THE FAMILY RELATIONS BUTTON SORT:

TOWARDS ITS VALIDATION AMONG

CHILDREN OF DIVORCE

by

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We accept this thesis as conforming
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Abstract

Projective tests have been studied in various ways, but little has been discovered about a long lost technique, newly revised as the Family Relations Button Sort (FRBS)™ (Carter, Piper, Ho & Ransby, 2000). This study involved 59 children in grades one to five (aged 6-11), 31 from intact families and 28 from divorced families. The children were asked to choose buttons that represented their family members. They first made their choices and then explained why each button was chosen. The children were then asked to arrange the buttons in a way that showed their family's feelings towards one another. They completed some demographic questions and answered the questions on FACES III™ for children (Olson, Portner, & Lavee, 1985). The results were analyzed with small proportions tests, independent samples t-tests and kappa approximations. It was found that children of divorce were more likely to omit parents and more likely to add extended family members into their button sort. Children of divorce were also more likely to place themselves in between their parents when arranging buttons. Children from intact homes were more likely to add pets into their button sort and showed a more balanced level of cohesion than those from divorced homes. Sorting was completed by raters and they could discriminate between children of divorce and children from intact families.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

No matter what profession one is in, people are constantly trying to "read between the lines," attempting to discover what meaning lies behind a person's speech, art, or work. Whether it is a salesperson attempting to figure out what they need to say in order to make the sale, or an art lover gazing into a painting and trying to fully understand Renoir's purpose for his art, humans are innately curious about others' motivations, relationships, and the meanings behind their poetry, speech, work or art. This desire to know what lies beyond words has existed since the beginning of time, as seen in the parables told by Jesus and the stories in Sufism (Groth-Marnat, 1999). Projection is a mechanism by which a person projects their unconscious and sometimes conscious feelings onto objects or people often as a defense, and sometimes as an expression of feelings that are not fully understood (Anderson & Anderson, 2001).

Being able to interpret the meaning behind a person's actions has been especially important in psychology, particularly in the psychoanalytic tradition. Freud (cited in Groth-Marnat, 1999) believed that people project their feelings, thoughts and agendas onto many platforms including art. The development of the *Rorschach Inkblot Test* is an excellent example of the belief that people, unaware of their unconscious thoughts, will reveal to therapists things which are hidden even to themselves, through projection (Groth-Marnat, 1999). People have difficulty outwardly expressing their pain and so they choose to cry for help in ways that are less obvious, with the hope that someone will interpret them and hear.

Children have been considered especially vulnerable to projection because they are often unable to verbally express the thoughts and feelings that they experience and

must, therefore, show trusting adults what exists in their inner world in different ways. Children are also taught to believe that adults are right, and so if it is modeled by adults that they are not to discuss their feelings, they must find other mediums to express their pain (Sattler, 1992).

Background to the Problem

Many projective tests have been used with children in order to gain a better understanding of their experience and to gain access into their world. There are both objective assessments such as the *California Psychological Inventory (CPI)* (Gough, 1990) and projective tests such as the *Children's Apperception Test (CAT)* (Bellak, 1993) and *Kinetic Family Drawings* (Burns, 1982) that have allowed psychologists to better understand the child's frame of reference, and in particular, have examined the child's personality traits and how they interact with his/her perceptions (Groth-Marnat, 1999). These tests have provided useful information about the child.

Projective techniques, in particular, can be most effective with children because they are generally more fun than the paper and pencil counterparts and they allow the child an avenue to clearly express thoughts and feelings that they may be unable to put into words (Klepsch & Logie, 1982). These techniques can be especially effective when children do not want to discuss their problems and would rather work on a task.

Statement of the Problem

It is well known among practitioners that many of children's problems are related to the family that they live in, yet most of the objective and projective techniques focus more on children's personalities and pathologies than on assessing children's families (Groth-Marnat, 1999). There is a definite need among most practitioners for an

assessment tool that adequately provides information on children's perceptions of their family members and their relationships towards one another. The development of a "fun," inexpensive, quick, easy to use assessment for children, particularly for children that do not like drawing, has been lacking. Very few tests ask children to give input about each family member in a creative way.

The hope is that this need can be met by the Family Relations Button Sort™ (FRBS) developed by the Therapeutic Tools Research Group, consisting of Dr. Mary Ann Carter, Dr. Audrey Ho, Dr. Emily Piper, and Dr. Marilyn Ransby (2000). In this newly standardized qualitative test, buttons are used to take on the characteristics of various family members because it is believed that children project their perceptions and meaning onto the buttons. Certain family models suggest that most children who suffer from psychological problems tend to have problems related to their family or to particular family members. Whether children are acting out their distress because of marital discord, or sharing their frustration with the unhealthy boundaries in their family, they do so mostly because there is some disharmony in the family (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2000).

The family relations button sort. The need for a test with the above qualities is evident. Little research has been completed on the Family Relations Button Sort (FRBS) (Carter, Piper, Ho & Ransby, 2000). As a result, this is a preliminary study, along with a study on children from step-families by the co-researcher Carissma Nance Coelho, on the newly standardized version of the previously known "button game." This assessment tool, which is generally administered to children, but is variable enough to be used with couples, families and adults, can be a very effective way of observing family dynamics.

The FRBS consists of 240 buttons, 48 which are target button and 192 which are non-target or plain buttons. The buttons have been placed into four categories of colour which include white/pearl, gold/brass, black, and primary. They have also been categorized into three levels of abstraction: plain (non-target), abstract, and concrete. These buttons are dumped from a box onto a tray so that the child can gain better access to them. In this projective technique, children are asked to choose from a variety of buttons one button to represent each of their family members. After they have chosen them they are asked to explain their choices and then to arrange the buttons in a way that shows the counsellor how the family members relate to one another. It is even possible to ask the children to show different arrangements for how the family relates to one another by changing the setting.

Family adaptability and cohesion. One of the more well known objective resources that is currently available to observe the structure and dynamics of the family is the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES-III) for children (Olson, Portner, & Lavee, 1985). This test assesses the degree to which family members are either separated from or connected to their family. Healthy families exhibit cohesion by being either connected or individuated (separated), but not to the unhealthy extremes which show signs of enmeshment or disengagement. This test also observes family adaptability, which explores how flexible or adaptable to change each family is. It considers the power structure of a family, the hierarchy of the family, and the rules of the family when faced with stresses of various kinds. Healthier families typically show patterns that are either structured or flexible, meaning there is room for change, while the

unhealthy extremes are either rigid or chaotic, leaving little or too much room for exploration.

The problem of divorce. Families today face an alarming phenomenon, that of divorce. With the divorce rate having doubled since 1960, it is no wonder that family values in society are slowly disintegrating (Myers, 2000). Children are the most affected, being forced to grow developmentally, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually with the possibility of access to only one parent on a daily basis. Divorce affects children in a special way because children usually do not foresee it and when confronted with the problem they are completely shocked. They in turn, react in certain ways because of their parents' decision.

Although recent studies by Amato, Loomis, and Booth (1995) and Jekielek (1998) have found that divorce can actually benefit children's well-being, if they are from high conflict homes, most research would agree that children of divorce experience some harmful effects. These children's attitudes toward marriage, families, school, and responsibility, differ tremendously from children in intact families.

There are, however, ways to battle these attitudes if parents understand their children's needs. Children are affected deeply by divorce depending on their age and gender, as divorce influences their short and long term adjustment, academic performance, psychological well-being, and behavior (Myers, 2000; Stevenson & Black, 1996). It is hoped that through this study, the FRBS will be able to identify children from divorced families versus children from intact families and observe the impact of divorce on children's perceptions of their family members.

