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HIGH-CONFLICT DIVORCE:

AN EVALUATION OF NEW WAYS FOR FAMILIES®

BY

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Dedication

To my family and friends, you have my gratitude for encouraging me on this journey. Love to my husband, Jay, who has taken each step of this process with me and to our three children who have joined us along the way (*Harrison, Harper, and Hollis)*. Lastly to my parents, your love, constant support, and faith in me has meant everything and kept me going. Especially my father, Michael Bigler, who never stopped being my dad and did everything he could to support my dream becoming a reality. I will never forget and I will always be grateful for you.

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ABSTRACT

High-conflict divorces have increased in the past two decades. They can include poor communication, low problem solving skills, aggressive, and violent behaviours. When they involve minor children there is an increased social concern. Children exposed to high-conflict can experience short and long-term negative biopsychosocial outcomes. Professionals (i.e., the courts and social agencies) involved in high-conflict families struggle to provide effective supports. The current thesis aims to evaluate the counselling intervention: New Ways for Families® for divorcing co-parents going through a high-conflict divorce. The Ribner Scale, developed by Neil Ribner, was used to measure pre- and post- intervention levels on the factors associated with high-conflict divorce: (a) perceived inter-parental conflict; (b) communication; (c) co-operation and (c) continuous litigation; With an inclusion of violence to explore its overlapping role with high-conflict. In addition, this thesis will add to the knowledge base around the demographics of former couples involved in a high-conflict divorce.

Keywords: high-conflict, divorce, Ribner Scale, children, co-parents, interparental conflict, co-operation, communication, continuous litigation, New Ways for Families®

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The term "high-conflict", to describe a type of divorce, is not misnomer. In fact, over the past two decades this term has been increasingly used by judges to describe divorce cases where the litigants are embroiled in conflict and use the courts to make their parenting decisions (Birnbaum & Bala, 2010; Birnbaum & Bala, in press; Dale, 2014). A Google search of the term "High-Conflict Divorce"[1] supports the growth of the descriptor in the divorce lexicon, because the results list yielded a plethora of resources. These resources included, but were not limited to, news articles, self-help websites, books, and peer-reviewed articles. In addition, family lawyers are now advertising, on their websites, that they specialize in high-conflict divorces. The large number of Google results for the term high-conflict divorce demonstrated how pervasive this phenomenon has become. Providing this population with targeted and effacious interventions is a social necessity because more typical routes to divorce resolution, such as mediation and settlement conferences, do not effectively work for these co-parents (Bala & Hunter, 2016; Gilmour, 2004). Individuals, who are involved in conflict, lose access to the thinking part of their brains', with complex decision making becoming inhibited, and the ability to appreciate multiple perspectives becoming impaired (Hamilton, 2015).

The stakes in high-conflict divorces are heightened when children are involved. During a high-conflict divorce, children are exposed to caustic interaction styles between their parents which, can include, but are not limited to, patterns of hostile communication, inability to problem solve, continuous litigation, controlling and or violent behaviours (Bala et al., 2010; Birnbaum &

[1] In this chapter, we use the term "high-conflict divorce" to describe highly conflictual interactions that may include protracted or recurrent litigation, irrespective of whether the former couple had been legally married or not.

Bala, in press; Fidler, Bala, & Hurwitz, 2013; Malcore et al., 2010). The inclusion of domestic violence (DV)/intimate partner violence (IPV) as a factor in high-conflict divorce is a debated one. Recently researchers have taken the step in the academic literature, to differentiate high-conflict and DV/IPV from one another (see Archer-Kuhn, 2018) to have the constructs recognized as discrete but, DV/IPV has been found to be present in a portion of high-conflict divorce cases (Birnbaum & Bala, in press). Therefore, it is prudent to view them as overlapping constructs that require attention. It is necessary to understand, in high-conflict divorces, if there are large power and gendered imbalances occurring (Birnbaum & Bala, 2022) so that safety is addressed and the experiences and perspectives of the victim(s) are included so that informed and appropriate decisions are made by stakeholders (i.e., the judiciary, mental health professionals, and government agencies).

Lack of awareness, by the parents, on how their interaction style is impacting their children keeps the children in the middle of the ongoing conflict (Garber, 2014; Moné et al., 2011). For children, there are both short-term and long-term consequences of exposure to their parents' high-conflict relational patterns (Fidler, Bala, & Hurwitz, 2013; Birnbaum & Bala, in press; Margolin et al., 2001). The consequences can include problems forming and maintaining healthy relationships, regulating emotions, maladjustment, internalizing and externalizing behaviour problems, issues with social problem-solving, school, and peers (see Cummings & Davies, 2010; Margolin et al., 2001; van der Wal, Finkenauer, & Visser, 2019). With the possibility of parent child contact problems (Birnbaum & Bala, 2010; Fidler, Bala, & Hurwitz, 2013). In addition, high-conflict has been used to explain strained and/or parent-child contact problems (Polak & Saini, 2015). Both parents can be perpetrators of alienation/PCCPs and it is

demonstrated through controlling the other parent's time or placing children in the middle of the conflict by inappropriately sharing negative information with them (Moné et al., 2011).

High-conflict divorce cases are difficult for judges to manage. When judges try to use typical divorce resolution routes, such as mediation, consultants, and psychosocial evaluations, they are typically unsuccessful (D'Abate, 2016). Typical divorce resolution routes are usually not effective with the high-conflict divorcing population. Nor are post-separation parenting courses, which are often required before parents can bring a court application or be granted a divorce (Alberta Justice and Solicitor General, 2021; Justice Education Society of BC, 2016; Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General, 2018). These courses lack the scope and structure necessary to alter conflict behaviours in the high-conflict population (Jensen, 2012).

To address the complexities facing separating and divorcing families today, in March 2021 the Government of Canada enacted changes to the *Divorce Act.* These changes are designed to better address family violence and post-separation parenting. The recent amendments bring sharper focus to the best interest of children, and change the terminology that promotes litigation (Bala, 2018; Government of Canada, 2020). The changes aim to bring parents and stakeholders' attention back to the best interest of children, and to limit the damaging conflict they are exposed to (Bala, 2018).

Co-parents being able to behave reasonably post-separation is beneficial for the long-term health of their children and the divorce process. Spillane-Grieco (2000) noted that the reestablishment of the family needs to occur after divorce because the parents are always linked together by their children. On July 16, 2016, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation published an on-line article entitled *Judge breaks up with couple in high-conflict divorce*. The court ordered the divorcing couple to stay out of court for the next two years, with the intention that the parents

would deescalate and learn to compromise. The article notes that a court order to refrain from making a court application was unprecedented. The action by the judge demonstrated the limitations on the patience of non-familial stakeholders in the divorce process, making effacious counselling services a priority for the high-conflict population.

New Ways for Families (NWFF)

NWFF, developed by Bill Eddy a lawyer and clinical social worker, was created to address the specific needs of the high-conflict population to save the courts time, the parents' money, and protect children as families restructure post-separation (Eddy, 2009). Focusing on behavioural changes in the parents, to create physical and emotional safety in families, is how NWFF protects children. The intervention involves the former couples' children in counselling so that they have a chance to have their voices heard in the process (Chang et al., 2016; Eddy, 2009). The goals of NWFF are to teach parents specific skills to communicate in more appropriate ways, thus helping parents to avoid developing high-conflict interactions. The program gives parents skills to teach their children to become resilient, strengthen the parent-child dyad, provide a measure for the courts to assess parents' abilities to make positive changes, and provide parents the opportunity to alter behaviours related to abuse or alienation (Eddy, 2009).

NWFF has a distinctive structure where both parents attend counselling with their own NWFF counsellor as they learn the same skills through the same activities; participating in alternating sessions of parent-child counselling; and using their newly acquired skills to make family decisions together without relying on the courts to intervene (Eddy, 2009). NWFF participants are taught the *four big skills*: *flexible thinking*, *managing emotions*, *moderating behaviour*, and *checking yourself* (Eddy, 2009). When these skills are utilized, during conflict,

the brain is re-trained to respond rather than to react. Without these skills, when an individual is faced with conflict they are less likely to manage the conflict because the brain takes over to protect and narrows the person's perspective to one that makes them feel safe (Hamilton, 2015). Behavioural change is supported in NWFF through teaching co-parent's problem solving and self-management skills through repeated skills practice and counsellor redirection (Eddy, 2009). In addition, accountability is built into the program through weekly counselling sessions that require each co-parent to attend and demonstrate the work they have done in the workbook, discuss their learning, and use their acquired skills during parent-child counselling (Jensen, 2012). This skill practice and accountability differ from typical post-separation parenting classes that take approximately three hours to complete and do not require co-parents to practice their newly acquired skills.

Personal Statement of Interest

Some of my first memories were coming to the law office where my mother worked. This left an impression on me; leading me to work in the legal field throughout my teenage years into adulthood. I worked, in various capacities, with my first job being in a family law office. What struck me then, and has stayed with me ever since, was how messy and conflict driven the process was. The lawyer's part, in the conflict, was to manage the expectations of their clients while advocating for the best position in the divorce. There are two sides to every situation and with two lawyers fighting for the best one I always wondered about the collateral damage of the process.

I did not find out the kind of damage high-conflict divorces can have on children until I started the thesis journey three years ago. The topic of high-conflict divorce became the topic of my graduate research methods course. Learning about the short-term and long-term negative

effects on children and the lack of evidence-based counselling interventions to help this population fuelled my interest. I believe that adding to the research evidence on an intervention for this population that considers the role of children in the process is relevant for the health of our communities. I am privileged to be able to combine my knowledge base in law with what I have learned during my Masters in Counselling program.

Problem Statement

High-conflict separated/divorcing co-parents are characterized by their engagement in a caustic interaction style that can include continuous and contentious litigation, poor and hostile communication, potential DV/IPV, and interactions that negatively impact co-parenting and children (Birnbaum & Bala, in press; Davidson et al., 2014; Fidler, Bala, & Hurwitz, 2013; Johnston, 1994; Malcore et al., 2010). Effective interventions being available to support high-conflict families supports not only the families, but their communities as well; the courts are less utilized, community resources are less taxed, and negative impacts on children can be reduced. However, the literature on high-conflict divorce consistently cites a lack of empirically supported interventions for this population (Birnbaum & Bala, 2010; Malcore et al., 2010). In addition, a reoccurring suggestion in the literature is that interventions, for these families, need parents to refocus on their children's needs (Trinder et al., 2008); when co-parents are embroiled in acrimony, they are less aware of how their divorce and negative interaction style impact their children (Birnbaum & Bala, 2022; Fidler, Bala, & Hurwitz, 2013; Mitcham-Smith & Henry, 2007).

The researcher, in the current thesis project, is working towards providing evidence to support NWFF as an effective intervention for high-conflict divorcing co-parents. NWFF focuses on developing parenting skills and flexible thinking to promote positive parental behaviours

post-divorce that allow co-parents to refocus their attention on their children. With the overarching goal, of the counselling intervention, being that co-parents are able to make decisions together without reverting back to the courts (Eddy, 2009). The data analysis will look at whether there are significant changes between the pre- and post-test on co-parents' perceptions of their and their co-parents' abilities to parent effectively post-divorce, with a reduction in negative interaction style. It is hypothesized that greater family and/or partner co-operation, communication and child welfare will be associated with lower self-reported violence.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to use quantitative data analysis to evaluate the counselling intervention NWFF for divorcing co-parents who have been identified as being high-conflict by the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta, Canada. The next chapter will review the literature and state the research questions.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review will examine how different researchers define high-conflict divorce and the factors that contribute to it. Also, it will look at the issues surrounding high-conflict divorce and how it negatively impacts the parties involved by demonstrating the short and long-term effects, specifically on children and adolescents. Finally, several therapy programs will be examined to determine their efficacy on reducing high-conflict situations to help parties successfully move forward with less conflict.

High-conflict Divorce, the Judiciary, and Mental Health

Currently the judicial system is being taxed with an overabundance of litigation in civil court. This issue has both financial and personal costs when cases become overly contentious and drawn out (Bala et al., 2010; Birnbaum & Bala, 2022; Henry et al., 2009; Neff & Cooper, 2004). The family segment of civil court can be particularly problematic because these cases take priority over other civil matters. When divorces are high-conflict in nature it can lead to re-litigation, leaving others to wait until a judge becomes available to hear their matter as they incur the costs of delay.

From 2006 to 2011, reporting provinces and territories (Nova Scotia, Ontario, British Columbia, Yukon, Northwest, and Nunavut) noted a 2% annual reduction in newly initiated divorces (Kelly, 2012). Even though new divorces were declining, the court system was still overtaxed with the number of divorce cases that were being carried over each year because they were taking up time and resources (Bala et al., 2010), creating a 1% increase in overall divorce cases that were not completed (i.e., the matter was still before the courts to have the divorce or applications adjudicated; Kelly, 2012). On average, 21% of divorce cases in the reporting provinces and territories (Nova Scotia, Ontario, Alberta, Yukon, Northwest Territories, and

Nunavut), took a year or more to finalize (Kelly, 2012). Divorce cases that took longer than six months to finalize may be stalled because the parties are stuck in high-conflict patterns of interaction (Bala et al., 2010).

Recently, Birnbaum and Bala (in press) looked at family law cases, in Ontario, from 2007 to 2020 to ascertain the rate of high-conflict divorces. What the researchers found, was a four percent increase in the judicial use of the term "high-conflict" to describe a case. When a wider net was cast, with legal databases being searched for "high-conflict" and additional terms: (a) "warfare"; (b) "battle"; (c) "fight"; (d) "acrimony"; and (e) "hostility" the researchers found a five percent increase in divorces being judicially characterized by these terms. These negative patterns of interaction may be further aggravated by the adversarial nature of the litigation process that have parents adopting behaviours that make them great litigants, but unsuccessful co-parents (see Sullivan, 2014).

Dale (2014) takes the position that community resources need to be available to reduce the burden on the courts, but they need to be able to effectively address conflict and violence within families. Without such community resources the courts will end up managing them. However, Dale (2014) notes that high-conflict families' needs exceed what the courts, mediators, and other professionals can ultimately provide them. For example, the Canadian Department of Justice pointed out that mediation is not effective with high-conflict divorces because the cases are too dynamic and caustic (Gilmour, 2004). The work of Gulbrandsen, Haavind, and Tjersland (2017), reflects Gilmour on traditional mediation being difficult with the high-conflict population. What Gulbrandsen et al. proposed was therapeutic mediation that focuses on the communication and cooperation blocks to encourage successful resolution. A form of therapeutic mediation, the Conjoint Mediation and Therapy Model is discussed later in this literature review.

Lastly, even when a high-conflict divorce has been adjudicated, the court's decision may not be satisfactory to one or both parties, which could lead to further litigation and financial output (Henry et al., 2011).

Therefore, it has become necessary for the courts and mental health professionals to address the specific needs of the parties involved in high-conflict divorces especially when children are affected. There is clear evidence that children who are exposed to this type of divorce style are negatively impacted (Fidler, Bala, & Hurwitz, 2013; Margolin et al., 2001; Owen & Rhoades, 2012). Having evidence-based family interventions available will assist in reducing high-conflict interactions, resulting in less utilization of court time and a reduction in negative impacts on families.

High-Conflict as a Descriptor for Divorce

Birnbaum and Bala (2010; in press), in their studies of Canadian and Ontario family court cases found that the trend of describing divorces as "high-conflict" has been increasing for the past two decades. In the authors' 2010 study, they looked at how both judges and divorce lawyers applied the term and the effect on case outcomes. They concluded that it is necessary to differentiate between the types of high-conflict situations and to ascertain whether one or both parents are causing and perpetuating the conflict. Differentiation between communication issues, issues with time with children, abuse, and alienation need to be developed so that families can receive proper support and appropriate classification during divorce and separation (Birnbaum & Bala, 2010). With appropriate classification, it is theorized that appropriate services, interventions, and family structure decisions can be made. Which could prevent intractable high-conflict divorce cases, minimize harm to children, reduce the reliance on and misuse of community agencies/resources (Birnbaum & Bala, 2010; Fidler, Bala, & Hurwitz, 2013).

A major problem around lack of differentiation is how the term is applied in family court. Birnbaum and Bala (2010) found precedents where judges have rejected a joint custody order because one parent was found to be perpetuating the conflict in the divorce. This led to others using this as a strategy to void or avoid a joint custody order. In addition, judges have begun labelling divorces as high-conflict without any expert evidence attesting to that label and inserting social science research into their reasons for judgment (Birnbaum & Bala, 2010).

Birnbaum and Bala (2010) demonstrate that the lack of consensus on the defining characteristics of "high-conflict" has far reaching ramifications in the lives of divorcing couples and their children. Accordingly, Birnbaum and Bala have stressed the need for a clearer definition and differentiation so that the courts and mental health professionals can better assist high-conflict families. The majority of the research cited in this literature review characterizes high-conflict divorces as involving hostile interactions and high levels of litigation (Malcore et al., 2010). Even though DV/IPV concerns are a part of high-conflict divorces some research studies have been excluding this population from their study samples (see Moné et al., 2011).

The term "high-conflict" denotes a spectrum of behaviours and interactions (Davidson et al., 2014) that include, but are not limited, to poor communication, lack of problem-solving skills, controlling behaviour, and varying types of violence (Bala et al., 2010; Birnbaum & Bala, in press; Fidler, Bala, & Hrwitz, 2013). Researchers have not reached consensus on an operational definition of the construct. For this quantitative research study, "high-conflict" is defined as an interaction style between separated and divorcing parents, marked by hostility, distrust, continuous litigation, negative communication, and interactions that impact co-parenting, with credible or false allegations of various forms of abuse (Birnbaum & Bala, in press; Davidson et al., 2014; Fidler, Bala, & Hurwitz, 2013; Jaffe et al, 2008; Johnston, 1994;

Malcore et al., 2010; Spillane-Grieco, 2000). The various definitions, discussed in this literature review, to describe high-conflict divorce were derived from a review of the literature. The majority of academic research cited, in this literature review, have included similar factors in their studies of high-conflict divorce and have either through correlation or causation demonstrated their functionality in describing or predicting high-conflict. In addition, the definition, for this study, is reflective of the factors under investigation on the Ribner scale.

