

The only-child adolescent's lived experience of parental divorce

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Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Masters in Social Work in Play Therapy at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University

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May 2015

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With much appreciation and gratitude I would like to thank the following people who contributed to this research and provided me with assistance, guidance and much needed encouragement and motivation to complete this study.

Issie Jacobs, my study leader – thank you for all the support, guidance, encouragement, motivation and enthusiasm you provided throughout this process.

The participant involved in the study – thank you for agreeing to be interviewed, for your co-operation, honesty and willingness to share your experiences with me.

My family, friends and boyfriend – thank you for having the patience and support during this time. Your love, guidance and encouragement will never be forgotten and I appreciate your support and patience throughout this process.

DECLARATION BY RESEARCHER

I hereby declare that this study, titled “The only-child adolescent’s lived experience of parental divorce”, is my own work and that all references used or quoted have been indicated and recognised.

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DECLARATION BY LANGUAGE PRACTITIONER

I hereby declare that the thesis, *The only-child adolescent's lived experience of parental divorce* by Dayle Hayley Dorfman, has been language edited by me.

After a career as editor-in-chief at a leading publishing house, I now work as a freelance text editor.

Lambert Daniel Jacobs (BA Hons, MA, BD, MDiv)

September 2014

PREFACE

Due to the fact that only one participant partook in the study and she therefore might be easily identifiable, the following ethical measures have been put into place in discussing the data:

- Nor the participant's name or those of her parents were mentioned, in order to maintain her anonymity as well as that of her parents.
- Nor her school or suburb that she resides in was mentioned.

As it was extremely difficult to find information on the only-child adolescent, the researcher made use of a few out-dated and classical sources within the text. One of these is the work of Adler (1932), who was one of the first researchers to refer to an only-child adolescent. His work even up to today is considered relevant and applicable.

ABSTRACT

The only-child adolescent's lived experience of parental divorce.

The aim of this study was to explore and describe the experience of an only-child adolescent's lived experience of parental divorce. Gestalt field and phenomenological theory in conjunction with current literature provided an overview of the theoretical underpinnings pertaining to the study. A qualitative research approach with a case study of an only-child adolescent dealing with parental divorce was conducted in an ethical manner by means of two face to face, one-on-one, in depth interviews.

Two main themes were identified. The first being experienced feelings associated with grief and bereavement, which revealed feelings of anger in the notion that the participant's childhood was lost as a result of the divorce and being caught between the parental conflicts. The participant seemed to take it upon herself to take care of those significant to her in fear that she would lose them and that the loss would continue to be repeated. It was further revealed that when the only-child adolescent felt a loss of her own identity she in turn felt out of control. The second theme identified was; experience pressure due to being an only-child. Pressure in being an only-child was very significant surrounding the participant. The participant shared a great deal of feelings pertaining to feeling lonely and longing for a sibling. As parents in divorce situations seem to be focussed on their divorce often the child suffers from stress and the unrealistic expectations parents often have surrounding their children. In this study the only-child could not seem to cope with the pressure and in times of despair made use of coping mechanisms, mainly that of cutting to compensate for the emotional pain experienced.

The researcher is of the opinion that the study delivered new found awareness into the only-child adolescent's lived experience of parental divorce and is in hope that the new found results are utilised as a platform for further studies about this vulnerable population.

KEY TERMS

Adolescent development

Only-child adolescent

Parental divorce

Trauma

Gestalt therapy

OPSOMMING

Die adolessent as enigste kind se ervaring wanneer ouers skei.

Die doel van hierdie studie was om die subjektiewe ervaring van 'n adolessent as enigste kind wie se ouers skei, te verken en te beskryf. Gestalt veldteorie en fenomenologiese teorie in samewerking met die jongste literatuur; verskaf 'n oorsig van hierdie teoretiese ondertoon. 'n Kwalitatiewe navorsingsbenadering met 'n gevallestudie van 'n enigstekind- adolessent wie se ouers geskei is, is op 'n etiese wyse uitgevoer deur middel van twee onderhoude wat in diepte uitgevoer is: van aangesig tot aangesig, en een-tot-een.

Twee temas is geïdentifiseer. Die eerste is gevoelens wat verband hou met hartseer en verlies, wat aan die lig gebring word deur gevoelens van woede en die idee dat die deelnemer se kinderjare verlore gegaan het as gevolg van die egskeiding en die deelnemer was ook vasgevang tussen die ouers se konflikte. Dit het voorgekom asof die deelnemer dit op haarself geneem het om te sorg vir diegene rondom haar in vrees dat sy hulle sou verloor en dat die verlies in die toekoms herhaal kon word. Die studie het ook getoon dat die enigstekind- adolessent 'n verlies van haar eie identiteit voel en op haar beurt het sy buite beheer gevoel. Die tweede tema wat geïdentifiseer is, is die ervaring dat die adolessent onder druk was weens die feit dat die adolessent die enigste kind is. Druk as 'n enigste kind het 'n gevoel geskep van eensaamheid en die verlange na 'n broer of suster. Ouers in egskeidingsituasies is baie gefokus op hulle egskeiding en dikwels ly die kind dus aan stres en die onrealistiese verwagtinge wat ouers gewoonlik vir hulle kinders het. In hierdie gevalle studie kom dit voor asof die enigste kind nie die druk kon hanteer nie en het gebruik gemaak van meganismes om die druk te hanteer, veral die toedien van snye in tye van wanhoop om te vergoed vir die emosionele pyn ervaar.

Die navorser is van mening dat die studie nuwe bewustheid kweek in die enigstekind-adolessent se ervaring wanneer ouers skei en vertrou dat die nuutgevonde resultate gebruik sal word as 'n platform vir verdere studies oor hierdie kwesbare bevolkingsgroep.

SLEUTELTERME

Adolescente ontwikkeling

Enkel adolessente kind

Ouers se egskeiding

Trauma

Gestaltterapie

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the research topic and the problem statement that will be explored. The aim of this study will be presented as well as the central theoretical argument followed by the way the researcher intends to conduct the study and capture the data. The chapter will conclude with necessary ethical considerations and some concluding remarks.

The research at hand focused on exploring an only-child adolescent's lived experience of parental divorce. In reading and exploring material, the researcher came to realise that there is very little literature on the only-child adolescent as well as the only-child adolescent experiencing parental divorce. This motivated the researcher to conduct the study as there could be a strong necessity for this knowledge for therapists and counsellors that come into contact with an only-child adolescent that forms part of a divorced family. The research may offer enlightenment and further provide awareness about this overlooked population to therapists and counsellors as well as present further information and understanding for families. As there are many stages in the process of divorce, for the purpose of this study, the researcher focused on the period after the divorce has been finalised.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The world-wide divorce rate for the period 1999-2008 stands at 67%. (Stats SA, 2011). In 2008, 186 552 marriages and 28 924 divorces were registered in South Africa. It is sighted that 16 370 of the 28 924 divorced couples had children younger than eighteen years, signifying that on average, there was between one and two children per divorce (Stats SA, 2011). During 2010, data on 22 936 divorces from civil marriages were processed in South Africa, signifying a drop of 7 827 or 25,4% from the 30 763 cases processed in 2009. In the same year, 12 486 (54,4%) of the

22 936 divorces involved children younger than 18 years old. Overall, there were 20 383 children, younger than 18 years old, involved in divorce showing that there was typically between one and two children per divorce (Preller, 2012:1).

In doing this study it is important to understand the authenticity of the stage in childhood known as adolescence. When using the term adolescence throughout this study it will refer to the development of children ages 12 through to 18 years that are presumed to embrace foreseeable physical and mental changes (Alderman, Benham-Deal & Jenkins, 2010:60. Waylen and Wolke (2004:5151-5159) further illustrate adolescence to be a shift from childhood to adulthood, relating to maturation of psychosocial functioning. In adolescence a stage of not only intense psychological and biological maturation occurs but social and identity manifestation tend to happen as well. During this phase the adolescent begins to form a sense of identity, attempts to increase independence and seeks to develop more mature interactions and autonomy with peers and family (Hartman, Magalhães & Mandich, 2011:506-510). Parents however continue to play an important role in the lives of the adolescent.

Amato (2000:1269) goes further and in general highlights the role of parents in the lives of adolescents by stating that the oldest and still foremost belief of parent-adolescent research is the effect that parental influence has on the adolescent. This notion looks at the degree to which parental approaches and behaviours add to diverse social-psychological virtues on adolescents. From this viewpoint, parents are social representatives who are educators of social customs, behaviours, conducts, and givers of emotional stability to the adolescent (Amato, 2000:1269).

It seems evident that the most considerable factors to adolescents' wellbeing would originate from their environments and the choices they make for their health supporting or compromising behaviours. Traumatic events such as parental divorce could therefore have a profound effect on the adolescent and the challenges they face (Call, Riedel, Hein, McLoyd, Petersen & Kipke, 2002:69; Everett & Lee, 2006:116). Work done by Anderson, Hetherington and Clinempeel (1989:310-334) showed adolescent children are in need of good quality parenting and guidance for the presence of children's adjustment within each type of family structure of divorced, remarried and intact parenting. It is for instance well documented in

previous and current studies that offspring of divorce are at an increased risk of various adjustment problems and challenges in both childhood and adolescence (Amato, 2000:1269; Harland, Reijneveld, Brugman, Verloove-Vanhorick & Verhulst, in Storksen, Roysamb, Moum & Tambs, 2005:726; Shin, Choi, Kim & Kim, 2010:1704).

Dissimilar to detached and broken family milieus (Amato, 2000:1269-1287; Kempton, Armistead, Wierson & Forehand, 1991:436; Rueter & Conger, in McKinney & Renk, 2011:444), research done by D'Onofrio, Turkheimer, Emery, Slutske, Heath, Madden and Martin (2006:495), shows that the various adjustments and life choice outcomes that the adolescent have to deal with involve aspects such as lower academic achievement, depression, anxiety, self-esteem issues, earlier commencement of sexual activity, earlier onset of drug and alcohol abuse as well as earlier emotional and/or psychological hardships (Chung & Emery, 2010:866; Everett & Lee, 2006:112; Hartman *et al.*, 2011:506-511; McKinney & Renk, 2011:444; Peris & Emery, 2004:701-702; Storksen, Roysamb, Holmen, Turid & Tambs, 2006:75).

With regard to parental divorce, adolescents continue to grow up in the effect of a decision made by parents. This decision changes previous living arrangements as separate parental homes are set up and the adolescent from now on begins dividing time between the two parents (Pickhart, 2009:10). Adolescents further may start to internalise the feelings they begin to experience (Chung & Emery, 2010:866). Another stress factor is therefore added into the lives of adolescents, where there are other pressures already emerging from this developmental stage of adolescence (Everett & Lee, 2006:132). It is essential to recognise that family stability is vital, which more often than not fragments when parents divorce and painful feelings may begin to surface (Chung & Emery, 2010:867; Pickhart, 2009:10). Buchanan, Maccoby and Dornbusch (1996:6) however point out that adolescents' success or failure in coping with a divorce situation depends in part on the parenting that is maintained. In many cases parents become so burdened with their divorce that they become emotionally absent to their child's need for care and support (Everett & Lee, 2006:113). Therefore the adjustment period of the adolescent will depend, at least to some extent, on the level of conflict that is sustained between parents or alternatively to the extent to which parents can moderate their conflict or guard the adolescent from exposure to this harm (Buchanan *et al.*, 1996:6; Everett & Lee, 2006:113).

The reason why adolescents may react negatively towards parental divorce is because they struggle to comprehend the full understanding of divorce in an adult way and inevitably become affected psychologically, emotionally and academically. It is common for adolescents to alter their attitude toward the world in reaction to a divorce (Chung & Emery, 2010:866; Hartman *et al.*, 2011:506-510). Even discussion of divorce is often accompanied by anger, fear, disappointment, unhappiness and dissatisfaction at the loss of the traditional family structure that society values so highly.

Adolescents may also be at that developmental stage where they do not normally discuss their problems with their parents, inevitably keeping their fears and upsets about the divorce bottled up. As Kelly (2000:963) explains, the married or intact family was typically seen as a more progressive and esteeming atmosphere for children; while divorced families often have been regarded by the media, public and mental health professionals as extremely damaging surroundings.

Amato (2000:1269-1287; in Storkson *et al.*, 2005:726) further reveals that adolescents' reaction to parental divorce also depends on their circumstances, such as the child's age at the time of the divorce within the family. The presence of a sibling could for instance also influence the impact of parental divorce and can to some extent act as a shield and support for one another (Kempton *et al.*, 1991:434; Steelman & Powell, 1985:117).

When looking at the development of the only-child, one of the highest discussed shortfalls is their lack of social interaction within the family as a result of not having sibling playmates (Rawal, 1998). A study conducted by Mueller and Vandell (1995:181-208) revealed that children with older siblings helped provide a channel for interaction, showing these children to be more socially receptive to peers their own age. The basis for developing this healthy peer interaction is set in the home at an early stage through being socialised by their siblings (Rawal, 1998). Possibly the emotional and development difficulties that the only-child is subject to, such as, extreme sensitivity and difficulty communicating anger or upset are results of living in an environment where there is not a sibling to interrelate to (Brophy, 1989:55).

The only-child adolescent, according to Pickhardt (2009:10), specifically prefers guidance and dependability from their parents, as opposed to change because of

their attachment. They often have a need for family life based on predictability. Not having had the experience of the competition that one might have with siblings, an only-child adolescent often finds conflict in the home uncomfortable. Being dependable on parents for emotional support and harmony, they too are averse to making a decision or being involved in decisions where their wellbeing might be disrupted. Generally the adolescent phase involves separation from parents, clashing with parents and inconsistency from parents; this could however be somewhat detrimental for an only-child who has shown patterns of insecurity or anxious attachment issues. Also, with settings of childhood so contented at home, the only-child can be hesitant to modify them (Pickhardt, 2009:11).

According to Erickson (2004:1), research has overlooked that by possibly being an only-child adolescent within a divorce environment, this can bring about different outcomes and experiences than that of an adolescent with siblings. This could be due to the fact that an only-child does not have siblings to learn from but they observe their parents and mimic their behaviour, thus growing up quicker than that of an adolescent that grows up with siblings (Pickhardt, 2010:19). Therefore, within the context of this research, the challenges of only-child adolescents might include aspects such as: solitude within the family context in dealing with the divorce experience as there is no sibling to share experiences with, as well as intensified difficulties dealing with the developments and challenges of adolescence itself with parental divorce.

For the purpose of this study the Gestalt field and phenomenological theory were used. According to Parlett (1991:68), Gestalt field theory involves a holistic perspective towards a person which includes their surrounding environments and takes the notion that one's environment and situations are constantly changing into account. The Gestalt phenomenological theory was considered to be valuable within the context of the study as Joyce and Sills (2013:17) consider phenomenology to focus on how an individual is always trying to make meaning of their world. The individual is therefore considered to be an active participant in what he or she is experiencing and how it is being experienced in the present moment.

The ecological systems theory to a great extent has similarities to the field theory in that both theories reflect on the individual's current experiences and ever changing

environment. For the purpose of this study ecological systems theory was not used, but was taken into account to provide the researcher with a critical integration (Spencer, in Spencer, Dupree & Hartman, 1997:818) of the specific dynamics of an only-child adolescent's lived experience of parental divorce.

The integration allows the researcher to capture an only-child adolescent's experiences and to recognise the general beliefs, stereotypes and preconceptions with regards to an only-child and that of the adolescent (Gordon & Gergen, in Spencer *et al.*, 1997:818).

From the above mentioned it seems that only-child adolescents may be an overlooked vulnerable population that presents with particular dynamics in the context of parental divorce. If more is known about their lived experiences in the context of parental divorce, interventions may be targeted more effectively to accommodate their particular needs with regards to being an only-child adolescent in a parental divorce situation.

The following research question is therefore formulated: What is an only-child adolescent's lived experience of parental divorce?

1.3 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The overall aim of this study is to do a qualitative phenomenological case study in order to explore and describe an only-child adolescent's lived experiences of parental divorce within the Cape Peninsula. The objectives of the study were as follows:

- To explore and describe an only-child adolescent's lived experiences of parental divorce.
- To analyse data and make recommendations to social workers, psychologists and counsellors within the field of family studies, as well as to parents in order to help them support their only-child adolescent in parental divorce.

1.4 CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT

If more is known about this overlooked population's lived experience of parental divorce, interventions may be targeted more effectively to accommodate their particular needs.

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.5.1 Literature review

The researcher used related books, articles and e-journals, in the social work and psychology fields, and used search engines such as EBSCO host and the SAGE NWU Lib Catalogue. Key concepts that the researcher focussed on were adolescent development, only-child adolescent and parental divorce.

The researcher intended to enter the field of the participant with as much knowledge available and pertinent literature before conducting the research. Fouché and Delport (2011b:134-135) concur by affirming that a thorough literature study sets the basis for worthy research.

1.5.2 Research design

The design the researcher will choose needs to be sinuous, flexible and as eclectic as required in order to answer questions presented (O'Leary, 2004:2). In light of the design, the researcher understands that qualitative research can be used as a blueprint to explore an only-child adolescent's lived experience of parental divorce and as such accomplish the study from an "insider's" perspective (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:53, 270; Creswell, 2009:4). Neergaard and Ulhoi (2007:81) divulge how Amado Giorgi had an objective to collect participants' lived experiences of a phenomenon and from those particular experiences approaches the overall aspects of the phenomenon. Giorgi claims that by following this procedure the researcher develops empirical comprehension of the participants' experiences resulting in a sublime arrangement of the phenomenon as it is experienced (Neergaard & Ulhoi, 2007:81-82). By choosing the qualitative approach, the researcher will be able to produce

more in-depth, open ended, inductive exploration and comprehensive information in a naturalistic setting as this form of research is more concerned with understanding than explaining (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:270; Fouché & Schurink, 2011:308; Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006:272).

The researcher used applied research with an explorative and descriptive purpose (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:79; Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95) and the design was that of a case study. Fouché (2005:272) describes a case study as an exploration or in-depth analysis of a “bounded system, or a single or multiple case, over a period of time.” The criterion for selecting cases for a case study should be “the opportunity to learn”. Gravetter and Forzano (2003:175) describe a case study as a report describing a single individual, including the description of the unique characteristics and responses of the individual. In this research it was intended to provide an intensive view into the life of the adolescent while building theory and attaining new knowledge (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:281; Burton, 2000:217; Fouché & Schurink, 2011:321). By choosing to do an explorative and descriptive research through a case study design the researcher aims to gain insight into a phenomenon (Kreuger & Neuman, in Fouché & De Vos, 2011:94), which in the case of this research was to explore and describe the lived experience of only-child adolescents in parental divorce.

1.5.3 Research method

1.5.3.1 Population, sampling and sampling size

The population of a study refers to a group with similar characteristics or a single participant (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:204). The researcher intended to obtain only-child adolescents who met the criteria for inclusion, yet since this is such a niche topic, many of these potential participants were not found. The researcher therefore decided upon selecting only one participant in order to set a platform for further studies on this limited scope. Thus for the purpose of this study the population consisted of an only-child adolescent of divorced parents in the Cape Peninsula.

The reason for selecting a sample is to be able to conduct the research process more thoroughly and as a result the quality of the research will be enriched (Babbie

& Mouton, 2001:288; Strydom, 2011b:224). The method of obtaining the sample was that of non-probability sampling as this is a method of sampling that does not make use of random selection because the research has a particular purpose in mind. The most appropriate type of non-probability sampling for exploratory studies is purposive sampling (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:287; Trochim, 2001:56). Voluntary purposive sampling and snowball sampling were used as it became evident that it was not that easy to obtain an only-child adolescent and therefore, the researcher had to make use of snowball sampling as well (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:287; Strydom, 2011b:224). Snowball sampling is appropriate to use when participants of a specific population are difficult to locate (Rubin & Babbie, 2005:149), such as the participants within this study.

The criterion for inclusion of the sample was:

- An only-child adolescent whose parents are divorced.
- The divorce of the parents must be at the final stage of dissolution and the marriage bonds must already be dissolved.
- A participant that resided in the Cape Peninsula.
- English speaking.
- Voluntary participation.

Data collection was assessed once saturation had been achieved (Greeff, 2005:294). Saturation was the moment the researcher concluded that the new data being gathered are not generating qualitatively different material and that additional information will undoubtedly modify the research obtained (Li & Baker, 2012:9-10).

1.5.3.2 Procedure

The procedure that was followed to obtain participants and to do the study was as follows:

- Protocol was compiled and submitted for ethical clearance from North-West University and clearance was given under the following ethical number: NWU-00060-12-A1.

- The researcher made contact with various social workers and psychologists to find participants. As it was difficult to find participants, the researcher eventually decided to focus on just one participant that was found through a social worker in private practice. The social worker made contact with the mother and adolescent for permission for the researcher to make contact. Once this was approved contact was made and a meeting was set up to meet the participant and mother in order to gain written consent and verbal assent.
- An interview schedule was formulated and “tested” in a pilot study with an adolescent in a similar situation as the participant in order to streamline the interview schedule. Seidman (in Greeff, 2005:300) recommends a pilot study to test one’s interviewing design to increase the likelihood of success as well as allow the researcher with the chance to see potential implications (Greeff, 2005:294). The reason why the data that was obtained from the pilot study or the adolescent that partook in the pilot study were not used in the main research was twofold. The pilot study was done early in the research process and even although the pilot study helped to streamline the interview schedule, the data that was obtained would not have been of value to use in the main research. Secondly, when the researcher realised that she was not going to be able to find more potential participants, it was decided that only one participant would partake in the study and therefore it was decided not to involve the adolescent that formed part of the pilot study in the research study.
- Data was gathered, transcribed and analysed after which the findings were discussed in the research report in the form of a dissertation. The researcher also intends to give feedback to the participant after the completion of the examining process in the form of a one-on-one feedback session/written feedback with regards to the main themes and categories.

