Services (2002) found 43 percent of marriages end within 15 years and 60 percent of these families have at least one child. Following divorce, parents may strive to create a well-functioning post-divorce family. In fact, the most frequently reported turning point in post-divorce family formation was creating a well-functioning binuclear family, which includes such characteristics as family members settling into new routines and roles, and new marriage partners becoming successful co-parents who jointly fulfill the children’s needs with ease (Graham, 1997). However, as Golish (2003) found, building a new cohesive family unit is a challenge for most post-divorce and binuclear families.

Unfortunately, parental divorce forces many changes in the parent-child relationship making the attainment of a well-functioning binuclear family difficult. Post-divorce parents and children likely need to renegotiate their relationships with each other in order to have a positive, well-adjusted post-divorce relationship because while the parents' marriage ends, the parent-child relationship does not end. Instead, the parent-child relationship takes on new challenges. One of these challenges is how the relationship should evolve after experiencing this family crisis.

A number of factors have been identified as being influential in the evolution of post-divorce parent-child relationships. One such factor is the age of a child at the time of parental separation (Amato & Booth, 1996; Booth & Amato, 1994; King, 2002; Woodward, Fergusson, & Belsky, 2000). Another factor that may affect the parent-child relationship post-divorce is the degree of conflict prior to divorce (Amato, Loomis, & Booth, 1995; Booth & Amato, 1994; Peterson & Zill, 1986), as well as various developmental factors of the child including
depression (Peterson & Zill, 1986; Videon, 2002), behavior problems (Peterson & Zill, 1986; Videon, 2002; Woodward, Fergusson, & Belsky, 2000), academic achievement (Amato, & Gilbreth, 1999; Aquilino & Supple, 2001; Menning, 2002; Woodard, Fergusson, & Belsky, 2000), and the amount of trust (King, 2002; Thomas & Booth-Butterfield, 1995). Divorce also changes the amount of contact children and parents have with one another (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1991; Cooney, 1994; Furstenberg & Nord, 1985; Golish & Caughlin, 2002; Shapiro, 2003; Stewart, 2003). All of these effects of divorce have been associated with children “feeling caught” between parents. Frequently, a child in post-divorce families feels stuck between his/her parents’ wants, needs, and requests. Divorce also affects children’s perceptions of their relationships with their parents (Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998). The various effects of divorce and the changes in the perceptions of the relationship all could be reasons children of divorced parents report feeling less close, more avoidance, more caught between their parents, and less satisfied in their relationships with their parents (Afifi, Golish, & Schrodt, 2003). Because of these changes and the lack of existing research on parents’ and children’s perceptions and experiences of divorce, it is important to learn how children and parents deal with changes in their relationships caused by divorce.

The prevalence of divorce creates a demand to understand better its effects on family relationships over time. Therefore, this study seeks to extend existing family communication research by examining how parents and their children communicate to renegotiate and manage relationship dialectical tensions following parental divorce. Relational dialectics (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, Rawlins, 1992) is a framework for understanding how individuals in relationships negotiate ongoing tensions in the relationship and can provide insight into the dyadic level of parent-child relationships. Since divorce splits the family unit into at least two
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separate yet overlapping entities typically operating differently than the family did while intact, it produces a great deal of change. Relational dialectics are used here, then, to examine adolescents’ and parents' perceptions of their communication with one another and to indicate how they negotiate the contradictory tensions through the extreme changes incurred by divorce, but especially pronounced during and post-divorce.

Effects of Divorce

Parent-child relationships and communication are affected by what occurs in the relationship over time. Because divorce only marks the end to the parents’ marriage and not the end of the parent-child relationship, it is necessary to understand how divorce can result in different outcomes for children and the parent-child relationship depending on the circumstances surrounding the divorce. Fallout from the parents' divorce as well as the causes of the divorce could influence the post-divorce parent-child relationship. Such influential effects on the evolution of the post-divorce parent-child relationship include those which make the child feel caught between parents, those affecting child development during adolescence, the amount of conflict between parents prior to separation, the age of the child at the time of separation, and the amount of contact between the child and each parent after separation.

Feeling Caught

Following divorce, a common effect many children experience is “feeling caught” between their parents. Feeling caught refers to a child’s description of feeling pulled in opposite directions by other family members, typically the custodial and noncustodial parent (Golish, 2003). This tension sometimes makes the child feel torn between parents--wanting to be loyal to both while being pressured to be loyal to only one.

Children most often feel caught in the few years immediately following parental divorce
while the former spouses attempt to renegotiate their relationship (Afifi, 2003). More specifically, according to Buchanan, Maccoby, and Dornbusch (1991), children’s feelings of being caught vary by sex and age but not necessarily residence. Female adolescents report feeling caught more than male adolescents. Older adolescents are more likely to report feelings of being caught than younger adolescents. Adolescents who are close to both parents report fewer feelings of being caught than adolescents who were close to one or neither parent.

Feeling caught can occur through a variety of ways such as inappropriate disclosure by a parent, being used to relay messages between parents, or a parent testing the accuracy of the other parent’s story with the child. According to Afifi, (2003), children feeling caught often state that either one or both parents share information that is hurtful toward the other parent or put the child in an uncomfortable position. Commonly shared information between parents and children often involves child financial support, visitation, household rules, and personal information about the other parent. Children often feel that parents’ disclosures are inappropriate when parents share information that should be kept between parents, such as talking about the other parent’s reasons for divorce, child support, loyalty, and custodial issues. Frequently, this feeling occurs because one of the child’s parents relies on the child to check the accuracy of the other parent’s story when s/he believes the other parent is leaving out important details. Because the parent is asking about the actions of the other parent, the child is placed between the parents and is forced to report on one parent to the other. The parent may not perceive the request as sticking the child between the parents or pulling him/her in one direction, but the request to check information against what the child knows may place the child in an uncomfortable position.

Parents often do not realize their children are feeling caught. In one study, over half of the children in post-divorce families (53 percent), reported “feeling caught” between their
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custodial and noncustodial parent, whereas only the 10 percent of parents thought the child was feeling caught (Afifi, 2003). The incongruity between a child feeling caught and the parent being able to pick up on this feeling underscores the importance of parental awareness of the powerful influence they have on their child’s perceptions of communication (Golish, 2003) and the relationship they have with their child during and post-divorce.

Positive communication patterns between parents and children are created by parents sustaining a cordial relationship with one another or restricting communication between themselves (Golish, 2003). Afifi (2003) found parents must establish appropriate privacy rules governing what and how much they share with their children. In addition, feeling caught is often reduced through constantly re-enforcing mutually defined household rules by all parents (Afifi, 2003) and open communication during family meetings used to solve conflicts in strong step-families (Golish, 2003).

Effects of Parental Conflict

The amount of conflict to which parents expose their children can have both positive and negative effects. High parental conflict is often a sign of marital unhappiness and instability and when followed by divorce, a further deterioration of the parent-child relationship typically occurs (Booth & Amato, 1994). Conflict is defined as yelling, arguing, shouting, and disagreement (Glenn & Kramer, 1985; Shapiro, 2003). In a 12 year longitudinal study in which families were randomly sampled and interviewed at five year increments to examine marital instability, Amato, Loomis, and Booth (1995) found the effects of divorce on children depends, at least partially, on the degree of parental marital conflict prior to the divorce. Through the use of a cross-sectional, longitudinal survey of over 1,400 children by the National Surveys of Children, Peterson and Zill (1986) found that 62 percent of children in low conflict, intact families reported having positive
relationships with both parents.

Parent-child relationships of intact families suffer increasingly as the degree of parental conflict rises (Peterson & Zill, 1986). When conflict is high between parents who stay together rather than divorce, Amato, Loomis, and Booth (1995) found children tend to have a deteriorated overall well-being, defined as high psychological distress and lower overall happiness, compared to children of low conflict, intact families and separated families. Further, Peterson and Zill found children in high conflict, intact families often suffer as many harmful effects as children who experience parental separation with only 29 percent of children in persistently high conflict families reporting positive relationships with both parents, which is similar to children in divorced families. In fact, girls in high conflict, intact families and separated families have fewer positive relationships with their mothers and fathers.

A child is worse off in early adulthood following parental divorce when parental conflict is low (Videon, 2002). This could be attributed to the child’s unclear understanding of the divorce. When a child hears parents arguing, s/he is more likely to understand why the parents divorce than if they do not hear parents argue before their separation.

Afifi (2003) found that post-divorce parental conflict is one of the strongest predictors of a child feeling caught in the post-divorce parent-child relationship—the greater the amount of conflict, the greater feelings of being caught. When the relationship between the custodial and noncustodial parent is high in conflict, parents limited their contact with one another and restricted what they revealed to each other, usually only sharing what pertains to the children. According to Buchanan, Moccoby, and Dornbusch (1991), parents’ lack of interaction decreases the hostility between the former spouses; however, it still makes the child feel caught. In other words, for parents to decrease direct contact with each other, they relay messages to one another
through the child. When parents are so disengaged, adolescents were less likely to feel caught compared to adolescents whose parents were still fighting, but adolescents feel more caught than those with cooperative post-divorce parents; this is even worse when parents share custody. Golish (2003) found that when there is high hostility between parents, frequently children eventually refuse to play the go between, or children set the ground rules for what was an appropriate topic of discussion.

In addition to these problems, children in divorced families have been found to develop a number of strengths. For example, they can successfully adjust to family crisis, which children of low conflict, intact families are not as capable of doing (Amato, Loomis, & Booth, 1995). In other words divorce makes children better able to adapt to adverse family situations, which children of intact, low conflict parents are typically less capable of since they are not exposed to such family difficulties.

Developmental Effects on the Child

In many instances, parental conflict and divorce has been found to impact various developmental factors in children, which in turn could affect the parent-child relationship. Further, many of the effects of divorce on child development have been associated with children reporting feeling caught between parents including greater depression and behavioral problems (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1991). Developmental effects include psychological and social characteristics impacting a child’s ability grow and transition from childhood to adulthood in a healthy manner. Factors frequently found to influence child development following divorce include depression, behavioral problems, academic achievement, and trust,

Depression. Children’s level of depression is dependent partially on the amount of conflict between parents when the family is intact. According to Peterson and Zill (1986)
children are least depressed when living in intact families where parents display low levels of conflict and are most depressed when experiencing high levels of parental conflict in intact families. Children living with only one parent have depression levels that fall in between high-conflict and low-conflict intact families.

According to several studies, during the post-divorce period, daughters have been found to be more depressed than sons (Peterson & Zill, 1986). Regardless of the daughter’s relationship with her parents following divorce, the depression was not diminished. (Videon, 2002). Further, Peterson and Zill found that daughters tended to be more depressed when living with fathers following parental separation than daughters living with their mothers. However, the more positively daughters rate their relationships with their fathers prior to parental separation, the lower their depression following separation. Sons’ depression tended to be similar to sons living in intact families, when living with fathers following divorce. Sons were more depressed living with single mothers when compared to living with remarried mothers. Additionally, when sons rated their relationship with their mothers positively prior to parental separation, they reported fewer depression symptoms, regardless of residence following separation (Videon).

Behavioral problems. Along with higher depression, children whose parents divorced at a young age are more likely to demonstrate greater behavioral problems (Woodward, Fergusson, & Belsky, 2000). Antisocial behavior is lowest for children in low conflict, intact families, greater for those living with mothers following divorce, and greatest for children in high conflict, intact families (Peterson & Zill, 1986). Videon (2002) found that when living with mothers, sons’ antisocial behaviors are equal to those of sons living in intact families while daughters’ antisocial behaviors are greater when living with only mothers compared to living in intact families. When living with fathers, found daughters tend to have greater antisocial behaviors than sons; however,
Videon found no significant differences in son’s delinquency behaviors when living with the mother or father following parental separation compared to when the son lived in a two parent home. Additionally, both sons and daughter tend to have increased behavior problems when they live with remarried mothers.

A positive relationship between a child and his/her parent can mediate antisocial behaviors during parental conflict and separation, especially for sons (Peterson & Zill, 1986). The best behavioral outcomes during divorce for daughters occur when a positive relationship exists between her and each parent, according to Videon (2002). More specifically, the more positively daughters rated their relationships with mothers prior to divorce, the fewer delinquent behaviors were reported during divorce when living with mothers. Conversely, more delinquent behaviors were reported when daughters live apart from their mothers in post-divorce. However, the father-daughter relationship prior to divorce does not influence the delinquency behaviors during divorce.

**Academic achievement.** Besides greater behavior problems and higher depression, adolescents in single parent and post-divorce families also have lower school performance (Aquilino & Supple, 2001) regardless of gender and developmental timing of the child at parental separation (Woodward, Fergusson, & Belsky, 2000). Greater academic achievement has been found to lead to fewer depressive symptoms in children of divorced parents (Aquilino & Supple), so, lower academic achievement possibly adds to the already increased levels of depression children experience following their parents’ divorce.

Children’s academic success following parental divorce also has been found to be positively related to father’s payment of child support, contact with father, and feeling close with father all together but not individually (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Menning, 2002). In other words
children need not only their fathers’ money in post-divorce but also contact and a close relationship with their father for academic achievement and to decrease depression following divorce.

Trust. Academic achievement, behavioral problems and depression are not the only potential negative effects of parental divorce on children. According to King (2002), the quality of the parent-child relationship while growing-up has a strong positive association with a child’s trust of both his/her mother and father. An adult child's trust in others, including parents, is dependant upon parental divorce in childhood and his/her parent-child relationship during adolescence.

When a child feels deceived, s/he will likely have lower trust and problematic interactions with parents (Thomas & Booth-Butterfield, 1995). Interestingly, Thomas and Booth-Butterfield found the more a child feels deceived by parents, the less satisfied the child is with their mother’s communication but not with their fathers; this is true especially in post-divorce families. They suggest this could happen for two different reasons. First, children may not have strong expectations for open and honest communication with their fathers, so when fathers are deceptive, it is not of much consequence. They further posit that this could occur because the mother tends to be the one who breaks the news of the divorce to the child, and because a highly trusting relationship is built with mothers at an early age, it is more detrimental when it is perceived she has been deceptive.

Divorce has a strong negative effect on adult child’s overall trust in their fathers regardless of the child’s age at the time of parental divorce (King, 2002). This may impede the ability of an adolescent to have a healthy relationship with his/her father. Further, King found that while over half of the children (52 percent) who experience divorce still trust their fathers
following parental divorce, children in post-divorce families are more likely than those from intact families to distrust their fathers. However, this was not found to be true for the mother-child relationship.

**Age of Child**

While the length of time since parental divorce has not been found to be significantly associated with the effects of parental divorce (Afifi, Golish, & Schrod, 2003; Amato, Loomis, & Booth, 1995), age of the child at the time of parental divorce does have significant effects on various aspects childhood outcome (Glenn & Kramer, 1985; Woodward, Fergusson, & Belsky, 2000). In their longitudinal study on the quality of adolescents’ attachment to parents following parental separation, Woodward, Fergusson, and Belsky found the younger a child is at the time of separation, the lower his/her attachment to parents, and the worse children perceive the parent-child relationships to be during adolescence. In other words if parents divorce when the child is young, the more difficulty the parents and adolescents might have renegotiating their relationship during post-divorce due to the worse perceptions of the relationship.

A child’s age at the time of the divorce is positively associated with how close the child reports feeling to his/her father for both sons and daughters but only significantly for daughters (Amato & Booth, 1996). When parental divorce occurs early in the child’s life, the father-daughter relationship suffers more than other parent-child relationships (Booth & Amato, 1994). In other words, if parents divorce when their daughter is young, the father and daughter may have trouble renegotiating their relationship because the relationship is not close. However, this may be attributable to traditional custody arrangements post-divorce.

A child whose parents divorce when the child is young may have lower quality relationships with parents, but the relationship can be mediated if the parent works to maintain a
good relationship with the child (King, 2002). If the parent, following divorce, actively sustains the relationship with his/her child, the parent-child relationship is more likely to be a healthy relationship or at least more likely to have a chance at working toward a healthy relationship. However, if parents divorce when the child is young and the parent does not work toward continuing the parent-child relationship, the relationship is likely to suffer, and the parent and child are unlikely to build a healthy post-divorce relationship.