Factors in High-Conflict Divorces

Just as important as creating a standardized definition of high-conflict divorce is recognizing the factors that may contribute to it. Some factors that have been noted in high-conflict divorce literature are poor communication, poor negotiation capabilities, concerns for the welfare of children, and level of court involvement (Bing et al., 2009; Fidler, Bala, & Hurwitz, 2013; Malcore et al., 2010). A professional's ability to recognize the characteristics of high-conflict divorce will help them to effectively serve this population by referring them to proper interventions, but currently there is a lack of research on this subject (Malcore et al., 2010).

Malcore et al. (2010) used archival data from a court mandated treatment program for parents involved in high-conflict divorce to research these possible factors. The participants were defined as high-conflict by the courts because of ongoing conflict and the courts involvement. Of the 248 pairs of co-parents, 56.45% (147 women and 133 men) completed the survey package. At time of data collection, 42.1% of participants had returned to court between two to five times. An almost equal amount had returned to court between six to 10 times (20.7%) and over eleven times (21.8%; Malcore et al., 2010).

To measure conflict and predictors of conflict, variables of conflict and indexes of conflict predictors were developed. The two conflict variables: (a) perceived relationship quality between co-parents; and (b) number of times returned to court were developed based on high-conflict research (see Malcore et al., 2010). The three conflict predictor indexes: (a) The Ability to Agree with Co-Parent index; (b) The Communication index; and (c) the Child Welfare index were created from non-traditional measurement scales and therefore measures of internal consistency cannot be used (Malcore et al., 2010). What the researchers found was that co-parents' ability to agree and communicate with one another was a predictor of their frequency of litigation. Malcore et al. hypothesized that co-parents require these skills so that they can successfully negotiate within the court system. The inability to agree with one's co-parent was found to be more related to ongoing conflict than the perception of child wellbeing or the quality of the parental relationship with the child (Malcore et al., 2010), but has been found to have a relationship with adjustment issues in children (Trinder et al., 2008).

Like Malcore et al. (2010), Bing et al. (2009) looked at the level of court involvement as a predictor of conflict in divorce. In this study, the level of court involvement ranged from no litigation to a high level of litigation (Bing et al., 2009). Unlike Malcore et al. (2010), litigation was not defined by the number of times participants returned to court, but by the type of court hearings they were involved in during their divorce. The four levels included: (a) dissolution; (b) little litigation, which was defined as a divorce without any court hearings; (c) moderate litigation, which is custody was not determined and the matter was referred to mediation; and (d) much litigation, which included custody investigation and/or property hearing. Within the last two court involved groups, there could be an undefined number of court hearings. Bing et al. (2009) hypothesized that less conflict would be perceived on the Divorce Adjustment Inventory-

Revised (DAI-R) in the families who could agree on how to dissolve their marriage. Using a pre- and post- design the participants' level of adjustment after divorce was measured at time one and then six months later. The DAI-R was found to have good criterion validity, but its Cronbach's alpha was .69 below the cut off of .77 (Santos, 1999) meaning that it lacked internal consistency and was not the most reliable measure for measuring adjustment post-divorce.

At the six-month follow-up, 31.58% of participants returned their questionnaires. Bing et al. (2009) found that the no-litigation group, compared to the moderate to high litigation group, experienced better post-divorce outcomes and positive child adjustment when there was less conflict and a better post-divorce parental relationship (Bing et al., 2009). Parents who were in the moderate and high litigation groups negatively endorsed items on the DAI-R that sampled for overt forms of hostility around children, which suggest that these parents may engage in more negative behaviours around their children. This negative pattern of interaction could lead to child maladjustment (Bing et al., 2009).

Those in the no-litigation group endorsed having a positive parental relationship, including feeling supported by their co-parent (Bing et al., 2009). The parents' positive relationship meant that they were able to agree on responsibilities, household decisions, and mutually support their children, which was associated with overall greater child adjustment (Bing et al., 2009). Bing et al., hypothesized that despite which condition the parents were in, each group overall would see an improvement at the six-month follow-up. Only those who did not get involved in litigation endorsed positive post-divorce outcomes and satisfaction with their communication and shared child responsibilities. Those who were involved in litigation negatively endorsed these items on the DAI-R demonstrating that conflict still existed (Bing et al., 2009). The high litigation group reported that they could not come to an agreement on the

role of their spouse in their children's lives (Bing et al., 2009). This could potentially lead to parent-child contact problems (Moné et al. (2011). Also, a continual adversarial litigation process increases conflict and anger between the divorcing co-parents (O'Hara-Brewster et al., 2011). When parents are in this continued cycle of litigation, their ability to co-parent diminishes because they have habituated to be adversarial (Sullvan, 2008).

Malcore et al. (2010) and Bing et al. (2009) have added to the literature on potential factors and predictors of a divorce becoming high-conflict. They have illuminated future areas of inquiry by identifying required skills, such as the ability to negotiate successfully, communicate and be able to agree, that are deficient in high-conflict co-parents. Future research should build on the existing literature because Malcore et al. (2010) had a large sample size, but the participants were court mandated and Bing et al. (2009) had a small sample size divided among four study conditions, but the participants chose to be a part of the study. The ability to generalize to the larger population, of divorcing couples, is limited because of these factors. An avenue for future research would be to conduct the study with divorcing co-parents who have not been mandated to the program in order to ascertain if similar levels of poor communication and agreeableness were found and were associated with higher levels of re-litigation. Samples could be drawn from archival data from case law and from the provinces that reported increases in divorces carrying over from the year they were initiated (see Kelly, 2012). In addition, it would be better if co-parents were studied separately so that any statistically significant results are not dependent on the co-parent participating in the intervention.

Violence and High-Conflict Divorce

In the past decade, violence within the family system has received increased attention (Bala & Kehoe, 2017). Violence that has or is occurring within a high-conflict divorcing family

requires a nuanced approach to assessment to understand its roots, what types of violence are present, who might be the perpetrator(s), and who might be the victims (Fidler, Bala, & Hurwitz, 2013). Separation and/or divorce does not mean that violence and aggression will stop, it could continue with deadly outcomes (Dalton et al., 2003; Jaffe et al., 2008). Jaffe et al. (2008) pointed out that cases involving DV/IPV and high-conflict do not occur within a vacuum, but share common elements that should not be ignored. The combination of divorcing parents with DV/IPV creates a high-risk situation that is often brought to the courts to be judicially managed (Fotheringham et al., 2013). The dynamics of violence and high-conflict in the context of divorce can get confused (Amundson, & Lux, 2016; Dalton et al., 2003). Conflict and violence both occur on a spectrum and it is important, in high-conflict cases, to understand where families situate on each of those spectrums to better assist them. In a high-conflict divorce it is possible for third party stakeholders to misunderstand dynamics occurring within the divorcing party's relationship (Bala & Kehoe, 2017).

Conflicting accounts by the parties contributes to the confusion about what occurred in the relationship (Jaffe et al., 2006). When the parties are involved in custody litigation it is common for claims of IPV (Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, 2016). Divorcing parents in high-conflict, are more likely to make allegations and denials of child abuse, spousal violence, child maltreatment, and parental substance abuse (Jaffe et al., 2006; Jaffe et al., 2008). Conflict accounts typically come from each divorcing partner's perspective, as opposed to knowingly lying to third party stakeholders (Jaffe et al., 2006). Although the court may appoint competent experts to assess parental suitability, for post-divorce custody, judges make final decisions on safety and suitability of the child(ren)'s living arrangements (Dalton et al., 2003; Jaffe et al., 2006).

It is difficult to assess the suitability of interventions for high-conflict divorcing parents because the scholarly literature has not agreed on the variables that make up *high-conflict* or what differentiates it from conflict in general. In relation to the function of DV/IPV within high-conflict what researchers have found is that coercive controlling violence (CCV), which allows the perpetrator to exert dominance and control over the victim is different than high-conflict (Fidler, Bala, & Hurwitz, 2013). But, other forms of violence can exist within high-conflict divorces. As previously noted, it is important to assess what types of DV/IPV that are occurring which, itself can be difficult because they cannot always be clearly differentiated from one another (Fidler, Bala, & Hurwitz, 2013). Fidler et al., again, believe it is important to identify, through assessments, the function, the nature, the intensity, and pattern of DV/IPV in a case to provide the appropriate interventions and ensure safety.

To aid decision makers and third-party stakeholders, on how to contextualize issues related to the function of violence within the family system, the changes to the *Divorce Act* address family violence. Family violence, within the act, is defined as:

> … any conduct, whether or not the conduct constitutes a criminal offence, by a family member towards another family member, that is violent or threatening or that constitutes a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour or that causes that other family member to fear for their own safety or for that of another person – and in the case of a child, the direct or indirect exposure to such conduct – and includes: (a) physical abuse, including forced confinement but excluding the use of reasonable force to protect themselves or another person; (b) sexual abuse; (c) threats to kill or cause bodily harm to any person; (d) harassment, including stalking; (e) the failure to provide the necessaries of life; (f) psychological abuse; (g) financial abuse; (h) threats to kill or harm an animal or damage

property; and (i) the killing or harming of an animal or the damaging of property (Government of Canada Department of Justice, 2020).

These criteria for DV/IPV are not exhaustive or static (Government of Canada Department of Justice, 2020). In addition, the inclusion of violence in the act means that violent behaviour within the family, need not be defined as a criminal offence "beyond a reasonable doubt" to be regarded as family violence (Government of Canada Department of Justice, 2020). Also, the act recognizes violence that is witnessed directly by a child or indirectly (i.e., witnessing a parent's fear or injures from abuse) is considered family violence and child abuse (Government of Canada Department of Justice, 2020). Prior to enacting changes to the divorce act, family violence was not defined under the law. It will be up to the individual provinces across the country to incorporate the federal law into practice.

Children and High-Conflict Divorce

Parent-Child Contact Problems (PCCPs)

Just as the term "high-conflict" has been increasing in the past two decades so has the term "parental alienation" (Bala et al., 2010; Fidler & Bala, 2020). Also, similar to high-conflict divorce, there is no one operational definition for alienation/PCCPs, but instead a growing list of characteristics to describe the phenomenon (Polak and Saini, 2015). The two concepts emerging together in the family court system and academic literature could be because of a possible connection, but regardless of a connection, the difficult relational dynamics at work in both phenomenon leave professionals, across disciplines, to struggle with how best to support these families (Birnbaum & Bala, 2010; Fidler & Bala, 2020). Parental alienation was brought in to the lexicon of the family court system and social science research by Gardner (Chang & Vath, in press), but today there is a dispute as to whether alienation is a useful construct (Fidler & Bala,

2020). Some academic researchers have shifted to other constructs to describe strained parent-child relationship, but on a continuum from positive/healthy to negative/pathological (see Polak and Saini, 2015).

Like Moné et al. (2011), Fidler and Bala (2020) believe PCCPs should be approached from a family systems perspective where everyone contributes in some way to the contact problems, either intentionally or unintentionally. PCCPs is an issue that needs to be assessed using a multi-variable perspective (Bala & Fidler, 2020), where, just like in high-conflict, the factors specific to each family are identified so that interventions, supports, decisions made are relevant and effective (Malcore et al., 2010; Polak & Saini, 2015). The salient factors to determine, from the beginning are: (a) distinguishing between alienation/unjustified rejection or realistic estrangement/justified rejection of a parent; and (b) is the contact problems a function of abuse or alienating behaviours by one or both parents (Fidler and Bala, 2020; Polak and Saini, 2015).

Warshak (2015), reflects Fidler and Bala's (2020) concerns around alienation as a useful construct, but the fallacies Warshak discusses are useful in terms of the multi-variable assessment that is needed. When it comes to assessing parental alienation Warshak cautioned that there are 10 parental alienation fallacies that could unduly influence judges in making important family court decisions. One of the fallacies is assuming that the custodial parent is responsible for the alienation without looking into the potential contributions of the other parent to the problem. Also, Warshak discussed an over reliance on the family systems perspective and attributing alienation to both parents, but recommended neutrality and attentiveness to all factors that could be contributing to feelings of alienation. Further longitudinal research needs to be

conducted in this area to determine the long-term effects of various consequences of parental alienation/PCCPs.

Positioning PCCPs within high-conflict divorce and from a family systems perspective Moné et al. 2011 used narrative interviewing with three families. From the data the researchers constructed meaning from each family members reality of the co-parent conflict. From the parents that participated two were women. The inclusion criteria required the children who participated to be nine years or older, for there to be current conflict between the co-parents and signs of alienation. To analyze the interviews, the researchers looked at the individual interview data and then coded for the group. Moné et al. (2011) observed in the narratives that both men and women were capable of perpetrating alienation. This was demonstrated through responses that discussed parent's controlling the time the co-parent spent with the children.

The children that were interviewed shared that they were put into awkward situations by their parents when they shared negative information with them about the other parent. Children also purposefully put themselves in the middle of their parents' conflict to try and mediate the situation. Moné et al. (2011) postulated that by parents putting their children into an adult role by sharing inappropriate information with them and children purposefully trying to mediate their parents' conflict, everyone was contributing to the conflict and the process of alienation. The implications of this finding is that when alienation is occurring a larger assessment of the family will need to be conducted to ascertain where the issues are stemming from.

Another important finding from Moné et al.'s (2011) research study was that parents and children were found to report their relationship differently. Children were more likely to report the parent-child relationship as being less positive than their parents would. This demonstrates the parents disconnect between how they perceive their children are being affected by the

conflict in the divorce (Moné et al., 2011). This finding reinforces the assertion that when co-parents are embroiled in a high-conflict divorce, parents tended to have a minimal understanding of how it is affecting their children (Birnbaum & Bala, 2022; Fidler, Bala, & Hurwitz, 2013; Garber, 2014; Mitcham-Smith & Henry, 2007; Moné et al., 2011). During the interviews, children reported that they were put into an adult role by their parents when they told them negative information about the other parent leaving them with conflicting feelings of loyalty (Moné et al, 2011).

A factor missing from this research project was the other parent. Moné et al. (2011) admitted that there would be a richer context to the narrative if the other parent had added his/her point of view, but the researchers believe that having the children's perspective makes-up for the data of the missing parent (Moné et al., 2011). The current study relies on self-report data, one has to factor in the potential social desirability bias because the topic is sensitive the respondents may not be providing the entire picture of their family's dynamic. Overall the findings from this study would be better supported by a larger sample size.

Fidler and Bala (2020) support the continued use of alienation as a construct and encourage a dialogue around its use. Regardless, the research that denotes alienation, PCCPs, or another name for the construct the research still needs to position itself within the relevant issues of the phenomenon, demonstrate effective ways to assess it, how to intervene, and determine best practices for professionals. The needs in "alienation" research mirrors the needs of research on high-conflict divorce.

Protective Factors

Sandler et al.(2008) studied the construct of parental warmth as a protective factor from the effects of high-conflict divorce on children. The sample for this case study was obtained from

a program that worked with non-custodial fathers. From the 214 participants who met the criteria to participate in the program, only 182 families were purposefully chosen because their files were complete for demographic information. Every member of these participating families completed questionnaires, which included measures of parental conflict, children's perception of interparental conflict, parental warmth, child internalizing behaviours such as depression and anxiety and child externalizing behaviours such as problem behaviours and hostility. Sandler et al. (2008) reported the Cronbach's alphas for these measures and they all met or exceeded the cut-off of .77 (Santos, 1999). The Cronbach's alphas demonstrated that the measures all had good internal consistency and were reliable measures for the constructs.

Sandler et al. (2008) found that a positive relationship between parents and children was important to their well-being after divorce. No significant relationship was found between the level of parental conflict and children's externalizing behaviours, but a relationship was found between children internalizing problems and the warmth of the mother-child relationship as a function of the level of parental conflict and the warmth of the father-child relationship. In addition, children were found to be at a higher risk for internalizing their problems when father warmth was low. High levels of interparental conflict and low parental warmth were associated with the highest level of children internalizing problems. The warmth of the mother-child relationship was the most significant protective factor against internalizing their problems.

One of the major limitations of Sandler et al. (2008) was that their focus was on a custodial mother and non-custodial father family dynamic, which excludes fathers who have primary care. In addition, the researchers did not include same-sex separated co-parents Sandler et al. (2008) acknowledge that their sample was predominantly of American-European descent who self-selected by volunteering for the program. This differs from the general population in

that they were likely more motivated to alter their family dynamics. A strength of this study was the inclusion of the children's perspective. Sandler et al. (2008) suggest that programs that focus on improving the quality of parenting and reducing conflict could help with children's post-separation adjustment, but caution that these programs need to demonstrate efficacy.

Interventions for High-Conflict Divorces

Parenting Coordination

Couples embroiled in a high-conflict divorce are non-responsive to the usual conflict resolution strategies like counselling or psychoeducational programs on parenting and effects of divorce on children (Mitcham-Smith & Henry, 2007). Parenting coordination (PC) is an alternative form of dispute resolution (ADR) for co-parents who are embroiled in a high-conflict divorce (Sullivan, 2008). PC has been used since the 1980's (Deutsch et al., 2018). Parenting coordinator (PCs) generally have a background in the law or mental health and are either court-appointed or engaged with the agreement of both parents to use one. PC is a structured activity that requires training and has professional guidelines for practice (see American Psychological Association, 2019; Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, 2019), but their authority and how they function within their role is determined by the jurisdiction in which they practice.

The overarching goal of PC is to manage parents' conflict without the use of the court. Getting parents to disengage from their conflict and engage in *parallel co-parenting* where their interactions are limited reduces the likelihood of conflict (Sullivan, 2008). To help achieve this, PCs help conflictual co-parents create and execute a parenting plan, and help them improve upon their communication, problem solving, and decision-making skills (Deutsch et al., 2018). The development of a parenting plan may increase the likelihood that parents can "move on" and parent within the parameters of the plan (Sullivan, 2008). PC is also useful for dealing with

recurring issues like vacations, extracurricular activities, and temporary changes to the parenting schedule.

Currently, the empirical evidence of the effectiveness of PC is emerging (Deutsch et al., 2018; Mitcham-Smith & Henry, 2007; Sullivan, 2008). O'Hara-Brewster et al. (2011) and Henry et al. (2009) both examined whether PC helped to reduce conflict in high-conflict divorce proceedings. Both studies found a reduction in high-conflict as indicated by the number of motions filed (O'Hara-Brewster et al., 2011).