1.6 DATA COLLECTION

1.6.1 Method of data collection

Face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participant as a data collection method (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:289; Elliot, 2005:22; Greeff, 2011:345). During the second semi-structured interview the research made use of the sandtray technique to help the participant share her experiences of being an only-child adolescent in parental divorce. This technique was chosen as it is considered to be a non-threatening tool to help children and adolescents elicit their feelings and experiences (Geldard & Geldard, 1999:112-113). The researcher used various interviewing skills such as prompting, reassuring, summarising and clarifying in the form of a conversation rather than a series of questions (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:289; Burton, 2000:199; Greeff, 2011:346). Interviews continued until data saturation was reached and the researcher no longer needed more material to enhance the study (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006:372).

Observations were used by the researcher, not as a data collection method but as a means to support the data collected, which are thorough and permissive explanations of what the researcher has observed (Greeff, 2005:298; Li & Baker, 2012:225; Marshall, 2006:98). The researcher used field notes to capture the observations made during the semi-structured interviews.

1.7 DATA ANALYSIS

After data collection, Tesch's approach to data analysis (Tesch in Babbie & Mouton, 2001:490) was used as follows:

Firstly, the transcribing of interviews took place. That involved converting spoken words (of the recorded interview) into written words, paying close attention to patterns and similarities across interviews; the researcher studied the transcription closely, making notes in the margins and asking relevant questions pertaining to the data. Tentative themes developed, linked to the objectives of the study; each theme was broken down into sub-themes, which were further broken down into sub-categories where necessary and applicable. A good qualitative study, according to Frankel (1999:341), presents not only the findings of the study but it also provides a thorough analysis of the data.

1.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Strydom (2011a:115-124), there are several ethical considerations that the researcher needs to consider. During this study the researcher aimed to observe these obligations, as the researcher had an ethical responsibility towards the participant in the case study. The researcher took the following ethical considerations into account when the research was conducted:

The actions and competence of the researcher requires that the researcher is adequately skilled and experienced in conducting the research. Written informed consent was therefore obtained from the mother and assent from the participant seeing that participation was voluntary and the participant was not forced to participate in the research. The participant was not in any way intentionally deceived by the researcher. Causation was taken not to physically or emotionally harm the participants during the course of the study. As this cannot be a guarantee, reflection took place after each interview so that the participant could reflect on her experiences of being in the study and to express any concerns she might have. This was accomplished by the utilisation of the Gestalt principles of honouring the participant's process as well as staying with the participant's foreground needs (Blom, 2004:52-58). If there was a reason for debriefing, the researcher would have made sure a referral took place to a professional counsellor, yet there was no need for this. Aspects such as privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of the participant and the information she shared were respected at all times during this research. The researcher is therefore the only one to analyse the data captured during the interviews. The researcher further assured that the identity of the participant was not disclosed by using "participant" instead of the name of the participant in the research report. The researcher (under the supervision of the study leader) took responsibility to ensure the research was compiled clearly and correctly in order for it to aid in other research studies. Data is also safely archived where only the researcher has access. A more detailed explanation of the ethical considerations utilised in this research can be seen in Chapter three.

1.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS

The evaluation criteria which included four criteria for establishing the trustworthiness of qualitative data by Lincoln and Guba (in Im & Chee, 2008:267-273) were taken into account. This involved credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. The researcher incorporated these four aspects in the study by providing assurance in the truth of the data, reassuring reliability of data, guaranteeing the objectivity of the data and securing that the findings from the data were conveyed. The researcher believes that an audit trail is explained in the study as well as data sampling, data collection and data analysis addressed in a scientific manner. As the researcher was very aware of the ethical aspects of this case study, transcription were chosen to be done by the researcher ensuring absolute verbatim accounts of what took place as well as to immediately begin familiarising herself with the data at hand for analysis. The audit trail is evident in member checking that was attempted to take place, which provides further trustworthiness to the study. The researcher tried on more than one occasion to contact the participant and mother in order to send, show or explain the information gathered, yet this was not possible for the family at the time. However the participant and mother both expressed confidence in the researcher in the data gathered as the participant claimed to have felt understood as well as obtaining awareness within the interviews and reflections thereafter. Finally the researcher's study leader was involved in the coding process of the transcribed data. The coding process was gone through numerous times therefore coding was not done independently, providing reflexivity to the study.

1.10 SECTION FORMAT

1.10.1 Dissertation

Chapter One: Orientation towards the study.

Chapter Two: Literature review: Only-child adolescent within a context of parental divorce.

Chapter Three: Methodology.

Chapter Four: Discussion of research findings.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and recommendations.

1.11 SUMMARY

This chapter presented the research topic and the research question that will be explored. The aim of this study was presented as well as the central theoretical argument followed by the sample population the researcher wishes to use as well as the method in which the researcher will go about capturing and analysing data from this particular sample. The ethical considerations applicable to the study were discussed after which a section showing the set out of the dissertation was provided. The next chapter will be the literature review in which the key concepts relevant to the research topic will be explored.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This literature review explored the key concepts of the study. Firstly, the importance of considering the characteristics and development of the adolescent is explored, followed by a discussion of the effects of divorce on adolescent development in general and specifically on the development of an only-child adolescent. The uniqueness of an only-child and how they as adolescents are affected by divorce are then illustrated. For the purpose of this study, the prospective of analysing data was done in the form of Gestalt field and phenomenological theory. A literature review of the only-child adolescent's awareness and present experience of their ever changing environment to parental divorce will therefore be discussed within these two concepts.

2.2 ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

Adolescence is a stage of changeover from childhood to adulthood and it can for that reason be seen as a progressive connection between being a child and converting into an adult (Gouws, Kruger & Burger, 2011:3; Louw, Louw & Ferns, 2007:278; Waylen & Wolke, 2004:5151). Adolescence is also defined as being categorised specially by inconsistency with parents and other authority figures, irritability and other high risk behaviour. In relation to this explanation adolescents undergo a turbulent phase which is geologically constructed (Louw *et al.*, 2007:281).

When referring to the phase of adolescence, Pickhardt (2012:17) explains that first arises a negative attitude by the adolescent along with its series of disapprovals and criticisms; rebellion through active and passive resistance comes later; and then comes early exploration of testing their limits. This is adolescents' separating themselves from childhood and beginning their passage toward more independence (Pickhardt, 2012:18). The stages of adolescence can be separated into three phases: early adolescence (9-13 years of age), middle adolescence (14-16), and late adolescence (17-19) (Karunan, 2006:1; Pickhardt, 2012:16-18). In early

adolescence, concrete thinking abilities develop and adolescents begin emotionally exploring decision-making opportunities (Karunan, 2006:1).

Middle adolescence is often when the toughest force against parental requests and restrictions transpires. In middle adolescence, by distinction, the young person really wants to be out in the world, discovering and experimenting with their peers. The drive in middle adolescence is for more autonomy than is often safe (Pickhardt, 2012:17).

In middle and late adolescence, the young person moves to assessing situations hypothetically and can cultivate rational skills. Emotionally, adolescents in the early stage are starting to explore decision-making opportunities, while in the middle stage, they start to progress to an intellect of identity, which is acknowledged more completely in late adolescence (Karunan, 2006:1; Pickhardt, 2012:16-17).

In the different stages of adolescence, the adolescent attains information and awareness of themselves in more recognised methods than during the primary school period (Gouws *et al.*, 2011:42). Adolescents become more proficient of multifaceted thinking and are inclined to assess and evaluate their thoughts before reaching a fixed decision. Adolescents begin inquiring things around them more and more. At the stage of middle adolescence already, adolescents are no longer limited to rational thoughts constructed on the here-and-now; they are capable of going past tangible proof (Gouws *et al.*, 2011:42-43).

2.2.1 Adolescent identity

Adolescence is a daunting phase in the life of individuals. Raising a sense of their own identity, adolescents must also establish their gender role, vocation and moral characteristics. They must also implement cumulative power over their emotions and to articulate emotions in an informally adequate way, while they also have to grapple with the mission of creating a believably optimistic perception of themselves (Gouws *et al.*, 2011:180). Moreover, humanity challenges adolescents with sizeable stresses. These stressors shared with all the changes happening may cause adolescents, without undergoing extensive mental or emotional difficulties, notable challenges and a wide range of difficulties during this phase (Gouws *et al.*, 2011:181).

According to Casey, Jones, Levita, Libby, Pattwell, Ruberry, Soliman & Somerville (2010:225-235) a stage of not only intense psychological and biological maturation occurs in adolescence but social and identity manifestation tend to happen as well. During this phase the adolescent begins to form a sense of identity, attempts to increase independence and seeks to develop more mature interactions with peers and family (Hartman *et al.*, 2011:506-510) as well as to spend time away from parents while going to school, and socialising with peers (Casey *et al.*, 2010:225-235; Hartman, Steinberg & Silk in Simpkins, Bouffard, Dearing, Kreider, Wimer, Caronongan & Weiss, 2009:530-557).

Erik Erikson (1968) sets the basis for investigating adolescent identity development in his book *Identity: youth and crisis*. In this book Erikson sees adolescence as a main link in life in which adolescents apply extreme momentum on topics such as identifying oneself and self-worth. Through an arrangement of influences connected with bodily development, work-related and social options, and opportunities by parents and peers, Erikson (in Gullotta, Adams & Markstom, 1999:75) retained that adolescents are involved in a phase of “identity crisis”. It is in this phase that the adolescent appeals to determinations from previous life crises and encounters to undertake the pursuit for a purpose of individual direction (Gullotta *et al.*, 1999:75; Louw *et al.*, 2007:309).

The progression of independence is thought to be one of the dominant developmental challenges of adolescence (Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2003 in Smetana, 2010:224). Smetana (2010:224) goes further to say that autonomy within the adolescent grows in the environment of the family, as parent-adolescent relationships are converted from ranked to somewhat reciprocal relationships (Smetana, 2010:224).

Dyregrov (2010:52) explains how adolescents can be very critical of themselves and of their responses, and execute irrational requests with respect to what they should or should not have done. They face particularly powerful emotions, but repeatedly have difficulties articulating them and can effortlessly protect themselves against this force by trying to suppress their responses or by discovering a histrionic manifestation for them (Dyregrov, 2010:52; Smetana, 2010:224).

Logan (in Adams & Marshall, 1996:429) proposes that identity diffused adolescents use a number of psychological defences to regulate the anxiety that comes from an undefined identity. Some adolescents provisionally flight the anxiety by participating in extreme, instantaneous practices that enhance their sensations and offer them with an immediate feeling (Adams & Marshall, 1996:431). Consequently wild activities, drug abuse, and/or other actions briefly rid them of anxiety connected with identity confusion. Other adolescents choose to move from one peer group to another in order to find a transitory feeling of fitting in by peer connotation and still others will take part in craze conduct such as body piercing, tattoos, eccentric dress and hairdos and other forms of risky actions (Adams & Marshall, 1996:432).

Since peers are currently dealing with the same pressures and stresses, adolescents feel that other adolescents recognise what they are undergoing at present. Adolescents therefore often rely on their friends for guidance and security (Fuligni & Eccles in Kaplan, 2000:521) rather than their parents at this stage.

2.2.2 Cognitive and physical development

Even though identity is an on-going growth process it is for the period of adolescence that identity turns into mindful and durable owing to a number of influences (Adams & Marshall, 1996:435). Primary of these are the physiological and cognitive developments which quicken noticeably during adolescence (Adams & Marshall, 1996:435; Hartman *et al.*, 2011:506-510).

Biological modifications entail adolescents to manage a new sense of self-consciousness and sexual desires that have not been practiced before. Furthermore it is during adolescence that adults and parents require more sensible conduct from adolescents. This encourages them to station their vocations and skills into sophisticated practices of rivalry, accomplishment and competency (Adams & Marshall, 1996:437). The intense bodily alterations happening are often ambiguous and there are equally important cognitive variations.

According to Van den Aardweg and Van den Aardweg (1993:147), cognitive development is the unremitting and growing development of the understanding, and it continues at one's own tempo. This shows that there are distinct changes between

adolescents and that not all adolescents are at the same cognitive level. Cognitive development has to do with everything regarding understanding or lack of the adolescents' sense of self together with awareness, intellectualisation, intuition, imagination and perception, and is strongly linked with experience and intent (Gouws *et al.*, 2011:42; Hartman *et al.*, 2011:506-510).

According to Dyregrov (2010:52) adolescents have a pattern of responses that often take after that of adults. Many of the decision-making organisms in the brain that aid an individual to prepare for the future, confine interactive reactions and control conduct, are developed in adolescence. This offers a larger emotional flexibility and the option for emotional regulation in public conditions. The adolescent recognises the connotation of what they have undergone and they can motivate themselves to be positive yet at the same time harmful towards aspects of their own behaviour in particular circumstances (Dyregrov, 2010:52).

2.2.3 Trauma and the adolescent

Erikson (in Gouws *et al.*, 2011:78) interprets adolescence as a central juncture of life that serves as a conversion between main issues and happenings in their life sequence rather than a phase of character strengthening. Conferring to Erikson (1954:27), a strong personality is assimilated through the determination of a succession of life crises known as dilemmas and/or traumas (Gouws *et al.*, 2011:78-79; Louw & Kail, 2007:20). Trauma refers to an experience that is emotionally distressing or alarming, which often develops into long-term mental and physical influences (Louw *et al.*, 2007:379).

In accordance with Erikson's (in Gouws *et al.*, 2011:79) psychological view, adolescence and childhood are connected with the growth of industry, identity and intimacy through dilemmas or traumatic incidences. Regrettably many adolescents will use self-destructive behaviour to distract themselves from worry and hurt from memories and current situations (Dyregrov, 2010:51-52). Louw *et al.* (2007:379) express how adolescents may also display responses comparable to adults who feel distress from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Generally they may pull away, withdraw, and have sleep disruption as well as insubordinate behaviour such as

clashes with parents and the school. At the same time anti-social activities such as drug and alcohol misuse may transpire. Adolescents may feel rage, embarrassment, deceit and remorseful feelings about their powerlessness to their current situation. It is thus explicable that depression and morbid thoughts may often exist (Louw *et al.*, 2007:379).

Gouws *et al.* (2011:183) concur that anxiety as a response to traumatic incidence in adolescence is often connected with family dealings such as matrimonial disharmony, divorce, socio-economic adversity, one parent moving into a different residence, loss of a family member. Pressure can also instigate many physical signs in the adolescent such as strain headaches, stomach aches, exhaustion, and fluctuation in appetite, in addition to psychological indicators such as disquiet, depression, withdrawal, discouragement and destructive behaviour (Gouws *et al.*, 2011:184).

In dealing with traumatic incidences adolescents, consistent with Dyregrov (2010:52), find themselves in a peculiar position as they often have a child's spirit stuck in an adult's body. Their emotional severity can have a childlike value, while their opinions can imitate a more mature thought structure. Thus it can be understood why many adolescents struggle intolerably in coming to terms with traumatic events when these transpire during a then tempestuous phase of adolescence (Dyregrov, 2010:52).

Elliot(2000:287) are of the opinion that variances in disposition can affect coping behaviour in a constructive or destructive fashion by ascertaining which circumstances the adolescent observes as stressful. Adolescents who have a tough temperament with extreme mood swings seem to have further problems after facing stressful events than do those with a calmer temperament (Dyregrov, 2010:79; Elliot, 2000:288; Emery & Forehand, 1996:83).

Similar to traumatic events, Dreman (1991:113-121) describes how normative life cycle transitions can be recognised in a vigorous multidimensional milieu in which personal growth takes place as an enduring interaction amongst the individual and the required individualities of the family circumstances in which one is positioned. Adolescence is an example of this stage which entails the individual to experience

adjustments in opinions, emotional assimilation of altered authenticities and adaptive conduct (Dreman, 1991:113-121).

Consistent with Dyregrov (2010:83), Elliot (2000:289-290) and Emery (1999:200), it is simpler to appreciate that adolescents' reactions to traumatic events can differ significantly when one understands the several causes that affect an adolescents' response. The factors can be broken down into situational factors, issues relating to the adolescent, and the loving atmosphere adjoining the adolescent child. These factors involve the kind of cautionary delivered about the circumstances that occurred, the amount of preparation time the adolescent had beforehand, how challenging it was to comprehend and tackle the circumstances and, especially, the strength of the incident to which the adolescent was subjected and the guidance provided (Dyregrov, 2010:83).

2.3 DIVORCE

For the majority of children, divorce will be the foremost trauma of their lives. This may not only severely impact their life with chaos but also weaken their relationship with both their parents and diminish contact with at least one of them (Emery, 2008:60). It is also believed that these adolescents have a less satisfied view of their parents and themselves and their lives (Harold & Conger, 1997:337). Moloney, Weston, Qu and Hayes (2012:33-34) reviewed traumatic happenings concerning divorce and progressions of normative transformation in the family life cycle. It was revealed that enduring change in children and their families is a function of the continuing collaboration of the advancing child and adolescent with altering interactive and situational dynamics (Dreman, 1991:113).

2.3.1 The adolescent and divorce

In their study of traumatic events such as divorce during adolescence, Aseltine Jr., Gore and Gordon (2000:257) detected that stresses, mainly conflictual social relationships, provoke undesirable emotional conditions, such as resentment, fear and disappointment, which generate internal stress for healthy achievement. Aspects

that play an important role in how adolescents deal with parental divorce involve resolution of loss, family influences, divorce as a source of conflict and stress, separation from an attachment figure and conflict. These viewpoints will subsequently be discussed.

2.3.1.1 Resolution of loss

Dyregrov (2010:83), Gullotta *et al.* (1999:181) and Louw *et al.* (2007:305) discuss how in divorce many young people feel hurt and rejected and therefore it is important how adolescents reach out for social support. Gullotta *et al.* (1999:181) maintain that the way parents approach the divorce and sense of loss for the family unit should be considered as equally important. Warm loving relationships maintained by both parents after divorce facilitate adjustment (Emery, 1994:195; Hines, 1997 in Gullotta *et al.*, 1999:181), but continued parental battles and anger increase adolescent stress and dysfunctional behaviour (Elliot, 2000:287-299; Emery, 1999:40-47; Hines, in Gullotta *et al.*, 1999:181; Nielsen, 1996:362).

2.3.1.2 Family influences

Family commences a necessary function in the adolescent's social, emotional and cognitive development. The value and constancy of family connections have a significant influence on the adolescent's security. Louw *et al.* (2007:351-352) and Nielsen (1996:362-363) reveal that consistency within a family and an emotionally reassuring family life are correlated with strong academic performance, a decrease in emotional and behavioural difficulties, greater confidence and self-assurance, strong intensity of liveliness, unlikely future preferences to substance abuse, delinquency and depression, lesser tension and stress associated sickness and a superior ability to handle adversities and traumatic experiences (Louw *et al.*, 2007:351-352; Nielsen, 1996:362-363).

The extensiveness of adolescent growth is pertinently captured by Hauser, Powers, Noam, Jacobson, Weiss and Follansbee's (1984:196) observation that the family is the location for reliance bonds, learning of one's primary skills, and the most

primitive separations and losses. Hauser *et al.* (1984:197) went on by verifying the signs of many studies directly tying family dysfunction and termination to an assortment of adolescent psychological disorders as well as the deficiency of the growth of the ego, which is vital to self-worth. Their biggest discovery was their outcome that adolescent ego development is directly secured with parental ego security, predominantly of the maternal figure (Hauser *et al.*, 1984:204). It can be interpreted from their results that if distressing happenings (e.g. divorce) harm parental ego and self- efficiency, then adolescent ego development can be deferred or perpetually weakened (Adams & Marshall, 1996:439; Hauser *et al.*, 1984:204; Kaplan 2000:521).

Wallerstein (in Gullotta *et al.*, 1999:181) believes adolescents and children do not recognise the notion of no-fault divorce. They see one or both parents or themselves as blameable for the split. Feelings of resentment and confusion may be expressed internally and until under control can present through withdrawal and/or depression as well as externally in acting-out behaviour in the family, at school or in the larger community (Emery, 2008:61; Gullotta *et al.*, 1999:181).

The effects of divorce on adolescents, according to Emery (1999:34), are often notably deep and persistent. The course of separation and alternating between households is exceedingly challenging for most of these adolescents, specifically when they are committed to both parents.

2.3.1.3 Divorce as a source of conflict and stress

According to Emery (1999:35), the value of the adolescent's relationships with both parents usually deteriorates post-divorce. Still divorce does not automatically bring a completion to spousal conflict; in reality, conflict may intensify and concentrate more on the adolescent. Another prospective tension for adolescents might be that of their parents becoming depressed or else engrossed with their own emotional state around the divorce (Emery, 1999:35-36).

Rueter and Conger (in Kaplan, 2000:526) refer to the capacity to elucidate conflict that is influenced by the family environment. A family atmosphere of sincerity, warmth and sustenance encourages positive conciliation of variances and keeps

conflict to small or reasonable intensities. When the surroundings are unapproachable or intimidating, no one really pays attention and conflict intensifies, sometimes to harmful levels. It is found that harsh and unanswered disagreements are connected with many changes and behaviour problems, as well as alcohol and drug abuse (Rueter & Conger, in Kaplan, 2000:526).

Conflict is more common in divorced and stepfamilies than intact families (Kaplan, 2000:525). Conflict itself does not deteriorate the parent-child relationship, but the failure to try resolving conflict in a reasonable fashion may. Parents and adolescents might manage better if they attempted to recognise problems from each other's perspective (Kaplan, 2000:526).

Divorce inescapably also has a damaging economic effect on the family. For the children, money predicaments for instance may require adjustments or changes in homes, schools, and friendships, or conceivably poor child care (Emery, 1999:35). With regards to the damaging economic effect that divorce has, Elliot (2000:288) specifically discusses the financial predicament among the majority of divorced mothers.