Parent-Child Contact

The passage of time does not appear to diminish the negative effects of divorce on children (Afifi, Golish, & Schrodt, 2003). The type of parent-child relationship prior to divorce and who the child resides with during and post-divorce both may have a greater effect on the child during post-divorce. While adolescents benefit more from living in a dual residence compared to living in sole residence (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1991), divorce makes a dual residency of parents nearly impossible. Post-divorce parent-child contact can help mediate the developmental effects of parental divorce. Depending on the level of stress associated with living in a two-parent home (Amato, Loomis, & Booth, 1995) and the relationship with parents while the family is intact, divorce may or may not be beneficial to children (Amato, Loomis, & Booth, 1995; Videon, 2002). When conflict between the parents is high, Videon found divorce removes a child from an aversive and stressful home environment, which potentially outweighs the loss of the resources the additional parent brings to the family and the negative developmental effects divorce could cause. Further, Videon posits that divorce is advantageous for a child when s/he has an unsatisfying relationship with the same-sex parent. Specifically, when a poor father-son relationship exists prior to separation, the son benefits from moving into a single mother home creating stress relief and leading to more positive outcomes.
Negative developmental effects of parental divorce can be mediated by the type and amount of post-divorce contact children have with both their mother and father. Divorce often greatly affects the frequency and nature of parental interactions. Adolescents often perceive their relationships with their parents to be negatively impacted by separation in spite of with whom the child lives (Woodward, Fergusson, & Belsky, 2000). Regardless of custody, divorced mothers experience an increase in the frequency of contact with at least one of her adult children and more limited contact with at least one child compared to mothers’ of continuously intact families and fathers of both intact and post-divorce families.

Fathers have less contact with both adolescent and adult children post-divorce (Cooney, 1994; Shapiro, 2003). In fact, lack of contact with father is reported most often by children compared to their reports of contact with mothers (Golish & Caughlin, 2002). Fathers seldom have weekly contact; typically, they have only yearly contact or no contact at all with their children (Stewart, 2003). There is a decrease in frequent contact with at least one adult child compared to continuously married fathers. In fact, many children want more contact with their fathers (Golish, 2003) and many fathers complain that the limited contact they have with their children is what hurts the father-child relationship (Furstenberg & Nord, 1985). But, as Amato and Gilbreth (1999) found, children appear to benefit from their father’s payment of child support more than when fathers maintain frequent contact.

*Residential parent.* Because custody is typically awarded to the mother in divorce settlements, the majority of studies have included few instances where the father was the custodial parent making it difficult to determine if these findings are due to sex differences in the parent-child relationship or due to the residential/nonresidential status of the parent-child relationship. A few studies have found parental custody does play some role in the post-divorce
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parent-child relationship. For example, children typically have satisfying relationships with the parent with whom they communicate most frequently; this usually is the parent with whom the child resides (Thomas & Booth-Butterfield, 1995).

In their study examining how marital disruption effects the parent-child relationship, Peterson and Zill (1986) found that in post-divorce children who live with their mother’s rate their mother-child relationship more positively than their father-child relationships. When children live with their fathers post-divorce, sons tend to rate their father-son relationship more positively compared to their mother-son relationship. Daughters still tend to rate their mother-daughter relationship higher compared to their father-daughter relationship. Of those living with their mothers, 60 percent of children report having a positive relationship with their mother and 36 percent of those children feel they also have a positive relationship with their nonresidential father.

Of those children residing with their father, 69 percent feel they have a positive relationship with their father and 57 percent of these children report also having a positive relationship with their noncustodial mother (Peterson & Zill, 1986). King (2002) found that children are somewhat more likely to trust fathers following divorce when fathers have custody or have frequent post-divorce contact. Despite this, adult children in post-divorce families are still less trusting of fathers compared to adult children's levels of trust in their fathers in intact families.

Nonresidential parent. Children tend to be more satisfied with their parent-child relationships when the child maintains regular contact with nonresidential parent. Unfortunately, divorce damages the ongoing relationship with the parent with whom the child does not reside (Furstenberg & Nord, 1985). Steward (2003) found children have limited contact with their
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Nonresidential parent. Nearly one-third of children in post-divorce families have seen their fathers only a handful of times in the past year. On average, children of divorce see their nonresidential parent only twice a month.

When contact dwindles as time passes following parental separation, Furstenberg and Nord (1985) posit that the nonresidential parent plays a more limited and social role rather than instrumental role especially when compared to the role of the residential parent plays in the child’s daily life. While residential parents participate in more task oriented and care giving activities, nonresidential parents participate in more entertainment-oriented activities. Children who see their nonresidential parent on a fairly regular basis do not complain about the amount of love or attention received. In fact, children report they do not often argue, feel loved, appreciated, or trusted by the nonresidential parent; however, they do feel they spend enough time with their nonresidential parent. Further, children in regular contact with nonresidential parents are no more likely to have relational problems than those with infrequent or no contact at all. On the other hand, children report being more discontent about their relationships with their nonresidential fathers than those children who live with their fathers post-divorce (Furstenberg & Nord, 1985).

Summary of Divorce Literature

Post-divorce parent-child relationships have been found to have a number of differences compared to intact family parent-child relationships in terms of contact and communication the parent and child have with one another. As can be seen in the phenomena “feeling caught”, children experience a pull in opposite directions between their parents frequently because parents ask the child about the other parent or disclose information the child is uncomfortable with possessing (Golish, 2003). Children frequently have a difficult time interacting with their
nonresidential parent due to the decreased contact they have with this parent, usually the father (Afifi, 2003). The amount of conflict between parents prior to their divorce is a factor in the post-divorce parent-child relationship and increases a child’s feelings of being caught between parents. Further, parental divorce appears to have the potential to greatly affect various child development aspects such as greater depression, more antisocial behaviors, lower academic achievement, lower trust, and lower communication satisfaction with parents. All these can affect the evolution of the post-divorce parent-child relationship and thus how the parent and child manage the challenges of the evolving relationship.

Because of the changes familial relationships endure following divorce, the parent-child relationship must be closely examined to learn how parents and children negotiate the experience in post-divorce. Relational dialectics provides a relevant framework for understanding how parents and children in post-divorce relationships negotiate and adapt to the changes in their family life. As such, this theoretical perspective is used to ground the current study.

Relational Dialectics

During post-divorce, the parent-child relationship is often not as strong as it was while the family was intact (Booth & Amato, 1994; Peterson & Zill, 1986). All relationships experience periods of change and evolution as the post-divorce parent-child relationship does. Divorce can cause unique changes in parent-child relationships, and therefore, the relational maintenance behaviors between the child and parent, especially the noncustodial parent (Golish, 2003). The management of change, manifested in dialectical tensions is an important issue to examine in divorced families. A dialectical perspective provides a framework to examine changes in the context of divorce.

Rather than examining how relationships begin and end, relational dialectics concentrates
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on how relationships are sustained through “inextricably intertwined” social, historical, and environmental forces (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). It focuses on the contradictory tensions that occur between two interdependent, yet mutually exclusive poles. These “paired opposites” exist on a continuum and operate together to continually negotiate the relationship in order to maintain it (Baxter, 1993). Accordingly, they cannot be studied independently of each other. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) argue that dialectics cannot be studied in isolation nor can they be examined without considering one's unified opposition because each are affected by prior experiences and are embedded in the development of the relationship (Baxter, 1994; Montgomery & Baxter, 1996).

Relationships change due to the dynamic interplay of the paired opposites, or contradictions (Baxter, 1993, 1994). Contradictions mutually negate each other yet are mutually dependent upon each other (Baxter & Montgomery, 1998). These contradictions are present in all relationships but not in equal amounts across all relationships (Baxter, 1993, 1994). Dialectical tensions, however, are inherent in all aspects of a person's social life, but the degree and importance of each contradiction and the ability to manage them vary from relationship to relationship. For example, one child might be more open with her mother than her father, but be more open with her sister than her mother. The degree of openness in the mother-daughter relationship for the child might be more important than the degree of openness in her relationship with her sister. Both members of the relationship must negotiate the contradictions to satisfy the needs of both people in the relationship, such as both the mother and daughter.

Because communication entails persistent interconnection and reciprocal influence (Rawlins, 1992), the patterns of parent-child communication have been found to be affected by divorce (Afifi, 2003). Since talk a basic element of relational maintenance in that it provides the
topics on which the relationship is based, the means of discussion and assessment for a
relationship, and projects a future for the relationship (Burleson and Samter, 1994), it is a key to
understanding change. It also explains the parent’s and child’s perceived need for everyday talk
to maintain and continue their relationship after divorce (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). In other
words, everyday talk provides the necessary interaction between the parent and child allowing
for a basis of interaction to further the relationship (Golish, 2003).

From dialectical view, it involves a constant a push and pull of communicative influences
of various individual, interpersonal, and social factors (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Further, a
parent and child use everyday talk and the situations in which the talk occurs to deal with the
push and pull of the tensions. As such, negotiating the tensions in the relationship allows the
parent and child to establish a distinct communication system for the relationship consisting of
unique symbols, meanings and interaction patterns (Baxter & Montgomery). With divorce the
opportunity for everyday talk with the parent who is no longer in residence decreases and the
ability to negotiate the tensions and the topics on which the parent-child relationship is based
will change. In fact, divorce can destroy the symbols, meanings, and interaction patterns unique
to the parent-child relationship. Further, the loss of everyday contact may decrease the
opportunities for the parent and child to negotiate caused by the tensions the divorce and the
absence of a parent causes. How they negotiate the various tensions in the post-divorce parent-
child relationship through communication will impact how the parent and child are able to
maintain the relationship and create the potential for future interactions.

Both external and internal dialectical tensions are negotiated in every relationship.
External dialectics are those tensions existing between the parent-child dyad and outside culture.
Created by social norms and expectations, these tensions help shape and frame the interactions
Dealing with tensions and experiences guiding the relationship. For example, the desire for a parent and child to feel that they have a normal relationship is based on the ideal social standards and represents an external dialectic. Internal dialectics, on the other hand, include those contradictions existing between the parent and child that give meaning to the relationship and function to help manage and maintain that relationship (Baxter, 1994, Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, Rawlins, 1992). This could occur when a child desires to be open with his/her mother about other family members but also wants to protect both his/her mom and him/herself from being upset at discomforting news. Thus, a tension occurs when a mother asks her son about the ex-spouse, and the child likely wants to tell his mother about his dad but fears hurting her with upsetting news.

Three important internal dialectics in the parent child relationship include openness-closedness, connection-autonomy, and predictability-novelty (Baxter, 1994). These provide insight into the relationship that exists in a dyad such as the one between the child and his/her mother and father in post-divorce. Openness, autonomy, and predictability needs in every relationship vary from topic to topic, activity, and time-to-time, making negotiation of these contradictions perpetual, but individuals may not always be actively, explicitly managing them (Burleson & Samter, 1994). Post-divorce families may have an especially difficult time managing the openness-closedness, autonomy-connection, and predictability-novelty dialectics as they go through the drastic change of divorce. In other words, they may have more to manage. For instance, while the family is intact, the boundary of husband-wife and parent-child are probably hierarchical. During divorce the boundaries may shift with the child “feeling caught” between parents. Post-divorce, the boundary may shift again depending on custody arrangements and the remarriage of either parent.

*Openness-Closedness*
The degree of confidentiality and sharing of personal information that each member of a relationship is comfortable with is the essence of the openness-closedness dialectic. Rawlins (1992) explains that the openness-closedness dialectic is further characterized by an individual's desire to be honest in disclosure while at the same time managing the risk of freely sharing information since once an utterance is spoken, its ownership becomes shared in the relationship. In other words, boundaries of openness-closedness are based on individual perceptions of cost and benefits of disclosure and discretion because individuals must protect themselves from the vulnerability inherent in disclosure. In the family context, family members wish for access to the private areas of each other’s lives but only to a certain extent (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). For example, when a mother shares information about the divorce with her child, both must share the responsibility for developing rules to govern that information. Disclosures concerning the divorce may force a child to assume undesired roles such as mediator and confidant, which further contributes to the dynamics of the opposing dialectical tension (Afifi, 2003). While the tensions occurs between each, both the parent and child have ownership of the tension and are likely to perceive the tension between openness and closedness differently and therefore may take responsibility of the information pertaining to the dialectic differently.

The openness-closedness dialectic tends to become more rigid in adolescence and young adulthood when relating to parents, especially when adjusting to a new family situation (Callan & Noller, 1986), such as post-divorce families. Golish (2003) found the most notable difference between intact and post-divorce families to be the degree of openness in communication. Further, the degree of openness in communication was the most significant difference between healthy functioning post-divorce families and non-healthy post-divorce families. Families having difficulties adjusting had more avoidance tendencies and were more closed with
one another and spent little time together as a family. Avoided topics in parent-child conversations can be viewed as the closed end of the openness-closedness dialectic. In parent-child relationships, commonly avoided topics include friends, dating, failures, relationship problems, negative experiences, current state of relationship with parent or step-parent, and household/parental rules (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995). In post-divorce parent-child relationships, sex, talking about the other parent or family members, deep conversations, and money are also commonly avoided topics. Further, children avoid talking about dating/marriage significantly more with fathers than mothers. A child’s topic avoidance with parents could be attributed to either not wanting to reveal information with a parent to whom a child is less comfortable disclosing, or it could be due to custody arrangements, which decreases contact with one parent, usually the father, leading to greater topic avoidance with the noncustodial parent (Golish & Caughlin, 2002).

Golish and Caughlin (2002) found topic avoidance for young adult children depends on the type of parent-child relationship the child reports having with their parents. As topic avoidance increases, children report poorer relationships with each parent (Golish, 2000). Avoidance is more likely to be used when a child is living with only one parent as opposed to when the family is intact (Afifi, Golish, & Schrodt, 2003). For instance, if a child feels a parent has not been completely honest regarding parental divorce, there will likely be long term negative effects on child’s satisfaction with parents’ communication and self esteem. Perceived deception or with-holding of information, or purposeful and deceitful closedness, can set the standard for parent-child openness and closedness making children less open if they feel parents are less open with them (Thomas & Booth-Butterfield, 1995).

A child is more open with parents following parental divorce if the parent-child
relationship is close. The closer children are to their parents, the more satisfied they are with the relationship and the less likely they are to avoid talking about the state of the family and the relationships within the family (Golish & Schrodt, 2002). Additionally, closeness and frequency of contact were found to be directly related in post-divorce families. Children tended to be more protective and apprehensive when disclosing to their fathers than to their mothers (Golish & Caughlin, 2002). Specifically, daughters, who normally had less post-divorce contact with their fathers, were less close with fathers post-divorce compared to intact families (Cooney, 1994).

While closedness by the child can act as a positive protective function allowing a child to avoid unnecessary conflict and stress, when avoidance becomes the norm for step-families, the family typically has problems adapting to the new family situation and it often leads to unresolved issues between family members (Afifi, 2003). Children who tend more toward the closed end of this dialectic feel more caught between their parents. This may be true for all post-divorce families regardless of parental remarriage. When children find avoidance to be ineffective, they openly confront both their custodial and noncustodial parent about feeling caught (Afifi).

On the other end of the openness-closedness dialectical continuum, being open equally may have either positive or negative affects on the parent-child relationship. Afifi (2003) found that parents, mothers more often than fathers, frequently reveal their feelings during post-divorce and information about the divorce to their children. While the mother may feel this is good to do, the children are often are uncomfortable with this inappropriate openness and the responsibility the knowledge of information places on the child. Children prefer to know as little pertaining to the circumstances surrounding their parents’ divorce as possible; and therefore, children carefully monitor the information they receive even when they are aware of relational
transgressions that lead to the divorce. Inappropriate openness, a child's perception that
information shared by the parent should not have been shared because it makes the child feel
uncomfortable, occurred in 53 percent of stepfamilies. This type of openness led to a role
reversal in 50 percent of divorced families where the child becomes the custodial parent’s peer or
“pseudo” parent. This phenomenon was found most frequently in the mother-daughter
relationship. Further, Afifi found that a child’s feeling of being caught was made worse when
parents were overly open or when the parents ask the child to be more open about aspects that
the child did not want to share. Increased openness of the mother’s communication, in particular,
created a power shift making the child more of an adult in the divorce. Such uncomfortable
disclosure thus placed too much responsibility on the child, and could help explain why
daughters reported feeling caught more than sons (Afifi, 2003).

Autonomy-connection

Because no relationship can exist without some degree of interdependence (Baxter, 1993), another dynamic contradiction exists between autonomy and connection. Divorce has
been shown to negatively impact children’s perceptions of closeness with their parents. Children
in post-divorce families tend to feel less close, or connected, with parents than children from
intact families (Afifi, Golish, & Schrodt, 2003). The autonomy-connection dialectic focuses on
the degree of interdependence between the members of the dyad who at the same time struggle to
maintain individual identity. This dialectical tension focuses on how the parent and child are
dependent on their familial relationship they have with one another to define their connection to
the other family member. In other words, a mother has her own identity as an individual and also
an identity as a mother, of which both the mother and the child must acknowledge and allow in
their mother-daughter relationship. Parents and children must negotiate a balance of connection-
autonomy within their relationship to create an appropriate level of interdependence and
closeness between them yet keep individual identity (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Anderson
and Sabatelli (1990) posit healthy functioning families are those who simultaneously are
independent of and connected with one another within the family. The degree of connection
changes over time both quantitatively and qualitatively as the relationship changes over time.

Frequent contact over a long period of time through various interactions allows a parent
and child to have a strong influence on one another, increasing their interdependence and
connection. The removal of a parent from daily contact with a child, as happens with divorce,
may decrease their connection and interdependence and weaken their relationship.