The Delimitations

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the validation of the Family Relations Button Sort. Comparisons of the results on FACES-III (Olson et al, 1985) and the FRBS (Carter et al., 2000) were made between 31 children from divorced families and 28 children from intact families. The children were in grades 1-5 and ranged in age from 6-11. This study investigated the differences in button choices and arrangements among the children of divorce versus the children from intact families.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study it is helpful to define terms used here.

Projective technique. Lindzey (1961; cited in Rabin, 1981) defines a projective technique as "an instrument that is considered especially sensitive to covert or unconscious aspects of behavior, it permits or encourages a wide variety of subject responses, is highly multi-dimensional, and it evokes unusually rich and profuse data" (p.11).

Ecosystemic play therapy theory. A theory by which all children's behaviours, thoughts and feelings are thought to be influenced not only by their experiences and internal dialogue, but also by the family system and to a greater extent, their world as a system. In this theory there is a respect for diversity and a belief that behaviours, thoughts and feelings are adaptive within a systemic context. The child's issues must be addressed by exploring the systems of influence and by including these as much as possible in the therapeutic process (O'Conner & Ammen, 1997).

Intact families. These families have a married male and female who have never experienced any kind of separation, divorce, or remarriage.

Divorced families. These families experienced marital dissolution where the custodial parent had not remarried and had been divorced for six months or more so that the research would not be too traumatic for the child.

Cohesion. Cohesion is how much family members are separated or connected to each other in the family unit. The four types of cohesion include disengaged, separated, connected and enmeshed (Olson et al., 1985).

Disengaged. Disengagement represents an extremely low level of emotional bonding that family members have towards one another. Family members experience little closeness with one another and little loyalty towards each other (Olson et al., 2000).

Separated. This is a more balanced level of closeness between family members, leaning more towards a high level of independence among members than interdependence, with some loyalty towards family members (Olson et al., 2000).

Connected. This is also a more balanced level of emotional bonding between family members, with members being more interdependent than independent and where there is a high level of loyalty between family members (Olson et al., 2000).

Enmeshed. This represents families who share an extreme amount of closeness, high loyalty towards one another and family members have a high dependency on each other, some would likely be considered co-dependent (Olson et al., 2000).

Adaptability. Family adaptability is how flexible the family is, and how able they are to change. There are four types of adaptability including chaotic, flexible, structured and rigid (Olson et al., 1985).

Chaotic. Chaotic families are those that have too much flexibility and tend to exhibit characteristics such as a lack of leadership, dramatic role shifts between parents and children, too much change and erratic discipline (Olson et al., 2000).

Flexible. These families are more balanced and tend to share leadership and roles between one another. Flexible families are malleable enough to change when change is necessary and are democratic in nature (Olson et al., 2000).

Structured. Structured families are also more balanced and are characterized by stable roles in the family where leadership is sometimes shared. There is some democratic discipline, however change rarely occurs unless the family is demanded to change (Olson et al., 2000)

Rigid. These families are more extreme and are characterized by strict discipline and authoritarian leadership. There is very little change, in rules and in everything else (Olson et al., 2000).

Therapeutic tools research group. This group developed the Family Relations Button Sort, which is now trademarked as the buttonsort. This group consists of Dr. Mary Ann Carter, Dr. Audrey Ho, Dr. Emily Piper and Dr. Marilyn Ransby.

Delineation of the Research Problem

The purpose of this research was to increase the validity of using the FRBS (Carter et al., 2000) as an assessment tool and also to observe the differences between children from intact families and children from divorced families. The FRBS and FACES-III (Olson et al., 1985) were both designed to gain a better understanding of children's families and explores their perceptions of the family dynamics.

Justification of the Study

This study is important because little research has been done on the FRBS (Carter et al., 2000). A tool, such as the FRBS, offers an opportunity for therapists to analyze the child's perception of his/her family relationships. The FRBS is quick to administer and gives detailed results about children's experiences. The FRBS was chosen as there is a need to validate tests that do not involve drawing and because it may provide children with the opportunity to talk about each family member in a unique way. The questions asked by the researcher are important because they delve into areas that are likely not overtly discussed, but still allow children to exhibit their feelings by "hiding behind" the button they have chosen. One of the benefits of a technique such as this is that it does not have to involve deception. Landreth (1991) states that honesty with children is important for building trust, and this allows the researcher to gain understanding about the child while modeling an honest, open relationship.

FACES-III for children (Olson et al., 1985) was chosen because it is a quick objective method for comparison with the child's responses to the button sort. It also looks at the child's perspective of family dynamics, but on a more global level. FACES-III for children allows the researcher to observe if there is any incongruence between what was found on the FRBS and what was answered on the five-point scale of FACES-III which explores children's views of family cohesion and adaptability.

Summary

This chapter provides an introduction to some of the issues related to assessing children's perceptions about their family members. It discusses some details about projective tests, the reason why the effects of divorce on children is so important to study,

the rationale for examining the Family Relations Button Sort, and the reasons for using FACES-III as a comparison measure.

The review of the literature in chapter 2 will inform the reader about the impact of divorce on children, the history of projective techniques, the benefits and limitations of projective techniques, the details about FACES-III for children, the history and research previously completed on the button game and the development and research that has been completed on the Family Relations Button Sort.

CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter will explore the literature that relates to topics such as the effects of divorce, an introduction to projective techniques, the limitations and benefits of projective techniques, the development of the "button game" and the Family Relations Button Sort, as well as the development of FACES-III for children.

The Effects of Divorce

Divorce, although painful, is occasionally necessary in relationships. Whether the divorce is due to abuse, affairs, or just irreconcilable differences, at the time, it is generally a hurtful experience for all parties. Before exploring the effects of divorce on children, one must take resiliency into consideration. Although divorce has many negative effects on children, they are not "doomed" to a life of misery. Children can have both traits and learned skills that allow them to bounce back and become loving, capable people, regardless of their past experiences or family type (Amato, 2000). These characteristics and skills may include perceptiveness, a sense of humour, optimism, a meaning in life, some aspects of spirituality, and a sense of morality (AADAC, 2002). With these traits, and other characteristics, most children will eventually overcome the hardship of their parent's divorce.

Research is clear, however, in stating that the effects of divorce on children are generally damaging (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). Divorce not only effects children in their family life, but it also effects their life at school, their emotional and mental well being, their behaviours, as well as their future relationships (Wallerstein et al., 1989, Wallerstein, Lewis & Blakelsee, 2000). When observing the current research by Wallerstein and colleagues (2000), it is clear that people spend a good portion of their

lives working through issues related to the divorce. This does not mean that their entire life is destroyed by divorce, but that many people face challenges depending on their different stages of development that relate to their parent's divorce. This is evident in the children's choices for future partners and in their fear that the relationship will have the same fate as their parents had (Wallerstein et al., 2000).

Many people believe that the experience of divorce can be compared to a death in the family. In this sense, they feel that the child will grieve the loss and move on. However, this view negates the fact that children experience many losses as a result of divorce, including the loss of the intact family, the changing parental roles, the introduction of parent's significant others and the loss of many of these boyfriends and girlfriends after establishing relationships with them (Wallerstein et al., 2000). They can become frustrated when one parent talks negatively about the other, when the co-parent decides that he/she is not visiting this weekend, and when that same parent re-marries and has more children.