It is therefore not unanticipated that children and adolescents can be distressed by on-going hostility concerning their parents and money (Elliot, 2000:288). Fathers annoyed about being inconvenienced by having to send money that they believe only profit the mother is another trigger causing adolescents' distress. They are often trapped in the centre of this deliberation (Emery, 1994:205; Nielsen, 1996:358).

2.3.1.4 Separation from an attachment figure

Another main source of distress for adolescents is the physical parting from one of their parents and the consequent moderated and intermittent interaction with that parent (Emery, 1994:200). Parents however continue to play an important role in the lives of the adolescent. The ecological systems and social capital theories describe the central role that parents play in enabling connections between the home and other perspectives, such as the school and community (Casey *et al.*, 2010:225; Nielson, 1996:8; Simpkins *et al.*, 2009:531). The value of these connections is that they facilitate smooth transitions for adolescents when they are ready to extend their

experiences beyond the home. A phase of dispute shadowed by anguish is a foreseeable response to a split from a parent. Objection and despondency may be followed by impartiality depending on the regularity and eminence of interaction with the non-residential parent (Emery, 1994:200; Emery & Forehand, 1996:68).

2.3.1.5 *Conflict*

The consistency of practically all foundations of security may be questioned by a divorce, as well as the family home, school and friendships (Emery, 1994:207). Throughout a divorce, residential parents are the most significant supply of permanence. The adolescent's further need for encouragement comes at exactly the stage when residential parents may be capable to at least meet these needs. Whatever their age, adolescents are anticipated to look for and gain support from whatever means of security remain unchanging through the adjustment (Emery, 1994:208).

The following areas of conflict between parents that cause harm to adolescents in a divorce situation will subsequently be discussed:

The greater and more complex the level of conflict and inconsistency before the divorce the less likely the psychological welfare of the child will be as well as their modification to the circumstances (Emery & Forehand, 1996:72). Sadly, many divorced parents do not recognise that the struggle and animosity after the divorce may have a fervent effect on their children's well-being and adjustment. One such example might be disparaging and challenging the ex-spouse within in the company of the adolescent child, manipulating them as pawns (Emery & Forehand, 1996:72; Louw *et al.*, 2007:354; Nielsen, 1996:357).

Louw *et al.* (2007:356) acknowledge that if the adolescent keeps on residing in the same house, the same school and has the same peers, the psychological shock triggered by the divorce is alleviated. Though, if the opposite takes place, it can disturb the adolescent's progress, which sequentially, confronts the assurance and nature of the adolescent as a whole (Nielsen, 1996:357). The degree of the fluctuations could also have severe influences on the adolescent's capacity to adapt (Louw *et al.*, 2007:356, Nielsen, 1996:357).

2.3.2 Factors important for adjustment to divorce for the adolescent

Louw *et al.* (2007:335) make note of certain factors in a divorce setting that are imperative for the adjustment of the adolescent. If social support is not provided and the reasoning of the dissolution of the parental marriage not properly explained, this can cause resentment and acting out in the adolescent and take away their natural instinct of resilience (Emery & Forehand, 1996:78; Louw *et al.*, 2007:335). The following factors are considered to be important for the adjustment of divorce for the adolescent:

2.3.2.1 Level of social support and information provided

The existence of reliable social support structure is an essential feature that can manipulate the impact of divorce on an adolescent. The possibility of a support system to bestow role models should also not be underrated. Support systems may ominously enrich adolescents' perception of security, esteem and sense of belonging (Louw *et al.*, 2007:335).

For that reason, it operates as a significant stand against the feelings of dismissal that some children from divorced homes face. A social support structure may concede a broad variation of people, from family members such as grandparents and siblings to friends, teachers, the religious affiliations and specialists, such as psychologists, social workers and counsellors (Gullotta *et al.*, 1999:181; Louw *et al.*, 2007:335).

When the required information is provided about the divorce, the adolescent is more capable to adjust (Karuppaswamy & Myers-Walls in Louw *et al.*, 2007:335). If the adolescent is occupied in the legal conflict involving the divorce, they should receive the important facts about the dispute, their possible outcome and also be made conscious of their rights.

Adolescents' awareness of where they will be living, if they will be attending the same school and when/if they will see the non-custodial parent is essential. It is also important that they know that they are still cared for and that the divorce is not their fault. When these details have not been communicated to the adolescent, they may

have a mislead understanding that considerably impacts their adjustment (Louw *et al.*, 2007:335).

2.3.2.2 The adolescent's perspective on divorce

Emery (1994:12), Emery and Forehand (1996:68), and Louw *et al.*, (2007:336) explain that the fundamental predicament in divorce and custody battles is that adolescents have a third point of view that often clashes with the interpretations of their parents. The adolescent's requirements are meant to be dominant in custody disputes, yet it is disturbing how often they take the effects of the divorce onto themselves, and how this is often overlooked in the parents' emotional chaos. Too frequently, a worry for the "children's" needs covers an effort to defy the termination of the marriage, a quest for traces of lasting togetherness, a fight to acquire dominance in mediations, or chastisement of the other parent with blame, elimination and/or segregation (Emery, 1994:12; Emery & Forehand, 1996:68; Louw *et al.*, 2007:336).

According to Emery (1994:13), many adolescents do not share the same understandings and views that their parents do of the divorce situation, with the prospect of choosing a side within parental battles with one another. With this being said many adolescents do tend to side with one parent subsequent to divorce. Though from the adolescent's viewpoint, the prevalent dilemma often is not selecting the correct side but needing to pick at all.

The majority of adolescents do not wish to be obligated to take sides with one parent against the other and as zealously as they might hope for an appeasement, their primary plea often is that the parental hostility and conflict will end. Facts often confirm that parental battles are the issues that most continuously foretell instability amid adolescents whose parents have divorced (Amato & Keith, 1991:26; Grych & Finchman, in Emery, 1994:13).

2.3.3 Effects of divorce on the adolescent

2.3.3.1 Adolescents' reaction to divorce

Boozar-Blasco (in Louw *et al.*, 2007:335) and Elliot (2000:287) explain how some adolescents believe that they are forced into adulthood because they must now (after the divorce) undertake new accountabilities, such as more tasks, taking care of siblings and offering emotional sustenance to their residential parents. Some adolescents might also experience resentment, solitude, fear, despair and remorse. Others may sense a lack of connection to their parents, along with less attention in managing their own progressive adjustments, such as an incipient sexual state of mind. Conduct crises, for instance struggling with authorities and regulations, often increase, while drug and alcohol abuse is particularly common (Elliot, 2000:287-299). It is fathomable that adolescents now also begin disbelieving their own capability to get or remain matrimonial (Boozar-Blasco, 2004, in Louw *et al.*, 2007:335).

2.3.3.2 Conflicts regarding the marital past and living arrangements

Adolescents can also be affected by the unending conflict linked to each parent's outlooks about the divorce. Since adolescent children often do not fully comprehend the happenings in their parent's marriage and divorce, they can effortlessly get immersed in destructive conditions concerning their parents' marital saga (Nielsen, 1996:359-360).

The percentage of divorce has stretched to a record height causing cultivation in behavioural problems in children and adolescents, whose foundation can be tracked to the family. If these complications continue to be unsettled they will shape part of their adult life as they develop past adolescence (Sun & Li, 2002:472).

Another widespread foundation of strain for adolescents put forth by Emery and Forehand (1996:69) as well as Nielsen (1996:361), comes from their parents' persistent quarrels over visitation rights and living provisions. Many bitter and resentful custodial parents restrict the children's interaction with the other parent by diminishing the amount of time spent together (Emery & Forehand, 1996:69; Nielsen, 1996:361). In these post-divorce conditions adolescents can be manipulated as "spies, allies and weapons" alongside each parent (Nielsen, 1996:362).

2.3.3.3 *Divorce and adjustment*

Those adolescents whose adjustment to their parents' divorce is paramount are those who are subjected to the minimum aggression and anger between their parents both during marriage and when they stop living together (Emery & Forehand, 1996:64; Nielsen, 1996:356). By pulling adolescents into their parents' divorce battles, according to Nielsen (1996:357), does more impairment than any other distinct influence excluding falling into poverty. Research is extraordinarily continuous that the harm due to parental divorce broadens to the adolescents' academic results, societal growth, rebellious conduct and mental health (Nielsen, 1996:357).

2.4 THE ONLY CHILD

Only children are distinct in the fact that they develop in a world that is surrounded by adults. There are no children with whom to compete and they may try relentlessly accomplishing an adult level of competency (Milliren, Evans & Newbauer, 2006:10). When the parents are particularly accomplished, the child may find it is too hard to contend with any degree of achievement, may become disheartened, and either surrender or seek other recreations where they can be exceptional. If the child may not be 'good enough' in constructive ways they may begin acting out. On the other hand the only-child may get so much devotion and assistance from the adults that they try to persist being helpless and undependable (Milliren *et al.*, 2006:11).

One more equally distinctive characteristic of an only-child is that they often grow up relishing being the focus of everyone and indulged by both parents (Roberts & Blanton, 2001:125). This is predominantly accurate when the child is the first or only grandchild. On numerous occasions, only children cultivate an aptitude of one kind or another and anticipate being permitted to be in the limelight. After been given their own way, they may reject being compliant when others do not give it to them. The only-child often acquires abilities for connecting only to adults, particularly if that is their main shared environment, as opposed to their peers. Consequently, they become satisfied being outsiders and experience no need to improve connections with other children (Milliren *et al.*, 2006:12).

2.4.1 The only-child adolescent

Pickhardt (2009:11) and Milliren *et al.* (2006:10-11) divulge that adolescents have a need for family life based on predictability. Not having had the experience of the competition that one might have with siblings, the only-child adolescent often finds conflict in the home uncomfortable. Being dependable on parents for emotional support and harmony, they too are averse to making a decision or being involved in decisions where their well-being might be disrupted. Generally the adolescent phase involves separation from parents, clashing with parents and inconsistency from parents; this could however be somewhat detrimental for a possibly attached only-child. Also, with settings of childhood so contented at home, the only child can be hesitant to modify them (Milliren *et al.*, 2006:11; Pickhardt, 2009:11).

To add further challenges to the life of the only-child adolescent, while parents will say that they simply want the best for their only-child adolescent, the adolescent may understand this encouragement contrarily, which may not always be incorrect in thought. With the parents' great investment in their only child, often arises a tall expectancy of return, such as, the only child to be healthy, to obey the rules, to achieve well (Milliren *et al.*, 2006:11, Pickhardt, 2012:1). For the only child, that expectancy can be understood as a requirement to recompense parents for everything that has been provided for them (Pickhardt, 2012:1).

According to Nielsen (1996:292), birth order and the absence or existence of siblings on one's intellect, educational achievement and occupational success has an impact on the temperament of the adolescent. These can be elucidated by their reception of additional responsiveness which, sequentially, appears to assist adolescents' improved social and academic abilities (Nielsen, 1996:292). Veenhoven and Werkuyten (in Nielsen, 1996:292) and Boer and Dunn (in Nielsen, 1996:293) go on to say that adolescents without siblings are more often than not more advanced academically with regards to their school accomplishment, social skills and psychological development.

Evidence from two studies indicates that the existence of siblings may help to support adolescents from the trauma due to divorce. In this regard Kempton,

Armistead, Wierson and Forehand (in Dyregrov, 2010:88) have established collaboration between marital status and the number of siblings. Adolescents from divorced families who had no siblings showed more externalising issues than those from divorced families with siblings or from intact families with or without siblings (Dyregrov, 2010:88).

The proposal that siblings offer support to one another as they handle comparable battles also is reinforced by suggestion that apparent sibling support is connected to more optimistic approaches and insights about the aftermath of divorce (Cowen, Pedro-Carroll & Alpert-Gillis, 1990:730). Exploration has established that the existence of siblings may also be a guarding dynamic that may help cushion adolescent children from some of the pressures and traumas that divorce can present (Cowen *et al.*, 1990:731; Jenkins & Smith, 1990:60-69; Kempton *et al.*, 1991:88-89).

2.4.2 The only-child adolescent in a divorce situation

Pickhardt (2012:1) notices three influences in the only child's family that can contribute to the pressure and stressors of the only child adolescent. The difference between parents and children that transpires in families with more than one child is absent; therefore the distinction between the "we" of parents and the "they" of children is unlikely to be made. Within the only child family, the child is inclined to make themselves apart of the parental "we" and try to become recognised in the parents' social world. This causes the only child to become "adultised" by their foremost camaraderie with their parents, socially and vocally often becoming precocious as a result (Nielsen, 1996:364; Pickhardt, 2012:1).

Secondly, according to Pickhardt (2012:2), there is fortitude to make parents satisfied with their adolescent child, as parents appear so significant in the only child's life. This thought pattern occurs as the only-child adolescent are their parents' primary concern, therefore making them proud is essential (Milliren *et al.*, 2006:11; Nielson, 1996:293). On the other hand, there is often a distress of disappointing their parents or of letting them down, and in the process the only-child adolescent may

start to become disappointed with themselves (Nielsen, 1996:364; Pickhardt, 2012:2).

Thirdly, there is the only child endeavouring to do well for him or herself. Parental admiration causes the only child to think well of themselves and typically becomes devoted to doing well on their behalf with high self-assurance and a solid enthusiasm for accomplishment both can describe that of most only children (Nielsen, 1996:364; Pickhardt, 2012:2).

When observing an only child and their ability to adjust to a traumatic experience such as divorce, they appear to pull through speedier when there is a sibling present. This is possibly because adolescents with siblings are unlikely to come to be enmeshed or too absorbed in the centre of the constant struggles concerning the divorced parents, as an only child adolescent might (Milliren *et al.*, 2006:11; Nielsen, 1996:366). Sibling support is especially associated with genuine understandings about the adolescent child's function in the divorce and their capacity to bring back together their parents. Therefore, while data is limited, there is some backing that signifies that siblings may be significant in encouraging resilience within the adolescent (Jenkins & Smith, in Dyregrov, 2010:88).

2.5 GESTALT THEORY

For the purpose of this study the Gestalt field and phenomenological theory will be used. Gestalt therapy is described by Blom (2004:4), Corey (2001:195) and Oaklander (2003:143) as an "existential, holistic and phenomenological approach to psychotherapy where awareness in the here and now is highlighted as an important aspect of this approach. "Awareness" is a term that is significant to Gestalt therapy, which explains how individuals ought to be mindful of themselves, of their emotions, and of what they are experiencing in the here and now. This point of awareness guides the individual to take ownership of the self and develop organismic self-regulation by growing to become aware of the choices they can make in regard to their actions. This allows for ownership and responsibility for self-choices and conducts (Blom, 2004:4; Oaklander, 2003:143; Zinker, 1977:96).

Gestalt therapy is centred on the theory that individuals are appreciated in the perspective of their continuing relationship with the environment as well as the interdependence between others and their surrounding field. Oaklander (2000:45-55) explains how Gestalt therapy emphasises beneficial, assimilated performance of the total organism, such as the senses, body, emotions and mind.

2.6 SUMMARY

This literature review has highlighted the theory behind the only-child adolescent's encounters and occurrences of parental divorce. This was done by first describing the overall importance of the study and of adolescence in order to grasp a greater understanding of factors that influence them and the general challenges that an only-child adolescent might face. The discussion was followed up on how divorce affects the adolescent and the only-child, as well as the unique experience of the only-child and how they as adolescents are affected by divorce. The next chapter will deal with the methodology used in the study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The research methodology used in conducting this study such as how the researcher went about finding participants, gathering data as well as interpreting the relevant data and how the researcher managed to conduct the study in a trustworthy and ethical manner are being illustrated in this chapter.

According to Fouché and Delport (2011a:61), the research methodology can be seen as a concept of the research framework, which was used to solve the research problem. The research question that was formulated to solve the research problem was formulated as follows: What is the only-child adolescent's lived experience of parental divorce? In order to answer the research question an only-child adolescent's lived experience of parental divorce was therefore explored and is described in chapter 4.

The goal of the study is to apply the findings and make a positive difference in the lives of the population that was represented by the participant by making recommendations to professionals such as social workers, psychologists and counsellors working with families as well as to parents going through a divorce and having an only-child adolescent.

3.2 RESEARCH METHOD

3.2.1 Design

The researcher was motivated to choose a case study in order to depict life as it is experienced by the participant as opposed to predetermined categories identified by the researcher. A qualitative approach enables the researcher to produce more in-depth, open ended, inductive exploration and comprehensive information in a naturalistic setting (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:270; Fouché & Schurink, 2011:308)

seeing that this form of research is more concerned with understanding than explaining (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006:272). The qualitative researcher was interested in understanding the experience within the viewpoint of the informed, being the only-child adolescent (Creswell, 2003:4-6). The researcher approached the participant by means of bracketing (Joyce & Sills, 2001:17) any preconceived ideas about an only-child adolescent or about matters pertaining to divorce situations. The researcher was also flexible to the participant's unique process, this being one of the key characteristics of a qualitative study (Kumar, 2005:12). It is described by Hayes (2000:183) that if researchers intend to gain awareness into human experience, their unique self-experience needs to be looked at first such as that of the participant's lived experience of parental divorce.

The researcher used applied research with an explorative and descriptive purpose (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:79; Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95). Through an exploratory approach the researcher had the chance to obtain insight into a situation or a phenomenon (Babbie, 2004:87) from an 'insider's' perspective (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:53, 270; Creswell, 2009:4). The study also had a descriptive nature. Monette, Sullivan and De Jong (2005:5) describe descriptive research as the attempt to discover facts or describe reality. Therefore, a synthesis of the applied, exploratory, descriptive research enabled the researcher to come to conclusions with regard to the practical problems of the lived experience of an only-child adolescent dealing with parental divorce.

Babbie and Mouton (2006:74) describe research design as "a plan or blueprint of how you intend to conduct the research". For the purpose of this study a case study design was utilised. The aim of a case study is a detailed description of a case with a premeditated value in its ability to show consideration to what can be learned from the experience (Flick, 2006:141) and from the unique responses of the case (Gravetter & Forzano, 2003:175). By using a case study design the researcher was able to gain insight (Kreuger & Neuman, in Fouché & De Vos, 2011:94) into an only-child adolescent's lived experience of parental divorce. Through the insight gained, it was also possible to make recommendations to social workers, psychologists and counsellors working within the family sector in order to support the only-child adolescent of parental divorce.

3.2.2 Research context

An only-child adolescent going through a parental divorce and residing in the Cape Peninsula participated in the research. The specific area where the participant resides is a middle class area with many cultures and with English and Afrikaans as a first and second language. The participant used was Caucasian, a female, both English and Afrikaans speaking, while the interviews were conducted in English.

3.2.3 Universe and population

The universe refers to individuals who hold the description that provide significance for the researcher (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2011:125). In this particular study, the 'universe' was only-child adolescents with divorced parents in the Northern and Southern suburbs of the Cape Peninsula. The population is a set of individuals or a single individual in the universe who retain specific characteristics that relate to the research being done (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:204; Strydom, 2011b:223). The population further refers to a broader section of what the researcher's sample selection will be (Gravetter & Forzano, 2003:465). As it was mentioned in the preface, due to confidentiality and the fact that only one participant partook in the study, the population is indicated as an only-child adolescent of divorced parents residing in the Cape Peninsula.

3.2.4 Sampling

A sample is comprised of elements of a population that is considered for inclusion in a study. Babbie and Mouton (2001:288) and Unrau, Gabor and Grinnell (2007:279) defined the sample as a small portion of the total set of objects or persons and together these set of objects or persons comprise the subject of the research. Non-probability sampling can be defined as sampling that is not based on randomisation, since certain members of a population are chosen for specific reasons (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:287; Strydom, 2011b:226; Trochim, 2001:56). Cottrell and McKenzie (2011:235) describe purposive sampling as a non-probability sampling method offering the researcher the ability to deliberately select a case or cases that could

enhance an in-depth understanding of the topic at hand. Voluntary purposive sampling was used as the participant selected was most representative of the respective group of people that provided the most information with regard to the topic.

As participants for this specific population were extremely difficult to trace, snowball sampling was also made use of (Rubin & Babbie, 2005:149). Snowball sampling, according to Rubin and Babbie (2005:149) refers to a non-probability sampling technique which researchers use in order to identify potential subjects in studies when they are hard to locate (Rubin & Babbie, 2005:149).

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001:287) and Trochim (2001:56), purposive sampling involves the selection of participants according to set criteria of inclusion which involved the following:

- An only-child adolescent whose parents are divorced.
- The only-child in this study being discussed is an individual with no siblings, either biological or adopted.
- The divorce of the parents was at the final dissolution and the marriage was already dissolved.
- A participant that resided in either the Northern or Southern Suburbs of the Cape Peninsula.
- A participant who is English speaking.
- A participant who would voluntarily partake in the study.

In order to find a possible participant the researcher had telephonic contact with various social workers, psychologists and counsellors as well as advertised the proposed study via electronic advertising.

In the whole search only one possible participant who met the criteria of inclusion was found and the study therefore comprised of only one adolescent with divorced parents, who voluntarily agreed to participate, who were English and Afrikaans speaking with no siblings biological or adopted and that resided in the Cape Peninsula.

3.2.5 Data collection

Creswell (2005:175) explains that the qualitative researcher should gather multiple forms of data and will therefore use a combination of research methods. Using different forms of data collection will also aid in data saturation. Data saturation is very important in qualitative research, especially in the study conducted as only one participant was used. Data saturation according to Terre Blanche *et al.* (2006:372) is achieved once the study has been richly fed by the material that has been collected, or when the researcher can say that data has been meticulously explored.