Not only has frequency of contact been found to effect the post-divorce parent-child
relationship, but so has the degree of warmth perceived by parents and children. When parents
report the parent-adolescent child relationship as being warm, involved and helping, parents later
report higher levels of shared activities and support. In turn, this promotes the connection
between a parent and child, from their young adult children compared to parents who did not
report a positive parent-adolescent child relationship (Aquilino, 1997). For sons, when parent’s
marriage remains intact, the father-son and mother-son connection is positively associated
(Booth & Amato, 1994). Buchanan, Maccoby, and Dornbusch (1991) examined of adolescents’
feelings of being caught between parents in post-divorce situations, and found that children who
are close to their mothers are less likely to feel caught between their parents than when they are
not close to their mother. Closeness to fathers also tends to assuage feelings of being caught by
children, but not as strongly. Further, adolescents who report being close to both parents were
significantly less likely to feel caught between their parents post-divorce than children who were
only close to one parent. So, according to this research, the more connected, or close, an
adolescent feels to his/her parents, the less s/he feels caught between them. However, when they examined adolescents’ feeling caught based on residence, Buchanan, Maccoby, and Dornbusch found closeness to mother was related to the child feeling caught regardless of residence. Closeness to father, conversely, was not related to feeling caught no matter with whom the child lived. This finding may reflect the expectations adolescents have for parents following divorce.

Furstenberg and Nord (1985) posit that children in post-divorce families use a sliding scale when judging their relationships with their nonresidential parents. Because less is expected of them, any bit of attention from the nonresidential parent may be gratefully received. When the noncustodial father visits with his children for an hour once every couple of weeks, children are appreciative of this regardless of whether it is just dinner or a holiday celebration because they do not have high expectations for their non-custodial father. But, the infrequency and brevity of their interactions may cause difficulty for the child and parent in negotiating their relationship and lead to a less connected relationship.

According to Furstenberg & Nord (1986), daughters tend to manage the autonomy-connection dialectic by becoming more autonomous with fathers more than sons. The decrease of time together creates an unexplainable loss and sense of resentment in the daughter. Research has also found that fathers who fear the loss tend to spoil their children (Furstenberg & Nord). But, Amato and Gilbreth (1999) found that frequency of contact was not as important as what a father and child did when they were together. Conversely, Golish (2003) found that children usually just waned everyday talk creating a more satisfying relationship (Golish, 2003). Everyday talk can be a simple social routine used to maintain relationships by creating shared meanings and understanding between the parent and child which operates to sustain the relationship and focus the dyad toward future interactions thereby providing some degree of
certainty for the two (Burleson & Samter, 1994). This type of everyday talk is also a means of building the connection between the parent and child.

*Predictability-Novelty*

Along with negotiating the degree of openness-closedness and autonomy-connection, the post-divorce parent-child relationship must renegotiate the degree of certainty in their relationship. Relating is a process of "weaving" predictability and novelty of interaction through the relationship (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). The predictability-novelty dialectic focuses on the degree of tension between stability and discontinuity in the relationship. Relationships continue with vibrancy, dynamics, and newness though the interplay of these contradictions (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Previous interactions between two people, such as a father and son, provide the grounds by which predictions and expectations are made because it is these prior interactions, which supply the constraints between which the interactions may occur. These prior interactions and constraints work to establish what is regarded as certain in the relationship, what is to be regarded as uncertain, and everything in between these two ends. Relationships are built through a series of interactions, which inherently introduce some degree of certainty. In families these interactions start at birth where child is highly dependant upon parents making the relationship have a high degree of certainty (Baxter & Montgomery).

Because familial relationships are historically established and expected to continue with great certainty and predictability, parental divorce is a shocking "newness" or novelty that can create a large rift in familial relationship. Parental divorce can destroy much of the continuity, or certainty, that is expected in the parent-child relationship. Therefore, a major challenge for both the parent and child in post-divorce may be re-establishing a sense of continuity, even if it is a different level (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). If the father and son no longer live together after
the parents divorce, the son may worry about the loss of predictability in their shared activities. The custodial mother may attempt to calm her son’s fear stating he and his father will still watch football on Sundays, but in over one third of the families having difficulties, the residential parent reports having a more idealistic, predictable view of the family than the child who expresses negative views of the family (Golish, 2003). The custodial mother may feel the son and father continue their relationship as before the divorce, including watching Sunday football, while the father and son had previously had many more shared activities, which the child might perceive as a major newness in the father-child relationship because they are not as involved in each others’ lives.

Baxter and Montgomery (1996) have identified multiple meanings that the predictability-novelty dialectic can take on within a single relationship, each focusing on the short- and long-term development of the relationship. The ability to predict the relational partner’s personality, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors demonstrates a person’s knowledge of the other person. The more a parent or child is able to do this, therefore the more predictability they will have about the future of their relationship because more is known. Divorce can change a person’s beliefs and behaviors (Amato, Loomis, & Booth, 1995; King, 2002; Thomas & Booth-Butterfield, 1995; Videon, 2002; Woodward, Fergusson, & Belsky, 2000) thereby changing the certainty a child has about his/her parents and the certainty a parent has about his/her child. A second meaning associated with the predictability-novelty dialectic is “making plans for the scheduling of the next meeting” (p. 122, Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Because a relationship is built on the continuance of interactions, this type of certainty could be of great concern to the post-divorce parent-child relationship, especially between the noncustodial parent and child who need to explicitly plan many of their interactions. A third meaning of the dialectic is concerned with
what takes place during the interactions and the extent to which they are fun, exciting, and stimulating. This meaning of the dialectic focuses on the need for routines and enjoyable activities, such as family dinners or movie nights, to have predictability in the relationship but that such predictability can make the relationship stale and boring. A fourth meaning to the certainty-uncertainty dialectic pertains to the state of the relationship. Parental divorce has been shown to change how parents and children view their relationship with one another (Afifi, Golish, & Schrodt, 2003; Amato, Loomis, & Booth, 1995; Booth & Amato, 1994; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998; King, 2002; Peterson & Zill, 1986; Thomas & Booth-Butterfield, 1995). Because of the changes to the family itself as well as to the relationship, a great deal of uncertainty and discontinuity likely surround the relationship.

Golish (2003) found that another potential meaning to the predictability-novelty dialectic specific to the post-divorce family is how to grieve the loss of a relationship, which in a sense, still exists. This is especially relevant in the noncustodial parent-child relationship, as can be seen in the example of father and son watching Sunday football. The removal of one parent from the household forces the loss of everyday contact and talk creating an uncomfortable sense of novelty about the relationship due to the uncertainty about when the parent and child will see each other, what they will do, and what they will speak about when they see each other. If the father and son continue to watch Sunday football together every Sunday, due to the loss of everyday talk and contact, the father and son lose much of their banter through the week they are accustomed to surrounding the game. With continual contact the noncustodial parent is more involved in the child’s life providing opportunities for everyday talk and attendance at school activities reducing the potentiality of the “weekend dad” perception. Continual contact following parental divorce with the noncustodial parent increases the certainty and predictability of the
post-divorce parent-child relationship by allowing for regularity in the relationship. Due to the lack of regularity in the parent-child relationship, noncustodial fathers state having in-depth conversations with their children is difficult because over time there is a growing lack of content for discussion and the lack of contact perceived by the child creates a sense of frustration, resentment, and loss (Golish, 2003). If prior to parental divorce the father and son’s conversations centered around the football game, with other topics growing out of that discussion, the father and son may loose that ability to relate due to the loss of normal discussion catalysts. Noncustodial mothers tend to stay in closer contact with their children following divorce although the contact is still not as frequent and continuous as in intact families (Furstenberg & Nord, 1986). In other words, if the father retains custody of the son, the mother and son during their interactions are likely to have an easier time relating and talking than with noncustodial fathers.

Summary of Relational Dialectics

While these three dialectics, openness-closedness, autonomy-connection, and certainty-uncertainty, are by no means the only tensions present in the post-divorce parent-child relationship, they are significant tensions that must be constantly negotiated to maintain the relationship following the challenges parental divorce introduces to the family. As such, each can play a large role in providing insight into the post-divorce parent-child relationship. But not only is it necessary to understand the tensions themselves within the parent-child relationship, it is also necessary to understand how the parent and child deal with these tension. Praxical patterns focus on the communicative behaviors used to negotiate the tensions (Dindia, 1998); they allow the parent and child to act and react to various aspects of their relationship (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). As a result, such behaviors allow the parent-child dyad to manage the
dialectical tensions as they go through the changes incurred through divorce. Specific praxical patterns will be discussed below.

Practical Improvisation Patterns

Praxis refers to how an individual is both the actor of an action and also the object of that action. In other words while an individual within a relationship acts to alter an aspect of a relationship, s/he is doing so as a reaction to a prior event in the relationship, and s/he will be affected by the action in the future as well. This provides meaning to the relationship’s past and future since future interactions will be constrained by how the individuals choose to act in order to negotiate the dialectical tension (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). The actions, or strategies, used to manage the relational tensions help to generate the options and constraints that guide the interactions between a parent and child (Rawlins, 1998). Sabourin (2003) identifies four dialectical management patterns employed by families including selection, separation, neutralization, and reformulation.

Selection. When family members choose to acknowledge or emphasize one extreme of a contradiction over another, the parent and child are using selection as a means of managing the tension. This either/or approach to the constant tensions creating the relationship can be effective under certain conditions, but continued use can lead to avoidance and denial (Sabourin, 2003).

One example of selection is avoidance. Avoidance is common between parent and child in post-divorce, and children tend to be more avoidant with fathers than mothers. Relationship protection and avoidance of conflict are the most commonly reported reasons for avoidance with mothers and fathers (Golish & Caughlin, 2002). Avoidance serves as a way for children to protect themselves and preserve the parent-child relationship (Golish, 2003). In some instances avoidance can provide a positive protective function by alleviating unnecessary conflict between
Dealing with tensions 32

the parent and child. Also, avoidance can work to establish a healthy balance of openness and closedness between the parent and child (Afifi, 2003). When feeling caught between parents, children avoid talking about one parent in front of the other. Children who feel caught steer clear of introducing topics that could start conflict between the two parents, which creates a problem for children whose parents communicate through their children. Due to desiring to be loyal to both parents, children are often unsure about what to share and what to conceal from family members wanting open communication with parents but not wanting to hear negative comments about the other parent (Afifi, 2003). In one study, half of residential mothers and over one third of residential fathers stated that they never or rarely talked about the other biological parent with the child (Furstenberg & Nord, 1985). In fact, the most common communication behavior of children feeling caught between parents is avoidance (Golish, 2003; Afifi, Golish, & Schrodt, 2003). When feeling caught, 60 percent of children responded though avoidance (Afifi, 2003). Many family members report over privileging avoidance or aggressive strategies when feeling caught in order to separate themselves from the problem (Furstenberg & Nord, 1985).

Selection can also be employed through minimizing strategies. In her study examining how family members experience “feeling caught”, Afifi (2003) found 30 percent of families used minimizing strategies such as sharing minimal personal information and having minimal contact with the other. This seemed to be common especially when former spouses were unable to have a cooperative post-divorce relationship.

Separation. A second management strategy, separation, occurs when the parent and child acknowledge the contradiction as an inherent part of their relationship and manage the tension between the poles of the contradiction by alternating back and forth between them typically through time, activity, or topic (Baxter, 1993; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Sabourin, 2003).
Alternating between the poles helps both parent and child to satisfy both needs such as feeling close and connected as well as feeling autonomous and like an individual. For example, so as not to feel caught between parents, a parent and child may not talk about the state of the parents' relationship, but will disclose everything else to one another. Separation is also displayed when a father participates in his child's athletic activities through attending the event or coaching but allows his child to go shopping with out him.

This management strategy, like the others, provides a temporary resolution to the tension. Over time, the parent and child will likely change the activities and topics that they choose to alternate back and forth (Sabourin, 2003). For example, a father is not going to allow his daughter to go shopping by herself when she is seven, but more likely to let her go by herself when she is 14.

**Neutralization.** When a dialectical tension is acknowledged and the parent and child seek to maintain moderation or balance between the extremes of the polar contradictions, neutralization is enacted. Neutralization is frequently achieved through compromise. For example a parent and child may decide on a middle ground between complete openness and complete closedness with one another (Sabourin, 2003). When a child is feeling caught between his/her divorced parents, the parent and child may decide that the parent may reveal feelings but is not allowed to talk about the other parent to the child. This approach is typically an unstable response in that it dilutes the intensity of the opposition instead of managing them (Baxter, 1993; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

**Reformulation.** Other times, families choose to redefine or reframe the contradicting tensions as a unified whole rather than linear opposites. This reformulation of the tension is sometimes accomplished through integrating the opposing forces through rituals (Sabourin,
Rituals are shared traditions that highlight and celebrate all degrees of the dialectical tension, such as family dinners where parents and child discuss individual family members as a group (Baxter, 1993; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Reformulation can also be accomplished by viewing the opposing forces as integral parts of one another through shared activities. For example, a mother and daughter might paint pottery together, a shared activity creating a sense of closeness and connection, but it allows them to celebrate their autonomy and individuality because they are working on separate pieces. Like the other four means of managing dialectical tensions, reformulation only temporarily resolves the tension and is not an indefinite transcendence (Baxter, 1993; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Summary

An abundance of research has documented the stepparent-child relationship and has discovered some of the adverse effects parental divorce has on children. Research has also found that a positive, healthy relationship between the parent and child prior to and following parental divorce can mediate many of the adverse effects. Further, the parent-child relationship has been found to help mediate some of the developmental effects of parental divorce on the child, although a positive post-divorce parent-child relationship can have a negative effect on a child. However, little is currently known about how parents and children continue their relationships following divorce as compared to prior to the divorce. Many unavoidable changes occur due to the parental divorce. For example, there is a loss of contact and daily talk with one parent and often decrease of talk with the other parent, both parents and children may experience depression, children often have increased behavioral problems, and children often feel caught between their parents. The need to examine the parent-child relationship in the past may have been ignored due to an automatic assumption that family relationships are highly likely to
continue regardless of what happens to the family. Current research has found that some parent-child relationships end; however, others may actually grow closer after the trauma of divorce. This means that families are dynamic and changing (Sabourin, 2003). Because of the differences that occur between family relationships post-divorce, we can no longer ignore the need to examine the post-divorce parent-child relationship due to the number of post-divorce families. It is important to learn how parents and children manage the changing tensions in their relationships brought on by the parents’ divorce. To do this, parent-child relationships must be studied to discover how families experiencing post-divorce manage dialectical tensions. This leads to the following research questions.

RQ 1: How do parents and children manage the openness-closedness dialectic during post-divorce?

RQ 2: How do parents and children manage the autonomy-connection dialectic during post-divorce?

RQ 3: How do parents and children manage the predictability-novelty dialectic during post-divorce?

RQ 4: Are there differences reported by parents and children that reflect how they manage dialectical tensions in post-divorce families?
Chapter 2: Method

To answer the four research questions, a constant comparative analysis was applied to responses on an open-ended questionnaire. Below, the procedures used, participants recruited, and means of analysis are discussed in depth.

**Procedures**

An online, open-ended questionnaire was used for this study. The purpose of the survey was to obtain individuals’ descriptions of their divorce experience and their perceptions of their relationship with their parent/child before, during, and after divorce. While an in-depth interview may have been useful to lead to a deeper understanding, due to the significant time constraints on divorced parents, an open-ended questionnaire was selected for this study. This method allows respondents to answer to questions freely and allows the researcher to capture individuals’ views and obtain a picture of the events but does not provide the deep understanding an in-depth interview would provide (Kvale, 1996; Silverman, 2001). On the other hand as Fink (1995) states, an open-ended survey response is useful when exploring issues that are not well understood. In this specific instance, an open-ended questionnaire provides the researcher an opportunity to gain insight into how individuals within the family have in the past and currently negotiate the parent-child relationship and how the parents' divorce has effected it allowing the researcher to learn how family relationships are perceived to have evolved over time. This means of self-report allows access to the person's own beliefs about their parent-child relationship. The open-ended format of the questions allows the respondents to explain their perceptions of the evolution of their parent-child relationship, their feelings, and experiences in their own words nor does it precategorize responses or respondents' experiences. Stories provided through this method of the parent's or child's experiences can provide insight into what the parent or child has
done or does to renegotiate the tensions they are experiencing.

The questionnaire was self-administered through an online website. An online survey method is similar to a paper-and-pencil survey method. By having the questionnaire on the internet, the researcher has access to population member across the country and potentially worldwide. Further, the degree of anonymity provided to survey respondents is even greater than through postal mail. Respondent addresses are necessary in mailing the survey to and from its destination when using postal mail. By emailing the website address to potential respondents, the respondents do not divulge their address when returning their responses to the researcher.

On the other hand, an online survey does eliminate parents and children in post-divorce families who do not have access to the internet. While an open-ended approach does provide a more in-depth understanding of how parents and children renegotiate their relational tensions than a close-ended survey might, responses are likely to be more general concerning parent-child relationship issues than they would be through the use of a semi-structured.