Another focus was whether PC reduced the work of the judiciary and outside agencies that work with high-conflict co-parents. Longitudinally, O'Hara-Brewster et al. (2011) coded 21 family court cases to ascertain the kind of motions that were filed, the involvement of other professionals and agencies in the two years prior to the beginning of PC and the subsequent two years. The researchers reported inter-rater reliability to be 97% (O'Hara-Brewster et al., 2011). Henry et al. (2009) compared court motions one year prior to PC and one year after. Both studies found less litigation after the initiation of PC than before. (Henry et al. 2009; O'Hara-Brewster et al., 2011). O'Hara-Brewster et al. (2011) found statistically significant reductions in the court's time in handling and hearing high-conflict divorces, a 70% decrease in the involvement of outside agencies with these families, and a significant reduction in motions filed concerning issues with children and safety issues concerning violence. Of 21 cases studied 5 (23.8%) fired their PC. Analyzing these cases separately from the 16 who retained their PC revealed that court motions increased by 112% after the coordinator was fired, versus a 75.4% reduction among families who continued to use PC.

Both studies have added research to the question of whether there is efficacy to the use of PC in helping to reduce high-conflict in divorces, but the research is limited upon the

conclusions that can be drawn. A major limitation, of both these studies, is their lack of a control group. Although O'Hara-Brewster et al. (2011) found differences between co-parents who fired their PC and those who did not, the direction of causality cannot be determined. Was letting their PC go a function of their high-conflict or were they more high-conflict after firing their PC? In addition, is there a time effect confounding the results? Did the co-parents reduction in conflict occur because the PC was involved or because enough time had passed to resolve the conflict? Without a control group there is no way to understand the cause and effect of using a PC.

Although Henry et al.'s (2009) and O'Hara-Brewster et al.'s (2011) findings are promising. It is necessary to have "buy-in" from mental health and legal professionals. Without the courts and lawyers believing in the efficaciousness of PC, their use may still meet with obstacles. In that vein, Fieldstone et al. (2012) surveyed lawyers, judges, and PCs as to their knowledge of PC, their experience with PC, their view of the court's response to PC, the relationship between PCs, courts, and family lawyers, and perceptions of PC's effectiveness. Response rates for judges was 52%, for lawyers was 35%, and for PCs was 92%.

Judges and lawyers responded that they would recommend PC, but Fieldstone et al. (2012) found confusion among lawyers and judges about the role of PC and its limitations. For example, some lawyers and judges did not understand that PCs' roles are not to give opinions on parent time sharing, provide therapy, act as a mediator, or diagnose one of the parties. Judges were in favour of PCs working on time-sharing schedules, but lawyers were not because they did not want PC's creating an immovable scenario for their clients. Another important finding was that only 59% of the judges inquired about DV/IPV before mandating parents into PC. This is problematic given that DV/IPV is a contraindication for PC. Judges are mandated to check on

DV/IPV, but it has fallen on the PC's to do so; therefore, families have been ordered to PC when the process is not suitable for them (Fieldstone et al., 2012).

The study demonstrated that both judges and lawyers found the PC model helpful. Judges found reports from PCs were helpful to their decision-making. As well, PC's were able to assist parents to reach an agreement on time-sharing issues, preventing them from returning to court (Fieldstone et al., 2012). Seventy-nine percent of lawyers said that their relationships with their clients were helped by PC because they perceived that they received fewer requests for crisis assistance with fewer calls overall.

Fieldstone et al. (2012) findings are not generalizable because there are multiple PC models utilized across North American jurisdictions (Kirkland, 2010). The availability of PC differs widely across these jurisdictions. When PCs are in private practice, some families are not able to afford PC, which in some locations has prevented judges from mandating it (Fieldstone et al. 2012). PCs have also withdrawn their services because of non-payment. This study has demonstrated a need to standardize the PC process. Research has demonstrated that PC's perform more successfully when they have a standardized approach, as well as, when they have clear guidelines, boundaries and role definition (Kirkland, 2010). Future research on parenting coordination needs to focus on developing empirically based research designs for this model that include a large representative sample of the divorcing population.

Conjoint Mediation and Therapy Model (CoMeT)

Jacobs and Jaffe (2010) reviewed the efficacy of the Australian developed CoMeT model that pairs a mediator with a therapist to help resolve issues in high-conflict divorces. The key assumption of this model is that the parents will focus on the needs of their children and are ready to take responsibility for their actions and work to change their negative behaviours; this is

essential if CoMeT is going to work, as breaking agreements is historically how one parent controls the post-breakup relationship (Jacobs & Jaffe, 2010). The therapy that is provided is done to discover and remove the blocks to effective mediation. There was no information on the types of therapy performed in the CoMeT model.

Unlike Henry et al. (2009), Jacobs and Jaffe (2010) used a pre- and post- design using a battery of measures. The measures used were: (a) The Parenting Alliance Measure; (b) The Parent-Child/ren Relationship Scale; (c) The Parental Conflict Scale; (d) The Acrimony Scale; (e) The Attachment Scale; (f) The Piers Inventory of Personal Well-being; and (g) The Post-Intervention Questionnaire. The post-intervention questionnaire was made up of 14 likert-type statements to assess parents' satisfaction. The measures assessed parents' perceptions of their ability to parent together, their level of conflict, the parent-child relationship, attachment, and well-being. Strong internal consistencies were reported for the Parenting Alliance Measure, the Acrimony Scale, and the Piers Inventory of Personal Well-being. Psychometric properties were not presented for the rest of the measures.

Jacobs and Jaffe (2010) found that by the end of CoMeT, 48% of participants were able to come to an agreement or a partial agreement, but because the researchers only did a three-month follow-up they were unable to determine if the agreements held. Therefore, the researchers cannot state that their model helped to reduce the rates of relitigation or the reduction of high-conflict divorce behaviours. The therapy appeared to help the divorcing couples detach from one another and move forward, which is consistent with findings that holding on to negative feelings blocks the progress of the divorce (Jacobs & Jaffe, 2010). This model yielded promising results that need to be built upon with further research. Further research should include a control group so that cause and effect statements can be made. In addition, research on

the model should look at what therapy/ies are being provided and how they support the high-conflict population. Knowing which therapy/ies are being provided will also help to support their use with the population.

The Working Together Program

The Working Together Program (WTP) is a court-mandated intervention that targets co-parent's relationship by working on their ability to parent after divorce and reduce their interparental conflict around their children (Owen & Rhoades, 2012). It is a 12-hour group-based intervention with psychoeducational and interpersonal process components. Participants receive education on the needs of children post-separation and co-parenting dynamics both past and future (Owen & Rhoades, 2012). The efficacy of the program was tested using measures to assess attitude and conflict at pre-, post-, and two-month follow-up (Owen & Rhoades, 2012). Attitude was operationally defined as adjustment in the co-parenting relationship and confidence in the co-parent and conflict was operationally defined as ability to communicate and level of overt hostility (Owen & Rohoades, 2012).

Both men and women reported reductions in attitudinal and interpersonal conflict at post-test. These results were maintained at the two-month follow-up (Owen & Rhoades, 2012). The authors suggested further research using a longitudinal design which, could determine if the effects of the intervention can be maintained over a longer period of time. As well, a larger more representative sample needs to be used to be able to discern interactions between variables and to ascertain if the program is able to address the familial needs of diverse families. The measure used to assess relationship adjustment was altered so that the questions reflected co-parents. By changing the measure, it alters its psychometric properties and it would have to be vetted to discern if it is a good measure of the construct.

Counselling Interventions With Children

Overcoming Barriers Family Camp (OBFC)

OBFC is an intervention that has been developed for high-conflict families where a child is refusing contact with one parent (Sullivan et al., 2010). The camp takes place over five days and provides families with psychoeducation, clinical intervention, and milieu therapy with the goal of reconnecting the parent with the alienated child (Sullivan et al., 2010). Every member of the family, including the original family unit and any new romantic partners, attend. Therapeutic activities support co-parents to work out current conflicts. Therapeutic activities with children work to create a safe connection and provide families with better communication tools when they leave (Sullivan et al., 2010).

Over a two-year period, the camp has worked with ten families, nine of which were court mandated (Sullivan et al., 2010). These families displayed hostility while at the camp that required defusing and took focus away from the camp's programs (Sullivan et al., 2010). The only data on this program is from exit interviews that positively endorsed the experience. There are no outcome measures to demonstrate a reduction in conflict or evidence of a long-term re-established relationship with the alienated child.

Giving Children Hope (GCH)

The GCH program was implemented in Winnipeg, Manitoba in the late '90s to bridge a service gap for families involved in high-conflict divorces (Rauh et al., 2016). GCH involves both parents and their children in groups that run parallel to one another. At the outset of the program each parent is in a separate group; after six weeks they begin to attend group together to mediate their co-parenting issues. The program works to demonstrate to the parents how their conflict has impacted their children to encourage them to work through their problems as well as

providing a safe and supportive environment to their children. Families experiencing domestic violence or parent-child contact problems are excluded.

GCH seeks to replace the existing familial culture of hopelessness and distrust with a culture of trust and nurturing. Rauh et al. (2016) provided insight into the emotional journey of high-conflict parents as they enter into the program. On referral, parents predominantly reflected general mistrust and hopelessness that a therapeutic intervention could succeed in reducing the conflict when previous interventions had not. Mistrust towards their ex-partner, their children, and the systems previously utilized to resolve the conflict was found. From the start, practitioners need to approach high-conflict families with a positive unconditional regard, empathy, and helpfulness. The intake process is important in this program to work through the parents' negative feelings. In addition, intake is where the therapeutic alliance is developed and how the practitioners of the group begin to break down the parents' resistance to the therapeutic work. Parents chose to engage in the program because they wanted supports for their children.

The program evaluation uniquely interviewed the children along with their parents about their experiences and the outcomes from participating in GCH. By interviewing the children their perspective can support the reported outcomes that the parents endorse. The participants reported improvements in communication, reduced conflict, less behavioural problems in their children, with less stress, and anger (as cited in Rauh, 2016). Further testing, with a quantitative study that includes a control group would add support to the qualitative results found.

Psychotherapeutic Interventions

Psychotherapy approaches, to counselling clients and families involved in high-conflict divorce, focuses on the reestablishment of the family unit post-divorce. Regardless of the co-

parent's relationship with one another they will always be connected through their children (Spillane-Grieco, 2000).

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

Spillane-Grieco (2000) proposed that CBT family therapy is a systemic approach that is appropriate for high-conflict divorcing families. To support a high-conflict family to re-establish as two families, post-divorce, by focusing on the clinical issues of family development. Through parent training and developing communication and empathy skills deficiencies observed in the high-conflict family are addressed. Onboarding skills in counselling is done with the whole family and is dependent on the needs assessed by the clinician.

Spillane-Grieco's (2000) case study documents the effectiveness of CBT with one family experiencing high-conflict divorce. Originally, the father wanted his eldest daughter to just receive supports, but through therapeutic assessment (i.e., interview with the eldest daughter), it was determined that family therapy was required to address what the therapist determined was a family crisis. The family crisis identified was the high-conflict family dynamic. Family counselling was consented to by the father and the children's mother declined to participate, but consented to the children taking part.

The therapeutic work included individual and family work. Work with the father focused on replacing his negative thought processes and emotions towards his ex-wife with loving focus on his children, confronting his misogynistic thought process towards his daughters, parent training, and support with communication. Work with the oldest child focused on mood and behavioural concerns. Family work focused on empathetic understanding, practicing empathy, problem solving and communication skills (see Spillane-Grieco's, 2000). In family sessions, the father and his daughters practiced their skills together.

By the end of counselling, the children had improved on mood and behaviours that had been flagged as problematic. The children had begun to communicate more assertively with both their parents. The father had disengaged from court processes with the children's mother (Spillane-Grieco, 2000). Spillane-Grieco noted that when one parent disengaged from the conflict it reduced the conflict globally.

Spillane-Grieco (2000) noted a change in the eldest child's mood when her parents were behaving more appropriately towards one another. There is no evidence in the study about the change in behaviours of the mother. The core work was completed by the father and his two children. As a family system, the father and his two children grew in their cognitive and emotional skills. Without further follow-up and assessment, it is difficult to determine that the high-conflict behaviours between the parents have decreased or CBT supported a healthier system between the father and his children. In addition, to support the use of CBT with high-conflict divorce parent child dyads, further research needs to be conducted to be able to generalize the positive effects across varying familial and cultural dynamics.

Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) and Narrative Approach

D'Abate (2016) proposes parenting coordinators and co-parenting coaches use a combination of SFBT and narrative therapeutic techniques with high-conflict parents, based on the perspective that SFBT and narrative therapy have been used together more frequently (Chang, & Nylund, 2013) and that the two modalities share fundamental therapeutic tenets of being post-modern, client centred, and view clients as nonpathological (D'Abate, 2016). Working holistically, the practitioner can guide the clients through therapeutic techniques such as the miracle question, exceptions, scaling, and re-storying to develop a post-conflict family narrative. Achieving the main goal of a positive new family narrative is perceived as the new

foundation upon which the family can build, and revisit to re-affirm post-divorce goals and cooperative co-parenting skills.

At the onset of services, the practitioner would contact and interview the relevant parties (i.e., parents, children, lawyers, and family). The initial conversations with the parents can be laden with conflict, requiring the practitioner to direct the conversation with open-ended questions (D'Abate, 2016). In addition, the practitioner will screen for DV/IPV and abide by any court order related to the safety of the family members. Speaking to multiple individuals involved with the conflicted family helps the practitioner understand the problems and the multiple perspectives on why the conflict has become intractable. The practitioner meets with the parents first, then their children, and if no safety issues were present then subsequent sessions would involve the whole family.

The SFBT and narrative techniques of the miracle question, looking for exceptions, and scaling are the therapeutic vehicle that moves the divorcing co-parents through their conflict (D'Abate, 2016). These techniques are utilized throughout the initial interviews and the subsequent family sessions. The use of the SFBT's miracle question is used with each member of the family and each of the parents' lawyers to ascertain the positive outcomes the parties would like to work towards (D'Abate, 2016). In addition, the parents and children are asked to share what the family narrative is and the parents are asked about exceptions to the conflict narrative (i.e., when the family narrative was more positive). Based on the information from the relevant parties and the judicial mandate agreed upon, then family goals can be created. From initial contact throughout the subsequent sessions the practitioner uses scaling to ascertain a base line and change in the problems that contribute to the conflict. With each session the practitioner works with the family to re-shape their narrative by asking about positive changes and exploring

exemptions to the conflicted narrative. Both therapeutic modalities, SFBT and narrative, believe in clients' abilities to reshape their future through externalizing the conflict and redirecting their negative energy to a positive narrative through achieving set co-parenting and familial goals. Written feedback is provided to the parents so that they can review their progress. Overall, the process teaches and reinforces the parents' abilities to create solutions, collaborate, and make decisions together.

D'Abate (2016) suggests that the limitations of the approach begin at the structural level because each practitioner will apply the theories techniques within the boundaries of their practice and the assessed needs of the clients. The variations in service application, in the therapeutic techniques chosen by practitioners to use render formal research on the use of SFBT and narrative with high-conflict families difficult. Validating these therapies with the high-conflict population would be difficult and the efficacy of these techniques with this population would come from anecdotal and self-reported accounts.

Emotion Focused Therapy (EFT)

EFT posits that the distress in a couple's relationship comes from unmet attachment needs, which creates the conditions for a negative interaction style (McRae et al., 2014). When viewing high-conflict divorce through the lens of attachment theory, Saini (2012) postulates that the behaviours are fear-based reactions to losing an important attachment figure. A separation and/or divorce does not mean that a former couple's attachment and underlying psychological foundations dissolve and therefore do not need to be addressed.

Using experiential, systemic, and attachment-based modalities EFT practitioners work to provide a safe space for couples to explore their unmet attachment needs (Burgess-Moser et al., 2015). Divorcing co-parents can experience their inner emotional worlds to help them transform

their negative interaction style (Burgess-Moser et al., 2015; McRae et al., 2014).

Allan (2016) and Saini (2012) have conceptualized the use of EFT, with the high-conflict divorcing population, to create new attachment scripts to develop a relationship as co-parents post-divorce. Allan (2016) proposes using the first stage of EFT, *cycle de-escalation* to facilitate change in co-parent's negative interaction style. Stage one, which is comprised of the following four steps: (a) recognize relational conflicts; (b) identify the negative interaction cycle where conflicts arise; (c) discover the emotions connected to attachment for each person that is the basis of their conflict; and (d) view the conflict through the lens of the couple's negative interaction cycle, the emotions that form the basis of the negative cycle, the couple's attachment weaknesses, and their needs (Allan, 2016; Gurman et al., 2015). Allan (2016) conceptualizes working with divorcing co-parents through exploring the co-parent relationship, and not their failed marriage. Currently, EFT as an intervention with high-conflict co-parents is in the early conceptual stage.

Summary

The term "high-conflict divorce" to describe a highly conflictual sub-population of litigants in divorce preceding's has permeated throughout the judiciary and social science research (Birnbaum & Bala, 2010; Birnbaum & Bala, in press; Dale, 2014). To date, an agreed upon definition of the construct has not been established in the academic research. A lack of a definition, for the construct, makes it difficult to define the population's characteristics and build a body of research. Without a consistent body of research, assessments and interventions cannot be continuously and empirically built upon to aid professionals in effectively supporting this population. The current study aims to add to and strengthen the literature on the characteristics that make-up high-conflict divorce to move the social science research towards a more concrete

definition of the construct.

DV/IPV has been discussed, in the literature, as being a facet of high-conflict divorce; the two share common elements (Fidler, Bala, & Hurwitz, 2013; Jaffe et al., 2008). It is difficult to discern how DV/IPV functions within a high-conflict divorce because some research studies exclude it (see Moné et al., 2011). The dynamics of DV/IPV within a high-conflict divorce need to be better understood and consistently included as one of the characteristics of high-conflict divorce. In addition, DV/IPV needs to become a part of the operational definition for the construct.