Children may feel out of control when the parent-child relationship becomes less stable. In fact, this instability is commonplace, as the parents try to cope with their own grief and often becomes less protective of their children (Wallerstein et al., 2000). If divorce were just one change, just one loss, then perhaps some children would not experience some negative effects. For many, however, the disappointments can quickly become overwhelming to the children.

Many factors are involved when exploring the effects of divorce on children. First of all, children react differently to divorce depending on their gender. Dreman (2000) stated that boys are more likely than girls to imitate parental conflict in their own

relationships. This is perhaps because parents may have been more willing to argue in front of boys than girls (Dreman, 2000). The impact of these conflicts, however, tends to disappear by adolescence. Boys are also known for being more likely to react negatively to the loss of daily contact with their fathers (Dreman, 2000). Social perceptions also negatively affect boys' adjustment following separation because custodial mothers often identify their sons with the father, which may cause mother-son conflict (Dreman, 2000). As well, males tend to be more aggressive in acting out their emotions, while females tend to be better behaved in the "aftermath" (Stevenson & Black, 1996)

In addition, girls react differently to divorce than boys. One difference is the fact that girls who experience early disruption (divorce before 5) tend to drop out of school more often than children whose parents divorced later in life. With boys, no differences occur in drop out rates (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Wallerstein (1991) found that a girl's transition into adulthood may be disrupted even when it appears as though she is doing well developmentally. There may be a delayed response in how girls react to the divorce. Therefore, the emotional impact is more likely to appear in adolescence and early adulthood. For instance, females do tend to show more internalizing symptoms of depression and anxiety than males when there is marital discord (Crawford, Cohen, Midlarsky & Brook, 2001).

Girls are also more likely to be treated differently after a divorce. In many of the divorced families that Wallerstein and colleagues (2000) studied, girls were not given the same special protection that their peers from intact homes received. They were more likely to have fewer curfews and were not expected to follow the same "rules" as their peers, but were instead allowed to do what they pleased, with fewer consequences

(Wallerstein et al., 2000). Poor supervision, as a result of the busy and pressured lives of single mothers, may play a role in why dropout rates and teenage pregnancies are higher among children of divorce (Stevenson & Black, 1996).

In addition, age is also a major factor in monitoring reactions to divorce. Infants are the least affected by divorce because they have never known life without separation. They may however, act out when they reach adolescence, realizing their loss (Ayalon & Flasher, 1993). Preschool aged children tend to be frightened, bewildered, and confused when they notice that one parent is gone. These children often regress and preschool boys, particularly, tend to be the most deeply affected by divorce (Ayalon & Flasher, 1993; Wallerstein, Corbin & Lewis, 1988). As preschoolers are in the psychosocial stage of initiative versus doubt as defined by Erikson (1950; cited in Wallerstein et al., 1988, Wallerstein, et al., 2000), these children tend to be self-centered, believing that the divorce is their fault, and it is typical for them to harbor reconciliation fantasies. This does, however, improve with time.

School aged children, on the other hand, have a better understanding that the divorce is not their fault, and are inclined to find constructive ways to express their feelings of loneliness. They have a tendency to search for support outside of the family. Ayalon and Flasher (1993) write that the feelings they may experience include a tendency to be confused, angry, hostile, and depressed. Adolescents are more inclined to react in anger at one or both parents due to divorce. Their feelings are manifested in either delinquency or depression. At this stage, teens have a desire to either take care of their parent or act out against them.

Furthermore, as time progresses, the experience of divorce is different. Stevenson and Black (1996) report that the first two years of divorce, when a child is experiencing short term adjustment, is considered the "crisis" period. Children are coming to terms with the stress of divorce and adjusting to their new lifestyle and economic situation in a single-parent home. At first learning of the breakup, children may experience shock, anxiety, anger, confusion, and sadness. Later on, parent/child relationships become difficult as the child feels anger toward one or both parents. This is especially evident in mother/son relationships, where the son may be expressing anger at the fact that his male role model is gone.

Long term problems for children of divorce include a higher drop out rate and higher rates of teenage pregnancy and young marriages (Stevenson & Black, 1996). These are generally due to a lack of supervision, and a desire to get out of the family situation. As well, Gabardi and Rosen (cited in Everett, 1992) have indicated that children of divorce have a more negative attitude towards marriage and have more sexual partners than college students of intact families. Stevenson and Black (1996) write that children also have difficulty relating to traditional sex roles due to the lack of a "father/mother figure."

The experience of parental divorce may also influence the choices that adult children make. Wallerstein and her colleagues (2000) discuss the fear of both commitment and happiness that adult children of divorce report facing. One of the lessons that some children have learned from their parents is that disaster is always looming, waiting to strike relationships just when things are going well. This fear, although seemingly irrational to many, makes complete sense when viewed from the eyes

of a child. Children of divorce rarely see the divorce coming. Even in the midst of parental arguments it does not occur at all to the child that his/her parents will "give up" on their relationship. Many of these adult children wholeheartedly believe that if there is conflict in their relationships or if they get too close to their partner and become too happy, they will be abandoned. The desire for love runs deep, but the fear of betrayal is looming too.

One woman in Wallerstein and colleagues (2000) longitudinal study discussed choosing an unhealthy codependent relationship with a man that she did not love just because she knew he would never leave her. Fortunately, this woman, along with many other children of divorce, recognized this mistake and is now in a safe and mutually loving relationship. This fear of abandonment, although with her even in a healthy relationship, is more subdued, but can be very frustrating for her partner (Wallerstein et al., 2000).

Relationally, adult children may struggle to communicate appropriately. Wallerstein and colleagues (2000) discuss the difficulty that exists when children have had few relationship role models. It is arduous for anyone to live in a relationship on a daily basis, accepting the inevitable ups and downs of life. However, children of divorce, for the most part, were not able to observe how adults resolve conflict. Some of these children missed important life lessons that they must face on their own. For instance, it is unlikely that they observed healthy communication, compromise, and negotiation. These children also may not have been exposed to the life lesson that love is not always easy but that with commitment and determination life can get better. Adult children from intact homes expect their relationship to succeed because they have seen a relationship work

out. This is not to say that all intact families are examples of health or that people should stay married in abusive situations, it just points out that for the best psychological well-being of children, it is good for them to have positive relational role models. This may mean that the parent and co-parent make a strong effort to show good communication skills in front of the children.

In addition, academic performance is often affected by a divorce, which explains the higher drop-out rate discussed earlier (Myers, 2000). These children tend to have fits of temper and are often distracted in school, usually daydreaming about their parents' reunification (Ayalon and Flasher, 1993). They have also been linked to more immature behavior such as being inconsiderate, impulsive, and taking advantage of other children (Stevenson & Black, 1996). Academic grades were impacted and tended to be lower, particularly right after the separation, mainly due to distraction (Stevenson & Black, 1996; Wallerstein et al., 2000). Many of these same children, however, eventually express their emotional frustrations and succeed in school later in life.

As well, children have been noted to have an increase in aggressiveness, a decrease in reading, math and language skills, changes in concentration level, and changes in their ability to communicate with teachers and peers after a divorce (Ayalon & Flasher, 1993). In contrast, children from intact families when compared to children in single parent and stepparent families, are more likely to attend school regularly, earn good grades, and stay in school (Myers, 2000).

Children are obviously affected emotionally and psychologically by their parents' divorce. They may experience anxiety because they fear abandonment or grief over losing a parent. Other possible feelings include depression, sadness, anger, feelings of betrayal,

and hostility (Stuart & Edwin Abt, 1981). Children of divorce report higher levels of dissatisfaction with their lives, find more distress in life, and have trouble trusting others (Stevenson & Black 1996). They may have a tendency to withdraw from people, become clinically depressed, and fear forming relationships (Ayalon & Flasher, 1993).