The questionnaire followed a chronological format allowing the respondents to retrace the parent-child relationship over time focusing on his/her feelings, experiences, perceptions, communication, and communication behaviors through time. Questions concentrated on gaining an understanding of how the post-divorce family has evolved and how the evolution has influenced perceived communication among the family members. Respondents were encouraged to share stories and their personal perceptions of experiences, which provide first-hand insight into the participants’ experience, feelings toward how the relationship has changed, and how they perceive they have managed the relationship.

Two survey questionnaires were necessary—one for parents (Appendix A) and one for children (Appendix B). The survey asked respondents to describe the parent-child relationship at
different stages of the family’s evolution. The parent group was asked to describe their relationship with their oldest, adolescent child “before” the divorce, “during” the divorce, and “now”. The adolescent group of children were asked to describe their relationships with both their mother and father “before” the divorce, “during” the divorce”, and “now” in order to gain an understanding of how they perceive their parent-child relationship with both the residential and nonresidential parent. In the introduction to the survey, respondents were encouraged to tell stories of what they remember and to share their experiences. The online questionnaire not only insures that the respondents' answers are recorded in their own words, but it also eliminates questions surrounding what the participant wrote that arise due to illegible hand writing.

Participants

A networking sample was used to contact post-divorce parents and adolescent children. Because the survey was an online questionnaire, potential respondents were accessed through emails containing the websites' addresses previewed by an explanation of the purpose of the study in which they are being asked to participate, a description of the survey itself, and they were informed that participation was strictly voluntary and anonymous. Networking occurred through two routes: 1) the researcher contacted those in support groups who were asked to contact others who are divorced to find potential survey respondents and 2) extra credit was offered to students in public speaking courses at a midwestern university to recruit survey respondents. Those that choose to participate in the study were asked to send the website links on to other people they know in post-divorce who were willing to participate.

Thirty-three completed questionnaires were returned and twenty-seven were included in this study (Appendix C). Nineteen parent group responses were received, and 14 were included in this study. Five were not included because the children where either "adults" at the time of the
divorce (over 18 years of age) or because the children were still "young children" and therefore not adolescents at the time of the parents' responses (under 10). Fourteen child group responses were received, and 13 were included. One was not included because it was from an adult child who was unable to remember much of his childhood relationships with his parents who had divorced 26 years ago.

Of the 14 parent group questionnaires, 12 (85.7 percent) were completed by mothers, and two (14.3 percent) were completed by fathers. Because prior research has shown post-divorce parent-child relationships are different between residential and nonresidential parents, both custodial and noncustodial parents were asked to respond to the survey since each relationship is likely to have a different balance of tensions prior to, during, and post-divorce. Eleven mothers reported their oldest adolescent child lived with them, two fathers reported having shared custody of the child, and one mother reported that her child lived the first year with her and has since lived with the child’s father. Five (35.7 percent) of the parents’ children were males, and nine (64.3 percent) of the parents’ children were females. Nine (64.3 percent) responses were mothers responding about the relationship with their daughters, three (21.4 percent) were mothers responding about the relationship with their sons, and two (14.3 percent) were fathers reporting on the relationship with their sons.

The average age of the parents group’s children at the time of divorce was 8.9 years ranging from four to 16. Four (28.6 percent) parents had children who were ages five or younger at the time of divorce. Four (28.6 percent) parents had children between the ages of six and nine at the time of the divorce. Three (21.4 percent) parents had children between the ages of 10 and 13 at the time of the divorce. Three (21.4 percent) parents had children who were between the ages of 14 and 18 at the time of the divorce.
Of the 13 child group responses, four (30.8 percent) responses were from male children. Nine (69.2 percent) of the responses came from female children. Eleven children (84.6 percent) lived with their mothers, and two children (15.4 percent) lived with their fathers. Four children (30.8 percent) lived in cross-sex homes--one daughter living with her father and three sons living with their mothers.

Target children for this study were those who are “now” adolescent children. This age group is important to examine because, as previous research found, parental divorce can have significant effects on children. Further, differences between adolescents and young adults could be due to adolescents still residing in a parent’s home while young adults live on their own and therefore do not have immediate, daily contact with parents. Because adolescent children still reside with a parent, both the parent and child must each decide on a daily basis how s/he will deal with the evolution of their family and the challenges they now face. By examining these children's perceptions, it is possible to learn how they, as well post-divorce, parents deal with the tensions caused by the changes and challenges the family has experienced. In addition these older child group participants are in a better position to look back on and articulate their experiences concerning their parents’ divorce.

However, previous research has shown that it is not the amount of time that has passed since divorce (Afifi, Golish, & Schrodt, 2003), but it is the age of the child at the time of divorce that has significant effects on child outcome (Glenn & Kramer, 1985; Woodward, Fergusson, & Belsky, 2002), connection to parents (Amato & Booth, 1996; Booth & Amato, 1994; Woodward, Fergusson, & Belsky, 2002), and quality of the parent-child relationship (King 2002). Therefore, the age of the child at the time of divorce is the focus in this study.

The average age of children in the child group at the time of parents’ initial separation
was 10.4 years ranging from 2 to 18. Of the 13 child group responses, four children (30.8 percent) were five years of age or younger at the time of the divorce. Two children (15.4 percent) were between the ages of six and nine at the time of the divorce. Two children (15.4 percent) were between the ages of 10 and 13. Five children (38.4 percent) were between the ages of 14 and 18 during the divorced.

**Analysis**

The survey returned responses ranging from one word descriptions of the parent-child relationship to descriptions upwards of 215 words. The descriptions of the parent-child relationship while the family was intact were more brief responses. Responses pertaining to the current parent child relationship tended to be more in depth. Parent response tended to be more thorough than child responses.

In order to increase the validity in the results, a systematic process was used to document the procedures used. Further, a constant comparative analysis was used to reach a clear understanding of the person’s responses. This thematic content analysis, based on Glaser and Strauss' (1967) Grounded Theory, allows for the ideas discussed to emerge from the survey responses. With such an approach, the researcher systematically examines and compares small ideas from a section of one respondent's questionnaire to other segments of the same questionnaire and to ideas in other respondents' questionnaires (Silverman, 2001).

A constant comparative analysis of the themes as they emerge from the responses serves three functions. First, it allows for testing of ideas as they surface during examination. In addition it allows for patterns and connections between questionnaires to form. Third, a constant comparative analysis allows the researcher to build a tentative understanding of the phenomena under examination.
The analysis in this study occurred in two stages. First, each survey was read to identify emergent themes from the interviews. The themes were used to reveal how the post-divorce parents and children perceive their communication, communication behaviors, and perceptions of their relationships and how it has changed through the evolution of the family. Child group responses were compared across each other, as were parent group responses. Because only one parent reported her child living with the other parent, all parent responses were grouped together. It is not known if any of the parents and children are related; therefore, no pair-wise analysis was possible. In the second stage, all responses were compared across each other to identify any larger similarities or differences. Throughout the analysis themes were continually re-examined to integrate findings.

Examining the range of topics parents and children report discussing with one another can help to illuminate the openness-closedness dialectic, a significant aspect of a parent-child relationship, and can highlight changes that may occur after parental divorce when compared to what was discussed prior to the divorce. Because openness can only be understood in relation with its opposition—closedness, the extent of this range can be defined by the topics most avoided between parents and child as representing the closed end of the continuum and the topics most frequently discussed between the parent and child as signifying the openness end of the continuum. While no significant differences have been found between child's age and amount of topic avoidance (Golish & Caughlin, 2002), avoidant behaviors of adolescents and young adults have been found to be related to the dissatisfaction with the family member with whom the adolescent/young adult is avoiding communication (Golish, 2000).

The scope of the topics and activities reported as being shared between parent and child could help to illuminate the autonomy-connection dialectic. One way that connection can
manifest is though the amount of sharing between parent and child. For instance, it is possible that the more that is shared between the parent and child, the more connected they will be. Conversely, the less that is shared, the more autonomous they may be. However closeness may also occur without the frequently shared time or activities but through memories or personal perceptions. Personal perceptions of connection including how parents and children describe the relationship may also provide insight into this contradiction. Accordingly, while frequency of contact is likely to play a role in the autonomy-connection dialectic, the analysis will be open to the interpretation of the autonomy-connection dialectic through multiple indicators.

To gain understanding of the predictability-novelty dialectic in post-divorce parent-child relationships, regularity of parent-child interactions such as shared activities and talk will be considered. All parent-child relationships were expected to have experienced some degree of change in stability in the relationships due to the alterations the divorce creates. This dialectic then focuses on how predictability and novelty has reconfigured itself since the divorce.

The praxical patterns, including selection, separation, neutralization, and reformulation, that are examined provide a guide for understanding how parents and children manage the dialectical tensions they experience in post-divorce. By identifying what approaches were used in the parent-child relationship to manage the relational tensions while the family was intact, during divorce, and after divorce, and comparing these management strategies across children and parents similarities and differences emerged.

The literature on divorce suggests a number of variables that may play a role in how both parents and children deal with the changes in their parent-child relationship. For instance, age at the time of the divorce is often cited as a major factor in the child’s experience. If the child was very young at the time, s/he might have different experiences and recall different memories than
children whose parents divorced at an older age. Remarriage of parents can also affect both the child’s and parents’ experiences.
Chapter 3: Results

Based upon the two-stage, constant comparative analysis of the survey responses, this study produced a number of findings. These findings reveal that as families progress through divorce, parents and children perceive renegotiating the tensions between both openness and closedness, autonomy and connection, and predictability and novelty through a variety of praxical strategies including selection, separation, neutralization, and separation. However, the parent group and child group respondents did not perceive the dialectical tensions to be managed through the same strategies during divorce and post-divorce.

Openness-Closedness

Research question one is concerned with how parents and children manage the openness-closedness dialectic. Examination of the openness-closedness dialectic focused on the degree of disclosure between parent and child. Themes emerging in openness-closedness included "Talking", "Emotional Openness", "Topics of Discussion or Topics Avoided", and the "Intensity of Discussions". "Talking" typically manifested in responses through statements such as "we talked all the time" and "we never talk". "Emotional Openness" refers to those respondents who described sharing feelings either verbally or nonverbally such as through hugging. For example, one father stated, "I was not fully present for [my son] as I was dealing with my own issues. [T]herefore, I was less emotionally available...". Responses explaining what the parent and child talked about or did not talk about such as the divorce, "every subject imaginable", or talking about activities were considered "Topics of Discussion/Avoidance". "Intensity of Discussions" referred to how the respondent described the "Talking". This often occurred through "yelling" or "fights". Openness before and during divorce also occurred through parents being open about their arguments and conflicts with their spouse; both parents and children reported this. Post-
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divorce, one unique theme was "Friendship". Because a large degree of openness is inherent in "Friendship", when a respondent referred to a parent or child as a friend, openness was assumed. Both the parent group and child group descriptions of the relationship differed over time in regard to the degree of disclosure with one another. General agreement between the parent group and child group appeared in the management strategies used to renegotiate through time.

Parents

Before divorce. One mother (7 percent) described the degree of disclosure between her and her daughter while the family was intact. Selection, or ignoring one polarity of the tension, was used in managing openness-closedness with the mother reporting "Talking". She and her daughter talked about nearly everything. No indications of feeling caught, parental conflict, or other potential effects were alluded to through these mothers’ descriptions of the disclosure.

During divorce. In their descriptions of the relationships with their children, seven (50 percent) parents mentioned disclosure with their child during divorce. Four parents noted closedness in the relationship (57 percent) and two noted openness (29 percent) and one noted both openness and closedness (14 percent). Reports of disclosure referred to "Talking" with the most commonly reported “Topic of Discussion/Avoidance” being the divorce.

During divorce, all seven parents described their relationship with their child in terms of separation when managing the dialectic during divorce. Separation refers to the temporary emphasis in either time or space, on only one polarity while providing a separate time or space to express the other polarity. Parents described both openness and closedness in the relationship during divorce. Two themes emerged in respect to how separation was used to manage the dialectic: "Talking" and "Emotional Openness". Five parents referred to the degree to which disclosure regarded the divorce; three parents felt openness, two felt closedness, and one
reported her son internalized more than she did. Two mothers described how their daughters blamed them for all the problems and changes that occurred because of the divorce. Further, the mothers said that their daughters expressed a lot of anger in regards to the divorce. A total of four parents were aware of the child's anger about the divorce. One mother stated that much of the disclosure between her and her daughter occurred during counseling where the mother was able to explain to her daughter why the divorce occurred. Accordingly, they were open during therapy but otherwise closed to discussion. Two respondents in the parent group (14 percent) described “Emotional Openness”. One parent reported she was emotionally open with her daughter, who was four during the divorce, which occurred ten years ago, because "I think I hugged her more than any other parent has ever hugged a child...", but she was not “Talking” about the divorce with her daughter. One father felt greater closedness in from his son during the divorce because he was "less emotionally available". In other words, this father was “Talking” with his son, but was not “Emotionally Open” with is son because the father was “…dealing with my own issues”.

Disclosure during divorce has been found to sometimes make children feel caught because often it forces the child into the middle of the parents' strained relationship. These seven parents did not provide any indication as to whether or not such disclosures took place. One parent mentioned parental conflict, but no one indicated his or her child was depressed, had behavioral problems, or lowered academic achievement through their descriptions of disclosures with their children. One parent, as stated above, experienced more closedness due to lower levels of trust from her daughter. All children in these seven descriptions were ages ten and younger at the time of the divorce with five female children and one male child. Amount of contact with the residential parent (mothers) versus nonresidential parent (fathers) might have played a role in
two of the mother-daughter relationship in which increased openness was reported: one through verbalization of anger and the other through physical openness of hugging.

After divorce. When describing the relationship with their children "now", eight parents (57 percent) referred to the degree of disclosure. All eight respondents referred to a greater openness within the relationship. Similar themes emerged in post-divorce families as during divorce; six parents (75 percent) referred to "Talking", one parent (13 percent) referred to more "Emotional Openness", and one parent (13 percent) referred to both “Talking” and “Emotional Openness”.

To manage the tension between openness and closedness, parents described selection and separation in their relationships with their children. Selection emerged in four responses (50 percent) and manifested through both "Talking" and "Emotional Openness". Parents stated, "we tell each other everything" and described the relationship as being "fully present" in regards to disclosure. Separation emerged in four responses (50 percent) and manifested through "Talking". One child of these parents was four, one was eight, one was ten and one was thirteen, all were female. The reported topics of openness were not consistent between the four. For instance one parent reported that her child does not always take her advice. Another mother reported openness regarding the child's father: "There are some fights about things her father has done over the years- she thinks he can do no wrong, but I feel she's old enough at 17 to know how he really is She sees it too now, but overlooks it, because 'doesn;t get to see him everyday like she does me' (sic)".

Based on parents' description of the child's response, this mother likely made her daughter feel caught by using the daughter's father as a topic about which to be open. But, no parent reported parental conflict, child behavioral problems or depression, or lower academic
achievement as part of their disclosure. Trust was mentioned by one parent utilizing selection as a means of managing the dialectical tension stating, "she knows she can trust me to be truthful and not judgmental". Contact with mother may play a role in the increased tendency toward openness. Six of the eight families were mother-daughter relationship in which the daughter resided with the mother; all had increased disclosure. The one father describing his relationship with his son stated "[I] can now be fully present for him" possibly implying more of a desire for openness rather than a state of openness.

Child

Before divorce with mother. Six responses in the children’s group (46 percent) referred to the degree of disclosure they had with their mother when the family was intact. Four referred to "Talking" (66 percent) with their mother, and two alluded to "Topics of Disclosure/Avoidance" (33 percent). Two children where very closed with their mothers and four perceived the openness.

To manage the tension between both openness and closedness while the family was intact, selection and separation emerged in the child group responses. Four children’s responses reflected selection in how they managed their relationship with their mothers (66 percent). In all of these descriptions, "Talking" was the theme. Two reported extreme closedness with their mothers explaining, "We hardly talked except when it was necessary". Two children reported an emphasis on openness explaining that they talked with their parents "all of the time". Through descriptions of the "Topics of Disclosure/Avoidance", two children’s responses (34 percent) reflected separation as a means of managing the tension between both openness and closedness in their relationships with their mothers. For example, one daughter explained “…it [the relationship] was hostile when my dad would join".
The degree of disclosure in these six responses did not indicate children feeling caught, but two questionnaires did indicate parental conflict. Further, child depression, changes in behavior, academic achievement, or trust were not reported. Because the children were living with their mothers, and did not mention low contact with their mothers, contact does not appear to affect the child's disclosure.

*During divorce with mother.* Nine responses in the child group (69 percent) addressed the degree of disclosure with mothers during parental divorce. Common themes during divorce that emerged included "Talking", "Topics of Disclosure/Avoidance", and "Emotional Openness". Through these themes, two child responses reflected a greater sense of openness (22 percent), two reflected a greater sense of closedness (22 percent), and five child responses (56 percent) appeared to acknowledge the “both/and-ness” of the dialectical tension describing both openness and closedness with their mothers.