Interviewing is considered to be the main form of data collection in qualitative research (Greeff, 2011:342). An interview is a very intimate method of data collection and allows for the participant to feel as though he/she is the knowledgeable one holding all of the information (DePoy & Gilson, 2008:203-217). For the purpose of this study the researcher therefore made use of one face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interview, as well as a second face-to-face in-depth, semi-structured interview while incorporating the sandtray technique.

A face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interview schedule of 50-60 minutes was constructed. The researcher used various interviewing skills such as probing, reassuring, summarising and clarifying (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:289; Elliot, 2005:22; Greeff, 2011:345). The data was captured electronically, as it was recorded by tape-recorder with the permission of the participant and the parent. This is significant as it provides a verbatim account of the interviews without the intimidating environment of a video camera and the distraction of a notebook. (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:289; Elliot, 2005:22; Greeff, 2011:345). Crystallisation identifies that like society there are many aspects to any single methodology. Crystallisation can be reached by utilising two semi-structured interviews. This can be done by linking “symmetry and substance” from various viewpoints of the study supporting a greater awareness of the topic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:873; Janesick, 2000:392). From the researcher’s point of view crystallisation took place from the two in-depth interviews that were conducted, therefore it became evident what experiences were had by the only-child adolescent in parental divorce.

The first face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interview of 60 minutes was conducted in order to gather information of the participant’s experience of parental

divorce as an only-child adolescent by means of an audio recording. Another interview of 90 minutes in the form of a sandtray exercise was conducted and filmed with a video camera with permission from both participant and parent. Blom (2004:135) explains a sandtray as a form of projective play where an individual, such as the adolescent participant, creates a sand scene using miniature objects and figures chosen by them. The researcher chose this form of data collection as it can encourage verbal discussion with the participant around the sand scene and thereby create awareness. Through this technique the visible trauma that the participant experienced due to the parental divorce was given a place seeing that the participant was able to externalise fantasies and thoughts onto the sand scene. By being able to externalise fantasies and thoughts onto the sand scene, helped the participant to create something (a picture) that she was able to own (Blom, 2004:134-138; Carey, 1990:197-198). The process that took place within this interview went as follows:

- The participant was asked to make contact with the sand using as much sand as she desired. This was done in pouring the sand into a deep plastic tray and to feel her way around the sand by touching it, squeezing it in order to make physical contact with the sand.
- She was then asked to choose miniature objects out of a range of possible objects such as; people, trees, shells, household objects, cars, animals, reptiles, etc.
- The participant was then asked to create any scene she would like with the idea of being an only-child adolescent experiencing parental divorce in mind.
- Once the participant was finished the researcher asked her to please explain the sand scene.
- She was asked to identify objects in the sand scene that were of importance to her, such as: a fence, unicorn, man, woman dolls, a baby, snakes, a pillow, a rabbit, green army men and more, which can be seen in a picture of the participant's two sand scenes in Addendum E.
- She was further asked to carry out dialogues amongst the objects.
- The participant then began to verbally explain the picture she made in the sandtray. Through explaining her sand scene and by having the dialogues between the different objects she became aware of why she unknowingly created her scene and chose certain objects.

- The researcher then asked the participant if she would like to change the sand scene to something that she would desire within this experience of being an only-child adolescent of parental divorce.
- This was a shorter process and the researcher once again asked her to explain her sand scene and to have conversations between the objects.

The researcher also made use of observations in order to support data collection of the participant. Marshall (2006:98) mentions that observation requires a process that involves the systematic observing and recording of events, behaviours and objects in the social setting chosen for study. This form of observation was used in an all-inclusive representation of what took place. Observations were documented in the form of field notes, used by the researcher, which, as Greeff (2005:298), Li and Baker (2012:225) and Marshall (2006:98) explain the need to be thorough and permissive explanations of what the researcher has observed. This offered the researcher an interpretation of the experience of the participant within the interviews that were not verbal as Holloway and Wheeler (1996:70) recommend.

3.2.7 Data analysis

Data analysis is the process whereby the researcher brings sequence, arrangement and sense making to the accumulation of the collected data (Graziano & Raulin, 2004:44; Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2011:397). Data analysis was done according to Creswell's application of Tesch's approach (Creswell, 2009:185-191; De Vos, 1998:343-344). The researcher transcribed both the in-depth interviews of which the second one involved the discussion pertaining to the sandtray activity. This was done in order to prevent important information from being misplaced (Creswell, 2009:185). The researcher then, as suggested by Creswell and Clark (2011:207), studied the transcripts and field notes closely and made relevant notes and applicable thoughts in the margins. Tentative themes and patterns started to develop and were identified, which the researcher as recommended by Creswell (2009:186) linked to the aim and discussion of the study. Each theme and category was then colour coded. By using coloured pens and highlighters the various themes, sub-themes and categories were identified, while some abbreviations were used to identify the main themes. Themes were broken down into sub-themes which were

further broken down into categories where necessary and appropriate. Once this coding of the data was completed, the researcher re-read the data as to ensure that she did not get carried away with the categorising process. Some relating topics were then grouped together to reduce the categories and simplify the analysis. The identified main themes, sub-themes and categories were identified and the researcher proceeded to develop a schematic framework for analysis.

3.3 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

The researcher took note of what was suggested by Yardley (2008:235) namely to evaluate the research and to make a decision about how well the research was conducted and whether the results can be looked upon as trustworthy and valuable. Botma, Greeff, Mulaudzi & Wright (2010:234-235) and Lincoln and Guba (1985:219) propose the following four constructs of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability in establishing the 'truth' value of qualitative research, which was considered throughout the research process. The researcher incorporated these four aspects in the study by providing assurance in the truth of the data, reassuring reliability of data, guaranteeing the objectivity of the data and securing that the findings from the data is conveyed.

The researcher guaranteed credibility by the effort to ensure that the topic of the study has been correctly recognised and depicted. This was done by stating the population of the study and the theoretical framework that was portrayed, which was conducted in accordance with Schurink *et al.* (2011:420). When the researcher refers to the transferability in assuring the trustworthiness of a study, it refers to whether the results of the research were transferrable from one situation to another (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:420). The researcher followed the suggestion by Creswell (2009:191) and rich, thick descriptions were applied to express the findings. The researcher also carried this out by describing the data effectively enough in order to compare with relevant and supported literature when available as proposed by Krefting (1991:4). The nominated sample and data saturation provided transferability as well as providing a dense explanation of the information gathered. Dependability was insured by means of stepwise replication, code-recode procedure and auditing as was suggested by Kloppe (2008:70), as well as Krefting (1991:217).

Smith (2008:240) indicates that the researcher should be able to offer substantiation connecting the unprocessed data to the completed study. For that reason, the researcher endeavoured to deliver a thorough portrayal of the progression that took place. This incorporated the rationale for the study, sampling, data collection procedures, data analysis, a presentation of the findings, as well as a summary of conclusions and recommendations. Seale (2003:172) goes on to say that this is beneficial in creating confirmability of a study. Authenticity about the research process is specified as a facet that adds to crystallisation (Ellingson, 2008:9). The findings were also confirmed with influence from literature control and by utilising a theoretical viewpoint as suggested by Krefting (1991:16).

According to Smith and Eatough (2007:36), authenticity of a study attempts to try to understand what the phenomenon is like from the participant's experience. In order to do this the researcher had to practice bracketing, a Gestalt therapy term which involves putting aside assumptions and being open to this unique person.

3.4 ETHICAL ASPECTS

Ethical clearance (Addendum F) was obtained from the North-West University to conduct this study as well as an ethical number was given under which programme the study falls, which is NWU-00060-12-A.1. There are several ethical considerations (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:521-526; Gilbert, 2008:152-154; McLeod, 2007:1; Strydom, 2011a:115-124) that the researcher considered when embarking on the data collection and analysis of the study. These will be discussed as follows.

The participant and her mother were contacted by the researcher. This was done with the participant's previous social worker contacting the participant and her mother for permission for contact to be made. After the researcher introduced herself to the parent and the participant and after it was explained to the participant what would be expected of her, written informed consent was obtained from the mother and assent from the participant. Written informed consent was obtained and signed by the participant's mother, as the mother has primary custody of the participant, which was queried by the researcher to make sure this was ethically sound. Assent was given by the participant to the researcher.

The actions and competence of the researcher requires that the researcher is adequately skilled and experienced in conducting the research. Participation for instance was voluntary and the participant was not forced to participate in the research, which was explained to the participant before consent was given by the participant. The participant was not in any way intentionally deceived by the researcher by making clear what the study was about and what would take place before each interview. Caution was taken not to physically or emotionally harm the participant during the course of the study. As this study had the potential to cause emotional harm emphasis was placed in order to make sure, to the best of the researcher's ability, that no harm would take place. As no harm to the participant could not be guaranteed, reflection took place after each interview where the participant was given the opportunity to reflect on her experiences of being in the study and to express any concerns she might have. Reflection was accomplished by utilising the Gestalt principles of honouring the participant's process as well as staying with the participant's foreground needs (Blom, 2004:52-58). If there was a reason for debriefing, the researcher would have made sure a referral took place to a professional counsellor. Yet a need for this was not expressed by the participant or observed by the researcher.

Aspects such as privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of the participant and her family and the information she shared was respected at all times during this research. The researcher is therefore the only one to analyse the data captured during the interviews, assuring that the identity of the participant was not disclosed by referring to the "participant" instead of the name of the participant in the research report. The researcher (under the supervision of the study leader) took responsibility to ensure the research was compiled clearly and correctly in order for it to be published and aided in other research studies. Data will be stored at the Centre for Child, Youth and Family Studies for a period of five years and will be deleted off the researcher's computer and hard drives for extra safety in a lack of access.

3.5 SUMMARY

This chapter looked at the methodology of the research such as the context of the research, research design, the population, sampling method, data collection, and

data analysis that were employed in this study. Trustworthiness and ethical considerations were also identified and discussed. The next chapter will deal with the discussion of the findings generated from the data collected.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will attempt to give a detailed explanation and analysis of the themes, sub-themes and categories of this study. The aim of the research was to explore and describe the lived experience of the only-child adolescent of parental divorce through the findings gathered from the participant as well as backing these findings with relevant literature. During data analysis the following main themes were identified:

- Experience feelings associated with grief and bereavement
- Experience pressure due to being an only-child

With each main theme sub-themes and categories to further support the main themes will be provided. Theoretical information will be integrated with the data and the verbatim recounts from the participant, in order to gain a greater understanding of the lived experience of the only-child adolescent of parental divorce.

For the purpose of this discussion, data will be discussed according to the viewpoint of Yontef and Jacobs (2011:329), Lewis (1999:32) and Phillipson (2001:18), that an individual's interpretation of their past is formed by present circumstances. With this being said, the "interconnectedness", a significant concept that came from Gestalt psychologists, comes into awareness with how the past is experienced in the present. The discussion will therefore be unpacked in the present recognition of the participant's past experience.

TABLE 4.1: Main theme 1: Experience feelings associated with grieve and bereavement

THEMES	SUB-THEMES	CATEGORIES
Experienced feelings associated with grief and bereavement	- Anger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of childhood • Caught in between parental conflict • Parentification/role-reversal
	- Fear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repetition of loss
	- Loss of identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not being in control

4.2 EXPERIENCE FEELINGS ASSOCIATED WITH GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT

When looking at the only-child adolescent the notion of phenomenology should be understood. Phenomenology refers to how an individual makes sense of their world by organising meanings. Yontef (1993:202) says, “Phenomenology is a search for understanding based on what is obvious or revealed by the situation – What is”. Within this study the “what is” will refer to the participant’s lived experience and how the participant internalised this as her world.

The serious impact that the family schema has on the conduct and emotional well-being of the only-child adolescent became apparent when discussing the participant’s experienced feelings which can be associated with feelings of grief and bereavement of a lost one. Thomas and Rankin (1998:2-3) in this regard mention that the grieving process is exceptionally similar to that of an adolescent’s loss of their family of origin through divorce. It has further been indicated by previous researchers that divorce is linked with many psychological confusion, emotional grieving as well as parental strain in relationships and life interruptions for their

children (Emery, 1994:200; Emery & Forehand, 1996:78-80; Louw *et al.*, 2007:354). Luttig (2006:101) further adds to this by saying that adolescents go through a range of feelings within the experience of divorce such as: grief, anger, loss, sadness, and feelings of rejection and of a lack of control. Hines (1997:375, 378) specifically refers to the fact that divorce-related aspects have a direct influence on the life progressions of adolescents and it may be particularly tough for the adolescent who is concurrently involved in extreme developmental changeovers.

When referring to grief and bereavement during the divorce process one denotes to a sensitive development that comes after loss and grieving and that is the progression of adjustment to this loss (Blom, 2006:185). Bourque (2006:1) states that it is particularly hard for the adolescent who forms part of a divorce process, as the parents are going through their own grief and the adolescent tends to be forgotten or in a way not considered that they too are suffering from their own grief. The participant for instance experiences that her mother would 'try' to comfort her during the divorce process, but at the same time also express her own grief to the participant.

The feelings associated with grief and bereavement that was identified as subthemes under the first main theme, involve anger, sadness due to losing a loved one and feelings pertaining to the loss of identity. These subthemes will subsequently be unpacked.

4.2.1 Anger

Anger is a powerful human emotion, provoked when individuals realise that their needs, requests, or purposes have been let down or blocked by others. Given that peers and parents have the utmost ability to hinder personal wishes and objectives, it is not unanticipated that researchers have found anger to be one of the most recurrently experienced relationship sentiments (Fitness, 2009:94).

Studies identify that divorce is associated with great emotional suffering, psychological misinterpretations, and relationship pressure and life disruption, severe anger and feelings of loss (Emery, 1994:200; Emery & Forehand, 1996:78-80; Louw *et al.*, 2007:354). Divorce is seen as a para-normative event (Terkelson, in

Dreman, 1991:113-121) which is indicated to be of a traumatic nature (Dreman, 1991:113-121). Eth and Pynoos (in Dreman, 1991:113-121) have likened the responses of adolescents in a divorce process to the post-traumatic outcomes of the adolescent who has witnessed loss, violence and fear. Substantiating this clinical statement is an analysis of divorce research which illustrates that directly after divorce the adolescent child shows post-traumatic stress indicators such as denial, worry, negativity, shame, depression, fault and persistent unpleasant memories of the traumatic events (Dreman, 1991:113-121; Emery, 2008:60-62).

For adolescents the divorce experience and what comes from it seems to be the most stressful period of their lives. In a study done by Wallerstein and Kelly (2008:35) the family being torn apart through their parents being divorced brought out a serious sense of anger, grief and shock for a group of adolescent participants. Half of the participants in the group were agitated with the idea of their lives being completely unsettled and more than 90% were upset about the divorce even though they have experienced high incidences of physical and emotional violence that took place (Wallerstein & Kelly, 2008:35). Emery (2008, 61-62) explains how divorce is an endless impediment for most adolescents where the core of their creation, namely their family, is split apart. As a result, adolescents may not only grieve, but they may also search for an inventive equilibrium as they grasp for the absence of refuge they once may have had in their lives (Emery, 2008:61-62).

According to Hawkins and Fackrell (2009:43) divorce in many cases denotes the breakdown of family structure. It is the breakdown of the family structure that left the participant with concerned ideas pertaining to what her friends might think of her and where will she be staying from one weekend to the next. These concerned ideas together with the conflictual relationship that her parents involve her in, appears to bring about a lot of anger and resentment. Aspects however that in particular seem to cause a lot of anger within the participant involve the following:

- The fact that she experiences a loss of her childhood due to the divorce and all that went with it;
- The continued parental conflict; and

- The role reversal that are taking place as the participant experiences that her mother in particular has become her responsibility.

These aspects that form part of the categories identified under the first sub-theme of Main theme 1 will subsequently be discussed in more detail.

4.2.1.1 *Loss of childhood*

Ahrons (1994:73) suggests that when a marriage breaks down, it is common for both parents to become self-absorbed and do less childrearing than needed. Both parents have to contend with their own responses and recuperation and as a result might be incapable of sustaining the difficulties of being a single parent. Many of these parents tend to rely on their children to deal with the problems that arise.

Thompson (1998:34) however states that adolescents do not have time or care for disturbances in their lives, such as divorce and all the aspects that come with it. They have things that they have to deal with themselves such as that they are stressed with physical encounters, substance experimentation, and bodily changes, classes they probably wish they didn't have to attend and peers to impress. They therefore do not want to be troubled by their parents' lives, which are in pandemonium from the divorce (Thompson, 1998:36-37). The researcher found this true to form with regards to the participant's experiences when she expressed the following: *"I just don't want him to talk to me about it (father's issues with the mother) because I already have stuff that a normal child has and things to worry about and then I have to take on that too."* The participant further explains how she is also made to feel guilty as her mother expresses that she needs someone to talk to, while the participant in actual fact just wants to get on with her own life.

Therefore the participant's roles appear to have become influential to the needs and support of her parents, causing her to take on too much responsibility too early on in her life. Due to taking on too much responsibility the participant explains how she feels that she has lost out on many things in her childhood when comparing herself to peers among her school environment. The participant feels it is unfair, *"... because all the other kids have their own lives and go places and see their friends and do not deal with the kind of stuff I deal with."*

The participant showed much aggravation in the above discussion because of wanting to be “a kid” and just enjoy her life like she sees others do. Yet she is in a situation where her parents have seemingly unrealistic expectations of her. The parents also seem to be oblivious and more focused on their own needs than that of the participant, causing her to have a lot of anger. She went on to voice the following:

I don't want to know about it (parents' problems) and they (her parents) make me worry about things I don't think a child should worry about. Or worry about how my mom is going to survive the month without money and how she's gonna support me and if he takes me away from her.

Oberst and Stewart (2003:13) explain that when an individual impacts another person, an alteration occurs in both individuals regarding their feelings, attitudes and behaviour, as well as in the relationship that characterises them. Hetherington (1993:40) discusses this alteration in the context of changes associated with marital transitions where these changes must be considered from the perspective of change in the entire family system. In the case of the participant it seems to cause extreme anger and upset especially since she is an only-child having no one to share this experience with. According to Larson (2011:4), it seems as if the majority of custodial mothers make known to their adolescents an assortment of problems, some of which are legitimately too vulnerable for an adolescent to have to hear. These include subjects including financial disputes, the reasons for the divorce, personal distresses, and deleterious information regarding the former spouse.

Throughout the interviews, the participant continued to show anger toward the childhood she did not really have and the childhood she “dreamt of”. During the sandtray exercise (refer to Addendum E), the researcher for instance enquired about the sand scene the participant had created and in particular an object that was half buried in the sand. The participant explained that the object was a baby sinking under the sand. She further explains that the baby in actual fact represents her life as she felt she has lost out on her childhood while watching others have theirs. She went further to say: *“And the baby that's sticking out of the sand made me think of my childhood and how basically he (the father) ruined it for me.”*

Following Piaget's model of child development, he discusses that children will only really become familiar with their particular developmental stages when they are ready to do so. Adolescents alike can also be compared with the notion of Piaget's model. Pushing them to miss developmental stages will make it troublesome for them to inaugurate a secure awareness of their personal individuality, and therefore leave them ill-equipped for the challenges and precedents of adolescence (Buckingham, 2013:22). Furthermore, children who are forced to grow up quicker than necessary take on physical, psychological and social trappings of adulthood before they are prepared to deal with them. This occurs when they are exposed to bewildering social environments such as divorce, single parenthood, violence in the home and parental conflict (Buckingham, 2013:22). The lived experience of parental divorce seem to cause the only-child adolescent to take on tasks that she is not ready for, nor should she need to at such an early age.

4.2.1.2 *Caught in between parental conflict*

Adolescents have a great need for emotional security, which consists of concepts like security, empathy, accepting and acceptance (Schoeman, 2007:44). Unfortunately for many adolescents, the family does not satisfy the needs of lending a safe environment. Conflict between parents and the unpredictability of what might happen may form a part of their daily lives. Both conflict and the actual divorce can unsettle the constant, safe home milieu adolescents habitually need in order to manage the stresses of their fluctuating world (Forehand, Long & Brody, 1988:155).

Larson (2011:3) discusses how parental divorce disclosures turn out to be particularly challenging when adolescents are unprotected from knowledge that is seen as unsuitable for them to receive. The participant expressed that she would often complain to her mother that she does not want to hear about her mother's issues with her father and vice-versa. She further reveals how her mother would then get cross with her explaining that: "*she (the mother) just wants me to know what is going on.*"

Whitehead (1997:17) mentions that in many cases of divorce anger and enmity are exchanged amongst parents right in front of their offspring. Adolescents then

observe issues they cannot comprehend. Furthermore, one of the most damaging things that parents can do to an adolescent is to make them pick one parent over the other. For the participant, she was ultimately asked to show her allegiance toward each parent. She for instance explained how her “... *parents fight all the time and they want me to choose between them.*” The participant in particular experienced this to be unfair that parents can expect their children to show their allegiance towards each parent.

Adolescents caught in-between this conflict (Wallerstein, 2000:37) like the participant show annoyance in their relationship with their parents. In lieu of the divorce process that took place, the participant several times mentioned how although both parents discuss sensitive topics with her, it is her mother who gets upset when the participant tries to explain that she does not want to discuss what goes on at her father’s house. For the participant it seems as if her mother does not understand that she does not want to be part of the parental conflict, as her mother tends to continue with the constant questioning and remarks about needing more money and also tends to get cross with the participant for not wanting to partake in such a discussion. Information is often asked about either spouse, directly or indirectly to their offspring, who are then expected to intervene as a messenger of information within parental quarrels (Buchanan, Maccoby & Dornbusch, 1991:1021; Cartwright & Seymour, 2002:138).