Lastly, there is little empirical evidence for the efficacy of interventions for high-conflict separated/divorced co-parents. PC, a service that is mandated by the courts to help high-conflict parents disengage from their conflict, focus on the needs of their children, and reduce court applications (Sullivan, 2008), is promising but not yet empirically supported. While there appears to be a relationship between PC and a reduction in the amount of litigation undertaken by high-conflict co-parents, the research was not controlled (Henry et al., 2009; O'Hara-Brewster et al., 2011). Like PC, the other interventions reviewed require further study. Some of them, like the psychotherapeutic techniques are in the proposal stage and need to be developed into a clinical format that can be studied. From the anecdotal information, provided by the researchers of these different interventions for high-conflict divorce, positive outcomes have come from parents refocusing on their children and working towards creating a healthier environment for them. The current study aims to provide evidence to support NWFF as an intervention for high-conflict divorcing co-parents that supports co-parents being able to make decisions together without reverting back to the courts (New Ways for Families, 2015).

CHAPTER III:

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK, RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used for this study is postpositivism. Postpositivism was chosen because it is adapted with an epistemological focus on quasi-experimental design (Taylor & Medina, 2013). Quasi-experimental designs do not utilize random assignment and rely on outcome measures and experimental units to create the comparisons that are used to make inferences about observed changes. From research results, the postpositivism paradigm strives to disseminate objective and generalizable knowledge on a phenomenon to demonstrate that it has a set of properties that are general in their relationships with variables that are pre-defined (Taylor & Medina, 2013). Knowledge is the outcome of social conditioning, in postpositivism, and to understand that knowledge you need to examine it in the context of the social structures that created that phenomenon (Wahyuni, 2012). Postpositivism is appropriate for the current study because context of the participants is necessary to make useful inferences about the results.

Research Design

For the current study, a quasiexperimental within-participants research design was utilized. The research design was determined by the nature of how the data being analysed, in this study, was collected. The data was collected using a pre- post-test design. The benefit of using a one-group pre- post-test design to collect the data is that it is easy to carry out and relatively simple to understand (Reichardt, 2009). In addition, quasi-experimental designs may be necessary because of a study's parameters where it may not be ethical or plausible to carry out a randomized study. Lastly, as Reichardt's notes, that results from a variety of research designs, taken as a whole, may yield more valid results versus a collection of randomized experiments.

Methods

Participants

Participants were adult clients of a non-profit family service agency in a mid-sized Alberta city that delivered NWFF. Judges of the Provincial Court of Alberta and justices of the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta, having been trained in NWFF, ordered clients to the intervention who made court applications for their co-parent to have highly restricted parenting time. Typically, this included situations when a parent requested their co-parent have supervised parenting time, have no overnight parenting time, or have severely limited parenting time (e.g., 2 days in a 14-day cycle).

Agency staff facilitated participants' connection with a NWFF clinician and collected the pre- and post- intervention data. Data was collected from a convenience sample of N=469 from 2011 to 2017. The cases were trimmed to a sample size of n=353 for analysis. The 353 participants were former partners who co-parented minor children. The participants were almost evenly split between male (50.1%) and females (49.9%) with the majority of participants, 73.5%, having been in a relationship between 0 to 10 years. A small portion (23.7%) of participants had been in a relationship from 11 to 20 years and 2.8% of participants were with their former partner for over 20 years. Also, most participants (39.5%) had two children with a comparable number having one child (35.2%), 17% of participants had three children and 8.2% had four or more. It is not clear, from the data collected, if all the children mentioned by participants are shared with their high-conflict co-parent. No other demographic information, such as age, cultural background, and socioeconomic status were collected in this study.

Data Analysis I

In data analysis I, descriptive characteristics were analyzed to create a baseline of functioning across the high-conflict divorce populations' factors: (a) communication; (b) co-

operation; (c) violence; (d) interparental hatred; (e) perception of child adjustment; (f) continuous litigation; (g) perception of parental involvement; and (h) personal perceptions of ex-partner relationship (see Appendix B). From the original N=469 the data was trimmed to n=353. One hundred and sixteen participants were removed from the data set. Criteria was created for case exclusions (see Appendix H). The exclusion criteria is as follows: (a) cases required a participation ID; (b) cases required a NWFF identification (NW) as part of its participant code; (c) if there were multiple cases for the same participation ID the cases were compared to determine which one(s) were valid; (d) if the cases were labelled follow-up they were excluded; (e) cases required a pre- or post-test designation, see Appendix H for detailed case exclusion rules; (f) cases required an A or B sex identification to be included, see Appendix H for detailed case exclusion rules. As a note, cases were excluded if they did not have an NW as part of its participation code because it was not clear, from the original data set, if more than the participants for NWFF were given the Ribner Scale to complete.

Data Analysis II

Data analysis II, focused on shifts in participant perceptions, across high-conflict divorce factors, from pre-intervention to post-intervention. From the trimmed data set of n=353 a sub-sample of n=14 of matched former co-parent pairs (14 females and 14 males) were used. Out of n=353 participants there were n=14 former co-parents who completed both the pre-and post-test. To be included in data analysis II, participants needed to have completed a pre- and post-test as well as their former co-parent having competed a pre- and post-test. Three hundred and thirty-nine participants were removed from data analysis II.

Sample Comparison

A comparison of the samples used in data analysis I and II was conducted to determine, statistically, if they are representative of the overall sample population. To complete the comparison the participants from data analysis II (n=28) were removed from data analysis I's population (n=353) to get n=325. The two populations were then compared on a select number of demographic variables, which include: (a) gender; (b) number of children; (c) number of previous separations; (d) length of relationship in years; (e) and length of separation or divorce to time of baseline data collection in years. Z-scores were computed from the raw data to conduct a two proportion test to determine if the populations are the same.

NWFF Intervention

NWFF is a 4-step, 6-session, counselling intervention that includes: (a) establishing the structure; (b) individual counselling; (c) parent-child counselling; and (d) family decision-making (Eddy, 2009). Structure was established when the co-parents were directed by the court to participate in NWFF. The co-parents each chose a counsellor and the judge selected a parent-child counsellor for the parent-child counselling portion of the intervention. Counsellors were masters-trained Registered Social Workers and Registered Psychologists. Some were employees of the agency and others were in private practice. Prior to starting one-on-one counselling, each parent wrote down their three concerns about the other parent, prepared a behavioural declaration (an affirmative commitment in response to the other parent's concerns), and listed three positives about the other parent. All parties involved in counselling were provided these documents (Chang et al., 2016).

During individual counselling, each co-parent attends six individual counselling sessions. The counsellor teaches NWFF *four big skills*: (a) *flexible thinking*; (b) *managed emotions*; (c)

moderate behaviour; and (d) *checking yourself* (Eddy, 2009). Flexible thinking aims to teach co-parents that there are multiple solutions to a problem (Eddy, 2009). Managed emotions focus on teaching parents not to overreact to situations by learning to cope with their anger, sadness, and anxiety (Eddy, 2009). Learning to moderate behaviours helps co-parents avoid taking extreme actions or using extreme language (Eddy, 2009). Lastly, learning to check yourself involves co-parents reminding themselves to use the other three skills when they are experiencing stress (Eddy, 2009). The goal during individual counselling is to teach the four big skills and develop co-parents' abilities to self-manage and effectively engage in conflict resolution (Eddy, 2009). To reinforce the skills and maintain continuity between counsellors the practitioners attended NWFF training as well as follow an intervention manual.

In parent-child counselling each parent attends counselling with their child(ren) for three sessions, for a total of six parent-child sessions. The sessions are guided by a workbook and the co-parents are expected to complete the assignments based on the information their child(ren) shares with them during the sessions (Eddy, 2009). The general structure of these sessions are: (a) the co-parents teach the four big skills to their child(ren); (b) the co-parents listen to their child(ren)'s concerns about the separation or divorce; and (c) the co-parents learn how they can support their child(ren)'s relationship with the other co-parent (Eddy, 2009).

Immediately after the parent-child counselling concludes the co-parents come together, usually in mediation, to make family decisions (Eddy, 2009). The goal of this step is for the co-parents to utilize the skills they learned during NWFF to make all their decisions by agreement (Eddy, 2009). When the co-parents can make an agreement during mediation or another form of settlement they are not relying on the court system any longer to make the decisions for them (Eddy, 2009). If NWFF did not work and the co-parents return to court their intervention

counsellors do not act as advocates for them. NWFF counsellors becoming experts for court would diminish the efficacy of the program, which aims to support co-parents' skill development.

Theoretical Orientation

NWFF is based on the following established counselling modalities: (a) family systems theory; (b) cognitive therapy; (c) Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT); (d) Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT); and (e) Child-Inclusive Mediation (CIM) (Chang et al., 2016). Family systems theory believes that a family member's behaviour cannot be separated from the behaviour of the other members, which makes changes within the system difficult (Chang et al., 2016). The theory influenced the development of the intervention by creating an opportunity for all family members to learn the same skills to help create change within the family system (Chang et al., 2016). Cognitive therapy is represented in the intervention through the development of a workbook of exercises that are specific to separation and divorce problems (Chang et al., 2016). DBT influenced the development of flexible thinking in the intervention (Chang et al., 2016). Flexible thinking aims to change co-parents' indecisive all or nothing thinking they hold about one another. PCIT, like family systems therapy, has its foundations in NWFF as a way to strengthen the connection between child(ren) and co-parents (Chang et al., 2016). Lastly, CIM is mirrored in the intervention by providing co-parents with information on their child(ren)'s concerns around the separation and divorce (Chang et al., 2016). The idea is that once co-parents are aware of how their child(ren) are being affected they can make

appropriate decisions about parenting (Eddy, 2009).

Ribner Scale

The Ribner Scale (see Appendix A) is a self-report measure that was developed by Dr. Neil Ribner to evaluate NWFF and collect demographic information. The scale has 83-items that uses both a likert-type scale and narrative responses. See Appendix B for a breakdown of Ribner Scale questions for each high-conflict divorce factor.

The psychometric properties of the Ribner Scale have not been evaluated. The factors being evaluated were empirically derived. These factors are cooperation, communication, violence, interparental hatred, perception of child adjustment, continuous litigation, perception of parental involvement, and personal perceptions of ex-partner relationship.

Data Collection

A research coordinator at the agency collected data from the participants using the Ribner Scale before the beginning and after the completion of the intervention. The research coordinator kept track of the participants during the intervention and made sure they completed it. Consent was obtained from the participants to have their data used for research purposes, and ethical approval was obtained for the use of archival data by the Athabasca University research ethics board.

Data Entry

Prior to conducting data analysis, the archival data set was imported from its original Microsoft Excel spreadsheet (MES) into IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 26 (SPSS; 2019). As the data was imported, into SPSS, I reviewed both the cases and participant responses to the continuous variables (see Appendix A; Questions 1-4). The original MES had N=469 cases; I grouped them by year; colour coded them by co-parent pair, for pre- post-

matches, and entries without a co-parent pair or a pre- or post-test. The colour coded groupings, of the data, helped determine the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the data set (see Appendix H). After reviewing the colour coded groupings, the data set was trimmed to n=353 or 75% of the original data set. The reduction of n=116 from the original MES was based on criterion created by the researcher (see Appendix H). In addition, criteria were developed to manage qualitative outliers for when participants answered a question that required a number for an answer, but responded by saying "a lot" for questions such as "how many days of work did you miss" (see Appendix H). Twenty-two qualitative errors were corrected before the data was entered into SPSS.

The researcher, In SPSS, created 56 variables by collapsing the likert-scale response options on the Ribner Scale as well as 7 dichotomous (yes or no) variables for both pre- and post-test questions (see Appendix I). The collapsed variables were created by grouping either: a) always and often; and b) sometimes, rarely, and never; or c) strongly agree and agree; d) uncertain; and e) strongly disagree and disagree (see Appendix I). The dichotomous variables were created to include participant responses that were qualitative when the response should have been quantitative.

Statistical Analysis

For the present study, the data analysis was conducted in two parts: analysing the demographics and using a smaller sample of matched pairs (n=14) to assess for changes on high-conflict divorce factors after completing the intervention. After the data was imported into SPSS (see Data Entry) it was assessed for inconsistencies such as outliers and missing data. After the data inconsistencies were appropriately managed, the sample of n=353 was analysed using descriptive statistics to illustrate baseline data for the high-conflict population. Reviewing the

descriptive statistics will provide an overview of the sample demographic characteristics, which includes length of separation, number of children, number of previous separations, and years separated or divorced before being court mandated into the intervention. Descriptive statistics will be used to summarize the pre- and post- intervention changes on specific factors from the Ribner Scale. The factors include, perceptions of co-parent's ability to co-operate, communication, violence in the relationship, continuous litigation and perceptions of child adjustment. In addition, omnibus chi-Square tests were performed on the frequency data. If the omnibus chi-Square tests showed significant results ($p<0.05$), the continuous variables were collapsed into two categories and post-hoc chi-Square tests of independence were performed to determine the source of significant results. A chi-Square test of independence, a nonparametric test, was performed to discern if the dependent variables and independent variable (i.e., gender) were related or not associated to one another (Kent State University, 2021). Chi-Square tests were conducted to support the descriptive statistics (Sharpe, 2015) and indicate what variables may be of importance for future research in high-conflict divorce.

The second part of the data analysis uses the McNemar's test, which is a non-parametric test, to determine differences in participants' perceptions on the factors of high-conflict divorce post-intervention. A non-parametric test was used because the sample for data analysis two was a matched pairs design. A matched pairs design, with nominal data uses the McNemar's test (Pembury-Smith & Ruxton, 2020).

To use the McNemar's test the three assumptions of the test must be met: a) there has to be a dependent variable with two categories, a dichotomous variable and a categorical independent variable that has two related groups, matched pairs; b) the dependent variable's two groups have to be mutually exclusive; and c) the participants are a random sample of the

population (Laerd Statistics, 2018). In the current study the assumption to use the test are met. There are dichotomous dependent variables, matched pairs, and the participants are only in one group.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The study results are divided into two parts. The first part describes the baseline sample of n=353 using frequencies and chi-square tests to show where the relationships are between gender and the dependent variables. The chi-square results should be interpreted with caution because the results border on or violate the two assumptions of the chi-square test. The two assumptions are: (a) 20% of cells cannot have an expected count of less than five; and (b) the expected counts need to meet or exceed the minimum expected count (Kent State, 2021). The second part of the results compares the selected outcomes from the NWFF intervention from a sub-sample of matched pairs (n=14) using the non-parametric McNemar's test.

Data Analysis I

Descriptive Statistics

Out of the n=353 participants, in this study, 50.1% were males and 49.9% were females. Prior to separating and/or divorcing for the final time, a small percentage (34.1%) of participants reported that they had previously separated between 1 to 10 times with the majority (65.9%) having never separated. The time from when the co-parents separated or divorced to the time they were mandated into the intervention was about 0 to 5 years for 81.6% of participants. A small percentage of participants (13.6%) had been apart for 6 to 10 years and 4.8% had not been together for over 10 years before entering the intervention.

Using the Ribner Scale, participants were asked if they have had to access medical, mental health, social services, and missed work because of their separation or divorce. For the majority of both male and female participants, they did not access social services (64.3% males and 69.2% females), they did not seek out medical services (87.7% males and 72.2% females), or mental health services (64.3% males and 51.0% females). A majority of males (60.9%) said they

missed work because of their divorce or separation versus 42.8% of female participants who shared they missed work.

Communication

To assess communication between high-conflict ex-partners, the Ribner Scale assessed frequency and types of conversations as well as the perception of conflict in the conversation. The frequency analysis is followed up with chi-square tests to determine if there is an association between gender and communication as well as where that relationship might be.

The majority of male (69%) and female (73.3%) respondents shared that an in-person conversation with their ex-partner had occurred within the week to the past month. Within the same time frame, fewer respondents shared that the conversation *in person* or *over the phone*, was positive (41.3% males and 41.5% females). The frequency of arguments resulting from discussions around parenting was reported *to always* to *often* occur by 58.2% of males and 72.7% of females. In addition, the majority of ex-partners endorsed *always* to *often* that a conversation was 'stressful' or 'tense' (72.4% males and 82.4% females; Ribner Scale, n.d.). Ex-partner's ability to discuss a range of problems and children's accomplishments consistently was poor for both male and female participants (see Appendix J). Specifically, respondents shared that they were *rarely* to *never* able to talk to their former partner to discuss issues around raising the children (61% males and 60.8% females), how they are adjusting to the divorce (73.4% males and 73.8% females), and problems with co-parenting (70.1% males and 66.5% females). In addition, ex-partners noted that they *rarely* to *never* could speak to their former partner when discussing problems, the children are having (46.4% males and 46.6% females), school or medical concerns (44.1% males and 37.5% females), and their accomplishments or progress (44% males and 50.6% females).

To further explore the baseline data, an omnibus chi-square test was conducted on all the variables. Two significant results were found. To determine where the relationships were between gender and the dependent variables, post-hoc chi-square tests of independence were performed. These post-hoc analyses found women were more likely to report an argument occurred when discussing parenting issues, X^2 (1, N = 348) = 8.9, p = .003, and that women were more likely to report that they would not discuss problems with raising their children with their former partner, X^2 (1, N = 346) = 5.5, p = .02.

Co-operation

The factor of co-operation was assessed by surveying respondents on their perceived ability to manage the co-parenting relationship with their former partner and exploring its associations with gender using chi-square tests (see Appendix K). Respondents shared that they *always* to *often* have a difference of opinion with their ex-partner about child rearing (49.2% males and 62.5% females; see Appendix K). Male and female participants endorsed that they *rarely* to *never* can make major decisions (49.2% males and 43.8% females), day-to-day decisions (59.3% males and 68.2% females), or plan special events (53.7% males and 67.1% females) with their ex-partner.

Assessing respondents' perceptions of co-operation, in their co-parenting relationship, most participants noted that when changes needed to be made their partner *rarely* to *never* accommodated (55.4% males and 56.9% females). Also, the majority of respondents (69.5% males and 77.3% of males) *rarely* to *never* perceived their ex-partner as supportive of them as a parent. More females compared to males (68.7% versus 57.6%) will *rarely* to *never* seek help from their ex-partner with the children or can rely on them to be a resource with parenting (52% males and 68.2% females). The reverse is seen when respondents were asked to assess their

perceptions of how supportive they themselves are to their ex-partner; with the majority of respondents endorsing *always* to *often* will accommodate changes (70.7% males and 72.2% females) and are a resource in parenting (44.1% males and 57.4% females).

Overall, participants shared that the atmosphere between themselves and their ex-partner is *always* to *often* one of hostility or anger (59.9% males and 75% females) making cooperation in co-parenting difficult.