To manage the tension between both openness and closedness, selection and separation emerged in the child group responses. Four daughters (44 percent) reflected selection in managing the tension during divorce. Two emphasized closedness by "Talking" to their mothers less during the divorce than they did before. Two emphasized openness by "Talking" with their mothers all of the time. Separation emerged in five children’s responses describing the mother-child relationship (56 percent). All five children’s responses reflected the theme of "Topics of Disclosure/Avoidance" with the divorce as the topic in which children perceived themselves alternating between openness and closedness most commonly being the divorce itself. "Emotional Openness" was expressed through sharing or concealing anger towards the mother. A few respondents explained how they avoided voicing their anger toward their mothers as well as talking about the divorce, for example, one daughter, nine at the time of divorce, was closed
about her anger toward her mother. She recalled, "I was very angry at my Mom. she initiated the
divorce and therefore, I had a lot of anger towards her. I was still respectful of her though and
was never hateful to her. I was just angry and resentful towards my mom (sic)". Two children
described their parents' openness in regards to "Topics of Disclosure/Avoidance" through
knowledge of parental conflict (40 percent).

In regards to the disclosure, children did not describe a sense of feeling caught between
their parents, nor did children evidence depression, behavior problems, academic achievement,
or trust in their descriptions. But, two children did reveal parental conflict in their mothers'
openness. There did appear to be a tendency for children who were older when parents divorced
to be more closed and/or have more intense disclosures with their mothers. One exception was a
son, nine at the time of his parents divorce, who described his relationship with his mother as
being hateful toward her, but not at her. Contact does not appear to be a factor since all seven of
these children likely had daily contact since they lived with their mothers.

After divorce with mother. Seven responses addressed the degree of disclosure with
mothers after divorce (54 percent). Three themes emerged the child group responses in
describing the management of openness and closedness post-divorce with mothers. Five
children’s responses (71 percent) reflected openness through "Talking", three (43 percent)
reflected "Friendship", and one (14 percent) reflected "Emotional Openness". One child response
(14 percent) described an emphasis on openness, one child (14 percent) described an emphasis
on closedness, and five child responses (72 percent) described both openness and closedness in
their mother-child relationship.

Selection and separation continued to be the means of managing the openness-closedness
dialectic. Two children demonstrated selection in managing the tension with their mothers post-
divorce (28 percent). Two described opposing ends of the dialectic though "Talking". One emphasized openness stating "[I] can talk to her about anything anytime". The other emphasized closedness stating, "[My relationship with my mother is the] same, don't talk much". In five child group responses (71 percent) separation emerged as a means to renegotiate the tension between both openness and closedness. Three did this through "Talking", two mentioned "Friendship" as a means of selection, and one referred to "Emotional Openness". For example, one daughter stated, “[W]e talk often on the phone” demonstrating separation through time in when the mother and daughter talk with one another.

Children did not state that disclosures with mothers made them feel caught between their parents. One child, who stated that her parents had conflict before and during the divorce, did state that she talked a lot with her mother post-divorce, but no further effects of parental conflict emerged in the degree of disclosure. Examination of the openness-closedness dialectic did not reveal signs of depression, behavioral problems, academic achievement, or communication satisfaction. In regard to trust, because friendship typically implies that there is a degree of trust and openness, children stating their mother was their "Friend" were regarded as having a great deal of trust within their mother-child relationship, which demonstrated an increase in trust when compared to when the family was intact. The age of the child at the time of the divorce did not appear to play into the degree of post-divorce openness. Whether contact with mother plays a role in the degree of openness is difficult to determine with such a small sample. Based on the responses, the two children (one male and one female) living with their father did not differ in their degree of openness from those children living with their mothers.

*Before divorce with father.* Four responses in the children’s group (23 percent) referred to the degree of openness with fathers while the family was intact: one male, three females. Most
frequently in referring to openness with their fathers, themes included to "Talking", "Topics of Disclosure/Avoidance", and "Emotional Openness". Two daughters emphasized extreme openness with their father through selection as a strategy to manage the dialectical tension, and two children alternated between both openness and closedness through separation.

Through selection two daughters (50 percent) emphasized openness with their fathers when describing the relationship. "Talking" emerged in both responses with the daughters explaining "[we] talked all the time about most things". Two children (50 percent) reflected separation in their responses describing "Topics of Disclosure/Avoidance" in the degree of disclosure. For example, both children described that they were aware of their parents’ conflicts, but did not “Talk” about the conflicts with their parents.

No child indicated through their descriptions of disclosures with their father feeling caught between their parents while the family was intact. Two children specifically referred to conflict between their parents. There were no signs of depression, behavior problems, academic achievement, or trust. Age at the time of divorce did not affect disclosure with father while the family was intact.

*During divorce with father.* Five child group responses (38 percent) referred the openness-closedness dialectic during their parents’ divorce. One child response reflected an emphasis on openness, one reflected an emphasis on openness, and three child responses reflected both openness and closedness during divorce with their fathers. "Talking" and "Topics of Disclosure/Avoidance" both emerged as themes in the children’s responses describing their relationship with their fathers during divorce.

In managing the tension between openness and closedness during the divorce, two strategies emerged: selection and separation. Two sons (40 percent) managed the contradictory
tension between openness and closedness through selection. For example one described "Talking" in describing the emphasis on closedness in the relationship stating, "We didn't really talk too much". Three daughters (60 percent) reported selection in their relationship with their father. One described separation through time in that she was not as open as before because she didn't "Talk" to her father as often. Two of the daughters described openness alternating between "Topics of Disclosure/Avoidance". One explained how her father wanted her and her brothers to understand what was happening to the family because of the divorce. The other described how she knew "something bad was happening" but her father did not discuss it.

Few of the effects of divorce appeared in the child responses. No indicators of feeling caught were mentioned in terms of the openness-closedness dialectic with fathers, nor did children recall parental conflict. One child did mention having separation anxiety during the time of her parents' divorce. There were no signs of behavioral problems, academic achievement, or trust in the responses. Age at the time of divorce may not play a role in the degree of disclosure or in the management strategy used since while both the children using selection were between 14 and 18, one of the three using separation also fell in to that age group.

*After divorce with father.* Eight responses in the children's group (62 percent) referred to the openness-closedness dialectic in the father-child relationship post-divorce--two male and six females. One child response described the openness of the relationship, three described the closedness of the relationship, and four described both the openness and the closedness of the relationship. Themes of disclosure to emerge in the descriptions of the post-divorce father-child relationship included "Talking" and "Friendship".

To manage the openness-closedness with their fathers post-divorce, children’s responses continue to reflect selection and separation. Selection was present in four of the father-child
relationships (50 percent). One son emphasized openness explaining that his father has remained his best friend implying a high degree of continued disclosure. Three daughters reported an emphasis on closedness in the relationship describing "Talking" and frequency of "Talking". One explained that her father "stays out of my business". The other two daughters described an emphasis on closedness stating that they have not talked to their fathers in months. Separation was used in four father-child relationships (50 percent) to manage openness. Three children explained that they talked to their father a number of times per month over the phone. Two referred to “Topics of Discussion/Avoidance” with their father. For example, "We talk maybe once a month. He always has something negative to point out when I am trying something new" (8).

In regards to the degree of disclosure with fathers post-divorce, there were no indications that the disclosure with their fathers made the child feel caught or that there remained any conflict between the parents. Further, children did not mention speaking with their fathers about depression, behavioral problems, academic achievement, or trust. Two of the respondents' parents divorced when the children were under five; these two did report having a very closed relationship one through selection and one through separation by time with their fathers. For the other six respondents, age at time of divorce did not appear to affect the degree of disclosure or the management strategy used. Additionally, the two children whose parents divorced when they were under five years old have less contact with their fathers now, post-divorce. All but one child who had some degree of closedness with their fathers had less contact with their fathers post-divorce than during divorce.

*Autonomy-Connection*

The second research question was concerned with how parents and children manage the
autonomy connection dialectic before, during, and post-divorce. In some sense, the degree of disclosure can reflect some of the connection a parent and child perceive in their relationship, but not all interdependence can be described by the degree of disclosure. The themes describing both the autonomy and connection parents and children expressed in their responses included "Closeness/Warmth", "Involvement/Helping", and "Support". "Closeness", or descriptions of "Warmth", between the parent and child indicated how interconnected one felt with the other. "Involvement/Helping" occurred through shared activities such as coaching the child's games or playing, helping with homework, or working on projects together. "Involvement" also included talking. Even though "Talking" was considered in the openness-closedness dialectic, talking can also be an indicator of connection. A person will not talk "about everything" if s/he did not feel a high degree of connection with that person, and a person who feel autonomous with a parent or child will be more closed or "talk only when necessary". So, the frequency of talking served as an indicator of connection. "Support" considers descriptions of "being there" for the other person, or showing interest in the parent's or child's life. Post-divorce children also described being "Friends" with their parents. In "Friendship" a strong bond, or connection, exists between the friends, therefore, references to "Friendship" were considered a reference to the autonomy-connection dialectic. While these may be assumed in the parent-child relationship, parents and children do not always refer to them when describing their relationship with the other. Further, the report of such relationship characteristics appear to change over time as the family endures change and evolves.

*Parents*

*Before divorce.* Ten responses in the parent group (71 percent) referred to the degree of interdependence with the child while the family was intact. Themes to emerge in the parents’
group responses include "Closeness", in eight responses, and "Involvement", in five responses.

Five parent group respondents (50 percent) perceived an emphasis on connection with their child while the family was intact, and five parents (50 percent) perceived both autonomy and connection in their parent-child relationship.

To manage this tension, selection was used in five of the relationships (50 percent) and separation was at work in five parent-child relationship (50 percent). Selection emphasized connection through descriptions "Closeness" such as "I was always very close to my child" or "Close relationship, [she was] pretty much the center of my life". While all parents reported being "Close" with their child, five parents used separation through "Involvement". "Involvement" occurred through shared time/activities with the child. Four parents felt reported feeling connection, for example, one father described the relationship with his son as "Close, [I] coached sports teams & [we had] a lot of day to day interaction (sic)". One parent felt autonomous with her daughter through separation through "Involvement" stating "...I think we lacked a strong connection because (sic) I was more focused on being a wife than a mother".

Through their descriptions of autonomy-connection, parents did not indicate making their child feel caught between parents, nor were there mentions of parental, child depression, behavioral problems, academic achievement, or trust. Age did not appear to affect how the parents described or managed the dialectical tension since the age of the child stretched across all age groups.

*During divorce.* Eleven parents (79 percent) referred to autonomy-connection during the divorce. Two parents perceived connection in their relationships with their children, two parents perceived an emphasis on autonomy with their children during the divorce, and seven parents perceived both connection and autonomy in the relationship. Themes to emerge during divorce
regarding the degree of interdependence included "Closeness" and "Involvement".

Four parents (33 percent) revealed selection in managing the relationship and seven parents (64 percent) revealed separation. Two parents described an emphasis on autonomy through selection in the parent-child relationship during divorce describing "Closeness". One parent described the relationship as "more distant, some anger"; the other parent described the autonomous nature of the relationship through decreased involvement in her daughter's life. One parent emphasized connection through selection stating, "We got extremely close. She slept with me for the first few months after separation". Those parents reporting greater connection through separation all were "Involved" in their child's life to some respect such as coaching sports teams or sharing feelings. Those parents experiencing autonomy were less "Involved" with their child's life. One parent using selection to manage the autonomy-connection dialectic, explaining how at first during the divorce her daughter lived with her, but due to the anger the daughter expressed, she then moved in with her father.

In terms of the autonomy-connection dialectic, one parent did note that her daughter was receiving differing stories about the divorce and the parents from herself and the father, potentially causing the daughter to feel caught and possibly contributing to the daughter’s anger expressed toward her mother. Further, this mother noted that the children were aware of the parents' conflicts. No parent mentioned differences in child depression affecting the dialectic or means of management. One mother, who experienced greater autonomy and managed it through selection, explained how her daughter's behavior had changed drastically becoming more rebellious, another noted less connection with her daughter since her daughter did not trust her during the divorce. No apparent difference was detected in how parents perceived the autonomy-connection dialectic or how they managed it when considering the age of the child at the time of
the divorce. Contact with parent did not appear to have a great affect on the dialectic or its management either since seven of the children resided with their mothers and two had dual residence. Thus, all varied in reports of connection.

After divorce. Post-divorce twelve responses in the parent group (86 percent) described the degree of interdependence with their child. Ten parent group responses (83 percent) mention "Closeness", ten parent group responses described "Involvement", and two parent responses described both “Closeness“ and “Involvement“ in the relationship. All parents felt an increased connection with their child. Three parents noted a growing sense of autonomy.

To manage the dialectical tension, separation, neutralization, and reformulation were reflected in the respondents’ descriptions. Separation was reflected in seven parent responses (58 percent). One parent described separation through "Involvement" only stating "She helps me out immensely around the house” even though the daughter no longer lives with her mother. Six parents perceived increased connection through separation describing "Involvement" and "Closeness". For example "[my daughter and I are] very close; [we] talk about everything". One parent using separation to manage the dialectical tension noted both autonomy and connection in their relationship with his son describing "Closeness" and "Involvement" stating "[We are] close, [I] see my son on a reagular (sic) basis throughout the week. He is less dependent at this age". Two parents (16 percent) described neutralization to manage the tension. One father described "Closeness" explaining he now has "better boundaries". One mother described "Closeness" and "Involvement" in explaining how she and her daughter have started working through their problems, and while she lives with her father, her daughter does come over and spend time but "sometimes she gets in these teen moods and I leave her alone". Finally, three parents (25 percent) revealed managing the tension between both autonomy and connection in the
relationship by reframing them into a unified whole. "Closeness" and "Involvement" were also themes in each of the reformulated relationships, but descriptions of such themes in reformulated relationships were referred to the evolution of the family through terms such as "experience" and "accepting differences". For example, one mother described the post-divorce relationship with her son saying "We are close and we enjoy each others company. We are both (more)healed now and understand that the life test was a learning experience and not a bad one. My child is growing and is properly developing their own interests (sic)".

In regard to the many effects divorce may have on the parent-child relationship, none appeared to effect or be affected by the post-divorce autonomy-connection dialectic. Because parents report a strong tendency toward connection after divorce, it does not appear that age of the child at the time of divorce or contact with parent affect the parents’ perceptions of the dialectical tension.

Child

*Before divorce with mother.* Twelve responses in the child group (92 percent) reflected a degree of interdependence with mothers while the family was intact. Four child group responses perceived connection in their relationships with their mothers, five perceived autonomy, and three child respondents perceived both autonomy and connection in the mother-child relationship. "Closeness" and "Involvement" emerged as themes from the children’s descriptions of the relationships.

Management of the dialectic occurred through selection and separation. Nine children’s responses (75 percent) reported selection as a means of managing the autonomy-connection tension in the mother-daughter dyad. Three children emphasized connection through "Closeness". One child emphasized connection through "Closeness" and "Involvement" stating:
"I was always very close with my mother. We spent a ton of time together... My mom was always at all of my sporting events, volunteering in my classes and driving my friends around". Two daughters emphasized autonomy through "Involvement" describing the relationship as "didn't talk much" and "not close". Three children (25 percent) demonstrated the use of separation to manage the dialectic. Through "Involvement", children reported a degree of connection. For example child felt more autonomous from his mother stating, "My mom was always very giving and loving. She spent more time cleaning the house and keeping my brother and I on schedule than she did actually playing with us and doing fun things with us". On the other hand three children reported feelings of connection with their mother: "We talked all the time and did a lot of activities together.

Prior to divorce, there were few indicators in the responses of potential effects of divorce. One child stated "I was young, but we were always happy when we were together, but it was hostile when my dad would join" indicating parental conflict. Feeling caught, depression, behavior problems, academic achievement, and trust were not indicated in children responses.

**During divorce with mother.** Eleven of thirteen responses (85 percent) reflected the degree of interdependence during divorce. The dialectic was described through "Closeness" and "Involvement". Three children (27 percent) perceived autonomy, two perceived (18 percent) connection, six perceived (55 percent) both autonomy and connection in the mother-child relationship during divorce.

The tension between the poles was managed through selection and separation as when the family was intact. Selection was applied in five (45 percent) mother-child relationships. Three child responses described an emphasis on autonomy in the relationship, and two child responses described an emphasis on connection. Two referred to not being "Close" and two referred to not
talking, or low "Involvement". All three children were between ages 14 and 18 at the time of divorce. Two daughters emphasized connection both referred to "Involvement". For example, one daughter stated, "My mom was very supportive, she was there for my sisters and I. We lived with my mom so we went to her with more problems...". Six respondents (55 percent) showed separation as a means of managing the dialectical tension. Three reported separation by "Involvement" through shared time such as talking frequently or doing activities together. Three reported topical separation. All three daughters stated that they felt "Close" to their mothers during divorce, but in regards to the divorce fell distance from their mothers. For example, one daughter, 12 at the time of divorce, recalled, "My mom and i had a hard time because i didn't understand the divorce. I was angry so we didn't get along as well [as before the divorce] (sic)".