Another psychological issue for some children of divorce is having a healthy attachment with their parents (Mills, 2000). A healthy attachment is a bond between two people that lasts through space and time and serves to join these two people emotionally (Magid & Mckelvey, 1990). One of the most significant bonds that could exist for a person is the attachment of parent and child. Healthy attachments help children to reach their full potential, sort through their perceptions, handle fears and worries, and develop future relationships and a conscience (Magid et al., 1990). Mills (2000) discusses attachment issues that may develop as a result of divorce. There are different attachment experiences that children may have with each parent. Some children may struggle with an "angry attachment" where there is an attachment with the parent but it is most often of an angry nature. Others may experience "reversed attachment" where the child becomes the secure base for the caretaker, instead of the parent representing security for the child. Other children may struggle with attachment because they are afraid of parental anger, rejection or a conditional bond with one or both parents. Children may also have an anxious attachment to parents because of separation anxiety or may experience a rift with a parent due to alienating messages by the other parent. Research done by Walker & Ehrenberg (1998) suggests that secure attachments and insecure attachments of children of divorce are dependent upon why the divorce occurred. Reasons for the divorce that

involved arguments about the children, extramarital affairs and overt expressions of anger were all related to children having insecure attachments with their caregivers.

In addition, children struggling to attach to a parent may be inclined to attach themselves to the home or some other object. This makes moving a serious issue for children of divorce, as they may have become emotionally attached to their home, finding security in it. The problem with this particular type of attachment is that due to the economic situation of single parents, most people must move after they are divorced. This can be an extremely traumatic change for children, as they move from a large home into a smaller place, sometimes even in a different neighbourhood (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Stevenson & Black, 1996).

Anti-social behavior may become routine for some children of divorce, particularly boys (Stevenson & Black, 1996). Although not all children of divorce rebel, it has been found that many children do act out in some way. Examples of behavioral problems include stealing, cheating, lying, bullying others, hitting, and picking on other kids by younger children (Franckle, 1983). As well, they may have a bad temper, engage in temper tantrums, be disobedient, and in general, be quite aggressive. In adolescence, many children of divorce become what is defined as young offenders, and end up in trouble with the law. Stevenson and Black (1996) reviewed 56 studies, all of which showed that children of divorce were more likely to become young offenders than children of intact families. They also suggest some reasons why children may act out including the lack of supervision found in most single parent homes, and the fact that they may be reacting in disagreement to the parent's divorce. Adult children also claim having

difficulties with people in authority, perhaps because they had to “parent” themselves (Wallerstein et al., 2000)

Inconsistent discipline affects anti-social behavior and is a problem in some single parent homes. This is a problem for two reasons. First, single parents may be too worn out to be consistent because they are generally working full time, maintaining a household, and trying to spend quality time with their children. Secondly, there may be inconsistencies in discipline between a mother’s home and a father’s home. Most parents want their child to favor them, and therefore construct loose rules that may or may not agree with the other parent (Wallerstein, 2000). There are also inconsistencies in discipline which lead to adjustment problems and anti-social behaviours because some parents feel guilty about the divorce and they therefore try to “make it up” to their children by giving them whatever they desire and making allowances in rules (Lengua, Wolchik, Sandler & West, 2000).

Myers (2000) also discusses some of the data that shows the general psychological health of children from intact families when compared to children of divorce. As adults, children from intact families are “more likely to say that they are ‘very happy’ and less likely to fight and contemplate divorce if their marriage proves unhappy” (p.78). He claims that in a survey done by the Search Institute of 47,000 teens, those who were living with both parents were about half as likely to report feeling “sad or depressed most or all of the time” compared to those with single parents. Being from an intact family does not guarantee happiness, nor does living in a divorced family always result in doom; however, the results of current research favour two parent families.

The following sections will now review the literature on the assessment tools that will be used in this study along with the research on projective techniques.

FACES-III

The Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales (FACES-III) (Olson et al., 1985) is a self-report, clinical rating scale for families. It was developed by David Olson and his colleagues, based on the Circumplex Model, and is the third version in a series of scales. FACES-III scales were "…developed to assess the major dimensions of the Circumplex Model and to provide an instrument with high levels of reliability, validity, and clinical utility" (p. 2). It was developed for clinical assessment as well as for research purposes.

The main version of FACES-III is intended to assess families across their life cycle, including just married couples without children to retired couples. Its readability and use was designed for adolescents 12 and up. It is a 20-item inventory with 10 cohesion items and 10 adaptability items, with a 5-point Likert type response to each question. The children's version is also a 20-item inventory, and is the same as the main version, but is written in language that is easier understood by children younger than 12 years old.

The children's version of FACES-III is used for the present research because it is known as an effective objective assessment tool (Olson et al., 2000). Due to the age variability and the differences in reading and comprehension ability, the questions will be read aloud to all children by the researcher. A visual cue card with the 5 Likert type

response choices will be displayed to make answering simpler for the children, as well as more reliable. The forms are both easy to administer and score. After the form is administered, the numbers for cohesion and adaptability are tallied and mapped onto the Circumplex Model. The mapping of the family will indicate where the child's perception of the family fits within the 16 different types of families. This will then be compared with the results of the FRBS (Carter et al., 2000).

Projective Techniques

Projective techniques have been used by clinicians for some time. Groth-Marnat (1999) states that, in the past, the creators of projective techniques have based their theoretical framework on psychoanalytic theory. A psychoanalytic assumption is that personal perception and responses to the world are influenced by internal forces. It is believed that to obtain a correct picture of a person's "inner world," there must be the ability to go around both conscious resistance and unconscious defenses. Therefore, indirect approaches such as projective techniques are both important and necessary. Expressions are more likely to occur when a person interprets stimuli that is unstructured, whether verbal or visual, and the respondent makes sense out of the stimuli by their own thoughts, feelings, imagination, and experience (Catterall and Ibbotson, 2000; Clark, 1995; Groth-Marnat, 1999) because they feature vague directions, unstructured tasks, and an unlimited amount of responses (Clark, 1995). They also produce a large amount of both conscious and unconscious information (Waislow, 1995).

Because projective techniques bypass the unconscious, they can reveal a great deal about a person. Projective tests can communicate internal dynamics, attitudes, themes, predispositions, and conflicts (Groth-Marnat, 1999). They can also disclose thoughts,

emotions and feelings, and memories (Groth-Marnat, 1999; Waislow, 1995). Waislow believes that they illuminate fantasy, the true self, object relation and representations, abilities, characteristics, inner and outer life, ego strengths, defense mechanisms, and relationships between the unconscious and symptom formation. The goal of projective techniques is to gather information about problems, conflicts and symptoms (Waislow, 1995). Information is gathered by various ways including association, construction, completion, choice, ordering, and expression (Catterall & Ibbotson, 2000; Clark, 1995).

During the past 100 years the use of projective techniques in the counselling field has grown rapidly. However, there has been a lag in research on these techniques. Historically, proponents of projective techniques were more interested in understanding people and their meanings. These clinicians were not concerned with scientific objectivity and validation. This is worthy of note because although they are used in clinical settings, there has been little validation of them using traditional psychometric methods (Macfarlane & Tuddenham, 1951).