To explore the baseline results on co-parent co-operation an omnibus chi-square test was conducted on all the variables. Three significant results were found at baseline. To discern where the relationships existed between gender and the dependent variables, post-hoc chi-square tests of independence were performed. The first post-hoc test indicated that women were more likely to rarely perceive their ex-partner as understanding and supportive of them as a parent compared to their male ex-partner, X^2 (1, N = 334) = 12.87, $p < 0.001$. The second test indicated that women were more likely to *rarely* perceive their ex-partner as a parenting resource X^2 (1, N = 345) = 15.29, $p < 0.001$. Lastly, women were more likely at baseline to report that they *rarely* make day-to-day parenting decisions with their former partner, X^2 (1, N = 348) = 10.13, p = 0.001.

Violence

Violence was explored by surveying if violence was present in the relationship, who was the perpetrator, and the type of violence that was engaged in. Further exploration was completed using chi-square tests to look at associations between gender and violence. Almost half of males (46.9%) and most female respondents (71%) shared that their relationship with their ex-partner was abusive. When asked who was abusive in the relationship (see Appendix L) 2.8% of males said themselves, while 19.8% said her or both parties (17.5%). In contrast, no female

respondents indicated they were the only abuser in the relationship. Instead, 51.1% of females said that their partner was the abuser with 6.8% sharing that they both were the abuser. The most common type of abuse reported by respondents was verbal and emotional abuse (46.3% males and 68.8% females). Physical abuse (23.2% males and 32.4% females), financial abuse (15.8% males and 30.7 females), and sexual abuse (2.3% males and 11.9% females) were also disclosed.

Exploring whether police or legal interventions occurred in respondents' relationships, a majority shared that the police had *never* been called (57.6% males and 51.7% females). Also, there were no restraining orders for 78% of males and 72.2% of females at baseline. For 10.2% of males and 13.6% of females there had been a previous restraining order, not specified against whom, and it had been removed at time of baseline data being collected. Lastly, when respondents were asked whether or not their ex-partner had been abusive to themselves or their children in the past three months, 48% males and 49.4% females *strongly agreed* to *agreed*. A total of 22% of males and 22.7% of females shared that they were uncertain whether or not any abuse had happened in the past three months.

Using both omnibus chi-square tests and chi-square tests of independence, the baseline data for violence was further explored. A chi-square test of independence showed that at baseline women were more likely to report that their relationship was abusive, X^2 (1, N = 328) = 24.60, p < 0.001. A statistically significant omnibus chi-square test, X^2 (3, N = 176) = 118.10, p < 0.001, showed that the person who was abusive, in the relationship, was not independent of gender. This result, for who was abusive in the relationship, should be interpreted with caution because it violates one of the chi-square test's assumptions of having more than 20% of its cells with an expected count of less than five. This result has 25% of its cells with an expected count of less than 5.

In addition, a statistically significant omnibus chi-square test, X^2 (3, N = 341) = 21.18, p < 0.001, showed that whether there was domestic violence restraining orders was not independent of gender. Post-hoc chi-square tests of independence could not be performed for who was abusive and whether there is a domestic violence restraining order because the categories, on the Ribner Scale, could not be collapsed. Lastly, three chi-square tests of independence for type of abuse showed, at baseline, that women were more likely to report verbal/emotional abuse, X^2 (1, N = 353) = 18.16, p < 0.001, financial abuse X^2 (1, N = 353) = 10.93, p = 0.001, and sexual abuse X^2 (1, N = 353) = 12.55, p < 0.001 had occurred in the relationship.

Continuous Litigation

To assess respondent's engagement in litigation, the Ribner Scale, focused on how often ex-partners had returned to court because of their children and the frequency and types of judicial avenues they had utilized at time of baseline. Further exploration was done using chi-square tests to look at associations between gender and continuous litigation. The majority of respondents (51.4% males and 55.6% females) shared that they had already returned to court *one to three* times over custody and access issues (see Appendix M). In addition, 46.9% males and 50% females noted that they had had between *one to three* court hearings already with 41.8% males and 50% females sharing that at the time of baseline that a court hearing was upcoming.

Omnibus chi-square tests were conducted on all the variables to further explore the baseline data for continuous litigation. No significant results were found for gender.

Perception of Parental Involvement

The factor of perception of parental involvement, focused on the respondents' assessment of their involvement with their children (see Appendix N). Further exploration was done using chi-square tests to look at associations between gender and perception of parental involvement.

Time spent engaging with their children in the day-to-day living activities of the family and special events were examined. The activities included: (a) disciplining the children (48.6% males and 82.4% females); (b) dress and grooming (52% males and 86.4% females); (c) running errands for the children (52.5% males and 87.5% females); (d) taking children to recreational activities (54.2% males and 82.4% females); and (e) the children's religious and moral training (41.8% males and 74.4% females). The same results were found with special events as well: (a) celebrating holidays with the children (47.5% males and 84.7% females); (b) celebrating significant events (54.2% males and 90.3% females); (c) attending school or church functions (39.5% males and 80.1% females); (d) taking children on vacations (41.2% males and 72.7% females); and (e) discussing problems with the children that they might be having (49.7% males and 86.4% females).

Post-hoc chi-square tests of independence found that women were more likely to report that they were usually involved with their children in the following activities: (a) discipling their children, X^2 (1, N = 351) = 54.96, p < 0.001; (b) dressing and grooming the children, X^2 (1, N = 352) = 42.36, p < 0.001; (c) religious and moral training, X^2 (1, N = 341) = 34.91, p < 0.001; (d) running errands, X^2 (1, N = 350) = 55.39, p < 0.001; (e) celebrating holidays, X^2 (1, N = 350) = 55.37, p < 0.001 for; (f) celebrating significant events, X^2 (1, N = 350) = 45.83, p < 0.001; (g) taking to recreational activities, X^2 (1, N = 348) = 24.75, p < 0.001; (h) attending church and school functions, X^2 (1, N = 338) = 58.00, p < 0.001; (i) taking children on vacation, X^2 (1, N = 343) = 36.97, p < 0.001; and (j) discussing problems with the children that they might be having X^2 (1, N = 343) = 41.82, p < 0.001.

Perception of Child Adjustment

Child adjustment post-separation or divorce was assessed through children's school performance, whether they are experiencing psychosomatic and behavioural symptoms, their relationship with their other parent, and how parental conflict is affecting them (see Appendix O).

When asked how much their children are impacted by parenting disputes, at baseline, participants (44.6% males and 51.1% females) shared that their children are *somewhat* to *moderately* negatively affected. In addition, both male and female participants agreed that their children *rarely* to *never* experience psychosomatic symptoms such as stomach aches (63.2% males and 45.4% females) or headaches (70.6% males and 52.9% females). Where the respondents disagreed was on whether their children had difficulty sleeping. The majority of male respondents (61.6%), believed that their children *rarely* to *never* had trouble sleeping. Whereas 50.6% of female respondents, believed that their children *often* to *sometimes* had trouble sleeping. Overall, behaviourally, both male (54.8%) and female (47.7%) respondents said that their children *sometimes* to *rarely* acted out.

Surveying participants perception of their children's school performance, both male and female respondents did not believe academics or attendance was an issue. In particular, 74% of males and 73.8% of females said that poor school attendance was *rarely* to *never* an issue and 61.1% of males and 62.5% of females noted that school performance was also *rarely* to *never* a concern.

Despite respondents acknowledging that their children, at baseline, are somewhat negatively affected by parenting disputes there were relatively no issues with resistance in spending time with their other parent. Both male (37.3%) and female (36.4%) participants shared

that their children *rarely* to *never* resisted seeing their other parent. In addition, this finding of little resistance was supported by the participants sharing that their children *always* to *often* look forward to spending time with their other parent (40.6% males and 38.1% females). When asked, both male and female respondents *disagree* to *strongly disagree* that their children would be better off if their former spouse was out of their lives (65.6% males and 51.1% females).

Post-hoc chi-square tests of independence were conducted to determine the relationship between gender and perception of child adjustment. At baseline, females were more likely to report the following issues were often a concern with their children: (a) difficulty sleeping, X^2 (1, $N = 317$) = 33.04, $p < 0.001$; (b) stomach aches, X^2 (1, $N = 318$) = 15.86, $p < 0.001$; and (c) headaches, X^2 (1, $N = 317$) = 11.20, $p = 0.001$. There was a statistically significant omnibus chi-square result for the factor of "Do you think your children would be better off if your former spouse was not in their lives" (Ribner, n.d.), X^2 (4, $N = 348$) = 26.53, $p < 0.001$, but the significant result was lost when a chi-square test of independence was conducted.

Personal Perceptions of Ex-partner and Relationship

To assess personal perceptions of ex-partner and their relationship, participants were asked about their feelings, their perceptions about their divorce, and perceptions about their ex-partners' parenting skills (see Appendix P).

A total of 51.4% of male participants shared that their former partner was *always* to *often* a good parent, but 58% of female participants said that their former partner was *sometimes* to *rarely* a good parent. This same pattern was observed when participants were asked if their former spouse was a caring parent; 56% of males shared that their former spouse was *always* to *often* a caring parent and 54.6% of females said that *sometimes* to *rarely* their former spouse was a caring parent. Continuing to survey respondents' perceptions of their partners' parenting they

were asked if they believed their ex-partner was irresponsible and incompetent. Male (52.6%) respondents, perceived that their former spouse was *sometimes* to *rarely* irresponsible and 47.2% of female respondents said *always* to *often* that their ex-partner was irresponsible. When asked if participants believed their ex-partner was an incompetent parent, 58.2% of males and 58% of females endorsed *sometimes* to *rarely* is their ex-partner incompetent.

Assessing personal accountability in the breakdown of the marriage, participants were asked if they blame themselves for the divorce. Most male (65.6%) and female (75%) participants said that they *rarely* to *never* blamed themselves. In addition, when asked whether they wished they had tried harder to make their marriage work (57.1% males and 75% females), if they felt guilty about the divorce (45.7% males and 43.3% females), and that they wish they could make up for the hurt they have caused (57.7% males and 69.9% females) most respondents endorsed that they *rarely* to *never* felt that way. Contradictory results in the current study demonstrated that respondents might feel guilty about their divorce. When asked "I do not feel any guilt for the divorce," both male (45.7%) and female (48.3%) participants shared that they *rarely* to *never* felt that way.

A total of 67.2% males and 73.3% female participants shared that they *rarely* to *never* had warm feelings for their former spouse. In addition, less than half of participants shared that they *rarely* to *never* felt compassion towards their former spouse (41.3% males and 43.2% females), while 70.7% males and 72.1% *females rarely to never* felt love for their former partner. Both male and female respondents did agree that they *always* to *often* care about the welfare of their former partner (44.1% males and 38.1% females).

For the participants, of the current study, their feelings towards their ex-partner were neutral or detached. Male (35.6%) and female (36.4%) participants *sometimes* feel neutral about

their ex-partner while 33.9% of males *sometimes* feel indifferent toward their former partner and 35.8% of females *always* to *often* feel indifferent. The majority of participants indicated that they *always* to *often* feel detached from their former partner (62.7% males and 68.1% females)

Post-hoc chi-square tests of independence were used to determine the relationship between gender and perceptions of their ex-partner and the relationship**.** At baseline, women were more likely to report that they rarely wished that they had tried harder to make their marriage work, X^2 (1, N = 343) = 10.28, p = 0.001. In addition, women were more likely to *rarely* perceive their ex-partner as a good parent and in contrast, more men thought their ex-partner was often a good parent, X^2 (1, N = 342) = 11.30, p = 0.001. In addition, women were more likely than men to report that their former partner was *sometimes* to *never* a caring parent, whereas men were more likely to say their former partner was *always* to *often* a caring parent, X^2 (1, N = 342) = 13.51, p < 0.001. Also, women were more likely to perceive their ex-partner as an irresponsible parent in comparison to men who perceived their ex-partner as responsible, X^2 (1, N = 345) = 11.60, p = 0.001.

Perceptions of Interparental Hatred

The factor of interparental hatred was explored using the perceptions of blame, revenge and emotional extremes towards their ex-partner (see Appendix Q). Slightly over a third of male respondents (35%) *rarely* to *never* blame their ex-partner for their divorce. While 39.8% of female respondents reported that they *always* to *often* blame their former partner. Female respondents (36.4%) shared that they *sometimes* feel hate towards their former partner while 53.1% of male respondents *rarely* to *never* feeling that way. When asked if respondents felt angry for their hurt they had gone through, men were split between *always/often* (33.3%) and *rarely/never* (33.3%), but 42.7% of female participants *always/often* felt that way. A total of

84.2% of males and 83.6% of female participants shared that they *rarely* to *never* feel emotional extremes of loving to hating their former partner.

Current feelings towards the former partner showed that both male and female participants *rarely* to *never* expressed that they: (a) want their former partner to have problems in a new relationship (83.6% males and 85.2% females); (b) believe that their former partner should be punished (72.3% males and 73.8% females); (d) want revenge on their former partner (88.2% males and 91.5% females); or (e) want to get back at their former partner (90.4% males and 93.1% females).

To explore the baseline results on interparental hatred an omnibus chi-Square test was conducted on all the variables. One significant result was found at baseline, X^2 (4, N = 348) = 24.31, $p < 0.001$. To discern where the relationship existed a post-hoc chi-square test of independence was performed. The statistically significant omnibus result, for the factor I hate him/her, was lost.

Data Analysis II

An exact McNemar's test was performed on all statistically significant omnibus chi-square tests from data analysis one. Other than one statistically significant result, which showed a difference in the proportion of hate for the participants ex-partner pre- and post-intervention p = .031, all other tests did not show significant results. The potential reason, for the non-significant results, could be the limited sample size and the nature of the analysis which created instability in the statistical model. The limited sample size was further hindered by the participants not responding consistently, on the Ribner Scale, on the pre and post-tests. Overall, there was not enough data to determine differences pre and post-intervention on the factors of high-conflict divorce.

The differences in gender on the McNemar's test was reviewed descriptively. Changes from pre- to post-intervention showed that female participants who reported *always* to *often* hating their former partner in pre-intervention endorsed *rarely* to *never* hating their ex-partner post-intervention. A similar shift was seen with male participants. The majority who, at pre-intervention, shared that they *always* to *often* hate their former partner shifted to *rarely* to *never* post-intervention.

Sample Comparison

Lastly, the baseline sample (n=353) and the matched pairs sub-sample (n=14) were statistically compared using z-scores to determine if their populations were the same. A select number of demographics were used for the comparison: (a) gender; (b) number of children; (c) number of previous separations; (d) length of relationship in years; (e) and length of separation or divorce to time of baseline in years. Z-scores were computed for raw scores in both the samples' data sets (see Appendix R). The samples were the same for the demographics of: (a) number of children; (b) number of previous separations; and (c) gender. The two populations differed in: (a) length of relationship in years; and (b) and length of separation or divorce to time of baseline in years.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

The purpose of this study, was to describe a large sample of court mandated, high-conflict couples, who were required to enter into the NWFF intervention and to evaluate changes evident on factors measured using the Ribner scale. The data analysis was separated into two sections. Data analysis I focused on describing the population and exploring the relationship between gender and the characteristics that make up high-conflict divorce. Data analysis II focused on determining changes in the population's perceptions of conflict between pre- and post-intervention using the McNemar's test.

Data Analysis I

This study established that there is a distinct high-conflict divorce population. The characteristics reflected in the sample population align with those identified as high-conflict in the academic literature and reflect the operational definition for the construct used in this study: high-conflict separated/divorcing co-parents are characterized by their engagement in a caustic interaction style that includes continuous and contentious litigation, poor and hostile communication, violence, and interactions that negatively impact co-parenting and children (Birnbaum & Bala, in press; Davidson et al., 2014; Fidler, Bala, Hurwitz, 2013; Johnston, 1994; Malcore et al., 2010).

In relation to the literature, on the amount of litigation occurring in a high-conflict divorce Malcore et al. (2010) provided a guide for what litigation looks like in a high-conflict divorce. In Malcore (2010) almost half of their sample (42.1%) had already been to court between 2 to 5 times, this parameter is reflective of the current studies sample, at baseline, where 44.1% of men and 47.1% of women reported that they had already had between 2 to 5 court

hearings. Also, participants shared, at baseline, that 39.5% of men and 41.4% of women have had between 2 to 5 custody and access hearings. It is unclear, if the custody and access hearings are in addition to or separate from the other court hearings surveyed on the Ribner Scale. In addition, 41.8% of men and 50% of women said that they had an upcoming court hearing within the next three months from the time of completing the Ribner Scale.

To successfully negotiate a divorce the co-parents' need to be able to communicate. Inability to agree was found to be more related to ongoing conflict (Malcore et al., 2010). The sample, in this study, reflected the difficulties with communication and cooperation in high-conflict divorce. Specifically, the results mirror hostile and poor communication with insufficient problem-solving skills (Bala et al., 2010; Malcore et al.,2010). When participants were asked about communication with their former partner 72.4% of men and 82.4% of women perceived their conversations as stressful or tense and when discussing parenting issues an argument would generally happen (men 58.2% and women 72.7%). Also, 59.9% of men and 75% of women perceived that the underlying atmosphere between themselves and their former partner was hostile or angry. Cooperation was perceived, between former partners, as rarely occurring. When asked about their former partner making changes when they needed to, 55.4% of men and 56.9% of women said that their former partner would not co-operate with them to make the change. The participants also reflected that they could not make day-to-day decisions about their children's lives (59.3% men and 68.2% women) with their former partner.

Problem solving between ex-partners, in relation, to their children rarely happened. When asked if they would discuss problems their children might be having, 46.4% of men and 46.6% of women said that they rarely would or would rarely seek their former spouse out as a resource in parenting (52% men and 68.2% women). In addition, participants shared that they would

rarely discuss problems in the co-parenting relationship with their former spouse. Lack of communication, cooperation, and being able to problem solve negatively impacts former partners ability to co-parent and this was reflected in the current study.