No children indicated that their mothers made them feel caught. As stated before, children felt more autonomous because the parents were arguing and the child did not understand why. No child reported on depression, behavioral or academic problems, or change in trust with their parents. Age of the child at the time of divorce did not appear to affect the connection the child reported having with his/her mother or the management strategies they reported. Because nearly all respondents lived with their mother at the time, contact with mother does not make an effect on the degree of interdependence or in management strategies.

After divorce with mother. Of the thirteen child responses, twelve referenced the post-divorce autonomy-connection dialectic (92 percent). There is a much greater sense of connection between child and mother post-divorce according the children's group. In describing this connection, the child group referred to themes such as "Closeness", "Friendship", "Involvement", and “Support”.

Selection, separation, neutralization, and reformulation were all reflected as strategy used
to renegotiate the post-divorce tension between both autonomy and connection. Two daughters used selection (17 percent); one to emphasize autonomy and the other to emphasize connection. Both stated that their relationships with their mother had not changed much through the course of the divorce. Separation was used in three relationships. All three descriptions describe "Closeness" to their mother and her "Involvement" with them, for example one daughter stated, "we are close, we talk alot. we are still happy even though our interests differ (sic)". All three reported having a fairly consistent degree of interdependence through the evolution of their family. Neutralization was reported by one child (eight percent) through descriptions of "Closeness" and "Involvement". This child described the relationship with her mother as one in repair: "My mom's feelings were really hurt by my decision not to live with her. We are beginning to mend a somewhat broken relationship, but she doesn't seem to understand me. We get along okay...". In six of the mother-child relationships (50 percent), children reported reframing the two opposing tensions of autonomy and connection into a unified whole through reformulation. Three children refer to their mothers as "Friends". One daughter explains the reformulation of the relationship referring not only to "Friendship", but also "Closeness", "Involvement", and "Support" stating, "I am very close with my mother, she is my best friend. I know she is someone who is always there for me and supports me in whatever I decide to do". Three others refer to "Closeness" and "Involvement" through the idea of a "new life". One daughter whose mother-daughter relationship had been highly autonomous before and during divorce explains, "my mom and I are closer than we have ever been. I live with her and we take care of each other it is awesome (sic)".

In terms of the autonomy-connection dialectic, no child indicated feeling caught between parents. Of the three children who had mentioned parental conflict, one remained close to her
mother as the family evolved. The two sons were not as connected with their mothers in post-divorce. The responses did not reveal any signs of depression, behavior problems, academic achievement, or communication satisfaction affecting the interdependence. But trust did appear to increase after the divorce. Three children reported that their mother was like a best friend. Age at the time of parents' divorce did not appear to greatly affect the interdependence a child perceived with his/her mother. The largest change in the degree of connection was noticed by children ten and older. These children more often after divorce mentioned that they were "closer than ever" or friends. Because only two of the thirteen respondents lived with their father, it is difficult to determine whether amount of contact with each parent effects a child's connection with mothers in post-divorce families, but both of these two stated that their relationship with their mother is better after the divorce than during the divorce.

*Before divorce with father.* Twelve responses in the child group (92 percent) referred to the degree of interdependence with their fathers while the family was intact including four males and eight females. Four child group responses (33 percent) emphasized connection, two (17 percent) emphasized autonomy, and six (50 percent) perceived both connection and autonomy in their relationship with their fathers while the family was intact. Themes describing the degree of interdependence with fathers include "Closeness" and "Involvement".

In managing the contradictory tension between autonomy and connection, children’s responses reflected selection and separation in the relationship. Six children (50 percent) spoke of an emphasis in the relationship on one extreme over the other. Three perceived an extreme connection by referring to "Closeness" and two children mentioned that they were highly "Involved" in their fathers' lives. For example, one daughter stated that she and her father were "very close, [we] talked all the time about most things. [He was] always helpful to me, worked
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together on projects". Two reported a high degree of autonomy because "my father always worked and I barely saw him". Six children (50 percent) felt the dialect managed through separation. Five referred only to the "Closeness" of the relationship. For expressed a feeling of connection through the state of the relationship, for example "we got along fine". Five referred to "Closeness" and "Involvement". For example, one daughter explained that while she felt "Close" to her father, he was not highly "Involved" in her life:

I always got along fine with my father but he was not very involved in my life. He didn't attend many of my sporting events and was not very involved with my personal life. my dad worked a lot and when I was young he worked second shift and went to school during the day. I really didn't see him all that often during the week.

One son demonstrated separation by time managing the dialectic: "He was always at work. But when he was home always hung out with me".

In regard to the degree of interdependence children reported with their fathers, no responses indicated that their feelings of connection were effected by their father making them feel caught. One child did state "I hated [my father] for everything he put my mom through" potentially suggesting parental conflict and it's effects on the father-son relationship. No respondents mentioned depression, behavioral problems, academic achievement, or trust while the family was intact.

*During divorce with father.* All thirteen responses (100 percent) perceived the autonomy-connection dialectic with the father during the divorce. All but one child perceived both autonomy and connection in the relationship. Themes emerging during divorce in the children's descriptions of their relationships with their fathers include: "Closeness", "Involvement", "Support", and "Friendship".
Selection, separation, and reformulation were reflected as a strategies used to manage the degree of interdependence in the father-child relationship during divorce. Selection was reflected by one child’s response concerning the father-child relationships (8 percent). One daughter emphasized autonomy describing the "Closeness in the relationship" stating "my dad and i were never close so the relationship didn't really change (sic)". In eleven of the child responses (73 percent) separation emerged as a management strategy in the father-child relationship.

"Involvement" in regards to how much time the child and father shared was reported in eight (73 percent) responses for example: "I resented him and didn't want to visit him much. I felt like spending the weekend with him was 'wasting' my time...". "Closeness" to father was stated in eight responses reporting selection (73 percent) also. One son referred to both "Involvement" and "Closeness" saying "[I] see him less but the attitude towards things have not changed" meaning that they still "got along very well". In five of the responses, "Involvement" (45 percent) explained the sense of connection. For example, one daughter explained "[my father] was very patient with me and made sure my brothers and I got counseling so that we would understand what was happening to our family. He was my rock during the divorce". Another daughter stated "[I] tried to talk to [my father], wanted to keep it close, but didn't see [him] as often". Finally, "Friendship" was the theme in one child response with one son used reformulation to manage the dialectical tension referring to his father as his "best friend".

During divorce, respondents did not indicate feeling caught between parents. No one reported being placed in an uncomfortable position between their mother and father, nor were there reports of parental conflict. Again, the only report of developmental effects the child responses revealed was separation anxiety. Age of the child at the time of the divorce did not seem to affect reports of interdependence with their fathers. Contact with father did not appear to
have to great of an effect on feelings of interdependence either. One son lived with his father
during the time of the divorce while everyone else lived with his or her mothers. He referred to
his father as being his "best friend", but two other responses also reported being "very close"
close to their fathers during the divorce while living with their mother.

*After divorce with father.* In post-divorce, thirteen respondents in the child group (100
percent) referred to the autonomy-connection dialectic. “Closeness”, “Involvement", and
"Respect" emerged as the themes in the post-divorce father-child relationship. Two child
responses reflected autonomy, two reflected connection, and nine reflected both autonomy and
connection.

In managing the dialectical tension, four (31 percent) referred to selection, six responses
reflected separation, (46 percent), and three described neutralization (14 percent). "Closeness"
and "Involvement" with father emerged in descriptions of selection. Two daughters emphasized
autonomy while two daughters emphasized connection. One daughter explained "My
relationship with my dad is good, although I do not think we're as close as my mother and I...".
Separation emerged through references to "Closeness" and "Involvement". One daughter
included both of these themes in the description of her father-daughter relationship: "he
remarried a woman i despise. we argued and that bastard took her side every time and now he
never calls. ive grown to hate him (sic)". Another daughter, 12 at the time of divorce, stated, "My
dad and i are a little closer [than before] he puts forth a little more effort but still not that close".
One child reported neutralization to balance the opposing tensions stating "all i can say is that i
still love him and i will always be his son" (10) implying that while he feels a sense of
connection to his father, the son does not feel "Involved" or "Close" with his father. Two
children used reformulation to unify the tension in the father-child relationship. In both of these,
the children have a feeling of "Respect" and "Involvement". For example, one daughter explained, "I am finally respecting him more as a person outside of the fact that he is my father. He has been making more of an effort to be involved in the lives of my sisters and I...The older I get the more I respect my parents as people and the decisions they had to make". This daughter had been very angry and resentful with her father during the divorce and did not want to see him at all but has reframed her the degree of interdependence with her father to one of respect and understanding.

No child reported feeling stuck between his/her parents, nor did they perceive conflict between their parents. Further there were no reports of depression, behavioral problems, academic achievement, trust, and communication satisfaction. In regards to age of the child at the time of parental divorce and the degree of perceived interferences with the father, respondents who were under the age of five all displayed greater levels of autonomy compared to children who were older at the time of divorce. Age did not appear to effect the means by which children managed autonomy-connection post-divorce. Because only three children lived with their fathers following divorce, it is difficult to determine the effects parental contact might have. But, by examining how the child describes the relationship and comparing that to the amount of time they report having with their father, it appears that those children with a greater amount of contact perceive a greater connection with their father in post-divorce regardless of with which parent they live.

_Predictability-Novelty_

The third research question examines the management strategies employed by parents and children in negotiating both predictability and novelty in their relationship before, during and post-divorce. Interestingly, the most frequently perceived relational dialectic in the parent-child
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relationship was predictability-novelty, or the degree of continuity in the relationship. This
dialectical tension typically manifested through changes in "Involvement", "State of the
Relationship", "Behaviors", "Key Words", and "Grieving". "Involvement", just as before,
included participation in each other's lives and spending time together, but in regards to the
degree of stability, analysis focused more on how "Involvement" changed over time. The "State
of the Relationship" focused on how the respondents referred to the relationship such as "we had
a good relationship" or "we are closer now than ever". "Feelings" includes statements concerning
how the respondent felt about the other or how they described their interactions. For example one
son described his relationship with his father while the family was intact stating "I hated him for
everything he put my mother through". Another theme to emerge during divorce was "Behavior";
parents frequently noted how their child had started acting different in the year or two after the
parents separated. Many responses used "Key Words" to explain changes in the relationship such
as "still" and "always". A final theme unique to children during and post-divorce was "grieving".
"Grieving" the loss of the relationship refers to how a child deals with the deterioration of a
relationship, typically the father-child relationship. The relationship has experienced a drastic
change in many respects and the child is unsure how to continue the relationship when s/he feels
that it has ended due to the ending of the parents' marriage. Nearly all responses indicated a great
deal of predictability about the parent-child relationship before parental divorce, and as to be
expected, a great deal of novelty was experienced during divorce by both parents and children.
Post-divorce, both parents and children experienced both predictability and novelty at the same
time.

Parents

Before divorce. Thirteen responses in the parent group (100 percent) referred to the
degree of stability in the relationship with their child prior to the divorce. Of these thirteen responses, one mentioned novelty existing in the relationship. When describing the predictableness of the relationship while the family was intact, parents commonly referred to the "State of the Relationship" and "Involvement".

All parent reflected selection in their responses regarding the parent-child relationship while the family was intact. All fourteen responses (100 percent) referred to "State of the Relationship" referring to it as "normal" or "close". Five parents also referred to the predictability of the relationship through "Involvement". For example, one mother shared "I always got her to the activities she was interested in and we liked the same things".

While the family was intact, no parents mentioned their child feeling caught, nor were there references to parental conflict. No parent mention changes in child's depression, behavior, academic achievement, or trust. Age did not affect the lean of the dialectical tension or it management. All parents had significant amounts of contact with their children before the divorce and nearly all parents reported a strong relationship with their child.

During divorce. Of the fourteen parent group responses, 14 parents (100 percent) described the predictability-novelty dialectic. Thirteen parents (93 percent) reported greater novelty in the relationship while one parent described the relationship in the same manner as he did while the family was intact. "State of the Relationship", "Involvement", and "Behavior" all emerged as themes describing in the degree of stability.

The tension was managed through selection and neutralization. Thirteen parents (93 percent) showed selection in their management of the tension. Twelve parents (92 percent) reported greater novelty in the relationship, and one parent described predictability in his father-son relationship during divorce. In ten of the parent group responses reflecting selection in
managing the predictability-novelty dialectic, “State of the Relationship" emerged as a theme through phrases such as "it was hard", "more distant", or "closer". All emphasized novelty in the relationship. "Involvement" was described in 12 responses (92 percent), for example "She slept with me for the first few months after separation"; eleven emphasized novelty (83 percent) and one emphasized predictability (9 percent). "Behavior" changes were also reported by seven parents whose responses reflected selection in managing the relationship during divorce; all implying greater novelty (58 percent). One mother stated, "The first year my daughter associated with miscreants that she has no associated with since and she wore tons of makeup. She was not happy and somewhat rebellious". One parent reported neutralization working to balance the tensions between novelty and predictability in her relationship with her son (8 percent).

In regards to the effects divorce can cause, a few parents did see signs of their divorce impacting their child. Two parents indicated that their child might be feeling caught during the divorce. One mother stated that the divorce "was hard for him, he felt he had to choose sides". Another mother shared that the relationship with her daughter was "Somewhat rocky. I got the blame for everything even tough it was not my fault. She began to take her anger for her father out on me". One parent noted a drop in the child's grades. Seven parents noted behavioral changes. One specific emotional/attitudinal change that has been previously noted to occur following parental divorce is a change in levels of a child's trust in a parent. Only one mother mentioned her daughter's lowered trust in her during the time of the divorce.

Age of a child at the time of divorce has also been found to affect the parent-child relationship. Parents reported a change in involvement with their child during the divorce when the children where older during the divorce, between the ages of 10 and 18. Before divorce five of the six parents of children who where 10 or older at the time of the divorce were actively
involved with their child, where as only one of eight parents of children under the age of 10 were
during divorce. The state of the relationship was reported as being more novel during divorce
when the children where under 10. All eight parents of children under the age of ten reported the
state of the relationship as changed as compared to before the divorce, whereas only two of the
five parents of children ten or older noticed a change in the state of their parent-child
relationship.

After divorce. Post-divorce all 14 parent group respondents described the degree of
stability in the relationship. "State of the Relationship" and "Involvement" were common themes.
Four parent group responses (29 percent) described the novelty in the parent-child relationship,
and ten responses (71 percent) described both the novelty and predictability in the relationship.

All four means of management were evident in the examination of this dialectical tension
post-divorce. Selection was reported by parents to be used in four families (29 percent). Both
"State of the Relationship" (75 percent), and "Involvement" (75 percent) were used emphasize
the novelty of the current relationship in comparison to during the divorce. Three responses show
novelty through separation (21 percent) by "Involvement". For example, one father described the
relationship with his son as "Close. [I] see my son on a reagular basis throughout the week. he is
less dependent at this age (sic)". Three parents (21 percent) demonstrated neutralization in the
management of the tension through the theme of the "State of the Relationship". For example
one mother, who had earlier described her relationship with her daughter as "rocky" stated, "We
are working to repair and move forward with our lives". Reformulation, or the reframing of the
polar tensions in to a singular whole, was reflected in four parent group responses post-divorce
(29 percent). Themes emerging in reformulation included "State of the Relationship" when
parents explained that they and their children now view the divorce as "an experience" and
"feelings" of "respect" by the parent from the child, for example one mother explained:

Well 10 years later it's been through the gamut of adjectives (!), but as of today the relationship is one of mutual respect and caring. She seems less resentful of her circumstances and has plodded through the many obstacles presented by a lack of self-esteem. She certainly does not abide by everything I suggest...but in her way she manages to do the right thing in the end and I couldn't be more proud of her. I guess I would say that our relationship is still very close, and that we have learned to accept our differences and let go of past resentments.

In respect to the predictability-novelty dialectic, by managing the tension with separation, one parent described how she told her daughter about what the father has done over the years. This disclosure might have made the daughter feel caught. However, parent group responses did not mention parental conflict after divorce, child depression, behavior problems or academic achievement. Two parents did refer to the level of trust in their relationship: "She knows she can trust me to be truthful and not judgmental". While this mother-child relationship had always been close, there was not prior mention of trust in this relationship. Neither the child's age at the time of the parents' divorce nor contact with the child appeared to have an affect on the parents' perceptions of the relationship after the divorce in terms of predictability-novelty.