Within the past ten years, new developments have allowed for rapid development in the use of projective techniques. Computer programs are now being commonly used for projective techniques (Clark, 1995), such as the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) (Piotrowski & Keller, 1993). New and unique approaches as well as diagnostic formulations have been made for drawing and thematic tests. Furthermore, although it may be unknown to many, projective drawings are one of the top ten most used tests among clinicians (Groth-Marnat, 1999).

Unfortunately, projective testing has often been met with resistance and criticism. Some possible difficulties with projective techniques include “psychometric limitations,

lack of training opportunities, and the obscure qualities of the instruments [that] have restricted their use among practitioners" (Clark, 1995, p. 311). Catterall and Ibbotson (2000) add that they have various concerns including the validity of the questions, interpretation problems, and the possibility that these techniques may expose areas that people want to keep concealed. Macfarlane and Tuddenham (1951) write that critics of projective techniques believe that interpretation reports confound both the technique and the interpreter, and that interpretations make these assessments non scientific because of their subjectivity and vagueness.

The apparent lack of validity in projective assessments has also created some concern within the academic community. Macfarlane and Tuddenham (1951) address some of the issues of validity. They believe that problems with validity are particular to each test and its particular uses. An assumption from critics is that even if the information from a projective technique is a valid form of showing personality or other factors, the test may not be comprehensive enough to allow a reduction of information. Another assumption is that projective tests are able to access personality traits the same way every time, regardless of how different people's personalities may be. One assumption of validity is that a client's performance is usually not seen as being influenced by other factors, but rather, is based on their basic inner world.

Another potential for problems when using projective techniques is that administrators can influence the assessment. Masling (1997) writes "the evidence clearly demonstrates that the two people in the testing situation come to that interaction with a background of interests, needs and fears and each influences, and is influenced by, the other" (p.260). Masling also notes that there are many different ways that an

administrator's own personality and characteristics influence both the administration and the interpretations. Administrators can easily influence clients by their subtle cues, without either knowing it. It has been found that administrators have more positive interpretations if clients appear more interested and approving of the test.

Projective techniques can, however, be beneficial. Objective testing has some limitations including the fact that answers depend on ability, on the willingness of a client to answer truthfully, and on respondents not "faking" responses. Therefore, objective tests can be "less adequate" than projective tests (Masling, 1997, p. 264). A main assumption is that important facets of a person and their personality are not clear to consciousness, which makes questionnaires and inventories limited (Groth-Marnat, 1999).

Projective data has more accurate predictions regarding long term behaviors than objective test data (Masling, 1997). Contrary to what is thought and expected, researchers have found consistency of projective technique responses (Catterall & Ibbotson, 2000). Masling discovered that "careful examination of the literature demonstrates the lack of empirical basis for condemning either projective or objective tests" (p. 265).

Clark (1995) believes that there are several major uses for projective techniques, especially within therapeutic settings. The first is in allowing an understanding of the client. Observation time is provided while a client does the task. Projective techniques can be used for enhancing the counselling relationship because they are a way, other than talking, for clients to express themselves. Multiple ways of expression are available and at the same time, clients find non-threatening ways to minimize their defenses. Projective techniques also reveals the thoughts, feeling, memories, needs, and other inner characteristics previously mentioned.

Clark (1995) discusses treatment planning as another use in which the techniques provide decisions for continuing therapy, referral, or the need for more evaluation. Knowing personal issues can also save time and speed up the therapeutic process. Projective techniques are a source of collateral information. They can be used with other sources, including other projective techniques, behavioral observations, verbal information from parents, spouses, teachers and other relevant people, records from school and work, and with other objective tests. Hypotheses can also be formed. Tentative information from a projective technique can be made for further exploration, and confirmed at a later time.

Moreover, there are other benefits to using projective techniques. As clients use a projective test, they are communicating both consciously and unconsciously. The unconscious communication can help avoid direct contact with something that is emotionally difficult, it can help to loosen inhibitions and defense mechanisms, and assist with therapy resistance, and fear of a personal relationship with a therapist (Waislow, 1995). People are able to express feelings and thoughts that would otherwise be difficult to discuss by structured, direct questions (Catterall & Ibbotson, 2000).

Due to the multiple formats of communication, projective tests can be considered universal because there are no structured stimuli and no language barriers. They are used around the world because they appeal to people of different languages and cultures (Piotrowski & Keller, 1993). Clients may find help with personal insight, awareness, and introspection. Catterall and Ibbotson (2000) find that projective techniques are often fascinating and captivating for respondents, and they are versatile, involving, fun and have the ability to generate ideas.

The Button Game

Although, the origin of the FRBS (Carter et al., 2000) dates back to World War I, there has been little documentation on the "button game." It is based on the idea of projection as developed by Freud, and integrates Bowlby's (1982) attachment theory, and ecosystemic play therapy (O'Connor & Ammen, 1997). The main belief behind the invention of the button sort is the idea that children will form either secure, avoidant, or anxious attachments with various people in their lives (Bowlby, 1982). The FRBS also suggests, through its connections with ecosystemic play therapy, that children's problems must be understood within the context of their culture, social environment, and family system. This test was designed to illuminate family feelings towards one another. The desire of those who created the button game was to tap into the unconscious of the child in order to get a picture of how the child perceives these "attachments" with various family members. This is done by observing how the children position family members. Attachments can often be inferred from the data.

Delphine Yau (1989) is the only known person to have written preliminary research on the button game, in an attempt to validate this projective test. Although her research used a greater number of buttons than is currently in the FRBS, she found that there were significant differences between the button choices of children from "normal" families and children from "clinical" samples. Normal families were defined as intact families, where children were not presently showing symptoms of psychopathology; whereas, clinical children were either receiving psychological services in a social welfare agency or receiving in-patient psychiatric treatment in a hospital. In her research, she discovered many important things that further helped develop this assessment tool. These

included the fact that two raters who were blind to the children's type of family were able to discriminate between normal children's button presentations and those of the clinical sample, with a hit rate of 95.3 percent accuracy. Yau observed that certain buttons were predominantly chosen, regardless of the group, and that these buttons were generally chosen to represent mothers, siblings, or themselves (p. 31). Interestingly, there was no predominant button choice for fathers.

Differences Among Children from Normal and Clinical Groups

Button-based results. Yau (1989) found many differences between groups related to the button choices themselves. The buttons had various dimensions including shape, colour, pattern, size, overall look, degree of transparency, and type of material. A significant difference in the number of dimensions that the children from the normal group versus the clinical group used to describe their family member was noted. Children from the normal group, for instance, generally used two or more button dimensions such as colour, shape and material, to describe their family member, while children from the clinical group tended to use only one or two dimensions. It was rare for children in the clinical group to use more than two dimensions.

Yau (1989) also compared normal children to clinical children on a variety of other dimensions and found that normal children used colour to represent a family member's gender, personal characteristics and the person's relationship with the child, discussing the person's likes and dislikes more than clinical children did. As well, normal children used the shape and design of the button to represent many more different aspects of a family member including things like the person's age, clothing, size, and even their wish for that person than clinical participants.

Family dynamics in normal and clinical samples. Yau (1989) discovered different aspects of the family dynamics in normal versus clinical children. Normal children gave more positive descriptions of family cohesion by saying things like "my family is close" while clinical children were generally more negative about their family, discussing family distance, negative feelings towards members, and making scattered, chaotic patterns when asked to place their family by degrees of closeness.