Relationships between gender and the factors that make up high-conflict were determined with the baseline sample. Specifically, on the factors of communication, co-operation, violence, child adjustment, personal perceptions of parental involvement, perceptions of their ex-partner, and interparental hatred, where women were more likely than men to report difficulties with communication and co-operation with their ex-partner. In addition, women characterized their relationship as abusive more than men did. More female participants shared that verbal/emotional, financial, and sexual abuse were present in their relationship. Also, women reported being more involved in parenting tasks (i.e., disciplining, planning and engaging in events, and emotional support) and shared concerns about their children's health (i.e., issues with sleeping, stomach and headaches). It is difficult to interpret these findings pertaining to mothers' descriptions of their active and engaged parenting because demographic information on primary custody, parenting time, and decision-making capabilities was not available. In addition, the Ribner Scale is a self-report measure of the parents' understanding of their children's adjustment post separation/divorce, and their own level of engagement with their children. There is a possibility that participants were seeking to appear socially desirable and did not accurately reflect their children's adjustment post separation/divorce. Moné et al. (2011) noted that parents were more positive about their relationship with their children than their children were when surveyed. When co-parents are embroiled in high-conflict divorce, they are generally not fully aware of how their children are affected (Birnbaum & Bala, 2022; Fidler, Bala, & Hurwitz, 2013; Mitcham-Smith & Henry, 2007). The descriptive data and chi-square results are consistent with

the current literature on the possible psychosomatic issues and negative behaviour outcomes for children of high-conflict divorce (see Cummings & Davies, 2010; Margolin et al., 2001; Owen & Rhoades, 2012; Trinder et al., 2008; van der Wal, Finkenauer, & Visser, 2019). Sampling children's views and comparing these with their parents' descriptions would provide supplemental information to this study's findings.

Lastly, the function of DV/IPV within the high-conflict divorce population, can be ambiguous. It is dependent on researchers including it in their studies and whether the court will take it into consideration when making decisions (Fieldstone et al., 2012). The Ribner Scale assessed an individual's perception of the function of abuse in their former relationship. At time of baseline abuse was identified as having existed in the relationship (46.9% men and 71% women) and present within the past three months post separation/divorce. With participants (46.3% of men and 68.8% of women) sharing that verbal/emotional, physical (23.2% men and 32.4% women), and financial abuse (15.8% men and 30.7% women) were present in the relationship.

The results on DV/IPV existing in the high-conflict population, in the current study, reflects Birnbaum and Bala's (in press) results that demonstrated that DV/IPV was present in their high-conflict sample. The two constructs, of violence and high-conflict, overlap and at times, the types of violence occurring cannot be clearly distinguished from one another (Fidler, Bala, & Hurwitz, 2013). Each person provides their perception of violence in their relationship (Jaffe et al., 2006). It is up to the stakeholders (i.e., community, mental health, and judicial professionals) to appropriately assess for violence, conflict, and PCCP's in the family and apply that information to ensure safety, onboard appropriate resources to reduce harm to children and maximize community resources (Birnbaum & Bala, 2010).

Data Analysis II

Data analysis II focused on determining changes in the population's perceptions of conflict between pre- and post-intervention. Evidence of the efficacy of NWFF was not obtained because of the high proportion of attrition, which has been identified as an issue in the research on high-conflict divorce (Garber, 2015).

One statistically significant result was found in data analysis II: a change in the proportion of individuals reporting hatred for their former partner. A shift was observed, where the rest of the participants endorsed primarily, at post-intervention, that they *rarely* to *never* hate their former partner. One interpretation of these findings is that this variable was the only one that had enough observations to discern a proportional difference because participants were willing, more than the other questions, to answer it.

Interparental hatred as a characteristic of high-conflict divorce, its role within the high-conflict population, and how to intervene when hatred is present are not well understood; especially if violence is present then there are immediate safety issues to be addressed because the situation may be more combustible (Smyth & Moloney, 2017). Just like Birnbaum and Bala (2010) posited, Smyth and Moloney also believe understanding the high-conflict characteristics working within a family is imperative to best understand, provide supports, and appropriate interventions. It is possible, that the results reflected in this study demonstrates that the Ribner Scale can assess for interparental hatred and that NWFF may, also, be a therapeutic intervention that supports the reduction of hatred in this population. Johnston (2017) has suggested, there needs to be a reliable way to measure hatred occurring in high-conflict cases. Assessing the function of hatred would be beneficial in understanding what kinds of interventions could be

useful so that it does not become another buzzword used to label and blame ex-partners in a divorce.

Another possible reason for this outcome with interparental hatred is that not enough time had elapsed between separation/divorce and pre/post-test for hate to subside on its own. Also, this outcome may reflect the differences between the samples for data analysis I and II. As discussed, below in greater detail, the sample in data analysis II were separated or divorced for less time before entering into the intervention. It is possible that the hate felt toward their former partner was not as intractable or does not reflect the type of interparental hatred that Smyth and Moloney (2017) and Johnston (2017) are discussing.

Sample Comparison

The two samples in this study were from the same population. To determine if they reflect the same population, the samples were statistically compared. On five demographic variables (gender, how long did this relationship last, how many children do you have, number of previous separations from the child's other biological parent, and when did you separate or divorce), the samples were sufficiently similar. However, the sample differed on two variables: (a) duration of the relationship in years; and (b) length of separation or divorce at time of pre-test in years. Participants in the matched pairs sub-sample (n=14) who completed the post-test were together from 0 to 10 years, and were separated or divorced for less time (0 to 5 years) before entering the intervention. Despite these differences, the sub-sample still generally reflects the characteristics of the high-conflict divorce population. They may differ in that their conflict may not be as protracted and may be more mutually amenable to an intervention and possibly able to reduce their conflict to communicate and cooperate with their former partner post

separation/divorce. Repeating the current study with more robust dependent measures may yield more post-test responses to explore these possibilities between the two samples.

Study Limitations

This study has several limitations. These limitations reduce the inferences that can be made from the current study. The main limitation of the study is that it is quasiexperimental. Despite quasiexperimental research designs being utilized to study therapeutic interventions, they have the potential to introduce bias into the sample because participants are not randomized, extraneous variables could be affecting the study's outcomes, and casual relationships between the intervention and outcomes cannot be made.

Internal Validity

A drawback to using a one-group pretest-posttest quasiexperimental design is that the observed difference between scores could be because of other variables and not the intervention (Morgan, Gliner, & Harmon, 2006; Reichardt, 2009). Unforeseen variables are a threat to internal validity. The threat increases with the use of a one-group participant design and the amount of time that lapses between the pre-and post-test (Morgan et al., 2006; Reichardt, 2009). In the current study the following threats to interval validity may be present: (a) time; (b) maturation; (c) practice effects; (d) attrition and (e) statistical regression (Reichardt, 2009). At this time, the biggest threat to both internal and external validity is the time lapse between the pre- and post-test.

External Validity

The passage of time is a threat because it violates the second dimension of external validity, ecological validity (Morgan et al., 2006). To have ecological validity, the intervention must be carried out in a naturalistic way to be generalizable to real life outcomes (Morgan et al.,

2006). The time between pre- and post-test indicates how long participants took to get through the NWFF program, which may not reflect an optimal timeline to complete the intervention, learn the skills, and apply them to effectively reduce the conflict in the relationship.

In the current study, participants took between three to ten months to complete the intervention, which should take about three to four months to complete (Eddy, 2009). Further analysis, with a more robust post-test sample is needed to explore ecological validity.

Another threat to external validity and the generalizability of the research results is the use of a convenience sample. A convenience sample may not be representative of the population under study making it difficult to generalize the research findings beyond the sample used (Morgan et al., 2006). In the current study, the convenience sample could not be assessed for representation of the population because the Ribner Scale did not collect demographics.

Ribner Scale

The measure itself is a potential source of error in this study because it does not have any research to support its validity that it measures what it purports to measure, or its reliability (Morgan et al., 2006). Research on high-conflict divorce supports the items included in the Ribner Scale because they reflect the characteristics of the construct under study, therefore we are assessing its suitability by its face validity. Also, the scale is a threat to ecological validity because it is a self-report measure. Self-report measures are considered artificial because they do not measure participants' typical behaviours (Morgan et al., 2006), but the respondent's view of their behaviours. Along with threats to external validity, there are concerns about desirability bias in the participants' responses on the measure because they have been mandated to the intervention by the court.

Another limitation of the Ribner Scale is its limited collection of demographic information. Without information on age, cultural background, socioeconomic status, years of education, and the proportion of parenting time, the results of the study cannot be generalized. There is a loss of data that could have yielded interesting relationships that could have informed further research.

Secondary Data

When using secondary data, researchers have to grapple with incomplete data sets. Statistical methods can be used to compensate for missing data and for handling outliers. These statistical methods can include excluding some participants from the study and regression imputation. However, reducing the number of participants could affect the statistical power of the study. Lower statistical power creates an opportunity for accepting a false null hypothesis (Morgan et al., 2006). Maintaining an appropriate sample size means there is less chance of error, less variability and the necessary power to reject a false null hypothesis (Morgan et al., 2006).

Attrition

The majority of the data collected in this study were pre-test results. It is not clear when or why participants left the study, or if they completed the intervention. In addition, participants may have completed the intervention, but declined to complete the post-test survey. Since participants were mandated by an Alberta court, to complete the intervention, it is possible that participants perceived they needed to complete the pre-test as part of starting the intervention and being assigned a counsellor. Multiple requests for follow-up were not responded to by the participants.

Directions for Future Research

Although the study's results did not support the hypothesis because of the instability in the McNemar's model, in data analysis II, it would be useful to extend the current findings by examining NWFF further. In addition, certain limitations of the current study could be addressed in future research. The following are several avenues of research that could address study limitations while continuing to build on the foundational research for NWFF.

Future research on the intervention could build upon the current study by completing another quasiexperiemental design with standardized measures, which would include technical specifications on reliability and validity. This would allow the researchers to make stronger inferences and make claims of generalizability to the larger high-conflict population.

In addition, results from two quasiexperimental studies (Valentine, Pigott, & Rothstein, 2010) could be combined and used for a metanalysis. A metanalysis could help to increase the sample size of the studies, which could demonstrate greater effect size, that would help support claims for the efficacy of the intervention.

To further support claims of the efficacy of the intervention, limit bias, and make causal statements about changes in the population post-intervention, a randomized control study could be conducted. Being able to randomly assign participants to a control group and the experimental group will control for extraneous factors that could influence the outcomes observed in the experiments data and strengthen the statistical significance of the findings. The findings of a randomized control study are more generalizable. Lastly, because the intervention is a standardized psychotherapy 12-week intervention, a randomized control study could support the efficacy of the manualized treatment.

Lastly, to add to the research, a mixed design case study of family court files could be conducted to determine the prevalence of high conflict divorce in the population and the courts ability to recognize them. Data could be collected from three British Columbian cities with a court registry. Using the factors identified in the high-conflict divorce research and this study, cases could be identified. In addition, the factors in the current study such as the prevalence of violence, whether restraining orders are in place, parental alienation concerns, whether the Ministry of Children and Families are involved, to name a few, are more present in high-conflict divorce cases in comparison to typical divorce cases. The findings of this research, on the prevalence of high-conflict divorce in British Columbia, would support a proposal to the judiciary of the necessity of NWFF in the province.

The Ribner Scale

To support the continued use of the Ribner Scale, to measure factors of high-conflict divorce, the scale will need to be evaluated for its reliability and validity. There are two routes researchers could take to begin to establish the Ribner's psychometric properties. One route would be to assess the psychometric properties of the Ribner Scale as is. The second route would be to take the Ribner Scale and treat it as a draft, pre-test the questions and reduce the items, reduce how many factors it is assessing, and then establish validity and reliability. Establishing validity and reliability would be the same procedure for either routes one or two.

To establish validity of the Ribner Scale, a confirmatory or exploratory factor analysis would be completed. Either factor analyses would evaluate how well the scale measures each of the factors that make-up high-conflict divorce. This would establish its content validity (Bryant, 2000).

To support the scale's construct validity, which is the type of validity that the scale is measuring the construct it is purporting to measure, discriminant and convergent validity will be assessed. To establish convergent validity, the researcher would administer along with the Ribner Scale, measures that also measure the factors present in high-conflict divorce, then using confirmatory factor analysis to hypothesis test that all the measures under study converge (Bryant, 2000). Similarly, to assess discriminant validity, measures that assess the opposite of high-conflict divorce (e.g., happy marriages) could be used. Using confirmatory factor analysis, if the scales differ, then they each would likely form discrete factors (Bryant, 2000). Lastly, to establish reliability, a researcher could evaluate test re-test reliability. A researcher would recruit participants who would take the Ribner Scale twice, at different times, under the same conditions and calculate correlations coefficients. A coefficient of 0.7 to 1.0 would demonstrate good reliability (Statistics How To, 2021).

Conclusion

The purpose of this research study was to use quantitative data analysis to evaluate the counselling intervention NWFF for divorcing co-parents who have been identified as high-conflict by Alberta Provincial court judges. Although this study could not answer the hypothesis proposed, the results support and add to the literature on high-conflict divorce and provide foundational research on NWFF for researchers to build upon. The sample in this study is consistent with the characteristics of the high-conflict divorce population as described in the literature: high-conflict divorce reflects impairments in communication, problem solving skills, and potentially violent behaviours (Bala et al., 2010; Fidler, Bala, & Hurwitz, 2013).

Violence, occurring within a high-conflict divorce, was found in the current study and reflects the results of Birnbaum and Bala (in press) where they found violence was present

within their high-conflict sample. Also, the results of this study reflect the current research on parties' conflicting accounts of events in the relationship, particularly when the participants differ on their perceptions of the type and origin of violence (Jaffe et al., 2006). To help support differentiation between CCV and DV/IPV, that can occur within high-conflict, assessments need to be conducted so that appropriate classifications and interventions can be utilized.

The Ribner Scale does not denote whether a couple who is going through NWFF are just separated or divorced. Without knowing the differences in the study sample means that inferences cannot be made about the level of protracted litigation the sample is in. A hallmark of high-conflict divorce is continued litigation post-divorce adjudication (Henry, Fieldstone, Thompson, & Treharne, 2011).

One finding, of this study, at post-test was the change in feelings of hatred by participants towards their ex-partner. Interparental hatred, as an aspect of high-conflict, has been proposed as a factor that could perpetuate and exacerbate conflict (Smyth & Moloney, 2017). The ability to assess hatred in separating or divorced couples has implications for safety and intervention planning. In addition, as Birnbaum and Bala (2010) note, it is necessary to differentiate the factors operating in a high-conflict divorce to provide the appropriate services. The Ribner Scale could help to differentiate communication, cooperation, robustness of litigation, perceptions of parenting, perceptions of self and former partner, and the role of violence in the family along with interparental hatred. The scale could be a useful tool for practitioners to identify high-conflict divorce cases and to ascertain how high-conflict is functioning in each family and NWFF could intervene to support the reduction of these factors high-conflict factors.

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Appendix A: Ribner Scale

New Ways for Families Research Project

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Client File Number:_____ Date:_____(Pre/Post/Follow-Up)

Here is a list of questions relating to you and your "former spouse" (meaning whether you are still married, divorced or never married). Your answers are strictly confidential.

SEPARATION INFORMATION

Answer in respect to ex-partner

1. How long did this relationship last? _____ (years)
2. When did you separate/divorce? _____ (month)_____ (year)
3. Number of previous separations from the child's other biological parent? _____
4. Is, or was, this relationship abusive? ❒ Yes ❒ No

If yes, who is (or was) abusive:_____

If yes, what type of violence: ☐ physical; ☐ verbal/emotional; ☐ financial; ☐ sexual

Since your divorce/separation:

→ How many times have you returned to court for custody and access issues? _____

→ How many times have Child and Family Services been involved? _____

→ How many times have the police been called to your home because of violence with ex-partner? _____

→ How many times have you accessed medical services as a result of issues related to separation/divorce? _____

→ How many times have you accessed mental health services as a result of issues related to separation/divorce? _____

→ How many days of work have you missed as a result of issues related to separation/divorce? _____

CIRCLE a number for each of the items below that best describes your situation.

Section #1:

1. How many children do you have?

1	2	3	4	5
One	Two	Three	Four	Five or more

2. How long ago did you and your former spouse separate?

1	2	3	4	5
In past month	2-5 months ago	6-12 months	Over a year	Never lived together

3. How many court hearings have you had already (including any length, short or long)?

1	2	3	4	5
None	One	Two-Three	Four-Five	Six or more

4. Are there domestic violence restraining orders in your case?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Before, but not now	Now, restraining me	Now, restraining former spouse	Now, restraining someone else

5. Do you have a legal decision-making process scheduled in the next few months?

1	2	3	4	5
None	Mediation	Court hearing	Other Process	Don't know

6. How much are your children affected negatively by parenting disputes now?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	Somewhat	Moderately	Significantly	Extremely

7. When was the last time you spoke in person with your former spouse?

1	2	3	4	5
This week	In past month	2-5 months ago	6-12 months ago	Over a year ago

8. When was the last time you had a positive conversation with your former spouse in person or over the phone?

1	2	3	4	5
This week	In past month	2-5 months ago	6-12 months ago	Over a year ago

9. Do you think your children would be better off if your former spouse was not in their lives?

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree

10. Do you think that your former spouse has been abusive to you and/or the children in the past 3 months?

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree

CIRCLE a number for each of the items listed below to show your closest estimate of how often it happened in your relationship with your former spouse.

Section #2:

1. When you and your former spouse discuss parenting issues how often does an argument result?

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

2. How often is the underlying atmosphere one of hostility or anger?

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

3. How often is the conversation stressful or tense?

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

4. Do you and your former spouse have basic differences of opinion about issues related to child rearing?

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

5. If your former spouse has needed to make a change in visiting arrangements, do you go out of your way to accommodate?

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

6. Does your former spouse go out of the way to accommodate any changes you need to make?

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

7. Do you feel that your former spouse understands and is supportive of your special needs as a custodial (or non-custodial) parent?

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

8. When you need help regarding the children, do you seek it from your former spouse?

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

9. Would you say that your former spouse is a resource to you in raising the children?

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

10. Would you say that you are a resource to your former spouse in raising the children?

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

Are you involved in the children in the following areas:

Section #3:

1. Disciplining the Children

1	2	3	4	5
very much	usually	somewhat	little	not at all

2. Dress and grooming

1	2	3	4	5
very much	usually	somewhat	little	not at all

3. Religious or moral training (if any)

1	2	3	4	5
very much	usually	somewhat	little	not at all

4. Running errands for/with children

1	2	3	4	5
very much	usually	somewhat	little	not at all

5. Celebrating holidays with the children

1	2	3	4	5
very much	usually	somewhat	little	not at all

6. Celebrating significant events (e.g. birthday) with the children

1	2	3	4	5
very much	usually	somewhat	little	not at all

7. Taking the children for recreational activities (e.g. sports)

1	2	3	4	5
very much	usually	somewhat	little	not at all

8. Attending school or church related functions

1	2	3	4	5
very much	usually	somewhat	little	not at all

9. Discussing problems with the children that they might be having

1	2	3	4	5
very much	usually	somewhat	little	not at all

10. Taking the children for vacations

1	2	3	4	5
very much	usually	somewhat	little	not at all

Which of the following have been shared between you and your former spouse?