**Child**

*Before divorce with mother.* Twelve respondents in the child group (92 percent) referred to the degree of stability in their mother-child relationship while the family was intact. The twelve responses (100 percent) indicated the children perceived a high degree of stability in the relationship. Themes to emerge in child group responses regarding the intact, mother-child relationship include "State of the Relationship" and "Involvement" with many responses
All twelve responses reflected management of the predictability-novelty dialectical tension by selection, with an emphasis on predictability. Eleven (92 percent) referred to the stability of the relationship by referencing "State of the Relationship". This included statements such as "we weren't close at all" and "we were always happy". Seven responses (58 percent) referred to the predictability of the mother's involvement in the child's life. "Involvement" was often stated as "we spent time together" and "we hardly talked".

Two responses indicated parental conflict when describing the state of their relationship with their mother. But, no responses indicated depression, behavior problems, academic achievement, trust, or communication satisfaction. Age and parental contact did not affect the predictability of the parent-child relationship.

During divorce with mother. All thirteen respondents in the child group (100 percent) referred to the degree of stability perceived in the mother-child relationship during divorce. Five responses (38 percent) focused their descriptions on the predictableness of the relationship, two (15 percent) on the novelty, and six perceived a sense of both predictability and novelty (47 percent). "State of the Relationship" was to what most child group respondents referred while a few did mention "Involvement", "Feelings", and "Behaviors".

Children group responses reflected selection and separation as a means of managing predictability and novelty in the mother-child relationship during divorce. Seven responses (54 percent) referred to selection. Through selection, five children (71 percent) emphasized predictability. For instance, one daughter simply stated that the relationship "didn't change". Through emphasis on stability, responses referred to "State of the Relationship" ("[it was the] same, cold") and to "Involvement" ("My mom was very supportive"). Two children (29 percent)
described the novelty in the relationship explaining the change by "having to deal with arguments". Six responses (45 percent) indicated separation as a means of managing the tension. Four alternated between predictability and novelty by topic with "Feelings" about the divorce causing the novelty in the relationship while the original "Feelings" and "Behaviors" towards their mothers did not change. For example, one son stated, "I think we were both stressed, but we go through it". One daughter explained of her mother that "she was sad alot but we still were close. she was hostile when my dad would call (sic)" (14).

While no responses indicated feeling caught between parents, two children did mention "hostility" continuing during divorce between her parents or "having to deal with arguments". No child indicated signs of depression, behavioral problems, academic achievement, or communication satisfaction. Trust was hinted at when one respondent stated that she went to her mother with her problems indicating that she trusts her mom to help her (2). When considering the age of the child at the time of the parent's divorce, there seems to be an increased sense of novelty in the parent-child relationship when the child is older during divorce.

*After divorce with mother.* Again, all thirteen respondents in the child group (100 percent) perceived the predictability-novelty dialectic. Four child responses (31 percent) perceived predictability in the mother-child, post-divorce relationship, three (23 percent) perceived novelty, and six (46 percent) perceived both predictability and novelty. As in the child group responses regarding the family before and during divorce, the major theme to emerge in post-divorce descriptions concerned "State of the Relationship" and "Involvement".

To manage the degree of predictability in post-divorce mother-child relationships, selection, separation, and reformulation were reflected in the children’s accounts. Of the seven child group responses demonstrate selection (53 percent), four emphasized predictability and
three emphasized novelty. Six children referred to “State of the Relationship”. The four responses focusing on the predictability of the relationship described "Involvement" they and their mothers had with one another. One daughter reported talking on the phone with her mom a lot and another states that she still goes shopping and watches movies with her mother. Three children (23 percent) reflected separation in managing the tension between both predictability and novelty. In alternating between the extremes, children seem to "get along with" or be “close” to their mothers, but they appear more autonomous in regard to "Involvement" with children perceiving their mothers to be less active in their lives. Reformulation was present in three children's descriptions (24 percent) of their post-divorce relationship with their mothers through descriptions involving the “State of the Relationship”. In all three responses the children expresses a sense of mutual concern and caring in the relationship, for example "My mom and I are closer than we have been. I live with her and we take care of each other its awesome".

No mention of feeling caught, parental conflict, depression, behavioral or academic changes, trust, or communication satisfaction were in the child's responses concerning their relationship with their mother after divorce. Children who were older (between the ages 15 to 18) when their parents divorce report more novelty in their relationships their mothers compared to children who were younger (under 14). Contact with mother did not seem to affect the degree of predictability with in the relationship. All but two of the respondents lived with their mothers and those two replied in the same manner as the rest of the respondents.

*Before divorce with father.* Eleven responses (85 percent) referred to the degree of stability with in the father-daughter relationship. Children all emphasized the predictability in their father-child relationships through the themes of "Involvement" with their fathers, "State of the Relationship", "Key Words", and “Feelings“.
Selection occurred in managing the predictability-novelty dialectic in all 13 father-child relationships. Nine responses (82 percent) referred to "State of the Relationship" though statements such as “we were close”. Eight responses (73 percent) referred to the amount of "Involvement" in regards to the predictability of the relationship. Four (44 percent) noted that they did not see their fathers much because he "always worked". Four others noted having plenty of "quality time" with their father while the family was intact. One son described both in his relationship with his father "He was always at work. But when he was home always hung out with me". Responses also referred to predictability concerning the "Feelings" within their relationship. For example, one daughter demonstrates this stating, "i loved him, i thought he was the coolest dad ever. He was always made at my mom but me and him were always happy (sic)". One son was very predictable in his feelings for his father saying "I hated him for everything he put my mom through". Numerous responses used "Key Words" implying continuance such as "always" and "many". Many of the responses referred to multiple themes. For example, one daughter stated, "I always got along fine with my father but he was not very involved in my life. He didn't attend many of my sporting events and was not very involved in my personal life."

The responses provided no signs of feeling caught between parents while the family was intact. Two responses did note that there was a continual sense of tension between the parents indicating parental conflict. There were no indications of depression, behavioral problems, academic achievement, or trust in the responses. Because all nine children reported a strong degree of predictability within their relationships with their fathers, age nor contact with him was a factor.

_During divorce with father._ Thirteen respondents in the child group (100 percent) perceived the predictability-novelty dialectic during the time of their parents' divorce. Three (23
percent) reported greater novelty in the relationship, three (23 percent) indicated predictability in
the relationship, and seven children (54 percent) described both the predictability and the novelty
in the relationship. Six females and three males perceived a degree of novelty in their
relationship with their fathers. Five females and three males reported a sense of continued
predictability. Common themes in relation to predictability concerning their father to emerge
included "State of the Relationship", "Involvement", and "Grieving" his loss.

Children used selection and separation to manage the predictability-novelty dialectical
tension during parents' divorce. Five children managed their relationship through selection. In all
descriptions children referred to "State of the Relationship" while three also mentioned the stress
or changing "Feelings" the divorce introduced to the relationship. For example, one daughter
demonstrates these themes in the following description of her relationship with her father:

My dad moved out and we were sort of angry with him. I resented him and didn't want to
visit him as much. I felt like spending the weekend with him was "wasting" my time that
I could have been spending with my friends. Because we lived with our mom we were
free to do what ever we wanted, but on the weekends with my dad we had to stay and just
hang out with him, witch is hard when you are in your young teems. A lot of times I felt
angry with my dad because we had less money once my parents got divorced. I couldn't
have all the extra things I had before and I though it was his fault. Truthfully I never
really wanted to visit him much.

Eight (62 percent) used separation. Seven referred to "State of the Relationship" through
statements such as "my dad and I maintained a good relationship" or "the relationship did not
change". Seven children referred to "Involvement". Three spoke of how they spent more time
with their fathers during this time while four spent less time with their fathers.
During divorce, no child reported new or continued feelings of being caught between parents by their father, no were there indications of parental conflicts. There were no signs of depression, but one child did state that she suffered from separation anxiety with which her father helped. No reports of behavioral problems, academic achievement, trust or communication satisfaction with parents. Further neither age nor contact appeared to affect the child's perceptions of predictability-novelty.

**After divorce with father.** Thirteen responses (100 percent) referred to the tension between predictability and novelty. Six references (46 percent) to novelty were in the descriptions, two (15 percent) referred to a sense of predictability, and five (39 percent) referenced both predictability and novelty. "Involvement", "State of the Relationship", and "Support" were the themes of predictability-novelty dialectic in the post-divorce relationship.

To manage the dialectical tension, selection, separation, and reformulation were reflected in the child group descriptions of the post-divorce father-child relationship. Eight children (62 percent) experienced selection in the father-child relationship. Two have experienced predictability through selection while six experienced novelty through selection compared to their father-child relationship during divorce. The "State of the Relationship" was referred to in six of the responses. "Involvement" and "Support" was referred to in six responses. Four responses included both themes; for example, one daughter explained "My dad and I talk at least once a week on the phone. We are not as close as we were before and I doubt we would be able to live with each other ever again". Separation occurred in three responses (23 percent). All three referred to the "State of the Relationship"; two reported on "Involvement" in the relationship. One daughter demonstrated both themes occurring through selection stating "My dad and I get along great. He is very supportive of all my high school activities and stay out of my business". 
Dealing with tensions

Two relationships (15 percent) reflected reformulation in their responses. The children reframed the opposing tensions and simply accept what has happened and perceive the divorce as a way to make the future better for everyone in the family.

Children did not indicate feeling caught or conflict between their parents in post-divorce. Further, children did not state that they had behavior problems, were depressed, had academic achievement changes, or changes in trust with their parents. Age of the child at the time of parents' divorce may have an effect on the amount of perceived predictability in their relationships with their father. With only two exceptions, as the age of the child increased at the time of divorce, the more the child reported novelty in the relationship from during divorce to post-divorce. The two exceptions include one daughter, three at the time of the divorce, grew to hate her father and one son who, 14 at the time of divorce, had a fairly predictable relationship with his father through time.

Of the six child responses that mentioned both the amount of contact they had with their father and the state of the relationship, it does appear that contact may have an effect. Four children reported decreased contact with their fathers. Three reported a negative change in the state of the relationship and one reported a bettered relationship. Two children reported an increase in contact with their father and a better relationship.

Differences in Management Strategies

The final research question addressed the differences between parents and children in their management strategies for each dialectical tension: openness-closedness, autonomy-connection, and predictability-novelty. While the management strategies are only temporary solutions to the contradictory tensions, they do assist the both the parent and child in dealing with the experiences the relationship endures. Selection, separation, neutralization, and
reformulation emerged in both parent group and child group responses; however, the frequency of each strategy varied between parent respondents and child respondents based on the dialectical tensions they perceived. Selection and separation were reflected in descriptions of the parent-child relationship when the family was intact, during divorce, and post-divorce to manage openness-closedness. However, in regards to autonomy-connection and predictability-novelty dialectical tensions, as the relationships progressed, neutralization and reformulation was reflected more often in the parent group and child group descriptions.

Openness-Closedness.

Overall, parent group and child group responses reflected selection and separation about equally in regard to the degree of disclosure they experience through the evolution of their relationship. While the family was intact, no parent described the degree of disclosure they had with their children, but six child responses reported disclosure with mothers while the family was intact and four reported disclosure with fathers. Sixty-six percent of the mother-child relationships and fifty percent of the father-daughter relationship utilized separation. In half of the mother-child and father-child selection occurred by talking all of the time with their mothers, but not describing what was talked about. Selection occurred in the other half of responses through clues in disclosures to parental conflict.

All parents described disclosure in their relationships with their child during divorce (46 percent) appeared to use separation to manage the tension. Parents’ descriptions reveal that frequently the disclosure centered on the child's anger about the divorce. This is especially prevalent when children are between the ages of 6 and 9 at the time of divorce with parents with children in this age groups who described the degree of interdependence in the relationship. During divorce, separation was reported most frequently in 78 percent of responses concerning
Dealing with tensions

Disclosing with mothers and in 60 percent concerning disclosure with fathers. Just as with parent reports, children frequently reported topical separation about divorce. When children were between the ages of six and nine at the time of divorce, separation was used in five of six mother-child relationships and all mother daughter relationships.

Post divorce, 53 percent of parents describe the degree of disclosure with children, 46 percent of children describe disclosure with mothers and 62 percent described disclosure with fathers. Parents about equally used selection and separation to manage the dialect. Children also used selection and separation about equally when disclosing to mothers. Three of the four children emphasized selection through extreme openness and two of three children using separation stated they talked often with their mothers. The father-child relationships used selection and separation equally, also, with similar tendencies and themes occurring.

Autonomy-Connection

In managing the degree of interdependence with in the parent-child relationship, parents rely most on separation over the evolution of the relationship, as do children with their fathers. In mother-child relationships, the child tends to emphasize one extreme of the dialectical tension, then acknowledges the tensions, then, during post-divorce, reframes the opposing tensions into a unified whole.

Before divorce, parents described selection and separation about equally as a means of managing autonomy-connection with their child. Eight-two percent of children described selection emphasizing connection as a means of managing the dialectic in their relationship with their mothers. Regardless of whether the mother or child is describing the relationship, all mother-daughter relationships in which the child is under age six when parents’ divorce and 80 percent of mother-daughter relationships in which the daughter is between 10 and 13 emphasize
connection while the family is intact. In their relationships with their fathers, children reported
selection and separation equally while the families were intact. Three of four children who were
under age five at the time of divorce described selection in their relationships with their mothers
and fathers before divorce.

During divorce, 66 percent of parents described interdependence through separation.
Many of the parents explained how when they attempted to work toward connection with their
child, the child kicked back wanting autonomy. Often parents described the relationship as
"distant", but were involved in their child's life noticing his/her anger. Children explained the
management of the tensions within their mother-child relationship through separation. Fifty-eight
percent of children sought to alternate between connection and autonomy with their mothers
through involvement or topic. Seventy-five percent of mother-child relationships with child
younger than six at the time of divorce, and 66 percent of mother-child relationships with the
child between six and nine described temporal separation and topical separation. Selection
occurred most frequently in the father-child relationships during divorce being reported in 73
percent of responses. All four responses from children ages five and under when their parents
separated explained separation by stating they felt "close" to their fathers but did not see them as
often.

Sixty-three percent of parent responses revealed separation as a means of managing
autonomy-connection post-divorce. All four parents with children between ages 10 and 13
managed through separation. All parents noted greater levels of involvement in their child's life
and six mentioned a bettered state of their relationships. When children describe their
relationships with their mothers post-divorce, 50 percent reframed the opposing tensions of
autonomy and connection in to a unified whole. Many referred to their mothers as their "best
friends". But, for four of the six mother-daughter relationships in which the daughter was under six at divorce, separation was the strategy used in post-divorce, and selection was used in four of six mother-child relationships in which the child is between 14 to 18 at the time of divorce with three emphasizing connection and one emphasizing autonomy. Separation was the most frequent means of managing the dialectical tension with post-divorce relationships with fathers (46 percent). Often there is an increased sense of "Involvement" the children reported, but not a strong sense of "Closeness". While separation was the most frequent strategy used by children in post-divorce, selection was reported by all five children ages 14 to 18. All three males in this age group emphasized connection with their fathers, while both females in this age group reported an emphasis on autonomy.

**Predictability-Novelty**

Both while the family is intact and post-divorce, parents and children appear to manage the degree of stability in their relationship through selection with an emphasis on predictability when the family is intact and an emphasis on novelty post-divorce. While intact, all parents use selection to manage the polar tension between predictability and novelty, emphasizing predictability through their "Closeness" and "Involvement". In their relationships with both mothers and fathers while the family is intact, children used selection also to manage the predictability-novelty dialectic.

During divorce, 92 percent of parents continued to use selection to manage the tensions but focused on the novelty in the relationship through the changing "State of the Relationship", "Involvement", and the changing "Behaviors" of their children at this time. Specifically, parents with children between ages 6 and 13 emphasized this through their descriptions. During divorce, children used both selection and separation equally in their relationships with their mothers.
Children under age six when parents divorced managed the dialectic with their mothers by separation, but children between ages six and nine and between 14 and 18 tended to manage through selection. Separation was described by 62 percent of children when explaining their relationship with their father. Specifically, children who were between the ages of 14 and 18 years old during divorce reflected separation as a management strategy.

Post divorce, all four management strategies were used equally by parents in renegotiating the degree of stability. Selection was noted by three of four parents with children between ages 10 and 13 and reformulation was each present in four relationships as reported by parents, selection was present in three, and neutralization was present in two. When describing their relationships with their mothers, 53 percent used selection with five children emphasizing the novelty in the relationship. Children, when describing their relationships with their fathers post-divorce, also reported selection. Sixty-two percent of children focused on the novelty in their relationships with their fathers after divorce.
Chapter 4: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to begin identifying how parents and children manage the dialectical tensions in their relationship with one another as the family evolves through divorce. Findings show that while the family is intact and during the divorce, parents and children appear to manage the tensions similarly, but post-divorce, parents and children attempt to manage the tensions through different strategies, specifically autonomy-connection and predictably-novelty. The differing strategies for managing the tension could also be a factor in how they each describe the relationship in terms of the dialectics themselves. Further, if each is trying to manage the tension differently, it could be causing greater stress within the relationship. For example, if one mother manages the tension between autonomy and connection through separation by being "Supportive" and "Talking", but the child is very angry with her mother and is using selection to emphasize autonomy, this could cause greater anger and hurt feelings between the two.