Other significant findings included that how children perceived their family members was correlated with the degree of positive attributes given to that member by the children. The degree of involvement by mothers, fathers, and siblings, was also correlated with the degree of positive attributes given to that member, regardless of whatever group they were in. The more positively a child perceived his/her family member, the more likely that the child was involved with the person on an emotional level. Normal children perceived parents and siblings in a more positive light than clinical children and were considered by raters to be more emotionally expressive. The degree of a positive perception of mom and mom's involvement with the child was correlated significantly with a high amount of emotional expressiveness.

The Family Relations Button Sort

Overall, Yau (1989) contributed detailed information on the button sort by validating its use and other important findings. Similarly, testing was done with a standardized set of buttons that was designed from the results of Yau's work. In a recent lecture on the Family Relations Button Sort, Carter, Piper, Ho and Ransby (2000), also known as the Therapeutic Tools Research Group, found that children do tend to choose particular buttons. There are three types of buttons including plain (non-target), concrete,

and abstract. Plain buttons, which are typically seen on clothes, have two or four holes in them and are round, with no detailed design and are white, brown, or grey. Concrete buttons are defined as such because they had a concrete design, such as a star or a teddy bear, while abstract buttons are any others without a specific design. Abstract buttons have different textures but do not have holes in them (See Appendix A). It was found that children did tend to favour abstract and concrete buttons over plain buttons (Carter et al., 2000).

Based on the work of Carter and her colleagues (2000), children were given clinical interviews and asked to do a kinetic family drawing. When comparing both the interview and the kinetic family drawing, along with the drawing with the buttons the results were significant. From this, the Therapeutic Tools Research Group designed four categories of colour including white/pearl, gold/brass, black, and primary, and three levels of abstraction which are plain, concrete, and abstract buttons.

In their research (Carter et al., 2000) they found that black buttons are selected half as often as other colours, and that choosing an abstract black button is highly unusual. They also found that brass buttons are associated with positive attributes 96 percent of the time; and white buttons are also associated with positive feelings. They also found some age differences in terms of the way a child arranged and chose the buttons. Older children were more likely to choose abstract buttons and more likely to place their family in a cluster when positioning them. Younger children were more likely to place their family arrangement in a line, rather than in a cluster. Some children did not even place themselves into the cluster. Finally, girls tended to choose more abstract buttons than boys.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the recent literature on the impact of divorce on children, the history of projective techniques, the limitations and benefits of using projective techniques, the use of FACES-III and its relationship to the Circumplex model, and the recent research done on assessments using buttons. It has been found that children do tend to choose particular buttons to express their family relationships and that the results of the FRBS can be compared to the results of a kinetic family drawing.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

This chapter includes the procedure for investigating the validity of the Family Relations Button Sort. The purpose of this study was to explore the differences in button choices between children of divorce and children from intact homes and to investigate whether a rater of the FRBS (Carter et al., 2000) would be able to differentiate children from divorced homes from children living in two-parent homes. Using the FRBS, the study compared the button choices of children of divorce to children in two-parent homes. A co-researcher, Carissma Nance Coelho, was involved in duplicate research with children from step families and therefore, much of the recruitment was done as a team.

Statement of the Problem

Of particular importance in the FRBS was its ability to discriminate between children from divorced families and children of intact families. This discrimination relies upon effective counsellor process because, particularly for those in the school system, there may not be any access to family information. It is imperative that an assessor understand how children perceive their families in order to use the FRBS appropriately as a screening tool. This is because counsellors are aware that family plays a large role in children's development and that experiences often shape who people become (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2000).

In addition, one of the issues that may need to be addressed is that this test may not show differences between these two groups. It may have been possible for children from intact families to perceive their families more negatively than children of divorce, as the opposite result is also possible.

The use of the FRBS, however, may offer a way to show both differences and similarities among children's perceptions of their family members. It is certainly possible for the FRBS to not only discriminate between groups, but to also provide useful and valuable criteria and information about the way that children view their family relationships.

Population and Sampling Procedures

Participants. A total of 59 children from the Lower mainland and the Delta School District voluntarily participated in this study. The participants were entered into a draw to win one $50 gift certificate to Toys R Us and one $100 gift certificate to Toys R Us when the children were given permission to participate in the study.

Teachers who allowed their class to send a permission slip home were entered into a draw for a $50 gift certificate to a local restaurant. Children from divorced families were selected from families whose parents have separated for at least six months and had not remarried or lived in a common-law relationship since the divorce. Children from intact families were selected from families that had never experienced any kind of separation, divorce, or remarriage.

Testing materials. A total of 240 buttons make up the button kit. There are 48 white buttons with two holes, 48 white buttons with four holes, 48 gray buttons with four holes and 48 brown buttons with four holes are used as non-target buttons. Also used are 48 target buttons which have the four categories of colour and are either concrete or abstract buttons and trademarked as the FRBS. Twenty-four buttons are abstract in shape and colour, while the other 24 are concrete, meaning that they have a design such as a star or teddy bear on them. Plain or non-target buttons are defined as buttons which have four

holes, are circular, and are plain in colour and shape. A variety of colours are used but there is no design on these buttons. Concrete buttons are defined as those which have a specific design or shape and vary in colour. Examples of these include buttons in the shape of stars, hearts, or teddy bears. Abstract buttons refer to buttons which are different in design, colour or shape. These include transparent/opaque buttons, brass/metal buttons, and unusually shaped buttons (see APPENDIX A: PICTURE OF TARGET BUTTONS). As well, a sheet for *demographic information* was used (see APPENDIX B).

FACES-III (Olson et al., 1985) for children was also used, and this assessment tool has undergone a number of tests for both reliability and validity by the original test producers. These numbers are reported. In terms of reliability, its internal consistency for cohesion is $\underline{r} = .77$ and for adaptability is $\underline{r} = .62$ for a total of $\underline{r} = .68$. It is reported to have very good face and content validity.

Procedure

The recruitment. Letters of permission were first sent to the Delta School District (see APPENDIX C: LETTER OF RECRUITMENT FOR SCHOOL DISTRICT/ AGENCIES). School personnel were then notified about the research when permission had been granted from the School District. Principals, teachers, and/or school counsellors from various primary school classes, where recruitment was approved of by the School District, were approached through a letter of recruitment (see APPENDIX D: LETTER FOR PRINCIPALS/TEACHERS) and asked if they had pupils who had experienced a parental divorce or were in original two-parent homes. If they agreed to allow children in their classroom to participate they signed a permission slip (see APPENDIX E: AGENCY PERMISSION SLIP). If so, they were asked to send letters of permission to the

parent/guardian of those children (see APPENDIX F: LETTER TO THE PARENTS). The letters of permission had permission slips attached, which were then sent back to the teacher (see APPENDIX G: PERMISSION SLIPS FOR CHILDREN). The children were seen only after these permission slips had been returned and parental approval had been met. Demographic information was verified through a phone call to the parents of participants. Posters of recruitment were also placed in agencies and community centers (see APPENDIX H: RECRUITMENT POSTER).

The testing process. The children for whom participation was approved, were then taken individually, during class time, to a private room for administration purposes. Both assessors were interns in child therapy and used their counseling skills such as warmth, genuineness and empathy to build rapport and trust with each child. The child was told that they were going to help the researcher with some research about what children think about their families by answering questions and doing some tasks. Children were told that they could choose not to participate if they wanted to and that they could leave at any time. Children were also told that their parents had given permission for them to participate in the research. Parents and children were also informed that if there were any problems as a result of this research, Dr. Joanne Crandall would meet with the child and/or family to debrief the situation.