Adolescents who experience parental divorce are influenced and vulnerable by the anger of one parent against the other (Eleoff, 2003:2). Eleoff (2003:3) further explains that there is a larger predisposition to brand a “good” parent and a “bad” parent and that adolescents experiencing parental divorce are at risk in trying to look out for a parent at the sacrifice of their own needs. The participant portrayed, in the sand scene, a clear divide between the two different sides of each parent and placed herself on the mother’s side whom she referred to as the “good side”. When asking her to redo the sand scene the way she would like it to be, it was obvious that she would like her parents to stop speaking about one another to her and in front of her and rather all be on the same level and understanding of one another’s needs and roles in life. The participant for instance mentioned that they should be the parents and let her be the child. She went further to reveal that:

I just think I would want to tell him that I want him to be the dad, ... but I don't want him to feel like he has to ... fight with my mom all the time to make her hear what he has to say. Just to be fair to me and it's not necessary to fight all the time, just have a normal conversation without trying to control everything.

As her parents have put various expectations on the participant it seemed she had no one to turn to when she was under pressure causing the participant to feel angered at her parents' 'selfish' behaviour and lack of support. Pickhardt (2009:10) explains how the only-child adolescent specifically requires support in the divorce situation and dependability from their parents, something that seems not to be available to the participant. This has led to the participant feeling anger and loneliness in the family field (Blom, 2006:188). The participant also seemed to be replaying her upsetting childhood through her nightmares and memories that have not been dealt with. She is also still living these upsets as the fighting and conflicts continue with her parents.

Oaklander (2006:6) and Walker (2006:2) both reveal that adolescents who are emotionally distressed owing to some kind of trauma, such as a divorce and other conflicts, become emotionally cut off and can experience a sense of anger and loss of their sense of self. In the participant's case and with regards to experiencing extreme anger, she shares how, *"It got to a point where he was trying to go to court and take me away from my mom permanently. And my mom just sat down with me and told me that she doesn't want me to go but she doesn't have a choice because I [the participant] have to go now."* The participant explained how she felt so angry and somewhat confused because she did not feel that her father really wanted her or to spend time with her but rather that he was involving the court in order to punish her mother.

An issue that shows considerable insecurity of adolescents, and is frequently overlooked, is continuous financial fluctuations that ensue from divorce. A single-parent household often has less financial security than prior to the divorce, a dynamic that could develop in severe strain and adjustment difficulties for custodial parents and the adolescent (Louw *et al.*, 2007:354). Financial matters which the participant seems to be continuously confronted with, in particular by her mother

seem to (as has been referred to earlier) cause a lot of conflict in the life of the participant.

The actual events that probably caused most of the anger in the participant revolves around not being informed and not realising that all the fights between her parents would eventually lead them to divorce. The participant for instance shared the following: *"I always thought that the way they were acting and fighting and [my dad] hitting my mom, I always thought that was just the way it was supposed to be. And I wouldn't think that they were gonna get a divorce because I always thought that that is how it was supposed to be for as long as I remember."* The participant further expressed how she was unaware what was truly happening in their family as during many fights before her dad was also "leaving" but it never resulted in permanent family separation.

She further on also feels that this time around her mother did not really support her in explaining what was taking place, nor any kind of explanation or mention of divorce or separation. The probable reason why her parents did not inform her with regards to what was happening could according to literature be seen as a protecting act of the parents towards their child (Emery, 1994:12; Emery & Forehand, 1996:68; Louw *et al.*, 2007:336). The participant also shared what happened the day she now realises was the day the separation was really taking place and that it was not 'just another fight':

I didn't understand and all I could remember was my mom crying and crying and my dad just got up and left like he always did. So I just remember my mom told me 'just get your stuff'. And I couldn't understand because a lot of the times when I was little they would fight and my mom would tell me and just put my bag on her bed and I would know to just pack my toys and um clothes and then we would leave and the next day we would go back or a few days after we would just go back. So I thought okay well we just gonna go back and we, my mom, we drove to X house and we got there and he [my dad] took his stuff and he left. And we stayed there. And I couldn't understand why aren't we going back and every time we drove past my dad's house she would just start crying and crying and I started crying too. I didn't fully understand why she was crying but I started crying because I saw her cry.

According to Peterson (2003:3), support and emotional well-being should not be underestimated with regards to divorce and the amount of pain and anger that the

adolescent may suffer due to the divorce of their parents. Adolescents experiencing parental divorce, according to Kelly (1996:375), specifically show feelings of sadness, anger and abandonment. When grieving for the departed parent they find it hard in the beginning to express their anger due to powerlessness and more often than not struggle with the idea of divorce itself (Eleoff, 2003:2). As it becomes more apparent what is happening they find a way to direct their anger (Robinson & Skinner, 1991:84) and their loss.

4.2.1.3 *Parentification/role-reversal*

Parentification, also known as role-reversal between parent and child, can deprive an individual of his/her childhood by placing a colossal level of tension and stress, says Fox (in Chabin, 2011:1). Role reversal refers to a position where a child adopts parental responsibilities to an extent that surpasses the developmental norms of the specific child. These responsibilities entail operational assistance (e.g., cooking, cleaning) and emotional support (e.g., giving comfort and support, listening to problems, being a companion) to the parent (Mayseless, Bartholomew, Henderson & Trinke, 2004:77). There, however, seems to be an array of this phenomenon, including the more prototypical role reversal in which a child parents the parent. Role reversal according to Mayseless *et al.* (2004:78) is also characterised by enmeshment (closed, entangled and angry preoccupation of the child with the parent) and triangulation (serving as go-between and mediator between parents or siding with one against the other).

The prototypical role reversal applicable to this study seems to be how the participant took on the role of being her mother's care-giver as opposed to her needs being met as an only-child adolescent by the mother. The participant in this regard felt that she was not being guided through the divorce and separation of her parents. She is further of the belief that her mother is not fully there for her, yet she experiences that she should be there for her mother. The participant also revealed how scared she would be during the parental divorce and the conflict between her parents when every time, *"[her mother] walks out the door and says goodbye."* In instances like these the participant's first thoughts would immediately be, *"what if something were to happen to her [mother]."* The participant further mentions how

worried she is *“that somebody is going to take her [mother] away or something is going to happen to her again.”* The participant showed so much anger toward the constant worry and concern about her mother, which she did not think was fair to have to feel.

It seems evident that the participant worry and have a lot of concern surrounding the idea of not seeing her mother again or be able to just *“hug her”* whenever she wants to. She explained her worries of something bad happening to her mother after many years and incidences where she witnessed her father being abusive toward her mother. In turn she has become overprotective of her mother in almost a role reversal way where she seems to take care of her mother and her mother’s needs instead of the other way around. When watching a mother being abused by her partner or worse the father, over time, adolescents may come to see their mothers as helpless, emotionally absent to them, vulnerable, not a person with legitimate parental authority, or as someone who cannot protect them in a time of need (Goldblatt & Eisikovits, 2005:644). This is displayed in the experience of the participant, where she became her mother’s protector, her confidant and her caretaker. Lewis (1999:151) cautions by stating that when the adolescent assumes a caretaking role in the family to make up for the loss, for example, by comforting a parent or playing a parental role such as a role reversal, it can interfere with the adolescent’s own uniqueness and development and need for care.

The moment where the role reversal and overprotection became pertinent was when enquiring about the unicorn in the sand scene that was leaning over the participant’s mother and grandmother (refer to Addendum E). According to the participant the unicorn represented a shielding object and even although the participant herself needed protection in her life, she seemed to have projected this need onto her mother and grandmother. The participant further explained that she, *“always felt like now that they divorced I have to look after my mom because who else is gonna do it.”* And because the participant was the only-child she is of the opinion that she has, *“to look after [my mother] and protect her because when I’m gone who is going to look after her.”*

Being overprotective over her mother became further evident when the participant expressed her feeling towards her father:

I just see the person who I can remember when I was little for hitting my mom and all the bruises on her and I would get so mad when I looked at him and I just [realise] my mom doesn't deserve it. ... I felt like [if] I had to leave her alone and [there is] no one to look after her and what if she gets hurt ...?

To illustrate to what extent the participant cares about her mother and have concern over her mother's well-being, she admitted to giving up cutting and by doing this she believes that she can further protect her mother from being hurt. She made this decision as she believes that her mother does not deserve to be hurt any further. The participant mentioned that she did not want her mother to witness how she (the participant) would hurt herself, *"... so I got other ways to like stop it ... I have had one of those elastic bands and I put it around my arm and started flicking myself because it still hurts so I [rather] started doing that."*

The participant further illustrated the extent to which parentification has become part of the relationship between her and her mother by mentioning the following:

"She [the mother] also had a boyfriend before him [current boyfriend] and I remember just always being very overprotective when she [went] out with friends or stuff like that and be like "ya mom be careful" and just um 'come home safely'. And the boyfriend she had before this one was always demanding and talking to her in a way he wanted to and the one day I just sat here and cracked and I just told him 'you better talk to my mom in a better way or you can just get up and leave'."

To take on the responsibility for a parent after a divorce seems to be a 'normal' reaction in light of the event. Wallerstein, Lewis and Blakeslee (2001:3) explain how often after a divorce the child takes on a caregiver role to the parent they see as the most weak in the relationship and worry the most about. When there has been a history of parental violence leading up to the divorce, overprotectiveness of the parent often takes place causing the child to have a need to safeguard that parent (Wallerstein *et al.*, 2001:87). Research specifically refers to the notion that adolescents are actually better able to put themselves in their mother's position. Therefore, according to Cunningham and Baker (2004:10), if their mother gets physically hit, many adolescents can envisage how she feels. The participant admitted to this by mentioning how when she saw her mother gets hurt that she, *"could almost feel the pain she [the mother] felt."*

4.2.2 Fear

Theorists, such as, Zinsmeister (1997:63) and Schoenfelder, Sandler, Wolchik and MacKinnon (2011:85) have conducted many studies about the fears of adolescents who have lost a parent, especially through divorce. Schoenfelder *et al.* (2011:87) and Zinsmeister (1997:63) explain that after parental divorce, adolescents specifically demonstrate fear of abandonment, and loss of love. Accompanied with these fears adolescents most often according to Hooper (2005:191) also fear about what will come in the future. This is often accompanied by grieving and feelings of rejection and fear of further rejection and loss.

Schoenfelder *et al.* (2011:91) in particular state that adolescents that have experienced abandonment issues are likely to experience psychological challenges, based primarily on the fear that the abandonment will recur. For example, the participant who felt abandoned by her father and who experienced a loss of trust in people struggled with her anger and fear that her friends and her boyfriend will also abandon her. The fear that her boyfriend in particular might also leave her (in other words fear of the repetition of loss), seems to be pertinent in her thoughts as she worries “... *that one day he (her boyfriend) is just going to decide he is just gonna go or just gonna leave or not stick around.*”

The participant's reaction to the fear of loss and love was to experience recurrent thoughts of the traumatic events that took place. She did not only dream of these events, but her fears resulted in her experiencing difficulty to concentrate in school and in an effort to avoid thinking of the trauma she hung out in the wrong peer groups, using drugs and coping with the pain by cutting.

4.2.2.1 *Repetition of loss*

Bowlby (1998:174) defines loss as a circumstance of losing someone or something that is in actual fact detrimental to the adolescent seeing that this person or entity, now absent, has or should occupy a key responsibility in the beneficial functioning of the adolescent.

Carnes (1997:24-26) explains trauma repetition as being something experienced by the sufferer to bring clarification to a traumatic memory. It is a way of handling old traumas, but as an alternative to solving the past, it generates new wounds, increasing the problem. From the sandtray scene (refer to Addendum E), it was revealed and expressed by the participant that she experienced fear due to the loss of a father and fear of losing friendships and more people in her life. The participant further explained that she fear the repetition of not only actual loss but also fear of further loss.

When taking Erikson's (1974:90) "psychosocial crisis" stages into account, each stage (as has also been referred to earlier) insists upon resolution before the individual can move forward successfully onto the next stage. If milestones are not reached in each stage, it often causes regression and the inability to achieve the proceeding developmental goals. Many studies, according to Kelly (2000:963), have shown that when and if this regression is present once an individual reaches the stage of adolescence, similar patterns are often chosen, such as to follow in response to the individual's experience of parental divorce. Carnes (in Eckes & Radunovich, 2007:1) sees these similar patterns as an individual who might be repeating traumas. When a typical reaction to trauma is present many symptoms can arise such as anxieties, fears, antisocial behaviour, sadness and fear of separation from loved ones.

The researcher agrees with Benokraitis' (2005:444) notion that one of the most important changes in an adolescent's life, when divorce and parental conflict is present, is the way the parents handle the situation and the guidance they offer. The researcher further agrees that if there was a more civilised handling of the divorce (Benokraitis, 2005:445), that there would be less likeliness for a repeat pattern of the grief and loss as well as less trauma and stress on the adolescent.

The participant shared how she has already experienced hurt by many people in her life which might be the reason why she does not open up to people easily as she believes they will just leave her like others have. During this discussion it seems as if the participant has come to a new awareness for not opening up to people when she mentioned that, *"I think [not being able to open up to people] has something to do with my trust issues."* During the discussion when the participant spoke about "the

rabbit” (refer to Addendum E) in the sand scene (representing her male friend), she seemed to recreate those feelings of sadness and fear of how she felt when her friend was “taken away” from her by her ex best friend. When discussing this event, the participant portrayed feelings of sadness and betrayal much like in her previous experiences of loss. She expressed:

I really miss him so bad but there's not much I can do about it. He was always there for me and was like one of the most important people in my life. Just makes me so sad.

The researcher noticed how similar the participant's stories were to her earlier story of her father leaving. The participant in her own exact words confirmed the researcher's observation by stating that it seemed that “history was repeating itself”. Carnes (1997:17-19) in this regard explains how presenting symptoms of trauma repetition similar to what the participant has experienced reflects on an incapacity to break a childhood pattern. An example would be how the participant over and over relives a “story” involving relationships from her past by engaging in comparable relationships repetitively. Incapacity to break a childhood pattern by engaging in comparable relationships repetitively seems to be the cause for the participant's ‘outcry’ for sustainable relationships when she mentions, “[I] just needed someone or something to be there. I needed someone to stay instead of just leave all the time.”

To some extent, trauma repetition is a determination by the sufferer to bring purpose to the trauma. By repeating the experience, the sufferer tries once again to find a way to react so that the fear can be removed. Instead it purely expands the traumatic wound. Repetition like shame can pull profoundly on the other types of traumatic effect, such as, reactivity, thwarting, splitting, and withdrawal (Carnes, 1997:17-19).

4.2.3 Loss of identity

Hawkins and Fackrell (2009:76-77) and explains that children accomplish the various developmental tasks related to psychological maturation only within the context of the adult-child relationship. Separation from or loss of parents due to divorce will therefore have a major impact on the psychological development and possibly also on the cognitive and physical development of children, which may result in identity

challenges (Hawkins & Fackrell, 2009:78; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002:112). Therefore, in order to be an autonomous adolescent, the adolescent would strive to fit in with their peer group (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002:112; Louw & Louw, 2007:330).

Peer group interaction delivers interpersonal interaction outside family relationships, stages a significant part in psychosocial development and promotes contentment of the adolescent's emotional needs (Louw & Louw, 2007:330). Therefore, it is the researcher's opinion that the only-child adolescent with a poor sense of identity and poor emotional gratification, will fall into the trap of peer pressures because of this loss of control. If certain dysfunctional behaviours are part of the peer group's conduct or if they are made to feel acknowledged by the peer group, there is a need to fit in and behave in such a way, in order to also have a sense of belonging (Hawkey & Cacioppo, 2009:987).

Oaklander (2007:86) explains that anger, loss and the sense of self/identity are linked together. The participant shared how she felt caught in the middle of her parents' conflict and the different rules of each home of her parents and the type of self she needs to be in each home. She expressed that she felt angry at her idea of "living two lives" because of her parents' continuous battles with one another and how they would argue about each other in front of the participant. The participant mentions how she was expected to understand how the divorce of her parents would proceed, yet that was never explained to her. She was furthermore expected to just continue living in one house one way and another house another way, causing her to, "*struggle to figure out who [I] wanna be.*" This struggle to 'place' herself brings the researcher to the notion of the lack of control the participant felt over her life and the experiences that took place surrounding her parents' divorce.

4.2.3.1 Loss of being in control

Wallerstein and Kelly (2008:34) mention that children (adolescents) have to adjust to many new locations, economic difficulties and conflicts during the process of divorce. It is further explained how the adjustment of the children does not only end with these adjustments but also to different behaviour and attitudes of parents to the child and the parents to each another in front of the child.

While observing the participant, she seemed to display a great deal of not being in control of her life, not knowing what to expect from the divorce as well as not having her parents communicate and discuss the process with her but rather tell her what to do one moment to the next.

With regards to these aspects the participant expressed her feelings of injustice and her struggle to adjust to the divorce and the process of communications and changes that took place. She further considered it to be unfair that, *“some people get the perfect life and [for] some people nothing ever bad happens ...”*, possibly indicating that those who never experience ‘bad’ things happening in their lives, have control over life events.

Blom (2006:107) and Oaklander (2006:570) describe how adolescents of divorced families, due to many different reasons, are often deprived of the chance to experience a sense of inner control and mastery. In the case of the participant she would more often than none feel as if she is being “thrown all around”. She would for instance explain how her parents would fight and then she would just be told to “get your stuff” and then the participant and her mother would leave. She explains her further confusion and lack of control as the *“next day we would go back or a few days after we would just go back.”* She could not comprehend what would happen from one day to the next as there was no consistency in her family life.

Hawkins and Fackrell (2009:81) highlights the fact that control and trust issues will continue to impact children and for the same reason adolescents’ behaviour, for as long as they experience that a large part of the decisions about life are out of their control. For the participant it seems to be especially true as she mentions that she feels, *“they (her parents) were in control of my life the whole time.”* Due to not experiencing having control over her life, she explains how she often could not get a grasp of who she was and who she was supposed to be from one home to the next. In this regard the participant mentioned the following:

... sometimes because I’m the only child and then I’m here and then I’m there and it feels I have to be two different people like when I’m with my mom and then when I’m with my dad I have to be a totally different person than when I’m here (with my mom).

The participant explains how she chose to interact with *“the wrong friends”* to gain control and to counteract the fighting that takes place over her and the decisions made for her by her parents. The participant seems to be experiencing some sort of control when she is with her friends by mentioning that, *“When I’m with my friends I can do what I want”*. The participant expressed how she was aware that the friends she chooses to spend time with were a bad influence on her and she very well knew that her parents did not approve of them. Yet it made her feel that she was free for a while of the dissimilar and confusing regulations her parents put on her. She disclosed how she finally had, *“... freedom to make my own choice”* with regards to whom she wanted to befriend. Lingnell and Dunn (1999:361) highlight how the approval from peers and strong friendships become crucial needs throughout adolescence, especially when the adolescent feels as though there are strict rules and regulations coming from the home. With regards to her friends the participant mentions how:

I just wanted to do something on my own without the control of them (the parents) and they telling me what to do all the time and they fighting over me and making me feel like it’s all my fault.

The participant explained that with her friends it felt easy and that she can be who she is and do what she wants to do. Being around her father on the other hand makes her feel as if she has no choices. She would for instance be made to go to him when she didn’t want to. She however has never been able to be honest with him as she does not feel she has enough inner strength to express to her father when she did not want to visit him. Her friends and poor choices on the other hand allowed her to feel free from her ‘powerless’ life as an only-child adolescent going through parental divorce.

When an adolescent is deprived of control in their family milieu they will often find power through one or other behaviour approaches (Blom, 2006:106). Some adolescents also seem to become reliant upon extreme stimuli, to give the sense that they are alive, and can pursue high-risk undertakings as a way of reaching control.

Intensified alcohol intake, as means of reducing pressure and deadening feelings of hardship, is a reaction created among adolescence (Dyregrov, 2010:52).

TABLE 4.2: Main theme 2: Experience pressure due to being an only child

THEMES	SUB-THEMES	CATEGORIES
EXPERIENCE PRESSURE DUE TO BEING AN ONLY CHILD	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Pressure caused by the burden of being an only child	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Experience feelings of loneliness and isolation• Unrealistic expectations from parents
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Induced pressure resulting in coping mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cutting

4.3 EXPERIENCE PRESSURE DUE TO BEING AN ONLY CHILD

When being an only-child in the family schema, there seems to be a need to make parents satisfied. Pickhardt (2012:1) explains this as an intensified wish to please parents and make them proud. On the other hand, there can be an intense fear of disappointing them, as only-child adolescents feel they are not living up to parental expectations, and in the process becoming disappointed in themselves. When faults occur and problems arise and parental expectations are not met, only-child adolescents can be tough on themselves as they struggle so hard to satisfy assumed parental anticipations (Pickhardt, 2012:1).

4.3.1 Pressure caused by the burden of being an only-child

In the case of the only-child adolescent, they are most frequently the centre of attention (Adler, 1932:154) and often search for support from others as they have no one else to turn to. The participant in this regard mentioned the following: *“All the attention is on me and I don’t like that so much because when my mom gets mad ... it’s always my fault and nobody to back me up.”*

Pickhardt (2010:19) explains that because the only-child does not have siblings to learn from they observe their parents and mimic their behaviour thus growing up

quicker than that of an adolescent child that grows up with siblings. An only-child in the family often takes responsibilities upon themselves to be perfect, to be the best and to accomplish for that much needed approval from their parents as there is no sibling to be likened to (Pickhardt, 2010:19-20).

The participant expressed that when looking at her friends with siblings she notices how *“different they are”* to her in their actions and ability to share and even interact socially with friends. She further reflected on the burden she carries by being an only-child adolescent in a divorce situation. She for instance explain how the environment within her family made her feel at *“fault and attacked by them [her parents]”* as well as *“not being perfect or good enough.”* These feelings reinforced her wish to have a sibling with which she can share her experiences and not to have all her parents’ expectations upon herself. With regards to the continuous parental conflict and fighting, the participant also explained how by having a sibling she may have felt not as distressed, as she would have had someone to confide in and go through this process with.