Section #4:

1. Making major decisions regarding your children's lives?

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

2. Making day to day decisions regarding your children's lives?

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

3. Discussing personal problems your children may be experiencing?

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

4. Discussing school and/or medical problems?

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

5. Planning special events in your children's lives?

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

6. Talking about your children's accomplishments and progress?

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

7. Talking about problems you are having in raising the children?

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

8. Discussing how the children are adjusting to the divorce?

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

9. Discussing problems you are having with the co-parenting relationship?

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

10. Discussing finances in regard to your children?

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

Which of the following would you say are descriptive of you and your former spouse and each of your roles in the divorce?

Section #5:

1. I wish I had tried harder to make the marriage work.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

2. I do not feel any guilt about the divorce.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

3. I blame myself for the divorce.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

4. I feel guilty about the divorce.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

5. I wish I could make up for the hurt I have caused him/her.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

6. I feel angry for the hurt I have gone through.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

7. I hate him/her.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

8. I hope he/she has problems in new relationships.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

9. I think he/she should be punished.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

10. I want revenge for wrongs done to me.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

11. I want to get back at him/her for what's been done to me.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

12. I blame him/her for the divorce.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

13. I don't feel he/she deserves to be happy.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

14. I have warm feelings for my former spouse.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

15. I care about his/her welfare.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

16. I feel compassion for him/her.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

17. I love him/her.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

18. My former spouse is an irresponsible parent.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

19. My former spouse is a caring parent.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

20. My former spouse is an incompetent parent.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

21. My former spouse is a good parent to the children.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

22. I feel emotional extremes of hating and then loving my former spouse.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

23. I feel detached from my former spouse.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

24. I feel neutral about my former spouse.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

25. I feel indifferent toward my former spouse.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

How is the current custody situation affecting the children?

Section # 6:

1. Child looks forward to their time with their other parent

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

2. Child puts up resistance when they are scheduled to visit their other parent

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

3. Child has difficulty sleeping

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

4. Child complains of stomach aches

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

5. Child complains of headaches

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

6. Child exhibits acting out behaviors

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

7. Child has poor school attendance – missing school

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

8. Child has poor school performance – poor grades, incomplete homework, etc.

1	2	3	4	5
always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

Appendix B: Certification of Ethical Approval

Athabasca University
RESEARCH CENTRE

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

The Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (AUREB) has reviewed and approved the research project noted below. The AUREB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS) and Athabasca University Policy and Procedures.

Ethics File No.: **23038**

Principal Investigator:
Mrs. Nicole Vath, Graduate Student
Faculty of Health Disciplines\Graduate Centre for Applied Psychology

Supervisor:
Dr. Jeff Chang (Supervisor)

Project Title:
High-conflict Divorce: An Evaluation of New Ways for Families®

Effective Date: June 28, 2018 **Expiry Date**: June 27, 2019

Restrictions:

Any modification or amendment to the approved research must be submitted to the AUREB for approval.

Ethical approval is valid *for a period of one year*. An annual request for renewal must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date if a project is ongoing beyond one year.
A Project Completion (Final) Report must be submitted when the research is complete *(i.e. all participant contact and data collection is concluded, no follow-up with participants is anticipated and findings have been made available/provided to participants (if applicable))* or the research is terminated.

Approved by: **Date:** June 28, 2018

Simon Nuttgens, Chair
Faculty of Health Disciplines, Departmental Ethics Review Committee

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Appendix C: Ethical Approval Renewal 2019-2020

Athabasca University
RESEARCH CENTRE

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL - RENEWAL

The Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (AUREB) has reviewed and approved the research project noted below. The AUREB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS) and Athabasca University Policy and Procedures.

Ethics File No.: **23038**

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Approved by: **Date:** May 23, 2019

Carolyn Greene, Chair
Athabasca University Research Ethics Board

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Appendix D: Ethical Approval Renewal 2020-2021

Athabasca University
RESEARCH CENTRE

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL - RENEWAL

The Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (REB) has reviewed and approved the research project noted below. The REB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2) and Athabasca University Policy and Procedures.

Ethics File No.: **23038**

Principal Investigator:
Mrs. Nicole Vath, Graduate Student
Faculty of Health Disciplines\Graduate Centre for Applied Psychology

Supervisor:
Dr. Jeff Chang (Supervisor)

Project Title:
High-conflict Divorce: An Evaluation of New Ways for Families®

Effective Date: May 8, 2020 **Expiry Date**: May 7, 2021

Restrictions:

Any modification or amendment to the approved research must be submitted to the AUREB for approval.

Ethical approval is valid *for a period of one year*. An annual request for renewal must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date if a project is ongoing beyond one year.

A Project Completion (Final) Report must be submitted when the research is complete *(i.e. all participant contact and data collection is concluded, no follow-up with participants is anticipated and findings have been made available/provided to participants (if applicable))* or the research is terminated.

Approved by: **Date: May 08, 2020**

Carolyn Greene, Chair
Athabasca University Research Ethics Board

Athabasca University Research Ethics Board
University Research Services, Research Centre
1 University Drive, Athabasca AB Canada T9S 3A3
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Appendix E: Ethical Approval Renewal 2021-2022

Athabasca University
RESEARCH CENTRE

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL - RENEWAL

The Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (REB) has reviewed and approved the research project noted below. The REB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2) and Athabasca University Policy and Procedures.

Ethics File No.: **23038**

Principal Investigator:
Mrs. Nicole Vath, Graduate Student
Faculty of Health Disciplines\Graduate Centre for Applied Psychology

Supervisor:
Dr. Jeff Chang (Supervisor)

Project Title:
High-conflict Divorce: An Evaluation of New Ways for Families®

Effective Date: April 22, 2021 **Expiry Date**: April 21, 2022

Restrictions:

Any modification or amendment to the approved research must be submitted to the AUREB for approval.

Ethical approval is valid *for a period of one year*. An annual request for renewal must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date if a project is ongoing beyond one year.

A Project Completion (Final) Report must be submitted when the research is complete *(i.e. all participant contact and data collection is concluded, no follow-up with participants is anticipated and findings have been made available/provided to participants (if applicable))* or the research is terminated.

Approved by: **Date: April 22, 2021**

Carolyn Greene, Chair
Athabasca University Research Ethics Board

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Appendix F:

Number of Participants by Year, Pre, Post-Test, Pairs, and Matched Pairs

Year	Number of Participants	Number of Pre-Tests	Number of Post-Tests	Number of Pairs	Number of Matched Pairs
2017	16	16	0	7	0
2016	31	31	0	15	0
2015	73	73	0	35	0
2014	74	74	27	34	10
2013	50	50	3	24	1
2012	108	108	10	51	3
2011	1	1	0	0	0

**matched pairs are ex-partners who have completed pre- and post-test*

Appendix G:

Ribner Scale Factors

Factor	Question
Communication	When was the last time you spoke in person with your former spouse?
	When was the last time you had a positive conversation with your former spouse in person or over the phone?
	When you and your former spouse discuss parenting issues how often does an argument result?
	How often is the conversation stressful or tense?
	Discussing personal problems your children may be experiencing?
	Discussing school and/or medical problems?
	Talking about your children's accomplishments and progress?
	Talking about problems you are having in raising the children?
	Discussing how the children are adjusting to the divorce?
	Discussing problems you are having with the co-parenting relationship?
	Discussing finances in regard to your children?
Cooperation	How often is the underlying atmosphere one of hostility or anger?
	Do you and your former spouse have basic differences of opinion about issues related to child rearing?
	If your former spouse has needed to make a change in visiting arrangements, do you go out of your way to accommodate?

Factor	Question
Cooperation	Does your former spouse go out of the way to accommodate any changes you need to make?
	Do you feel that your former spouse understands and is supportive of your special needs as a custodial (or non-custodial) parent?
	When you need help regarding the children, do you seek it from your former spouse?
	Would you say that your former spouse is a resource to you in raising the children?
	Would you say that you are a resource to your former spouse in raising the children?
	Making major decisions regarding your children's lives?
	Making day to day decisions regarding your children's lives?
	Planning special events in your children's lives?
Violence	Is, or was, this relationship abusive
	If yes, who is (or was) abusive
	If yes, what type of violence (physical, verbal/emotional, financial, sexual)
	Are there domestic violence restraining orders in your case?
	How many times have the police been called to your home because of violence with ex-partner?
	Do you think that your former spouse has been abusive to you and/or the children in the past 3 months?

Factor	Question
Interparental Hatred	I feel angry for the hurt I have gone through
	I hate/him her
	I hope he/she has problems in new relationships
	I think he/she should be punished
	I want revenge for wrongs done to me
	I want to get back at him/her for what's been done to me
	I blame him/her for the divorce
	I don't feel he/she deserves to be happy
	I feel emotional extremes of hating and then loving my former spouse
Perception of Child Adjustment	How much are your children affected negatively by parenting disputes now?
	Child looks forward to their time with their other parent
	Child puts up resistance when they are scheduled to visit their other parent
	Child has difficulty sleeping
	Child complains of stomach aches
	Child complains of headaches
	Child exhibits acting out behaviours
	Child has poor school attendance – missing school
	Child has poor school performance – poor grades, incomplete homework, etc

Factor	Question
Perception of Child Adjustment	Do you think your children would be better off if your former spouse was not in their lives?
Continuous Litigation	How many times have you returned to court for custody and access issues?
	How many court hearings have you had already (including any length, short or long)?
	Do you have a legal decision-making process scheduled in the next few months?
Perception of Parental Involvement	Disciplining the children.
	Dress and grooming.
	Religious or moral training (if any).
	Running errands for/with children.
	Celebrating holidays with the children.
	Celebrating significant events (e.g. birthday) with the children.
	Taking the children for recreational activities (e.g. sports).
	Attending school or church related functions.
	Discussing problems with the children that they might be having.
	Taking the children for vacations.
Personal Perceptions of Ex-Partner and Relationship	I wish I had tried harder to make the marriage work.

Factor	Question
Personal Perceptions of Ex-Partner and Relationship	I do not feel any guilt about the divorce.
	I blame myself for the divorce.
	I feel guilty about the divorce.
	I wish I could make up for the hurt I have caused him/her.
	I have warm feelings for my former spouse.
	I care about his/her welfare.
	I feel compassion for him/her.
	I love him/her.
	My former spouse is an irresponsible parent.
	My former spouse is a caring parent.
	My former spouse is an incompetent parent.
	My former spouse is a good parent to the children.
	I feel detached from my former spouse.
	I feel neutral about my former spouse.
	I feel indifferent toward my former spouse.

Appendix H:

Criterion for Case Exclusion, Inclusion, and Error Corrections

Criterion	Number of Excluded Cases	Number of Error Corrections	Error Corrections
Case requires a New Ways for families (NW) designation as part of their participant ID	18	-	-
Case requires a participant ID	12	1	A case (excel cell 440) was missing the 2 in the year code of the participant ID. After comparing the case to the female participant (excel cell 439), it was determined to be its pair.
Case needs to be identified as a pre- or post-test. If the test designation is missing than it needs to be compared with the case pair (i.e., ex-partner) and if the two surveys were completed within a reasonable time frame of each other than it was determined that the missing test was the same as its case pair (i.e., pre/post-test).	4	16	16 cases (excel cells: 14, 20, 25, 37, 41, 43, 79, 83, 87, 125, 205, 208, 277, 357, 362, and 445) were corrected for the missing baseline designation.
Case needs to be assigned an A (male) or B (female) to denote participant sex. If the participant ID is missing an A or B designation it needs to be compared to its participant pair (ex-partner) on the following 5 survey variables: date of test, time of separation, number of previous separations, abuse, and who was abusive).	3	5	5 cases (excel cells: 67, 108, 116, 205, and 296) were corrected for sex.

Criterion	Number of Excluded Cases	Number of Error Corrections	Error Corrections
Case needs to have a pre-test to be included (excluded if there is only a post-test)	8	-	-
Multiple entries for the same participant ID need to be reviewed to determine which cases are valid. The decision was made by comparing the multiple entries on 5 variables (date of test, time of separation, number of previous separations, abuse, and who was abusive).	24	-	7 cases (excel cells: 183, 238, 253, 261, 359, 419, and 438) were included because they were determined, based on the criteria, to be valid/usable cases.
Case was classified as a follow-up test (the current study is not utilizing follow-up data)	3	-	-

Note: N=469 after data trimming n=353

Appendix I:

Collapsed and Dichotomous Variables Used for Pre/Post Test or Both

Factor	Variable	Collapsed	Dichotomous	pre-test	post-test
Demographics	How long did this relationship last (years)?	x			
	When did you separate/divorce (years)?	x			
	Number of previous separations from the child's other biological parent?	x			
	How many times have Child and Family Services been involved?		x		
	How many times have you accessed medical services as a result of issues related to separation/divorce?		x		
	How many times have you accessed mental health services as a result of issues related to separation/divorce?		x		
	How many days of work have you missed as a result of issues related to separation/divorce?		x		
Communication	When you and your former spouse discuss parenting issues how often does an argument result?		x	x	x
	Talking about problems you are having in raising the children?		x	x	x

Factor	Variable	Collapsed	Dichotomous	pre-test	post-test
Cooperation	Do you feel that your former spouse understands and is supportive of your special needs as a custodial (or non-custodial) parent?		x	x	x
	Would you say that your former spouse is a resource to you in raising the children?		x	x	x
	Making day-to-day decisions regarding your children's lives		x	x	x
Violence	How many times have the police been called to your home because of violence with ex-partner?	x	x	x	
	Physical abuse		x	x	
	Verbal/emotional abuse		x	x	x
	Financial abuse		x	x	x
	Sexual abuse		x	x	x
Continuous Litigation	How many time have you returned to court for custody and access issues?	x		x	
Perception of Parental Involvement	Disciplining the children		x	x	x
	Dress and grooming		x	x	x
	Religious or moral training (if any)		x	x	x
	Running errands for/with children		x	x	x
	Celebrating holidays with the children		x	x	x

Factor	Variable	Collapsed	Dichotomous	pre-test	post-test
Perception of Parental Involvement	Celebrating significant events (e.g. birthday) with the children		x	x	x
	Taking the children for recreational activities (e.g. sports)		x	x	x
	Attending school or church related functions		x	x	x
	Discussing problems with the children that they might be having		x	x	x
	Taking the children for vacations		x	x	x
Perception of Child Adjustment	Child has difficulty sleeping		x	x	x
	Child complains of stomach aches		x	x	x
	Child complains of headaches		x	x	x
	Child exhibits acting out behaviours		x	x	x
	Do you think your children would be better off if your former spouse was not in their lives?		x	x	x
Personal Perceptions of Ex-Partner and Relationship	I wish I had tried harder to make the marriage work		x	x	x
	I feel compassion for him/her		x	x	x
	I love him/her		x	x	x
	My former spouse is an irresponsible parent		x	x	x

Factor	Variable	Collapsed	Dichotomous	pre-test	post-test
Personal Perceptions of Ex-Partner and Relationship	My former spouse is a good parent to the children		x	x	x
	My former spouse is a caring parent		x	x	x
Perception of Interparental Hatred	I hate him/her		x	x	x

Appendix J:

Frequency of Sample Variables for Communication Grouped by Gender With Missing Data for Pre-Test

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
When was the last time you spoke in person with your former spouse?				
this week	84	47.5	88	50.0
in past month	38	21.5	41	23.3
2-5 months ago	33	18.6	30	17.0
6-12 months ago	08	4.50	08	4.50
over a year ago	12	6.80	09	5.10
missing data	02			
When was the last time you had a positive conversation with your former spouse in person or over the phone?				
this week	44	24.9	44	25.0
in past month	29	16.4	29	16.5
2-5 months ago	41	23.2	30	17.0
6-12 months ago	24	13.6	24	13.6
over a year ago	35	19.8	48	27.3
missing data	04		01	

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
When you and your former spouse discuss parenting issues how often does an argument result?				
always	49	27.7	62	35.2
often	54	30.5	66	37.5
sometimes	56	31.6	29	16.5
rarely	10	05.6	12	06.8
never	06	03.4	04	02.3
missing data	02		03	
How often is the conversation stressful or tense?				
always	64	36.2	76	43.2
often	64	36.2	69	39.2
sometimes	37	20.9	22	12.5
rarely	07	04.0	03	01.7
never	03	01.7	02	01.1
missing data	02		04	
Discussing personal problems your children may be experiencing?				
always	17	09.6	11	06.3
often	29	16.4	24	13.6
sometimes	46	26.0	57	32.4
rarely	44	24.9	50	28.4
never	38	21.5	32	18.2
missing data	03		02	

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
Discussing school and/or medical problems?				
always	29	16.4	30	17.0
often	32	18.1	23	13.1
sometimes	35	19.8	56	31.8
rarely	40	22.6	37	21.0
never	38	21.5	29	16.5
missing data	03		01	
Talking about your children's accomplishments and progress?				
always	26	14.7	19	10.8
often	29	16.4	22	12.5
sometimes	41	23.2	44	25.0
rarely	36	20.3	48	27.3
never	42	23.7	41	23.3
missing data	03		02	
Talking about problems you are having in raising the children?				
always	15	08.5	05	02.8
often	21	11.9	15	08.5
sometimes	29	16.4	46	26.1
rarely	54	30.5	55	31.3
never	54	30.5	52	29.5
missing data	04		03	

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
Discussing how the children are adjusting to the divorce?				
always	08	04.5	02	01.1
often	14	07.9	10	05.7
sometimes	20	11.3	28	15.9
rarely	56	31.6	62	35.2
never	74	41.8	68	38.6
missing data	05		06	
Discussing problems you are having with the co-parenting relationship?				
always	08	04.5	02	01.1
often	20	11.3	31	17.6
sometimes	23	13.0	24	13.6
rarely	55	31.1	55	31.3
never	69	39.0	62	35.2
missing data	02		02	
Discussing finances in regard to your children?				
always	18	10.2	05	02.8
often	21	11.9	29	16.5
sometimes	39	22.0	42	23.9
rarely	42	23.7	38	21.6
never	54	30.5	61	34.7
missing data	03		01	