Administration Procedure for the FRBS

All sessions were audiotape recorded for the purposes of transcription. One of the two assessors (co-researchers) told the child that this meeting was being recorded so that the assessor would remember what the children had to say. When the children entered the room the experimenter pressed “record” on the audiotape, and stated:

> "Thank you for coming to help me with my research. I am studying what children think about their families. Your teacher and parents thought that you might be interested in helping me learn more about children and their families. Today, I will begin by asking you to play a game with buttons."

Then the protocol began.

The FRBS. The FRBS followed the protocol developed by The Therapeutic Tools Research Group (Carter et al., 2000). In this protocol, the researcher is referred to as the assessor.

The assessor took the box of buttons and the tray and said:

> "Here is a box; it contains buttons of different shapes, sizes, and colours."

The assessor opened the box in front of the child and touched and moved the buttons inside the box in a clockwise direction. The assessor used her dominant hand to pick up a handful of buttons and slowly allowed the buttons to drop through her fingers, back into the box. The assessor then brought the box closer to the child, and placed it directly in front of the child, while saying:

> "I would like you to use the buttons to introduce your family members to me. This helps me to learn about you and your family."

The assessor then poured the buttons onto a tray and said:

> "I would now like you to choose one button for each member of your family. Please use a different button for each family member. Please tell me when you have finished."

At any time if the child did not tell the assessor when he/she was finished the assessor asked:

"Are you finished?"

The assessor noted the child's responses by an audio recording.

If the child did not choose a button to represent him/herself the assessor said:

"I would like you to also pick a button out for yourself. Pick a button that shows me who you are. Please tell me when you have finished."

Once all buttons were chosen the assessor introduced the button protocol sheet by saying:

"Here is a piece of paper. Put your family members on this sheet of paper. Tell me who each button is, and what made you choose each button."

The FRBS arrangement. After this the child was told:

"Thank you for showing me your family. As we know, each family is different from one another. Family members may have different feelings for one another. For example, in a family, a mom and dad may feel one way towards one another, while a mom and daughter/son may feel another way towards another. Now that you have picked out the buttons for your family members, could you put the buttons in a way that explains how each person in your family is feeling towards one another? Please tell me when you have finished."

When the child indicated that he/she had finished the assessor said:

"Could you please explain how you have put your buttons?"

The assessor recorded the sequence of the button presentation and the child's verbatim descriptions.

Picture taking and demographics. After administration of the FRBS a picture was taken of the child's button sort arrangements and the choices that they made. Each child

was asked to give some demographic information, including a mini genogram (see APPENDIX B).

Procedure for FACES-III

FACES-III for children. After the FRBS was completed, the children were given the following instructions:

> "Now I am going to ask you some questions about your family and you can answer with a number. The number 1 means that this almost never happens in your family or is almost never true, 2 means once in awhile it happens or is true, 3 means that it sometimes happens or is sometimes true, 4 means that it frequently happens or is frequently true, and 5 means it almost always happens or is almost always true. When I say the sentence you can point to the number and say it for me. Do you understand?"

The researcher then asked each child the 20 questions written on FACES-III and subsequently wrote down the child's responses. A visual cue card with the 5 response choices was displayed to make answering simpler for the children, as well as more reliable (see APPENDIX I: VISUAL CUE CARD FOR FACES).

Omission of parents. When studying children from divorced homes and step-families, it is important to take into consideration the fact that the children may omit someone. Therefore, the research team decided to add this to the protocol: When a child omitted his/her parent that he/she had an ongoing relationship with, the researcher asked the child at the end of the session to choose a button for that parent, explain what made them choose the button and place him/her in the family arrangement. Two pictures were taken; one of the buttonsort before the child chose his/her parent and one afterward.

Debriefing. Debriefing occurred as soon as the data collection was complete. During the debriefing time, the children were asked how the process was for them. They were asked how the researcher could help to make this process easier for other children to do. They were asked what they liked best and least about the tasks. They were also asked if there was anything that they would like to add now that they were done. The debriefing ended with a chance for the children to ask questions or make comments. Parents were informed about the purpose of the study through a written letter and were given information about where to obtain the results of the research (see APPENDIX F). Children were then asked to keep what they did confidential among their peers for two weeks, just in case someone in their class would also be a participant. They were told, however, that they could talk to their teachers or parents about what transpired. The children's responses were transcribed verbatim and this information was used for both the independent raters and to extract significant themes.

Reliability Analysis

In order to ensure reliability, two trained raters, who were both Master of Arts counseling psychology students, blind to the groups that the children were in, were employed. These raters independently looked at the pictures of the button placement and choices and tried to discriminate whether the children were from divorced or intact families, without having read the transcripts. The raters were asked to give their judgment three times. First, based on the children's choice of buttons and pattern arranged, without reading the transcripts. Second, based on the above and the FACES-III responses; and third, based on the combined information and the written transcripts

explaining why the children chose certain buttons. Agreement between raters and the experimenter were explored.

Scoring The Protocol

Scoring can be done at both the individual and the group levels. The data can be observed on three levels: button based, pattern based and profile based, according to Yau's methodology (1989). Two additional raters, who will be blind to the family background of the participants, will score the protocols in order to minimize bias.

Button-based analysis. The button-based analyses looks at why children choose a particular button to represent various family members. Dimensions of the buttons can be observed, including such things as size, shape, and colour. The assessors can look at what aspects of their family members the children choose to point out through the use of the buttons. Examples of things that the buttons might represent include family members' personal characteristics, their physical appearance, or the child's likes/dislikes. After these are examined on an individual level, the data of intact and divorced children can be pooled together. Frequency counts can be done in order to see how often a particular button dimension, such as size, is used. As well, the frequency that children discuss personal aspects of the people that the buttons represent, such as clothing, behaviors, and the person as a whole can be taken into account (Yau, 1989).

Pattern-based analysis. The next level of analysis observed how each child placed their family members on the page and what the children said about these positions. The distance between buttons, whether they were placed in a linear or clustered manner, and where members were placed in relation to their roles (e.g., dad below child would be atypical) can all be taken into account. The child's explanation also informed the

experimenter and themes can be created according to the patterns that emerge. For example, close, chaotic, and distant might be some possible patterns. Comparisons can then be made between the two groups of children and the frequency of patterns can be noted (Yau, 1989).

Profile-based analysis. This section allowed the researcher to explore how the children perceive their individual relationships with family members by observing their explanations and button choices qualitatively. The researcher can develop themes based on what aspects of the people the children focused on, what aspects of the people were represented by the colour of the buttons, the shape of the buttons, the pattern of the buttons, the size of the buttons, the design of the buttons, the overall look of the buttons, the degree of transparency of the buttons, and the material of the buttons. Frequency counts can be done, comparing the groups, on the aspects of the family members for each measure. The experimenter can also observe the number of dimensions used by children and compare the two groups (Yau, 1989).

Hypotheses

There were five hypotheses. This research hypothesized that:

(1) Children of divorce will be more likely to omit the parent that they do not live with when they make button choices when compared to the omission of any parent by children of intact families.

(2) Children of divorce will be more likely to add in extended family members and pets than will children from intact homes. It was also hypothesized that (3) children from intact families will be more likely to choose brighter colours, white or gold to represent their family members, as these colours are associated with

positive attributes of family members. In contrast, children from divorced families will be more likely to choose dark coloured buttons, abstract buttons and the dark abstract buttons together, as these have been associated with negative feelings.

(4) Children from intact families will also be more likely to show greater cohesion and adaptability on the FACES-III than children from divorced families.