4.3.1.1 Experience feelings of loneliness and isolation

Gleason (2014:1) puts forth the many reasons of adolescent loneliness and the ones applicable to the present study involve aspects such as, losing a friend or loved one and recent parental divorce or separation. These reasons can trigger feelings of loneliness or isolation especially for an only-child adolescent as they already tend to feel different from their peers. In the case of the participant she expressed that, *“None of my friends that I had at that point had gone through anything like that so I didn’t have anyone to talk to ...”* It became evident that experiencing feelings of loneliness and isolation for the participant was not only about the loneliness of being an only child, but also due to the fact that none of her friends have experienced parental divorce, and on top of being an only child, there was no one to talk to.

From the discussions it was evident that not having a sibling to share her experiences with was a huge issue for the participant – almost as if the presence of a sibling would have ‘halved’ her problems. The participant for instance kept on mentioning that how *“people that have siblings always have someone to talk to”* and

that she felt depressed by not having a sibling and having to be on her own. When asking the participant how she would have felt if there was a sibling around she responded; *“I think it really is a different experience than when you have brothers and sisters. And you always have someone to talk to and play with ...”*

Wallerstein and Lewis (2004:360) further shed light on the adolescent's feelings of loneliness. In their study it showed that almost all the participants going through parental divorce felt a sense of loneliness, caused by feeling different from their peers and struggling to feel a sense of belonging. The study showed that the participants tended to withdraw as they feel they have no one to help them through the process of the grievance that the divorce brings (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004:366). In the case of the participant she revealed that:

It would have been better to have the experience with a sibling and feel that somebody understands because with me I feel a lot of the time that nobody understands what I'm going through and I have to do all these things alone and figure it out for myself.

The participant further mentioned that if she had had a sibling or someone to share her burdens with, she would not feel that all the attention and pressure fall on her shoulders. Kennedy and Volling (2009:1495) and Mueller and Vandell (1995:181) highlight a valuable point by stating that sibling relationships, in general, from birth through old age can act as a favourable role in growing stronger capabilities of social interactions that last a lifetime. It would be particularly true during stressful situations such as the participant has endured. Therefore, it became apparent how the participant felt at fault for the conflicts that went on in the family environment and how she wished she had a sibling to almost 'divide' the fault she felt. During the discussion the participant expressed that:

I think there would have been somebody to help me and understand that it's not only my fault. Because I always felt it's my fault why they got a divorce. And they fight only about me and for me. And if there was a sibling I would have understood ...

Ramsey (1991) explains how children who feel lonely due to parental divorce experience poor peer relationships and therefore often become bullied or picked on for being different than peers with solid friendships. This can also cause sadness and boredom, which can give rise to negative undertakings in order to gain attention.

The participant shared that experienced pressures at school and peer rejection due to especially *“high school rumours”* going around about her, caused her to feel further alone and isolated in her experiences. The participant further discussed how the rumours about her were often surrounding *“decisions”* she would make which made her feel *“judged”* and *“not accepted”* by her peers. The participant’s experience of loneliness and isolation was in particular expressed in the sand scene (refer to Addendum E) that she made. The participant set up her sand scene by making herself isolated on the side, almost ‘sinking in the sand’.

Loneliness is a substantial issue that can predispose adolescents to immediate and long term negative consequences (Cassidy & Asher, 1992:350-352). It seems further evident that adolescents’ relationships with their family may influence how deeply they can feel lonely. Research in this regard by MacEvoy and Asher (2009:991) proposes that early family relationships may be responsible for a vital footing for how children feel later on in their lives, such as in their adolescent years, as well as how they experience other forms of relationships. In the case of the participant, her early years were unsettled and she experienced it as being alone and confused.

4.3.1.2 *Unrealistic expectations from parents*

Jeynes (2002:41) reveals how divorce has a large impact on the school going child’s academic performance and often an inability to focus in classes. This might be a reason why the participant often found herself having difficulty with her school work and felt that she was unable to keep up in class like her fellow peers. She further explained how both parents gave her a ‘hard time’ when it came to her grades and the anticipations they had for her to do better. The participant disclosed how her father in particular was extremely strict when it came to her school marks. She for instance felt she was under a lot of pressure from him and mentions that her marks were never good enough. She explained how she was *“trying to do the best”* she could, *“... yet it did not feel good enough.”* The participant might have experienced her parents’ expectations as specifically unfair as these expectations of her were expected while there already were major marital problems between her parents.

The participant further shares how she experienced it as that her mother technically does not *“understand what I’m going through at the moment with school and being a teenager ...”* She also revealed the pressure she feels she is under, not only in her day to day life of being an adolescent and all that that phase brings, but also by her parents’ high hopes and expectations of her. It further became evident that the participant had a strong sense that she was a disappointment and not good enough for her parents. This she expressed was hard as she was the only child and felt pressurised to do everything even although she often felt that it was not fair or appropriate to expect that from an adolescent.

The participant not only felt pressurised by her parents but also seems to put a lot of pressure on herself. She for instance believes that due to the fact that she is the only child she needs to be: *“... perfect and has to be everything.”* The way in which the participant expressed herself seems to indicate how much pressure she was under not only to be the only child but the liability and the responsibility she feels within herself because there is not another sibling for her parents to focus on.

From the discussion it seems as though the participant was expected to deal with certain incidences and experiences that were far beyond her years in age. There probably could be many reasons for the unrealistic expectations that her parents had, of which one could be that they, from an academic point of view, wanted their child to excel in school, not taking into account the influence that their marital problems had on their only-child adolescent daughter. The other reason might be that they were oblivious of their child’s needs, focussing only on their own needs and worries.

4.3.2 Induced pressure resulting in coping mechanisms

The authors, Mortola (2006:59) and Spagnuolo Lobb (2005:27) define the self as a complex system of contacts that enable the organism to self-regulate in various different situations in the environment in order to achieve optimal growth and development. Blom (2006:102), Mortola (2006:59) and Oaklander (2006:52), explain how change in an adolescent’s life is inescapable, yet when there is conflict it generates misperceptions about their self-perception and impeding personal growth.

Gestalt theorists' objective is to work through the difficulties that develop as a result of contact boundary disturbances of their clients such as, introjection, projection, retroflection, deflection, and confluence, as these mechanisms form instabilities amid belief and action and thwart positive assimilation of the self (Polster, 2005:54).

Oaklander (1994:143) explains that while contact boundary disturbances exist, the adolescent is forced to use coping strategies that are not always positive, in order to integrate with those whom the adolescent is in contact with. When only-child adolescents are unable to make contact with the environment, they often feel stuck, creating a stressful situation for themselves. The adolescent therefore needs to find out how they are inhibiting themselves from recognising their boundless possibilities; they need to come to be mindful of their obstructions (Corey, 1996:27). Oaklander (2006:23) explains that the behavioural manifestations of a dysfunction is often called resistance, being the adolescent's way of coping and attempting to survive the world as best they can. Resistance also aids the adolescent in being able take care of themselves as well as trying to see the world in a way that it has been offered to them by their 'role models'. In the case of the participant she revealed that:

A while ago I started coping with like cutting myself and like having the wrong friends and like doing stuff I'm not supposed to. I like have experimented with drugs, not a lot, but it got too heavy but I felt like they [her parents] pushed me around a lot and I have to have two lives ...

Blom (2004:21) goes further to say that adolescents that employ these coping mechanisms are powerless of objectivity and therefore attempt to take in others' thoughts and opinions. With regard to this study the researcher believes that the contact boundary disturbances employed by the participant should be seen as a portrayal of the process she is in.

4.3.2.1 Cutting

Adolescents are infamous for formulating extremely unhelpful acts of self-expression in their adolescent years. Drug abuse, drinking and other adverse behaviours seem to arise during this developmental phase (Plante, 2007:1). The participant expressed her curiosity to drugs and the idea of experimenting in a way of expressing her

feelings of powerlessness over her parents' divorce and unpleasant relationship. Carroll (2009:465) explains that while adolescents watch their parents struggle with hardships, they (the adolescents) often keep their personal suffering to themselves, often increasing their segregation. Yet when given the amount of difficulties, it is not unexpected that divorce is related with great troubles in the changes among adolescents (Emery, 1999:36).

According to Walker (2006:33), the need an adolescent has to repress agonising thoughts and feelings is often referred to as the ultimate goal of self-harm, which release endorphins causing a sense of relief, such as cutting. Cutting was a form of coping that the participant expressed helped her take her mind off what she was experiencing with her parents' constant battles around her and one another. She further explained that by cutting it helped her focus on the pain she felt on the outside as opposed to the pain she felt on the inside which took her to a place of feeling calm and in more control of her emotions. Walker (2006:33-34) further explains how self-harm is often taken on as a means of lessening painful emotions, securing the help of others, rejecting negative parts of the adolescent, or striving toward greater self-control, self-sufficiency, and independence. As obstinate as it may seem, cutting is done by many adolescents in a grave need to defeat and relieve the suffering associated with normative encounters. Though cutting is undoubtedly a destructive way of reaching these goals, the profitable nature of this objective must not be discounted. The participant in this regard shared that:

... sometimes I would just sit on me bed and it wasn't like a complete black out but I would lose control of what I was doing and then the next moment when I would realise what I was doing I was sitting with a pair of scissors in my hand and I was just crying.

The participant further shared how she often thinks of the violence she witnessed towards her mother and how she would do anything to take the pain and memories away. Cutting she mentioned *"... would almost half take away my pain inside of me and I would just concentrate on my arm hurting so badly so I would forget about it."* The power of cutting to relieve pain leaves many adolescents disinclined to stop it. The adolescent who is overcome with anger, sadness, pining, self-hatred, or many other emotions generally turn to cutting as a way of transferring internal pain into a

somatic act that they can control (Franklin, Aaron, Arthur, Shorkey, & Prinstein, 2012:691).

Prior studies have connected self-injury to discrepancies in handling emotions metaphorically via semantics. Emotional pain miraculously converting into physical pain, which the adolescent feels, can then be controlled. This kind of thought pattern correlates with the notion that cutting disposes of internal suffering, therefore by visually seeing the blood and focusing on the external pain is a means of gaining power over unpleasant feelings experienced (Gregory & Mustata, 2012:1045; Plante, 2007:4). The outcomes advocate that magical thinking signifies a pre-symbolic psychological condition that develops and systematises distressing emotions by means of bodily schema. Magical thinking consequently delivers a conceivable mechanism for why cutting succeeds (Gregory & Mustata, 2012:1046).

The researcher believes, after analysing the data, that the breakup of a family system and the grief and loss the participant experienced, is possibly one of the toughest experiences for an adolescent to surmount. The researcher is further in agreement with Bosch (2005:33) who affirms that the adjustment after divorce and the experience of it is irrepressible.

4.4 SUMMARY

In this chapter the researcher discussed the various results found in the study. These results were discussed under the themes, sub-themes and categories that the researcher had identified and which also reflected that which the researcher felt was pertinent to the outcomes of this study. The next chapter will focus on the integrated summary of the study, conclusions and recommendations from both the researcher and the participant.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTEGRATED SUMMARY OF THE STUDY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The goal of this chapter is to put forth the summary of the findings, conclusions and recommendations based on the data gathered and outcomes of this study. The aim of this study was to explore and describe the only-child adolescent's lived experience of parental divorce. The study was undertaken in order to come to a deeper understanding of the experiences of parental divorce for an only-child adolescent so as to make recommendations to social workers, psychologists and counsellors working within the field of family studies. It is also hoped that parents will gain an awareness of the experience of the only-child adolescent in parental divorce.

Data was gathered by means of two face-to-face in-depth interviews and through the lens of Gestalt field and phenomenological theory.

5.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The only-child adolescent in parental divorce experiences feelings associated with grief and bereavement. It involves feelings such as anger, fear and a loss of identity. Of these feelings the participant felt more anger at the loss of her childhood, being caught in-between her parents' conflict as well as the role-reversal she felt took place with her mother. Due to the domestic violence that the participant witnessed she started to see her mother as helpless and vulnerable, therefore not one that is able to fend for herself or to support the participant. This can often turn to a care-taking role reversal such as mother and child in this case. The anger and fear that the participant felt furthermore channelled from the participant's discussion of the repetition of loss of loved ones, stemming from her earliest childhood memory of the loss of her father.

Loss of control was also found to be prominent for the only-child adolescent experienced parental loss. The participant experienced that she was never informed or had the matters surrounding the divorce discussed with her. Further on, certain demands and expectations were put on the participant and as a result she also experienced a loss of mastery. This coincides with previous literature which explains that adolescents of divorced families often feel deprived of that sense of control.

The participant also experienced pressure due to being an only child. Outcomes also showed that the only-child adolescent takes on the burden of being the only one who continuously receives attention and scrutiny from parents as there is no sibling to share this encumbrance with when problems arose. The continuous attention that the participant received was experienced as stressful specifically pertaining to her school work as her parents, and her father in particular, expected her to perform in school. She felt that this expectation was unfair against the backdrop of the marital problems that already existed between her parents and the stress that it caused for her being an only child.

Another burden that the only-child adolescent carries is that of feeling the need to support or side with one parent. This corresponds with current research explaining how parents often speak negatively about one another in the presence of the only-child adolescent. This sentiment of being put in the middle was something the participant did not want, yet experienced none the less. The participant also experienced a feeling of loneliness and isolation within her family setting. This is on the one hand partly due to the fact that she is an only child with no siblings and on the other hand due to the fact that her parents are so involved in dealing with their own feelings with regard to the divorce. She therefore experienced their involvement as almost non-existing.

In order to deal with all the pressure and to try and regain control over her life and to cope with the emotional pain, the participant started to induce self-harm by cutting herself. It was found that by cutting the participant felt that the physical pain took over the emotional pain, thereby she was able to experience relief and to take control over her life.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

Being an only-child adolescent in parental divorce seems to be very difficult and stressful. Add domestic violence and marital conflict to the scenario then it becomes understandable that an only-child adolescent might induce self-harm like cutting in order to cope with the situation.

From the findings it became evident that the most outstanding experiences that the participant shared revolved around her anger and fear and feeling lonely and isolated. It seems sad that amidst all the turmoil that the family system endeavoured, that the only-child adolescent was available to support and protect her mother, but that she (the participant) did not experience any care and comfort from either parent. This correlates with research and literature which highlight the fact that parents in a divorce situation are often so enmeshed with their own feelings of hurt, loss and anger that they tend to forget to attend to the feelings of their offspring. Should one take the philosophy of attachment theory into mind then it might be that a trusting relationship between the participant and her parents might be lacking as the participant lacks an experience of nurture from both her parents.

Even although it might be said that siblings in situations like these will support and comfort each other, they also on the other hand have to deal with and adjust to their new situation. The only-child adolescent in this study, however, almost seems to view the presence of a sibling as the answer to all her problems and needs. It seems as if the presence of a sibling would have resulted in her not being and feeling lonely and isolated, and not having to experience so much stress and pressure.

It is interesting that the participant in this regard (the presence of someone else to share the burden of the parental divorce with) did not once refer to the possibility of the presence of any other significant person to whom she could talk/share her concerns with. The reason behind this is not clear, but this fact almost sets the stage for realising just how lonely and isolated the participant must have felt in having to experience a parental divorce as an only-child adolescent.

The researcher realises that most of the aspects mentioned in the discussion, might be applicable to other scenarios where an only-child has to deal with parental divorce, like unrealistic expectations and demands put onto the only child and no one

to talk or share specific feelings with. However, not all parental divorce involves domestic violence or situations where the only-child adolescent is not being informed regarding the parental divorce or is being expected to take on responsibilities that should in actual fact not be expected from a child. The findings in this research could therefore only partly be generalisable to other similar situations.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are based on the findings of the study regarding the only-child adolescent's lived experience of parental divorce. These recommendations are directed to social workers, psychologists and counsellors working in the field of family therapy as well as to parents of an only-child adolescent who find themselves in a divorce situation.

5.4.1 Recommendations by the participant

The reason the researcher chose to acquire recommendations by the participant, was because of the very reason she accented to do the study. The participant felt so strongly about how traumatic her experience was that she did not want anyone else to have to endure what she had. She recommended that:

- Parents should not fight or physically assault one another or say unkind things about each other in the presence of their children.
- Parents must know this is their fight not the child's fight and they should not have to experience adults' problems.
- Parents must be more aware that the child is also going through things of their own during parental divorce and they should be more aware not only of their own well-being and needs, but also of those of their only-child adolescent.

- Parents should realise that they still have parental duties to fulfil with regard to protecting their child from not having to be exposed to information that a child should not have any access to.

5.4.2 Recommendations by the researcher

- Professionals working in the field of strength in families, need to familiarise themselves with this vulnerable population and have a vast knowledge of the different dimensions associated with being an only child. This involves aspects such as their fear of loss, their sense of identity and external pressures they are experiencing apart from the actual divorce. Professionals also need to familiarise themselves with the possible ways in which an only child might choose to cope in their current situation. They must also be able to assist the only-child adolescent in finding constructive and sustainable coping mechanisms which can support them not only in their current situation, but with other life crises that they also might have to deal with.
- Professionals must be able to help the only child to find a trustworthy person to share their problems with and aid them with identifying whom such person could be (ie: a teacher, friend of parent, councillor etc).
- Parents should be sensitive and knowledgeable to the needs of their only-child adolescent as well as realise that when these needs are not being met that potential coping mechanisms might be taken on in order to brave.
- Parents should be aware of the impact of their response towards each other and their children as divorce is a sensitive situation and amidst the turmoil it should not be expected of an only-child adolescent to have to choose sides. Parents should also take into account that it will be more helpful if they inform their adolescent child about what is going to happen with regards to their

separation, rather than believing that it will be in their child's best interest not to share such detail with them. Parents should further keep in mind that the harmful influence that the divorce has on their only-child adolescent has to be taken on alone as there is no sibling to share this with. Parents should further be mindful of the external pressures their only-child adolescent is going through. This involves the specific developmental stage of adolescence and the impact that it has on an adolescent, such as school and peer pressures.

- Parents should be aware of the fact that they as well as their only-child adolescent might need professional help in order to deal with their current situation and must be willing to pursue such possibilities.

5.5 FUTURE RESEARCH

In terms of future research, the following recommendations are made:

- Only one participant was used in this study, therefore it could be used as an introductory point for future research that has not yet been explored in order to generalise and research a larger group of participants. If more is known about this overlooked population's lived experience of parental divorce, interventions may be targeted more effectively to accommodate their particular needs.
- According to the researcher there needs to be far more current research done on not only the only-child adolescent but on the only child in general. The focus of such research could be on a larger population as opposed to a single case. Research could also be done on the experience of not only the only-child adolescent but also the parents of the only child.
- A future study could also include the lived experience of only-child adolescents from multi-cultural backgrounds as this would add an extra

dimension to the study of potential differences in results of participants from other socio-economic backgrounds as well as religious backgrounds.

- Including professionals working in the field of parental divorce in a study and get their viewpoints on the challenges they feel the only-child adolescent might face, will not only add a professional opinion to the knowledge base but might also add credibility to studies involving the experiences of only children (adolescents) in parental divorce.

5.6 FINAL COMMENTS

The researcher is of the opinion that the study provided new insight into the only-child adolescent's lived experience of parental divorce. The researcher further asserts that the goal of the study was met adequately, as well as attempting to adhere to ethical conduct throughout the study and pursued to ensure that the study was trustworthy. The researcher furthermore believes that this knowledge offers a foundation for further studies to take place and that the conclusions reached in this study may also aid professionals working with these children as well as parents of these children. The researcher hopes that the findings of this study will be put to good use, and make a difference in relation to the understanding and experience of the only-child adolescent dealing with parental divorce.

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ADDENDUM A: CONSENT FORM



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
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Consent for parents:

Title of research: The only-child adolescent's lived experience of parental divorce.

The purpose of this study is for the researcher to explore only-child adolescents' lived experience of parental divorce. If more information is known about this population group, interventions may be targeted more effectively to accommodate their particular needs.

My name is Dayle Hayley Dorfman, and I am a Masters student in Social work. I will be conducting this study.

The data collection method will be done through a one-on-one interview session with your child. Aspects such as privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of the adolescent and the information they share will be respected at all times during this research. By doing this the researcher will be the only one to analyse the data captured during the interviews, assuring that the identity of your child would not be disclosed by using numbers instead of names in the written research. The interview will take place at the organisation where I was put into contact with you. If he/she does not want to take part in this study or feel uncomfortable for any reason during the interview they are free to leave.

Reply to consent:

Have you read the information provided above? YES/NO

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions about the study? YES/NO

Have you received satisfactory answers to your questions? YES/NO

Have you received enough information about the study? YES/NO

Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study?

• At anytime YES/NO

• Without having to provide a reason YES/NO

Do you agree to take part in this study? YES/NO

Name of participant _____

Signature _____

Date _____

ADDENDUM B: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

TITLE: The only-child adolescent's lived experience of parental divorce.

Thank you for being prepared to do these interviews with me.

As mentioned when we met the aim of the study is to explore the only-child adolescent's lived experiences of parental divorce. I would therefore like to learn from you and the experiences you have had with regards to being an only-child adolescent of parental divorce. You are also seen as the expert of your experiences so there are no right or wrong answers or responses in your story.

QUESTION 1

What has your experience been like as an only child?

QUESTION 2

Can you tell me about your experience of being an only-child adolescent, experiencing parental divorce?

Probing questions:

How did you react when informed by your parents of the divorce?

How often do you see your other parent/if you see them at all?

How do you experience your relationship with your parents since the divorce?

How are you finding the divorce process since the divorce was finalised?

What changes took place and how did it affect you?

How did this affect your school work?

How did your relationships with your friends change and/or become affected?

Who supported you during the divorce process and did you seek help?