Appendix K:

Frequency of Sample Variables for Co-operation Grouped by Gender With Missing Data for Pre-Test

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
How often is the underlying atmosphere one of hostility or anger?				
always	40	22.6	52	29.5
often	66	37.3	80	45.5
sometimes	39	22.0	30	17.0
rarely	19	10.7	08	04.5
never	03	01.7	02	01.1
missing data	10		04	
Do you and your former spouse have basic differences of opinion about issues related to child rearing?				
always	29	16.4	46	26.1
often	58	32.8	64	36.4
sometimes	54	30.5	43	24.4
rarely	22	12.4	15	08.5
never	05	02.8	04	02.3
missing data	09		04	

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
If your former spouse has needed to make a change in visiting arrangements, do you go out of your way to accommodate?				
always	67	37.9	55	31.3
often	58	32.8	72	40.9
sometimes	36	20.3	33	18.8
rarely	03	01.7	06	03.4
never	06	03.4	04	02.3
missing data	07		06	
Does your former spouse go out of the way to accommodate any changes you need to make?				
always	09	05.1	02	01.1
often	16	09.0	21	11.9
sometimes	49	27.7	48	27.3
rarely	55	31.1	61	34.7
never	43	24.3	39	22.2
missing data	05		05	
Do you feel that your former spouse understands and is supportive of your special needs as a custodial (or non-custodial) parent?				
always	06	03.4	00	00.0
often	09	05.1	01	0.60
sometimes	29	16.4	30	17.0
rarely	57	32.2	61	34.7
never	66	37.3	75	42.6
missing data	10		09	

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
When you need help regarding the children, do you seek it from your former spouse?				
always	11	06.2	05	02.8
often	14	07.9	07	04.0
sometimes	45	25.4	41	23.3
rarely	48	27.1	49	27.8
never	54	30.5	72	40.9
missing data	05		02	
Would you say that your former spouse is a resource to you in raising the children?				
always	18	10.2	03	01.7
often	20	11.3	09	05.1
sometimes	44	24.9	39	22.2
rarely	43	24.3	58	33.0
never	49	27.7	62	35.2
missing data	03		05	
Would you say that you are a resource to your former spouse in raising the children?				
always	40	22.6	59	33.5
often	38	21.5	42	23.9
sometimes	42	23.7	35	19.9
rarely	20	11.3	12	06.8
never	28	15.8	20	11.4
missing data	09		08	

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
Making major decisions regarding your children's lives?				
always	31	17.5	27	15.3
often	23	13.0	26	14.8
sometimes	33	18.6	44	25.0
rarely	40	22.6	38	21.6
never	47	26.6	39	22.2
missing data	03		02	
Making day to day decisions regarding your children's lives?				
always	17	09.6	02	01.1
often	19	10.7	13	07.4
sometimes	33	18.6	39	22.2
rarely	45	25.4	61	34.7
never	60	33.9	59	33.5
missing data	03		02	
Planning special events in your children's lives?				
always	19	10.7	10	05.7
often	26	14.7	17	09.7
sometimes	34	19.2	29	16.5
rarely	46	26.0	57	32.4
never	49	27.7	61	34.7
missing data	03		02	

Appendix L:

Frequency of Sample Variables for Violence Grouped by Gender With Missing Data for Pre-Test

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
Is, or was this relationship abusive?				
yes	83	46.9	125	71.0
no	82	46.3	38	21.6
missing data	12		13	
If yes, who is (or was) abusive?				
he	05	02.8	90	51.1
she	35	19.8	00	00.0
me	00	00.0	00	00.0
both	31	17.5	12	06.8
none	02	01.1	01	0.60
missing data	104		73	

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
If yes, what type of violence (physical, verbal/emotional, financial, sexual)				
physical	41	23.2	57	32.4
missing data	136		119	
verbal/emotional	82	46.3	121	68.8
missing data	95		55	
financial	28	15.8	54	30.7
missing data	149		122	
sexual	04	02.3	21	11.9
missing data	173		155	
Are there domestic violence restraining orders in your case?				
never	138	78.0	127	72.2
before, but not now	18	10.2	24	13.6
now, restraining me	14	07.9	02	01.1
now, restraining former spouse	02	01.1	16	09.1
now, restraining someone else	00	00.0	00	00.0
missing data	05		07	

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
How many times have the police been called to your home because of violence with ex-partner?				
0	102	57.6	91	51.7
1-5	52	29.4	62	35.2
6-10	01	0.60	04	02.3
over 10	01	0.60	00	00.0
missing data	18		14	
Do you think that your former spouse has been abusive to you/or the children in the past 3 months?				
strongly agree	40	22.6	44	25.0
agree	45	25.4	43	24.4
uncertain	39	22.0	40	22.7
disagree	16	09.0	20	11.4
strongly disagree	35	19.8	25	14.2
missing data	02		04	

Note: 888 n=8 responses for continuous variables that were string responses

Appendix M:

Frequency of Sample Variables for Continuous Litigation Grouped by Gender With Missing Data for Pre-Test

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
How many times have you returned to court for custody and access issues?				
none	24	13.6	17	09.7
one	40	22.6	47	26.7
2-3	51	28.8	51	28.9
4-5	19	10.7	22	12.5
6 or more	13	07.4	11	06.3
missing data	20		19	
How many court hearings have you had already (including any length, short or long)?				
none	25	14.1	19	10.8
one	31	17.5	35	19.9
2-3	52	29.4	53	30.1
4-5	26	14.7	30	17.0
6 or more	38	21.5	33	18.8
missing data	05		06	

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
Do you have a legal decision-making process scheduled in the next few months?				
none	33	18.6	30	17.0
missing data	144		146	
mediation	17	09.6	11	06.3
missing data	160		165	
court hearing	74	41.8	88	50.0
missing data	103		88	
other process	22	12.4	20	11.4
missing data	155		156	
don't know	29	16.4	26	14.8
missing data	148		150	

Note: 888 n=19 responses for continuous variables that were string responses

Appendix N:

Frequency of Sample Variables for Perception of Parental Involvement Grouped by Gender With Missing Data for Pre-Test

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
Disciplining the children				
very much	86	48.6	145	82.4
usually	27	15.3	24	13.6
somewhat	24	13.6	03	01.7
little	22	12.4	01	0.60
not at all	16	09.0	03	01.7
missing data	02			
Dress and grooming				
very much	92	52.0	152	86.4
usually	24	13.6	13	07.4
somewhat	25	14.1	02	01.1
little	15	08.5	06	03.4
not at all	20	11.3	03	01.7
missing data	01			

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
Religious or moral training (if any)				
very much	74	41.8	131	74.4
usually	29	16.4	19	10.8
somewhat	26	14.7	07	04.0
little	14	07.9	01	0.60
not at all	28	15.8	12	06.8
missing data	06		06	
Running errands for/with children				
very much	93	52.5	154	87.5
usually	19	10.7	15	08.5
somewhat	27	15.3	02	01.1
little	15	08.5	01	0.60
not at all	20	11.3	04	02.3
missing data	03			
Celebrating holidays with the children				
very much	84	47.5	149	84.7
usually	21	11.9	16	09.1
somewhat	28	15.8	06	03.4
little	24	13.6	03	01.7
not at all	17	09.6	02	01.1
missing data	03			

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
Celebrating significant events (e.g. birthday) with the children				
very much	96	54.2	159	90.3
usually	23	13.0	10	05.7
somewhat	23	13.0	02	01.1
little	14	07.9	01	0.60
not at all	18	10.2	04	02.3
missing data	03			
Taking the children for recreational activities (e.g. sports)				
very much	96	54.2	145	82.4
usually	26	14.7	15	08.5
somewhat	23	13.0	02	01.1
little	08	04.5	04	02.3
not at all	20	11.3	09	05.1
missing data	04		01	
Attending school or church related functions				
very much	70	39.5	141	80.1
usually	18	10.2	13	07.4
somewhat	29	16.4	07	04.0
little	17	09.6	01	0.60
not at all	33	18.6	09	05.1
missing data	10		05	

Variable	Males (n=177)		Females (n=176)	
	n	%	n	%
Discussing problems with the children that they might be having				
very much	88	49.7	152	86.4
usually	23	13.0	11	06.3
somewhat	30	16.9	06	03.4
little	12	06.8	02	01.1
not at all	16	09.0	03	01.7
missing data	08		02	
Taking the children for vacations				
very much	73	41.2	128	72.7
usually	25	14.1	20	11.4
somewhat	24	13.6	09	05.1
little	12	06.8	08	04.5
not at all	38	21.5	06	03.4
missing data	05		05	

Appendix O:

Frequency of Sample Variables for Perception of Child Adjustment Grouped by Gender With Missing Data for Pre-Test

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
How much are your children affected negatively by parenting disputes now?				
not at all	15	08.5	10	05.7
somewhat	51	28.8	50	28.4
moderately	28	15.8	40	22.7
significantly	48	27.1	48	27.3
extremely	28	15.8	24	13.6
missing data	07		04	
Child looks forward to their time with their other parent				
always	36	20.3	32	18.2
often	36	20.3	35	19.9
sometimes	54	30.5	52	29.5
rarely	21	11.9	29	16.5
never	07	04.0	13	07.4
missing data	23		15	

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
Child puts up resistance when they are scheduled to visit their other parent				
always	11	06.2	21	11.9
often	19	10.7	29	16.5
sometimes	60	33.9	43	24.4
rarely	31	17.5	36	20.5
never	35	19.8	28	15.9
missing data	21		19	
Child has difficulty sleeping				
always	03	01.7	12	06.8
often	07	04.0	41	23.3
sometimes	34	19.2	48	27.3
rarely	42	23.7	31	17.6
never	67	37.9	32	18.2
missing data	24		12	
Child complains of stomach aches				
always	02	01.1	08	04.5
often	05	02.8	22	12.5
sometimes	39	22.0	50	28.4
rarely	36	20.3	28	15.9
never	76	42.9	52	29.5
missing data	19		16	

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
Child complains of headaches				
always	01	0.60	04	02.3
often	07	04.0	23	13.1
sometimes	24	13.6	40	22.7
rarely	36	20.3	33	18.8
never	89	50.3	60	34.1
missing data	20		16	
Child exhibits acting out behaviours				
always	04	02.3	23	13.1
often	21	11.9	38	21.6
sometimes	65	36.7	66	37.5
rarely	32	18.1	18	10.2
never	37	20.9	19	10.8
missing data	18		12	
Child has poor school attendance – missing school				
always	03	01.7	02	01.1
often	06	03.4	04	02.3
sometimes	11	06.2	12	06.8
rarely	41	23.2	49	27.8
never	90	50.8	81	46.0
missing data	26		28	

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
Child has poor school performance – poor grades, incomplete homework, etc.				
always	03	01.7	03	01.7
often	08	04.5	07	04.0
sometimes	33	18.6	25	14.2
rarely	27	15.3	37	21.0
never	81	45.8	73	41.5
missing data	25		31	
Do you think your children would be better off if your former spouse was not in their lives?				
strongly agree	15	08.5	17	09.7
agree	12	06.8	14	08.0
uncertain	32	18.1	52	29.5
disagree	41	23.2	59	33.5
strongly disagree	75	42.4	31	17.6
missing data	02		03	

Appendix P:

Frequency of Sample Variables for Perception of Ex-partner and Relationship Grouped by Gender With Missing Data for Pre-Test

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
I wish I had tried harder to make the marriage work				
always	20	11.3	12	06.8
often	17	09.6	04	02.3
sometimes	32	18.1	25	14.2
rarely	35	19.8	50	28.4
never	66	37.3	82	46.6
missing data	07		03	
I do not feel any guilt about the divorce				
always	34	19.2	24	13.6
often	22	12.4	21	11.9
sometimes	35	19.8	43	24.4
rarely	22	12.4	36	20.5
never	59	33.3	49	27.8
missing data	05		03	

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
I blame myself for the divorce				
always	10	05.6	06	03.4
often	07	04.0	06	03.4
sometimes	38	21.5	31	17.6
rarely	38	21.5	50	28.4
never	78	44.1	82	46.6
missing data	06		01	
I feel guilty about the divorce				
always	10	05.6	08	04.5
often	10	05.6	10	05.7
sometimes	39	22.0	39	22.2
rarely	26	14.7	45	25.6
never	84	47.5	72	40.9
missing data	08		02	
I wish I could make up for the hurt I have caused him/her				
always	17	09.6	08	04.5
often	15	08.5	06	03.4
sometimes	38	21.5	36	20.5
rarely	35	19.8	43	24.4
never	67	37.9	80	45.5
missing data	05		03	

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
I have warm feelings for my former spouse				
always	10	05.6	01	0.60
often	08	04.5	10	05.7
sometimes	33	18.6	36	20.5
rarely	34	19.2	45	25.6
never	85	48.0	84	47.7
missing data	07			
I care about his/her welfare				
always	35	19.8	23	13.1
often	43	24.3	44	25.0
sometimes	42	23.7	56	31.8
rarely	23	13.0	28	15.9
never	29	16.4	25	14.2
missing data	05			
I feel compassion for him/her				
always	18	10.2	11	06.3
often	26	14.7	36	20.5
sometimes	54	30.5	53	30.1
rarely	26	14.7	43	24.4
never	47	26.6	33	18.8
missing data	06			

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
I love him/her				
always	24	13.6	09	05.1
often	03	01.7	15	08.5
sometimes	18	10.2	19	10.8
rarely	24	13.6	31	17.6
never	101	57.1	96	54.5
missing data	07		06	
My former spouse is an irresponsible parent				
always	11	06.2	19	10.8
often	40	22.6	64	36.4
sometimes	69	39.0	64	36.4
rarely	24	13.6	17	09.7
never	27	15.3	10	05.7
missing data	06		02	
My former spouse is a caring parent				
always	44	24.9	17	09.7
often	55	31.1	49	27.8
sometimes	53	29.9	77	43.8
rarely	11	06.2	19	10.8
never	7	04.0	10	05.7
missing data	7		04	

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
My former spouse is an incompetent parent				
always	09	05.1	12	06.8
often	18	10.2	29	16.5
sometimes	66	37.3	69	39.2
rarely	37	20.9	33	18.8
never	40	22.6	28	15.9
missing data	07		05	
My former spouse is a good parent to the children				
always	33	18.6	11	06.3
often	58	32.8	50	28.4
sometimes	60	33.9	73	41.5
rarely	13	07.3	29	16.5
never	06	03.4	09	05.1
missing data	07		04	
I feel detached from my former spouse				
always	68	38.4	74	42.0
often	43	24.3	46	26.1
sometimes	28	15.8	24	13.6
rarely	09	05.1	09	05.1
never	23	13.0	19	10.8
missing data	06		04	

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
I feel neutral about my former spouse				
always	28	15.8	22	12.5
often	32	18.1	39	22.2
sometimes	63	35.6	64	36.4
rarely	17	09.6	28	15.9
never	29	16.4	18	10.2
missing data	08		05	
I feel indifferent toward my former spouse				
always	24	13.6	28	15.9
often	31	17.5	35	19.9
sometimes	60	33.9	60	34.1
rarely	26	14.7	22	12.5
never	27	15.3	18	10.2
missing data	09		13	

Appendix Q:

Frequency of Sample Variables for Perception of Interparental Hatred Grouped by Gender With Missing Data for Pre-Test

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
I feel angry for the hurt I have gone through				
always	29	16.4	33	18.8
often	30	16.9	42	23.9
sometimes	55	31.1	49	27.8
rarely	25	14.1	33	18.8
never	34	19.2	19	10.8
missing data	04			
I hate/him her				
always	16	09.0	07	04.0
often	17	09.6	34	19.3
sometimes	46	26.0	64	36.4
rarely	37	20.9	44	25.0
never	57	32.2	26	14.8
missing data	04		01	

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
I hope he/she has problems in new relationships				
always	03	01.7	04	02.3
often	01	0.60	08	04.5
sometimes	20	11.3	11	06.3
rarely	33	18.6	37	21.0
never	115	65.0	113	64.2
missing data	05		03	
I think he/she should be punished				
always	08	04.5	03	01.7
often	09	05.1	09	05.1
sometimes	26	14.7	33	18.8
rarely	34	19.2	34	19.3
never	94	53.1	96	54.5
missing data	06		01	
I want revenge for wrongs done to me				
always	01	0.60	04	02.3
often	09	05.1	01	0.60
sometimes	06	03.4	09	05.1
rarely	32	18.1	29	16.5
never	124	70.1	132	75.0
missing data	05		01	

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
I want to get back at him/her for what's been done to me				
always	00	00.0	02	01.1
often	05	02.8	00	00.0
sometimes	07	04.0	10	05.7
rarely	31	17.5	27	15.3
never	129	72.9	137	77.8
missing data	05			
I blame him/her for the divorce				
always	21	11.9	26	14.8
often	36	20.3	44	25.0
sometimes	52	29.4	57	32.4
rarely	26	14.7	18	10.2
never	36	20.3	26	14.8
missing data	06		05	
I don't feel he/she deserves to be happy				
always	03	01.7	02	01.1
often	03	01.7	04	02.3
sometimes	13	07.3	14	08.0
rarely	24	13.6	27	15.3
never	127	71.8	127	72.2
missing data	07		02	

Variable	Males (n = 177)		Females (n = 176)	
	n	%	n	%
I feel emotional extremes of hating and then loving my former spouse				
always	02	01.1	01	0.60
often	05	02.8	05	02.8
sometimes	16	09.0	21	11.9
rarely	29	16.4	45	25.6
never	120	67.8	102	58.0
missing data	05		02	

Appendix R:

Population Comparison Z-Scores, Percentages, and p Values

Variable	n	%	Z-Score	p
Gender	325	50	0	1.00
	28	50		
How long did this relationship last	325	70	8.86	< 0.0001
	28	39		
How many children do you have	325	39	1.08	0.28
	28	43		
Number of previous separations from the child's other biological parent	325	43	1.89	0.06
	28	36		
When did you separate or divorce (years)	325	62	2.50	0.012
	28	71		

* $p < .05$