During divorce, separation was use most in managing openness-closedness and autonomy-connection, but parents use selection in managing predictability-novelty while children use separation slightly more. Post-divorce, parents and children report equal uses of selection and separation to manage openness-closedness. Children reflected separation in their descriptions of their father-child relationship when renegotiating autonomy-connection. In regards to predictability-novelty, children report selection most frequently, but parents report using all four management strategies.

Openness-closedness was the only dialectical tension to be managed solely by selection and separation through time. Parents did not describe the degree of disclosure while the family was intact rather they referred to the "State of the Relationship": "normal", "very good", "close". This could be attributed to parents not considering disclosure, or "Talking", as a major
component of the parent-child relationship. Further, because the degree of interdependence was described by nearly all parents through the "State of the Relationship" while the family was intact, and the predictability with in the relationships, parents possibly had not thought about their interactions with their children much prior to divorce simply feeling the relationship was "normal" because they were doing what they felt a parent should do with their child. This might also explain the emphasis on separation in managing openness-closedness during divorce. A topic that was often avoided or discussed, such as the parents' relationship, stands out in their memories because it might be a highly unusual disclosure in the parent-child relationship.

Only four children described their disclosures with parents while the family was intact. Four children described disclosure through separation with both parents. Two children described hostility in both parents' disclosures concerning the other parent. Two children referred to temporal separation in regards to disclosure with parents with both daughters stating they talked all the time with their mothers, but because their fathers "always worked" they did not get to talk to him as much. The other two daughters describing disclosure with their parents, both used selection stating they only talked to their mothers "when it was necessary" but talked about everything with their fathers. It is possibly because of the extremes regarding time, degree of disclosure, and parental conflict that these children revealed describing disclosure, in the relationships while the rest did not. Similar to parent's descriptions of disclosure during divorce, children relied on separation in their relationships with their parents. Because of the change in the amount contact with parents and the "new" topic of disclosure, children might have described disclosures surrounding the divorce for the same reasons parents did--they feel outside of "normal".

Both parents and children used selection and separation equally in managing disclosure
with one another post-divorce. Through selection, both parents and children stated that they emphasized complete openness or extreme closedness with the other. Those parents and children demonstrating separation in their relationships typically did so though time. Because of the change in the amount of contact with the other, time may play a major factor in when they are able to disclose to one another. For example, many stated talking on the phone a number of times a month. Children, on the other hand, noted some change in the degree to which they were open with their mothers during and after the divorce, but it was not a drastic as compared to the degree to which they disclosed to their fathers.

These findings support previous research regarding openness in parent-child relationships concerning the negative impact divorce can have on disclosure (Afifi, Golish, & Schrodt, 2003) and that avoidance is more likely when a parent is living with only one parent. Through separation, avoidance occurred in regards to openness about feelings such as anger with parents during divorce. Parents and children who disclosed with each other before and during the divorce continued disclosing post-divorce. Many of the relationships using separation as a means of managing the tension while the family was intact and during the divorce used either selection emphasizing openness or reformulation describing the other as a "Friend" post-divorce. Those describing a more closed relationship while the family was intact and during divorce, continued to have a closed relationship in post-divorce though a few did mention that they were "mending the relationship". These results show that while avoidance does occur when residing with only one parent, it is frequently overcome through time.

Findings also support Golish and Schrodt's (2002) conclusions that a child is more open with their parents post-divorce if the relationship is close. Parents and children, who reported having a close relationship while the family was intact fell into two groups. Nine of the
relationships stated "Closeness" while the family was intact described a constantly open relationship through the evolution of the family. The other group of parent-child relationships describing "Closeness" while the family was intact described anger and having difficulties during the divorce, but were able to trudge through and have an open relationship again. This tendency was stronger between residential parents and child, possibly making this pattern partially attributable to contact with parents.

As mentioned before, many of the descriptions concerning the autonomy-connection dialectic while the families were intact focused on describing the "State of the Relationship" with only a few mentioning "Support" or "Involvement". Selection and separation occurred equally in parents' descriptions and in child-father descriptions, while selection was most common in child-mother relationships. Those focusing on selection in the child-mother relationship often felt connection with their mothers because of a "Closeness" and through their "Involvement" in their lives such as doing activities together and talking; two daughters reported feeling autonomous with their mothers due to the low "Involvement" they had with their mothers while the family was intact.

During divorce separation was reported in all relationships to manage the degree of interdependence. For example in mother-child relationships, the child felt close to the mother in regards to "Closeness" and "Involvement", but when concerning the topic of divorce, there was a great feeling of autonomy. In fact, half of the twenty-six respondents mentioned a greater sense of distance in the mother-child relationship during divorce. All attributed this greater distance to "stress" or "anger” caused by the divorce. Because nearly all children lived with their mothers during divorce, the use of separation as a management strategy was very pronounced in children's descriptions of their relationships with their fathers. While many children still felt
“Close” with their fathers during divorce, many children did not feel as much “Involvement” mostly because they did not spend as much time with their fathers.

As the parent-child relationship evolves, separation continued to be the strategy for managing autonomy-connection in child-father relationships and in those relationships described by parents. The children, however, described managing the tension with their mothers most frequently through reformulation. These responses referred to the mother as being a “best friend”, as well as having a great deal of mutual respect.

Through both disclosures and the degree of interdependence, little evidence of feeling caught occurred in the responses. This could be attributed to Buchanan, Maccoby, and Dornbusch’s (1991) finding that when children are close their mothers before divorce, children are less likely to feel caught, and when children are close to both parents while the family is intact, they are even less likely to feel caught during and post-divorce. Most responses revealed “Closeness” to mothers, if not both parents. Nearly all responses reflected a close relationship between mother and child while the family was intact. Those that did not did not describe feeling caught. While previous research found children who experience parental conflict are more likely to feel caught between parents (Golish, 2003), the few children who experienced parental conflict in this study did not reveal feeling caught between parents, but did experience a decreased level of connection with their nonresidential parent. Daughters reported a decreased connection with their fathers after divorce compared to sons. This could be attributed daughters having less contact with their fathers than sons, but Amato and Gilbreth’s (1999) finding that frequency of contact is not as important as how fathers and children spend their time. Sons did report consistent levels of "Involvement" with fathers, and daughters reported lowered levels of "Involvement" with fathers. All of the children "Grieving" the loss of the relationship were
daughters upset about the loss of their father and had a number of feelings of resentment toward their fathers. This could be related to the decreased amount of time the father and daughter share creating an unexplainable loss as Furstenberg and Nord (1986) found.

As the parents and children managed their relationships through the divorce and beyond, those respondents who mentioned "Involvement" and contact in the relationship while the family was intact and during divorce were more likely to describe the relationship as close in post-divorce. This supports Aquilino’s (1997) findings on involvement and closeness in the parent-child relationship.

Predictability was emphasized in nearly all parent-child relationships while the family was intact. This could be due, once again, to the perception of having a "normal" relationship. During divorce, selection and separation were used both parents and children in describing the relationship. Of those managing the tension through selection, all but five noted the novelty in the relationship. Fifteen respondents acknowledged the opposing tension between predictability and novelty. One parent strived to balance the tensions, while fourteen children alternated back and forth between the extremes. Children often went back to relying on selection to manage the dialectical tensions, such predictability-novelty, in post-divorce while parents used all four strategies equally to renegotiate the tensions. This might be a factor of the age of the children. Parents might be more capable of managing openness-closedness, autonomy-connection, and predictability-novelty through multiple management strategies because they are more mature. On the other hand, children, who have less experience in managing the tensions inherent in relationships, might only be capable of using one or two strategies at a time to manage all dialectical tensions.

Overall, these findings do not support prior findings indicating residential parents have a
more idealistic view of the parent-child relationship than the child (Golish, 2003). Neither residential parent nor child had an idealistic view of the relationship; many acknowledged the difficulties in the relationship. Many of the meanings of the dialectic arose through the responses including predictability of "Feelings" and "Behaviors", the extent to which interactions are fun, exciting, and stimulating, the "State of the Relationship", and "Grieving" the loss, as noted in regards to connection with the father. But, this may be because this study did not examine matched-pair parent-child relationships as Golish (2003) did.

Interestingly, the degree of stability in the relationship was nearly always referred to in all responses, while openness and connection were not always mentioned in responses. This might be because the divorce has caused many changes in the family; and therefore, the predictability of the relationship is at the forefront of family members' minds. The strong emphasis on predictability while the family was intact might make the novelty of the divorce seem prevalent since novelty in the relationship is something to which parents and children are not accustomed. This might explain why there is little agreement between parents and children on how the tension is managed during and post-divorce; if parents and children are unaccustomed to novelty in the relationship, they may disagree on how to manage it.

Limitations

An open-ended questionnaire limits the depth and breadth of responses compared to a semi-structured interview. Many times respondents referred to an idea, such as "Talking" but did not describe the "Talking". Did talking surround every topic possible or just some topics? Are other topics taboo or evaded as much as possible? With out further descriptions about the disclosures, or either of the other tensions, it is difficult to determine the management strategy used and how they perceived the dialectical tensions with in the relationship. Additionally, the
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brief answers do not provide a full picture as to what was occurring in the relationship through time, instead generalizations were provided. Many of the influential factors such as parental conflict or indicators of feeling caught were not described, even though previous research has found it to be common in parent-child relationships dealing with divorce. While the answers were brief, they were likely parents' and children's strongest memories and experiences about the divorce, which may be what was most influential in managing the tensions.

Further, because they were asked to reflect on the parent-child relationship, respondents might have described the relationship more orderly or “cleanly” than how it actually was. Since, in many cases respondents were recalling relationships and interactions that occurred 10 and 15 years ago, much of the “messiness” and “flux” of the relationship was not noted. This likely effected how the openness-closedness, autonomy-connection, and predictability dialectical tensions were perceived and described. Additionally, because of recall imposing a sense of order on a relationship that was in flux, the management strategies that emerged in the responses might have been more temporary before, during and post-divorce than implied in the relationship descriptions.

The number of respondents in this study was very low. Over 130 emails were sent to various networking contacts and only 34 completed surveys were returned. With so few responses, there is no assurance that these themes and management strategies reflect how the larger population perceives and deals with post-divorce relationships.

Only group wise conclusions can be drawn from this study. Because parent-child dyads were not examined, it cannot be said with any certainty that parents and children agree or disagree on how to manage the tensions at different stages of the divorce, only that these twenty-seven reports tended to agree in their management of openness before, during, and after, agreed
in their management of autonomy before and during, but not after, and agreed in their
management of predictability before, but not during and after divorce.

*Implications and Further Research*

This study focuses on how parents and children attempt to manage the dialectical
tensions in their relationship as the family experiences divorce. By learning how parents and
children perceive their relationship in regard to both openness and closedness, both autonomy
and connection, and both predictability and novelty while the family evolves through divorce, it
is possible to gain an understanding of how parents and children manage these tensions. Further
it can help a better understand how families become health functioning post-divorce families.
Understanding the use of management strategies may also provide insight into how parents and
children work through particular problems introduced by divorce and could be used to help
parents and children in post-divorce who are having difficulties work towards and health
relationship.

This research begins the examination of how parents and children deal with the effects of
divorce on their relationship. Future research should examine how parent-child dyads describe
their relationship as it evolves through divorce. This would provide a better picture as to how
each person perceived the relationship as it endures the change that divorce precipitates, and
whether parents and children perceive the use of the same management strategy or not.
Additionally, this could assist in understanding if difficulties parents and children experience
during and post- divorce are due to how the family manages the divorce or to the parent and
child attempting to use different strategies to manage the dialectical tension. Amount of contact
with each parent may also affect the management strategies employed. The management
strategies of a post-divorce parent-child dyad must also be compared to intact parent-child dyads
at the same age to determine whether there are differences between post-divorce and intact families in how they manage relational tensions as the family matures.

In conclusion, this study adds to current family communication research by providing a basic understanding of how children and parents attempt to manage the degree of disclosure, interdependence, and stability in their relationship as the family evolves through divorce. Selection and separation were the most common means of managing openness in the parent-child relationship through time. In managing autonomy-connection, families rely on selection while intact, separation during divorce, and post-divorce there appears to be disagreement between mothers and children on how the tension is handled. Selection is the only means of negotiating predictability while the family is intact, but as the relationship evolves through divorce, parents and children report different management strategies. While this does not paint a complete picture of how parents and children renegotiate relational tensions post-divorce, results of this study do demonstrate what parents and children dealing with divorce emphasize in their relationship.
References


Alberts, M. Hecht, & J. Buley (Eds.), *Contemporary Perspectives in Interpersonal Communication*. Madison, WI: Brown and Benchmark.


Cooney, T. M. (1994). Young adults’ relations with parents: The influence of recent parental


I am looking at how your communication with your child has changed since your divorce. You will be asked to talk about your relationship with your child before, during, and after your divorce. You will be one of many divorced parents answering this survey.

The survey should take about 15 minutes to complete. The questions ask you to describe your relationship with your child before, during, and after your divorce from their father. You are encouraged to share your thoughts and feelings about your relationship with your child as well as stories about things you have done or talked about with your child.

You receive no direct benefit from your help with this study. You may help other parents like you to understand what happens to their relationships with their children following divorce. Also, you may help others like you learn that there are other parents out there with similar experiences.

I know that talking about your divorce and how it has changed your family can be difficult. You may feel upset, nervous, or uncertain about how you feel or your family relationships. This is normal and you are welcome to share these feelings in your answers. Any evidence of abuse or danger must be reported to authorities.

Your help with this study is completely your choice to make. Participation in this survey is voluntary.

I do not know who you are, nor can I identify you or your family members in any way through this website. The survey is completely anonymous. Any names you do use will be changed to protect you and your family members' identities completely. The only information that will be shared in the study is your age and the number of years since you divorce.

This consent does not waive your legal rights. It does not release the investigator, the university, or its agents from liability or negligence.

By answering yes to question 1 of the survey, you will be stating that you have read this information and are voluntarily agreeing to help with this study.

1) Have you read the above information concerning the purpose of this study and its voluntary, anonymous nature?
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*2) How old were you when you and your spouse separated?

*3) How old are you now?

*4) You are the child(ren)'s

- Father
- Mother

*5) Who do your children primarily live with?

- Me
- My ex-spouse
- Joint/shared custody
- Other (Please Specify):

*6) As you complete the rest of this questionnaire, think about your oldest child who lives with either you or your ex-spouse.

This child is a

- Male
*7) How old was this child at the time of the divorce?

*8) How old is this child now?

*9) Describe your relationship with your child when you and your spouse were married.

*10) Describe your relationship with your child when you and your spouse were going through the divorce.

*11) Describe your relationship with your child now.
Click Here to Conduct Your Own Survey
Appendix B
Child Survey

Post-Divorce Parent-Adolescent Child Relationships

Thank you for your participation. I am studying how you and your parents communicate after your parents' divorce. You will be asked to talk about your relationship with both of your parents before, during, and after their divorce. You will be just one of many other 13-18 year olds answering these questions.

This survey should take about 15 minutes to fully complete. Questions will ask you to describe your relationship with both your mom and your dad. Be as descriptive as you feel comfortable. I encourage you to share how you think and feel about your relationship with your parents as well as share stories about things you have done with them or things you have talked about with them.

You will receive no direct benefit from your help with this survey. You may help other teens just like you understand what happens to their relationships with their parents after their parents divorce. Also, you will help other teens like you realize there are other people going through similar things during and after parental divorce.

I know talking about your parents' divorce can be hard. Feeling upset, nervous, or uncertain about your parents's divorce or about how you feel about your parents after their divorce is normal and you are more than welcome to share these feelings. Any evidence of abuse or danger must be reported to authorities.

Just to remind you, your help with this study is completely your choice to make. You will not be punished if you choose not to answer the following questions.

I have no way of knowing who you are or who your family is, so your help with this study is completely anonymous. Any names you use in your answers to the questions will be changed to make sure there is no way to identify you or your family. Only the age you report will be reported.

If you have any questions please feel free to email me at parent_child_relationship_survey@yahoo.com.

This consent does not waive your legal rights. It does not release the investigator, the university, or its agents from liability or negligence.

By answering yes to question number 1, you will show that you have read the information provided above. You also show that you voluntarily agree to help in this study.
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<tr>
<td>*2) How old were you when your parents separated?</td>
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<td>*3) How old are you now?</td>
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<td>*4) You are a</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mom</td>
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<td>Other (Please Specify):</td>
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<tr>
<td>*6) Describe your relationship with your mom when your parents were still together.</td>
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</table>
*7) Describe your relationship with your dad when your parents were still together.

*8) Describe your relationship with your mom during your parents’ divorce.

*9) Describe your relationship with your dad during your parents’ divorce.

*10) Describe your relationship with your mom now.

*11) Describe your relationship with your dad now.
## Participant Descriptions

### Parent Respondents

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