In your experience how would the presence of a sibling have helped support you during this process, and why?

What was/is your experience of who was and/or is the most helpful to you during this time?

Who supported you during the divorce process and did you seek help?

Does either of your parents have a boyfriend, girlfriend or have gotten remarried since and how do you experience this change?

Do you see them and what is your experience of them “joining” in your life?

What is your experience of your relationship with them? (Only ask if this does not come up)

Can you tell me in your experience if there are characteristics that you feel make you different as an only child than those with siblings?

In your experience how would the presence of a sibling have helped support you during this process, and why?

Can you tell me about the coping mechanisms you may have used during this time?

Research suggests that not having a sibling to share the experience with had negative effects – what is your viewpoint on this?

QUESTION 3

What would you as an only child adolescent of parental divorce recommend to others in your position?

Are there any questions from your side you may have or anything more you would like to share?

Thank you for talking to me today and I look forward to seeing you next week for our follow up interview.

ADDENDUM C: VERBATIM INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

TITLE: The only-child adolescent's lived experience of parental divorce.

R: Thank you for being prepared to do these interviews with me.

As mentioned when we met the aim of the study is to explore the only-child adolescent's lived experiences of parental divorce. I would therefore like to learn from you and the experiences you have had with regards to being an only-child adolescent of parental divorce. You are also seen as the expert of your experiences, so there are no right or wrong answers or responses in your story.

R: Can you first begin by telling me what your experience has been like as an only child? And as an only-child adolescent?

P: Um it was more about for people that have siblings or something you always have someone to talk to and stuff like that. And it was more about being on my own and was more like the attention was just on me and if I did something really wrong the attention was all on me and stuff like that. And I had to play on my own. I think it really is a different experience than when you have brothers and sisters. And you always have someone to talk to and play with and to learn how to share. To be honest I struggled with sharing.

R: Even to this day?

P: Yes. I try but it's different.

R: Can you maybe tell me some of the stories in your life of being an only child and an adolescent that have impacted you in anyway?

P: Sometimes it's um really alone. All the attention is on me and I don't like that so much because then if my mom gets like mad then it is all on me and it's always my fault and nobody to back me up.

R: And with your dad?

P: Um with my dad it's more like he wants everything from me. More like pressuring me because I am the only child and then I have to be everything and do everything

right and always feel like I have to try and do the best and everything because I'm scared he is gonna then like get mad or stuff like that or I'll be disappointment cause I'm like the only child and it's not like anyone else gets forced to do something.

R: So in what you are saying do you feel that maybe you have the pressure to be perfect at all.

P: Ya. It's more like that because there isn't another child that they are gonna like um, because I am the only child so I have to be the only one that is perfect and has to be everything and do everything.

R: Okay. Thank you for sharing that. How about if you can tell me a bit about your experience as an only child adolescent with the divorce and how that affected you?

P: Um. It's pretty hard because I feel like I am being thrown all around like umm one moment I'm here then I'm there. It's sometimes it gets alone because my parents fight all the time and like it's always like they try to like ... they want me to choose between them. It feels like that sometimes because I'm the only child and then I'm here and then I'm there and it feels I have to be two different people like when I'm with my mom and then when I'm with my dad I have to be a totally different person than when I'm here.

R: How do you have to be when you're with your mom?

P: With my mom is more like ugh like I am more myself with my mom. My friends have also told me when I'm with my mom I'm more me. I'm like a very hyper person, I'm a very happy person, I say what I want in my mom's house and she's like my best friend. And when I'm with my dad it's more like strict and I have to be like prim and proper and there is no saying what I want. It's doing what he wants me to do. So I don't feel myself when I'm there.

R: So how does that make you feel and what must that be like for you?

P: It makes me angry and when I'm with my dad on weekends and I come back like on a Monday to my mom's house I'm always like grumpy. I dunno I struggle to figure out who I wanna be because when I come back from my dad I'm always like I'm not happy at my dad's house because I can't be the happy hyper person there like when I'm here. So I have to struggle to get myself back again when I'm here and then me

and my mom fight a lot cause she tells me I'm such a different person when I come from there and I dunno how to deal with it. And I get mad because I have to get my clothes ready and then I forget stuff because I'm here and then I'm there. It's like two different worlds and two different lives.

R: Yes. Where do you primarily live?

P: I live at my mom's house.

R: So how often do you see your dad?

P: Um, every second weekend. So he picks me up on a Friday and then he drops me off on Mondays.

R: Do you have clothes there or do you pack each time?

P: I just pack every time. It gets frustrating.

R: Yes, I can hear. And you said the readjustment of coming back home to your mom and the fighting, is that because of the person you say you have to be at your dad or now the person you have to come back to being?

P: Yes, it's very difficult cause I have to try figure out who I wanna be. Because at my mom's house we're best friends, we talk about everything, we do everything together and at my dad's house I struggle to share things with my mom and struggle to talk to her. It's a big difference with the communication. At my dad's house there isn't really any communication there's just like you do it his way because there isn't any other way. So I struggle to communicate with my mom here.

R: How do you cope with that?

P: Um, a while ago I started coping with like cutting myself and like having the wrong friends and like doing stuff I'm not supposed to. I like have experimented with drugs, not a lot, but it got too heavy but I felt like they pushed me around a lot and I have to have two lives almost and when I'm with my friends I can do what I want and I just wanted somebody to, I just wanted to do something on my own without the control of them and they telling me what to do all the time and they fighting over me and making me feel like it's all my fault.

P: You said you got involved with the wrong friends. Were these new friends that you made before or after the divorce?

R: Um, in the beginning I was very quiet about it and I didn't know how to deal with it and I always felt like now that they're divorced I have to look after my mom because who else is gonna do it. And I'm like the only child so I want to look after her and protect her because when I'm gone who is going to look after her. That why I always, I didn't want to go to my dad's house a while ago. Um, but I started going again but I didn't want to go because then I felt like I had to leave her alone and no one to look after her and what if she gets hurt and it's really sad for me because my dad wasn't always there when I grew up and basically my mom was always there and now I feel like why do I have to go when he was never there? Like why love me now when it felt like he didn't love me back then? And made friends because when I got to high school everything changed because it's a big adjustment. And I made friends and then I felt like it wasn't really like, like I got bored if I can say it in that way. And so I knew these people that like um that they smoked and I started to getting to know them better and I started to smoke too and drink and I would tell my mom "no but it's what I wanna do now" but I never told her what we did at these parties, but it didn't, but um I felt like I was in control of that and they were in control of my life the whole time.

R: How did it make you feel when you were drinking and smoking? What did it do for you?

P: I felt like I fit in somewhere and with my mom and dad I was always like in the middle being thrown around. And there with my friends I felt like I can do something that was my choice. I found myself sometimes where I would just sit on my bed and it wasn't like a complete black out but I would lose control of what I was doing and then the next moment when I would realise what I was doing I was sitting with a pair of scissors in my hand and I was just crying and I didn't know what to do anymore because it felt like um. When I look at my dad I don't see a father figure. I just see the person who I can remember when I was little for hitting my mom and all the bruises on her and I would get so mad when I looked at him and I just like my mom doesn't deserve it. And I'm not saying it's all his fault but I'm saying it's not fare for doing that in front of me cause I have to live with that for the rest of my life now and I

don't think its fair for my mom going through that. And so then I would just, it would almost half take away my pain inside of me and I would just concentrate on my arm hurting so badly so I would forget about it.

R: So are you saying that it felt like it was taking your emotional pain away and putting the pain in your hand?

P: Yes.

R: And did that feel like a release for you?

P: Yes, because I would concentrate on that more from the burn and I would forget about all the stuff that happened.

R: Are you still cutting currently?

P: Well no, because the one day I just sat and told my mom about it and I showed her and I just saw the fright in her face and I think she was a bit disappointed too. And then I decided that it's not fair. Why does she have to go through this again and see me get hurt? So I got other ways to like stop it 'cause I have had one of those elastic bands and I put it around my arm and started flicking myself because it still hurts, so I started doing that.

R: And in that way do you feel your mom couldn't see you getting hurt?

P: Ya.

R: So do you feel that once again you were doing this to protect your mom?

P: Ya, I feel that it's not supposed to be my job to feel I'm supposed to protect her. I don't mind. I just feel it's unfair because all the other kids have their own lives and go places and see their friends and not deal with the kind of stuff I deal with.

R: Thank you for sharing all this stuff with me.

P: No problem.

R: Can I ask how you reacted when you first found out your parents were getting divorced? Did you know why?

P: I was in grade 4 so I always thought that the way they were acting and fighting and hitting my mom, I always thought that was just the way it was supposed to be. And I wouldn't think that they were gonna get a divorce because I always thought that that is how it was supposed to be for as long as I remember. And one day my parents just, we sat down and they told me they're getting a divorce and I was like "whats a divorce?" I didn't understand and all I could remember was my mom crying and crying and my dad just got up and left like he always did. So I just remember my mom told me "just get your stuff". And I couldn't understand because a lot of the times when I was little they would fight and my mom would tell me and just put my bag on her bed and I would know to just pack my toys and um clothes and then we would leave and the next day we would go back or a few days after we would just go back. So I thought okay well we just gonna go back and we, my mom, we drove to my grandpa's house and we got there and he took his stuff and he left. And we stayed there. And I couldn't understand why aren't we going back and every time we drove past my dad's house she would just start crying and crying and I started crying too. I didn't fully understand why she was crying but I started crying because I saw her cry. And I almost felt that I could almost feel the pain she felt. But eventually we never went back and I started understanding that this is the way it's gonna be now and that um I never went to my dad but a few times he would come to our house. The one night he tried to break into our house because he wanted to take me away from my mom and I just woke up and there was, the one window was broken and he was trying to come into our house. I just remember my mom was standing there like pots in her hands and screaming for him to get out because she wouldn't let him take me. And I think that I didn't want to go with him because why would I go to someone who is hurting my mom so much and she basically raised me and he was never there. I wouldn't want to go to him because he just was never there. Why would I go to someone that is trying to take me in a way like that?!

R: How do you carry that with you a few years later and having to go see him every second weekend?

P: I um got to a point where he was trying to go to court and take me away from my mom permanently. And my mom just sat down with me and told me that um she doesn't want me to go but she doesn't have a choice because I have to go now. And then I started going to his house and I just distanced myself and I just remember the

first day I went to him he took me to a woman's house and we slept over there and I just felt like how can you take me to a woman's house when he hurt my mother so badly and now we're here at this woman's house. Why is he trying to get me another mother or something in that way? And I was mad at him 'cause I just didn't want to see him with someone else but I didn't want to see him with my mom either.

R: That sounds like it must have been hard for you?

P: Yes, it was.

R: Did you know why your parents got divorced? Did they ever explain that to you?

P: My mom never quite told me but obviously as I got grade 6, grade 7 I started asking questions and um so I just found out that he had like several women in life while him and my mother was married and they just didn't get along that well anymore so I just accepted that that was all that happened. But when I got to high school I started getting dreams and nightmares and of things that I thought I couldn't remember and so things that I saw when I was little I started dreaming and remembering again. And that's when all the cutting started and being depressed and just fighting with my mom a lot because I couldn't understand how they could do this to me.

R: Did you become depressed?

P: Yes, I was supposed to go on depression pills but my mom said she thinks it's better if I didn't go on them because she didn't want me to get like addicted to it.

R: How is your relationship with each of your parents now, since the divorce?

P: Um, my relationship with my mom, it's like

P: Um, my relationship with my mom is like you can't always be happy because here and there you are gonna fight and not get along that well but I get along with my mom really well and we have a good communication.

R: Do you still feel the need you have to take care of her or has that subsided a bit?

P: I still wanna always still be there because I think she deserves someone. I just wanna make sure nothing like that ever happens to her again and with my dad if I had the choice I don't think I would go to him on weekends because I hate it there.

R: Have things gotten at all better since?

P: I know that he is trying. For his sake I am trying to just keep the peace just between him and my mom but I really don't like it there because um he got married again and um the woman she has twins, a boy and a girl.

R: Okay, and how old are they?

P: They are 6 now. So I've adjusted but I don't feel like it's my house. It feels like I go to a stranger's house just for the weekend and just live there. In my dad's house I feel almost scared to just open the cupboard because I'm hungry no or I don't wanna open the fridge because it feels like I'm being rude. It just feels like a stranger's house.

R: So what do you do there?

P: I just do stuff without them seeing me. When I want something to eat or something to drink I just do it quick without them seeing because I feel that it's not my house so I'm not supposed to be scratching in cupboards or stuff like that. And at my mom's house it's just a normal house where you can open the cupboards and eat something.

R: How long have you been going to your dad every second weekend?

P: Um I went till the beginning of grade 8. From the beginning of grade 5 to grade 8 and then in the middle of last here when I was grade 8, I stopped going to him. I just decided it's not what I want to do it's unfair, why do I have to go to him when I don't want to be there? And then, um, about February I went back to him again because he went to court and my mom would get into a lot of trouble if I didn't go to him.

R: Is that the meeting your mom has to go to on Monday?

P: Um, the meeting on Monday they had was more about the money he has to give her a month. The thing that frustrates me is when I'm here at my mom's house I don't like to talk about my dad but obviously my mom gets mad and she starts talking

and telling me things and saying ya she needs more money. Then sometimes she would ask what happens at my dad's house and why can't he give her money if he has all those things in his house but I understand her point. And when I'm at my dad's house it's all about the money and I don't get it why discuss it with me I don't want to know about it and they make me worry about things I don't think a child should worry about. Or worry about how my mom is going to survive the month without money and, um, how she's gonna support me and what if he takes me away from her. Um, I'm not the kind of person, like the big house and all the fancy things because I grew up with that. And I would prefer growing up here at my mom's house and just getting things that I need, not all the fancy things my dad can give me.

R: Is that what he has at his house?

P: Yes. And it's not the type of person I am and then all I hear when I go to his house is all about "ya, I give your mother enough money" and "ya, why is she like that" and it's always talking bad about her and she is always talking bad about my dad. And I don't wanna hear stuff like that I don't care anymore it's their problems not mine.

R: So how do you cope when these things are happening around you now?

P: Um, you know my mom, we fight a lot and she forgets all about me and it's like I'm just floating around. Sometimes I feel like I just want a little bit of attention too because sometimes there is just too much attention on me but I do stuff to also get attention. Like my mom freaks out when my room's untidy so I sometimes leave it untidy so she can come sit by me and just talk to me for little a while without bringing my dad's name in the conversation.

R: Is that how you cope now? Do you find you have changed your coping mechanisms from drinking, smoking and cutting to means of getting attention or do you feel there are still other coping mechanisms that you use?

P: Um, I definitely don't cut myself anymore. Sometimes I just have to sit down and breathe and just realize because there was one day that I just picked up the pair of scissors and I was like "what are you doing, it's not fair" and ...

R: Not fare on whom?

P: On my mom and have this done to her again. Because she already lost everything and lost my dad and it's not gonna be fair for her to lose me also. And, um, things I do now to cope are more, here and there I smoke but ya my best friend helps me a lot and um my boyfriend I have now he's also helping me a lot. And I can talk to him because he also lost his brother a while ago so I um I can talk to him a lot. We help each other and my best friend she also understands and I can talk to her whenever I want and call her in the middle of the night if I have to.

R: That's very lucky to have that.

P: Yes

R: And the friends that you used to hang out with that you said where the "bad friends", do you still hang out with them?

P: Um, yes I am, but I decided I know where my limits are its my choice I don't have to feel like there's pressure on me to do it.

R: Okay, so they don't pressure you?

P: No, not at all.

R: Okay. How did the custody battles and divorce affect your school work?

P: I think when I was not in high school yet I don't think it affected my school work so much, but I just remember when I was in grade 4 the term it all happened I remember my mom was called in and they just told me that they understand and um I don't think it was that much of an issue back then. But when I came to high school I, my dad was always so strict. My marks must be very good and pressuring me. I just felt like why should I do this for you and I started not caring and my marks dropped a lot. But I'm trying to do the best I can. I'm not trying to be spiteful but it's just like why should I do something for you when I can only remember the bad things you did for us?

R: And how is your school work right now?

P: I'm still struggling a bit but I'm trying to motivate myself in a way.

R: That is understandable. Who supported you during this process? Did you see a counsellor, were their grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends from when it happened until now?

P: Mostly I had to figure things out on my own. Um, I saw a counsellor about in the beginning of this year and for about a year after my parents' divorce. But mostly I was on my own. And I didn't wanna bother my mom too much and I kind of felt like I was in the way because she was sad and I didn't want to bother her with asking questions and telling her that – because I could feel things changing. Like I was in a phase where I wasn't that happy child anymore and I was very grumpy and everything felt so bad and I didn't know what was happening. But I didn't tell my mom about it because I didn't want to put any more pressure on her.

R: That must have been hard for you ...

P: Yes, and none of my friends that I had at that point went through anything like that so I didn't have anyone to talk to so ...

R: You were quite alone during that time?

P: Yes, not even a brother or sister or anyone. I think the good thing that came out of that is that I'm much stronger than I was back then or I'm much stronger than some of my friends are. But if I can take anything back I would want my mom not to go through any of the stuff that she had to go through.

R: You sound like you were very worried about your mom?

P: Yes. I felt it was very unfair because why do some people get the perfect life and some people nothing ever bad happens to them, which is a good thing but why my mom? Why does she have to go through everything and bad things after another happens to her. I don't think its fare.

R: And what about you?

P: It's unfair and people judge but they don't know what I've been through and the things I have to do to cope.

R: Do you find that people judge and what kind of people judge?

P: Um, they just ...

R: People from school or society?

P: Just more society I think.

R: So do you feel that of recent you have had more people to confide in like your boyfriend and your best friend like you previously said?

P: Yes, I think that it's more the age that I am now. And I'm choosing my friends and I just think that I'm a stringer person now, um, from the stuff that I've been through 'cause my mom also has diabetes and, um, I have to look after her a lot and, ah, when I was about grade 1 – 6 years old when my dad wasn't there and my mom would go into like a sort of a coma when her sugar levels are too low. I would have to look after her and try to make it better cause you have to, um, feed her chocolate or make her okay again. So I also, I think that's where the point came in where I was very overprotective of my mom 'cause why was he hitting her when I was looking after her the whole time and he was gone. Like I was building up my mom and he was just hurting her and pushing her down.

R: That must have been very difficult to see. You have told me a lot of experiences of how this has affected you as an only-child adolescent. How do you feel this would have been different if you had had a sibling/s?

P: Um, I think that I wouldn't feel so alone and there wouldn't have been time to sit and think too much and cutting myself. I just think that it might have been a bit easier if there was always someone to talk to and like a shoulder to cry on.

R: Can you tell me a bit more about what you mean when you say a shoulder to cry on?

P: Yes, I think there would have been somebody to help me and understand that it's not only my fault. Because I always felt it's my fault why they got a divorce. And they fight only about me and for me. And if there was a sibling I would have understood and felt that it's not only my fault. That there's someone else that would have made me understand.

R: It sounds like you have taken on a lot of self-blame. Is that how you feel that the whole divorce has been centred around you?

P: Yes, I think that if for being an only child my mom had to spend a lot of money on me and money that she doesn't have and my dad is pushing her down the whole time because he is wanting me to stay there. All the fighting and about all the money goes to me and the fighting about me and for me. I really just don't like it because I feel that every bad thing that happens is just for me or about me and I don't think its fair. Sometimes I just think the life would have been easier for my mom though maybe if I wasn't here and she, um, like can spend the money on things that is necessary though.

R: Do you feel your mom would have wanted a life without you here?

P: Sometimes those things go through my mind.

R: And what about another sibling, would you not be worried about the money then being shared even more.

P: I think if I had another sibling it would have been harder because then there definitely would have been attention to be shared, money to be shared and more money. And I just don't like everything going around for like the money. It just makes me sad because I just want them to stop fighting and why can't they just be like peaceful.

R: Does your dad ever speak about why he doesn't want to give your mom money?

P: He always tells me that he doesn't think its fair to give my mom more. He always talks bad about it and I don't think its fair. I'm not going to tell him to give her more money. I just don't want him to talk to me about it because I already have stuff that a normal child has and things to worry about and then I have to take on that too.

R: That is true.

P: I talk to my boyfriend and my best friend but some things I have to keep to myself because I don't think they need to know everything that goes on in my house and sometimes I talk to my mom about it all and I just ask her to – I don't want her to talk

about my dad and want her to talk about everything so sometimes I just have to keep it to myself.

R: How does it feel to have to keep things to yourself?

P: I think that I'm doing a pretty good job coping but I think that one day I'm going to crack.

R: Do you think that will happen?

P: Yes.

R: What do you think will happen when you crack?

P: I have no idea it's just that I don't have another way of coping or dealing with something like this it's the only way I know.

R: Yes, I see that. Research has suggested ... how do you feel that research says it's a better experience? How do you feel that that is what the research is saying? Do you find it true?

P: For me not having the personal experience of that I think that maybe it would have been better. It's better to have the experience with the sibling and that you feel that somebody understands because with me I feel a lot of the time that nobody understands what I'm going through and I have to do all these things alone and figure it out for myself. Like it's all on me.

R: That must be very difficult to feel that it is all on you.

P: Yes, it is.

R: What would you say to an only-child adolescent that has gone through parental divorce just like yourself, what would you recommend for them, for anyone helping them and or for their parents?

P: I just think that that they shouldn't feel like it's their fault and maybe they should just – it helped me a lot seeing a counsellor and speaking to someone and, um, knowing that somebody understands. And I just think that whatever they do it's not a really good choice to do things I did to cut myself. At the end it's not gonna help it's just gonna hurt somewhere else and someone else like my mom like even more.

And just making good friends and trying to move on and not listening to the negative things that everyone else is trying to say and just be yourself and not be influenced by your parents telling you things. And the father saying things about the mother and the mother saying negative things about the father. It's just like make your own opinions and decide what you want to do and not keeping everything for yourself. Like go get a hockey stick and hit a hockey ball and get that anger out because if you keep all that anger inside of you it's gonna do something very very bad inside of you that happened with me. And I just think that don't keep everything to yourself. And just try to speak with someone even if it's just a grandma or someone that you can really trust.

R: What a lovely recommendation. Thank you. Do you have anything that you want to recommend that maybe parents could do differently?

P: Um, I just think that they shouldn't fight in front of the children or say mean things or throw things or hit each other or send emails and show it to the children or things like that. Just don't put the children through things that I went through because later on it's like the dreams I had, everything comes back the dreams come back. They should just keep the children out of it and not put them through everything because it's not the children's fight it's the parents fight. And they shouldn't let the children see the things that they go through because eventually the children will also have lives that they will understand and go through their own things. So it's not necessary or fair to put them children through things that adults are supposed to experience.

R: Can I ask you about the dreams you mentioned? Can you maybe share those with me?

P: It was more about the one night that I can remember is my dad standing downstairs at the staircase and me and my mom standing upstairs and there was like a gate that we would close when we went to sleep. And the one side of the gate was open and my dad went down the stairs with a baseball bat 'cause he thought he heard something downstairs. So my mom just said something – it wasn't even like a comment just like saying that "just put on the light downstairs there" and he got really mad and he swung the bat and almost hit my mom in the face and I was standing right next to her. There was also another night where my mom's sugar levels were very low and I could hear her screaming so eventually I stood up and ran to their

room and just as I came into their room his fist went into her face and hit her again and again and again. I just remember asking him to stop and I climbed onto my mom and he almost hit me and I told him to stop and eventually he stopped. And, um, it's just the worst things I could remember I would dream and then I would wake up and I would walk in my mom's room and go look if she was fine. And there was also this one time – if with diabetes if you don't help the person or get their blood sugar levels up again they could die after about 3 or 4 hours. And I remember it was a Monday morning of school and I was in grade 1 and I could hear my parents fighting and the door was closed and I just thought I will just put my school clothes on so long so they wouldn't fight any more for me being late and did everything myself and I remember I couldn't get my hair fixed myself and I just, um, did it. So I just walked into my parents' room and opened the door and my mom was lying on the floor and asked him "what are you doing" because I already knew how to help her and how to make her better and he just told me "no leave her, let's go to school" and I said "but you can't leave her she is going to die". And I just remember him screaming and screaming "ya, just let her die she does this to herself" and that was a dream I had over and over and over again. And then I would just wake up and go to my mom's room and make sure she is fine.

R: So these are dreams you have had in more recent years about when you were younger?

P: Yes, and it's like I thought I couldn't remember and it came back. And that is also one of the reasons why I didn't go to my dad's house anymore because every time that I walked into that house – because he still stays in that same house that we lived in – I just I get so mad at him and remember everything and it's almost as if I get those flashbacks when I walk in there.

R: Does your dad know that you remember and know what happened?

P: He asked me the one day why I didn't want to go to him. I told him that "you know why, don't pretend you don't know what I know". And the one day he put something on Facebook like a link or something about men who abuse women. And I just got so mad and he put a comment there like yes something about "these pigs should be killed". And I remember getting so mad 'cause how can he say something like that when he did exactly the same? It feels to me like he has memory loss or something

because he doesn't remember it's like he doesn't remember any of this. And it's not fair for me remembering everything when he can just forget everything, it's not fair it's not how it works. It's not fair.

R: Yes, that doesn't seem okay when like you said you are also dealing with everyday adolescent life and challenges.

P: Yes, it isn't fair.

R: And what about your mom's boyfriend? How do you get on with him?

P: Um, she also had a boyfriend before him and I remember just always being very overprotective when she went out with friends or stuff like that and be like "ya mom be careful" and just, um, "come home safely". And the boyfriend she had before this one was always demanding and talking to her in a way he wanted to and the one day I just sat here and cracked and I just told him, "you better talk to my mom in a better way or you can just get up and leave". And then my mom got really mad at me. But I thought why would she go through this again when she already did and then eventually they broke up because I didn't get along with him. But I didn't like him, the way he was like you're not going to speak to my mom that way not after everything she has been through, she deserves better. And a few months after that she met – a his name is (Dirk) and I just remember her laughing so much and I couldn't even remember her laughing with my dad like that ever. And obviously here and there I got a bit jealous because she spent more time with Dirk than with me but I ended up telling myself that she deserves this. One day I'll get my turn for being happy like she is with him now and I can just see 'cause I've never seen my mom this happy. And she is now and me and Dirk, we get along really well and he is more of a father figure to me than my dad has been and I have ah told him that I really I really love him. And he does probably more for me than my own dad does.

R: That's lovely. Thank you so much for sharing all this with me. Is there anything more you would like to say or add or have any questions you would like to ask?

P: Not really. I just think that things like this is just like all I want is like the parents to know don't put any child through this. I wouldn't want the child that I've had or any other child to experience the things that I did. It really never goes away.

ADDENDUM D: VERBATIM SANDTRAY INTERVIEW

The researcher gave the participant an explanation of what a sandtray is. Offered her soft background music or not. She chose to have the soft music. She was asked to feel the sand with her hands to ignite the sensation to start with. Then, after explaining the process, she began her sandtray experience.

R: Can you tell me a bit about your sandtray?

P: (pointing to the one half of the sand scene) Well, this side is my dad's side. This is my dad (immediately identifying him and gesturing the small wooden man doll). And this side is my side. That's my mom and my grandma and this is me and my cat and I think this (gesturing to the other side again) is more like the bad side. Well, I was afraid of snakes and I still am afraid of spiders. And the snakes are, I think, are the bad things. And the rabbit ... I say it and ... I thought of one of the friends I had but it's very bad stuff that happened and I kind of lost him as a friend. He was like one of my most important people in my life. So, he's on the bad side. And the baby that's sticking out of the sand (buried baby) made me think of my childhood and how basically he ruined it for me. Not ruined, but I didn't have the childhood everybody else had and everybody else dreamt about. And my mom and my grandma are two of the most important people in my life and I just made the ground a bit higher here so it will be a lot harder for my dad to get to the part where we are and get across. And, um ... the army guys surrounding me, um, they just make me feel I'm put under a whole lot of stuff I don't want to go through and, uh, it's like everybody's like every day just attacking me. It feels like I'm under a lot of pressure and doesn't feel like I'm on the ground.

R: It looks like you put yourself half under the sand like you're sinking?

P: Yes, that's like how I feel. It's like with the army guys feels like every day. I just wanna, I put my mom and grandma on a cushion because I think they deserve the best. Just like they don't deserve the things that happened to my mom. And ya the unicorn just made me think of ... unicorns used to exist and now made me think of things that used to happen and memories that I can never take away or relive again.

R: What does a unicorn mean or represent to you?

P: It's like something magical but now it's like gone.

R: Can I ask why you chose to put the unicorn above your mom and gran?

P: I don't really know it doesn't all make sense.

R: That's okay.

P: I think it's almost like a sort of like a protection. I want them to have magical lives they always tell me to have.

R: Is there a reason you chose to protect them but not do the same for you?

P: 'cause you know it feels like there's not much, I'm too far under the ground for something to protect me. Too much has happened. Too much to almost save me. And I feel like they deserve it.

R: When I look at the scene of you with all the army men holding guns to you – not one but six – it's quite frightening. That a lot of people or things holding guns at you. What do they represent?

P: I think it's more about ... they are ...

R: Would you be able to touch each one and say what you feel they might be for you?

P: It made me think of school work and all the pressure at school and studying and I can't concentrate like others can. And not having the, almost, freedom to make my own choice yet or to tell my dad the truth when he asks me something like, "do I want to go to him" or how I feel about something. I always feel like I have to lie or tell him something just so that he can be happy.

And my friend or people at school like high school rumours add the decisions I make that people don't accept. Just things that happen and not being sure that I wake up tomorrow and my mom's still going to be there or what's going to happen. I get so scared like every time she walks out of the door and I say goodbye to her or drops me off at school, I just think about it would be if she wasn't there like who else is gonna fight for me?

R: What do you think could happen?

P: I just worry that somebody is going to take her away or anything's just going to happen to her and I won't be able to see her or hug her anymore and things like that.

R: What about your gran? What part does she play in this (gesturing to the sandtray scene)?

P: She's also just had a really hard life. Since I was little I always went to go visit her and she always made me feel better and I'd just hug her and I love her so much. And when she says goodbye and I give her a hug she always tells me she is praying for me. Just wants happiness for me and when I was little I'd think why are you praying for me nothing's wrong and she always tells me just by looking at me she can tell something's wrong and she's usually right. And she'll just look at me and say I'm praying for you – you don't let your dad do this to you or anything like that.

R: So now, what has changed for you when she now says she is praying for you?

P: Just think she is praying for me to have enough strength to like conquer everything like she knows my dad, she knows how he can be and I just think she wants me to stand up for myself.

R: I'm wondering about your friend that something went wrong with. He is on your dad's side, the "bad side", and you have made him what looks like a very cute animal.

P: Yes, I made him a rabbit, hahaha. Well, it's kind of a weird story. His name is Nelius. I met him last year the beginning of the year. It made me think how I gave him the nickname "Nelihaas" like rabbit so every time I see rabbit I'm like, yeah, that's him. And like he was always there for me and was like one of the most important people in my life. Just makes me so sad because my one ... she was my best friend, and she knew how I felt. Um, me and Nelius were like best friends until obviously he told me the one day he had feelings for me and whatever and I said that I don't want that for us. I just want to be friends with you. And she ... like kind of ... I told her "ya, but I just want to be friends with him". Yes, I kind of had feelings for him but I decided I don't want it that way and she kind of took him away from me and she changed him so much. And I really really miss him so bad but there's not much I

can do about it. He was always the one that understood and I always called him in the middle of the night when I couldn't sleep and we had like a perfect friendship but ya.

R: It sounds like (pointing to sandtray of rabbit) this relationship (pointing to her figure and dad's figure) has a lot of up and down inconsistency in both. Do you think these two may have anything in common? (gesturing to dad figure and rabbit) .Can you relate anything or do you just see it as two negative experiences?

P: I just think that the thing that they have in common is they let people influence them a bit too much and then they make choices and then they think, "oh, I made the wrong choice" and want to go back but it doesn't work that way 'cause once you've hurt someone they're not going to like forgive you like in a day.

R: Do you think they have caused her (her figure) to be so far in the sand too with all the guns pointed at you?

P: They put pressure and by making me sad and feeling like there's no one left for me or to help me through everything.

R: Can you tell me about the car?

P: My dad has, um, he loves cars; um, just think that also had something to do with the army men (awareness, linking and owning). My dad races with cars as well.

R: And the spiders and the snakes and your dad and your friend and the car? They all seem to be facing you and you have your back to them. Are you aware of that at all?

P: I had the idea of the sand and the beach over here because I love the beach and um ...

R: So, you are on the beach with your back to the "bad side"?

P: I just think that I never see anything coming. The one day I'm happy and I think everything is working out then the moment it just like hits me and I never saw it coming. And I don't want my mom to see everything that happens and I just want her to go on with her life and I don't think it's possible for my dad to turn his back and go on with his life.

R: So, am I correct to say that you try to turn your back on it and you never see it coming but it's always come?

P: Yes.

R: I feel sad for this little girl buried under the sand ... why is she buried gone? Is there anyway you can get her back?

P: Well, the baby made me think of my childhood and when I was little and I just think that he made it unfair, he took everything and he took it away from me and I think I didn't have a fun childhood everybody else had. I dunno, I just don't think it's fair and it's on his side because he took it so it's on the bad side.

INTERRUPTION – MOTHER COMES HOME and DOG runs in. I apologise to her, she doesn't seem affected, says hi to mom and pats her dog. Mom apologises and says she will wait. (30 seconds). When I turn around she is looking at her sandtray ready to continue. So, I start again with something a bit lighter and see if she is still open to share or if she is now a bit reserved from interruption.

R: I see there is a lot of holes in the ground on the "bad side". What do these holes mean to you and represent for you ... there are so many?

P: I just think it was like more the texture kind of thing.

R: What is the difference in the two textures of each side for you?

P: This side is smooth and big and like walking smoothly and not having anything in the road to stop you or falling in somewhere or getting hurt. And when you stand on something you can get hurt. It was just more making a world on this side which is not happy and smooth and coming towards me.

R: I'm wondering if you could use the object that you have identified as you to say something to the object that is your dad. You don't have to say "dad" as you have already identified yourself what each object represents for you and I wasn't sure what to expect or if you would do that so soon so well done to you for that. That is great. Could you without your dad knowing as it is just you and I in the room, say to your dad what you wish you could say to him but may not be able to ...?

P: I just think I would want to tell him that I want him to be the dad, not always wanted, but I don't want him to feel like he has to like has to fight with my mom all the time to make her hear what he has to say. Just to be fair to me and it's not necessary to fight all the time, just have a normal conversation without trying to control everything (interesting – what she does as a defence is a lot to do with controlling what she can't in her life). And try to hear my point. That never happens/ I just want him to listen to me one day and not me be scared to tell him what I really want to say. And just accepting what I have to say to him and not getting mad all the time. I just don't want to be scared of him anymore. I just want him to leave my mom alone and have normal conversation with her without screaming and shouting.

R: Is there screaming and shouting a lot? What do they say to each other?
(addressing the two objects on opposite sides)

P: It's always like money issues or about me. But it's never really about me. I think he just fights with my mom because I chose to live with her and just think he is more mad at her because I was too small to see what was really going to happen. I just automatically left with her and I just think he is blaming her that I that me and my mom have such a good connecting that we just bond. And my dad and I, we just don't get along and I think he is just blaming her for everything that happened. That he can't just take it back. He feels sorry, I just think he made a choice and now he is regretting it and he is trying to get her back for leaving. I just don't think it's about me. I don't think he is fighting with her because he wants to see me I think he just wants to fight with her and not for any reason. It just feels like that sometimes.

R: So do you not feel like it is real love for you but just to fight?

P: It does feel that way!

R: How do you know what they fight about?

P: Because I always see it or hear it or hear about it or she tells me or when I go to my dad he usually tells me about it.

R: Do you ever wish that they would both not tell you?

P: Sometimes I tell my mom I don't want to hear about it but she just gets mad because she says she just wants me to know what is going on.

R: Do you maybe think she needs someone to talk to?

P: I think she needs, she just needs someone to understand and I do.

R: Tell me about these three people ... (gesturing to object of her mother and father). When they fight and he speaks to her and she speaks to her ... do you think that is fair?

P: I don't think it's fair, is more part of me slipping into the sand.

R: And this unicorn that you put to try and protect everyone isn't protecting you?! Do you not feel that you need protection too? How would you feel if the unicorn was protecting you and these (snakes and spiders and guns) were facing everybody else?

P: (silence, thinking) I do I just want somebody to be there for me. I mean I know my mom is there for me I just think she fights with my dad more than anything else. I guess it has to do with me not having the childhood that I always wanted and now experiencing all the drugs I did.

R: Do you think you're still being punished for it? You hurt somebody else because of it?

P: I think I just want the childhood that I wanted and now I'm trying to almost get back the years and just trying to do something or just trying to have the life that someone else had or experiencing some stuff. Or feeling in control of doing something in my life 'cause I always get told what to do, how to feel. I always get told about the fight and I'm always in the middle of the fight. I just sometimes want to feel in control of something or some decisions that I make.

R: The decisions being all the guns to your head ... and this little kitty?

P: I got the cat when I was 4 and she still lives today.

R: Is she here.

P: No, she is away.

R: What does she give you?

P: It makes me think of how two nights ago I was lying in my bed. I had just started crying and I don't know what I was crying about but I was just crying and my door was closed and so ... there was like a small opening and she just came and she pushed her head through and she opened the door and jumped on my bed and she just lay next to me then on a little cushion. And she just looked at me the whole time. I dunno it feels silly but like.

R: Well, she can't talk, can she, and she can't judge you or make you do things. She can only give you love and accept you. So, maybe you have given them a unicorn to protect them because you are worried about them and scared to lose them but you have someone next to you and to keep your "head above the sand".

P: Ya, I mean sometimes I do just need someone to listen, just be there, just sit and don't say anything and understand my point and the way I think and why I get mad. No one to scream back at me when I get mad, when I crack. It's like a, I think when someone screams at me or hits at me I freak out I don't like it when people scream at me and I think it has something to do with my dad and mom screaming at each other the whole time. And every time I just freak if someone screams at me.

R: Did she just come in or did you invite her in (cat)?

P: I don't know. I think I just needed someone or something to be there. I needed someone to stay instead of just leave all the time.

R: Like when he went away (friend) and he went away (dad) and your fear of her going away (mom). So, it's understandable turning to her (cat) to stay. How do you think you can help her (her object) from getting out of the sand?

P: I just need someone to ... I know my mom is there but she doesn't technically understand what I'm going through at the moment ... with school and being a teenager and everything. Yes, I have people in my life but I just need someone that's going to stay. Not someone who I'm going to share everything with and then they gonna leave. To kind of like help me get out of the sand and stuff.

R: Do you mind if I take a picture of your sandtray and then do something further with you?

P: Sure.

R: Okay, so now I have taken a picture. We have it. Now I would like you to (if you can) to change this a bit to how she (her object) would like things. Maybe, for example, not stuck in the sand or with these men holding guns at her. However you want.

Participant starts removing snakes, army men, gates etc. and moving things around keeping in mind why we are here. She then takes everything out and begins flattening the surface of the sand ... interestingly she has forgotten about the little girl buried under the sand and then feels her eventually and takes her out.

NEW SANDTRAY:

R: What's this?

P: I just think that ... (long pause)

R: I see all the ground (sand) is the same level now. Do you want to be on the same level?

P: The complications and always screaming and shouting and being angry at each other. I think being on the same level would be nice for a change.

R: I see your dad is sitting and everyone else is standing.

P: I think that he is so used to being on top, it's kind of his way or no way. Just want him to sit down for a change and hear what I have to say and, um, think I just want everyone else to have their own – not their own life – just concentrate on their own things.

Another interruption, phone rings –

P: I just think that my dad should hear what we have to say for a change. Not overpower and control him just, just he can go on with his life. Because that's not going to change – like my parents will get back together or anything – it's just he can do his own thing. And I just want them to trust me and give me a bit of my own space. And with my mom, she can get what she wants for a change and just be happy. We don't have to get along and talk everyday like that. It's just, stop fighting

and be normal with each other. I think that I just want my friend, the bunny. I just want him to be there. And Bob the Builder made me think of my best friend 'cause she is always joking about Bob the Builder and I think the dog made me think of my boyfriend because he is always ... Just so cute and he loves animals. I just think the plane made me think of that sometimes I just need my own space and don't need I, I don't need all these things. I just want to get away. I'm not grown up yet and I'm not an adult so don't make me hear about all the things going on in their lives because I'm not there yet.

R: Are you wanting to go away so that they can't tell you everything that is happening?

P: Exactly. Just be myself for a change.

R: So I hear you saying that you're sick of hearing all the problems between your mom and dad and would like people to stick by your side no matter what and not just leave. And as a teenager you have your own life. Do you feel that this is what you deserve?

P: Yes. Um, I don't know how to comment more.

R: That's fine. At least you know what it is that you want and you were able to show me that. How did you find this?

P: It's made me think of situations and stuff that has happened. Like the whole thing with my friend. It only happened this week (repeat trauma playing out patterns).

R: It only happened this week?

P: yes.

R: Do you feel this is at all linked to anything else that is coming up in your sandtray?

P: Ya. Like yesterday I started to try to talk to him and he told me, ya, he has made his choice. Like he still wants to be my friend but he doesn't do anything or he has already made his choice. Because I, because he loves her.

R: Wow, I'm taking a risk by saying this but to me it sounded like you were talking about your dad for a second. Different experiences yet so similar. Do you ever worry your boyfriend will do this?

P: I worry a lot that one day he is just going to decide well, um, just gonna go or just gonna leave or not stick around. It's very scary.

R: It sounds like a scary feeling.

P: It just really sucks always thinking this is going to happen all the time.

R: Have you considered speaking to someone professional to talk it through maybe?

P: No I get scared to ask my mom for things sometimes because of the money.

R: I think maybe it would be okay to ask about this?

P: I just think I don't really talk about it, everybody has issues.

R: Do you feel it may help you through to have someone to talk to?

P: Yeah, a bit. I mean sure it would help but I still have to deal with the situation and decide what you want and don't want.

R: Yes, I understand what you mean. It is good sometimes to talk to get alternative ideas from coping. Maybe someone you know and can trust?

P: I do talk to people like my best friend I have now. I don't see her that often because she is in another school and that but I trust her with everything so much. I just hope she doesn't go anywhere. I think it has something to do with my trust issues as well.

R: That is understandable to have that fear. And those fears in general when you feel and experience it to keep happening.

P: Yes.

R: Thank you for sharing your experiences with me.

ADDENDUM E: PICTURES OF SANDSCENE



ADDENDUM F: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



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ETHICS APPROVAL OF PROJECT

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2012/08/31

This is to certify that the next project was approved by the NWU Ethics Committee:

Project title *DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE SUPPORT TO ENHANCE
QUALITY OF LIFE AND WELLBEING FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND
FAMILIES IN SOUTH AFRICA: A TRANS-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH.*

Project leader: Dr. H Grobler & Prof V Roos

**Ethics
number:** NWU-00060-12-A1

Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation

Expiry date: 2017/08/30

The Ethics Committee would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your project.
Please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Committee for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

The formal Ethics approval certificate will be sent to you as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Me. Marietjie Halgryn'.

Me. Marietjie Halgryn
NWU Ethics Secretariate