(5) Two independent raters will be able to discriminate between the children from intact families and the children of divorce on the three levels at a level greater than chance. These include a) their judgment based on the picture of the FRBS alone, b) their judgment based on the FACES scores and the FRBS, c) their judgment based on the above with the written transcripts.

For the purpose of this study, a novel variable was defined as "middle." This variable looked specifically at the placement of the child's buttons, compared to the placement of their parent's buttons. The purpose was to observe whether children of divorce placed themselves or their siblings in between their parents rather than placing them side by side or without another relationship blocking it.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter investigates the preliminary analysis of the results and the statistical analyses for all of the hypotheses. It explores inter-rater agreement and surveys the differences in button placement when comparing children from divorced homes to children from intact families. It also seeks to provide insight into the children's experiences of the FRBS by giving examples from the children's transcripts.

Preliminary Analysis

A total of 59 children participated in this study. Of these, 31 were from intact families and 28 were children of divorce. The children were from a number of schools in the Delta area and from agencies which were located in a major urban centre, located in the Lower mainland of British Columbia. All children voluntarily participated in this study. These children were enrolled in grades 1-5 and ranged in age from 6-11. In the intact group there were 10 females and 21 males while in the divorced group there were 10 females and 18 males. The age distribution is in the table below:

Table 1

Age Distribution of Children

Age	6	7	8	9	10	11
Intact Group	5	5	5	10	5	1
Divorced Group	4	9	0	5	6	4

After exploring the participant characteristics, FACES-III (Olson et al., 1985) was tested for reliability and no questions posed reliability problems. On the cohesion scale the mean was 3.83 and the alpha was 0.73. On the adaptability scale the mean was 2.80 and the alpha was 0.56.

Means and standard deviations for the dependent variables are included in Table 2 on page 46.

Hypotheses

Omissions. Hypothesis 1 was supported as children of divorce (21%) were more likely than children from intact families (0%) to omit a parent when making button choices, $\chi^2(1) = 7.40$, $p = .007$. In all cases the children had an ongoing relationship with the non-custodial parent such as weekend visitations or close contact via telephone or e-mail. Child 31, a six year old girl, chose a black skull for her dad and said it was because "I like him." She then proceeded to place her father right beside her and in the centre of the entire family unit. Child 30, a brother to 31, omitted his dad and then chose a non-target grey button for his father when asked to include his dad. He placed him far away from his mom and close to himself. Child 32, from the same family, chose a polka dot teddy bear for dad after first omitting him. She then placed him beside herself. This was interesting because she chose a black heart for her mom, which may symbolize some anger toward her mother.

The remainder of the hypotheses addressed the responses of children after the missing family members had been placed in the button sort.

Extended family members. Part of hypothesis 2 was supported as it was found that children of divorce were also more likely to include extended family members as a part of their family when making button choices, $\chi^2(1) = 10.77$, $p = .001$. This means that

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for The Dependent Variables

	Cohesion Scaled Scores[a]	Adaptability Scaled Scores	Parent Omitted[b]	Extended Family	Pets Included	Middle	White[c]	Gold	Black	Primary	Age
					Intact Group (n = 31)						
M	4.26	5.35	1.00	.65	.42	.19	.90	1.10	.74	1.01	8.26
SD	1.48	1.76	.00	.25	.50	.40	.83	.94	.73	.79	1.44
					Divorced Group (n = 28)						
M	4.11	5.29	.79	.43	.18	.61	.75	1.64	1.00	1.25	8.43
SD	1.81	1.65	.42	.50	.39	.50	.75	1.31	.82	1.21	1.77

Note.

[a] Scores for FACES-III are means ranging from 1-8.

[b] Omissions, extended family members, pets and middle are all proportions.

[c] Colour scores are all mean frequencies.

although they may have left out a parent, it seems that aunts, uncles, cousins, or grandparents were added and considered an important part of the child's family.

Some children, when asked to introduce their family, included teachers, psychologists, and various other important individuals in their lives. Child 34 included both her grandmother and her teacher as a part of her family, while omitting her father with whom she had regular contact. Child 22 chose every member of his mother's extended family including aunts, uncles, cousins and his recently deceased grandfather. Child 39 chose a gold heart for her nanny, who has a significant caretaking role in her life. Child 40 chose both of his grandparents when introducing his family to the researcher and stated positive things about them. He chose a gold star to represent his grandpa and stated "I just figured out that he was with me and he was number one all along." This same child chose a button for his psychologist and psychiatrist, stating many positive attributes about them while choosing a black heart for his father and stating "He's hard at heart." These are just a few examples of many.

Pets. Part of hypothesis 2 was not supported but was statistically significant in the opposite direction. It was found that children from intact families were more likely than children from divorced homes to include pets in their button sort when asked to introduce their family, $\chi^2(1) = 4.02$, $p = .045$.

Colour choices. Interestingly, hypotheses 3 was not supported because there were no significant differences between the groups of children on the frequency of their colour choices, White: $t(57) = .740$, $p = .462$; Gold: $t(57) = -1.85$, $p = .07$; Black: $t(57) = -1.29$, $p = .21$; Primary: $t(57) = -.583$, $p = .56$. There were also no significant difference between the children from intact homes versus those from divorced homes on their choice of

button for both the child's birth mom and birth dad when observing colour and the level of abstraction, Birth mom: $\chi^2(8) = 14.70$, $p = .065$, Birth dad: $\chi^2(9) = 11.39$, $p = .250$. These negative results may be a result of a small sample size.

FACES-III. Part of hypothesis 4 was supported, while the other part was not. It was found that children from intact homes were more balanced in levels of cohesion, while those from divorced homes lacked that balance, *Test for the equality of variances* $F(26, 29) = 2.10$, $p = 0.05$ (Hays, 1973). Interestingly, levels of adaptability looked almost identical for both groups, and was therefore, not significant.

The independent rater's results. Two independent raters, who were Master of Arts counselling psychology students, were asked to observe the children's responses to the buttonsort and attempt to discriminate whether the child was from an intact or divorced home. The raters observed the data on three levels: first, examining a picture of the child's buttonsort only; second, examining the picture of the buttonsort with the FACES-III grid; and third, examining the picture, the FACES-III grid and the child's transcript. There was a significant amount of agreement among raters, however, the percentages can be improved upon. The levels of agreement are in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Percentages of Agreement Among Raters

	Picture Only	Picture & FACES grid	Picture, FACES & Transcript
% Agreement	79	74	86
Kappa agreement	58	47	63

Although percentages of agreement seem promising, when actually observing the agreement using *kappa*, one can see that the FRBS needs improvement in order to be used as a tool for discrimination.

Clinically Relevant Observations

Choosing the buttons. In general, the children seemed to enjoy the task of choosing their buttons and discussing their family members and family relationships, as determined when they were asked follow up questions. There seemed to be many common choices such as the gold heart to represent the child's mom, and the dog and cat buttons to represent their pets. However some choices stood out and made a significant contribution to this preliminary research on the button sort.

Child 18, from an intact family, chose all non target buttons, four brown buttons and one white button. The child then described his choices stating "because I wanted to do the skin colour . . . because my dad's white, I'm black, my sister's black, my brother's black, and my mom's black." For this child it was significant that he was from a biracial family. For counseling purposes this would have been a wonderful indication to the therapist that the child may either enjoy this as a part of his identity or be struggling with identity issues.

Children's comments. Observing the children's comments regarding their button choices seemed to be the most effective way to gain an understanding of their perceptions. For instance, some children commented about personality traits of parents and siblings when choosing their buttons. Child R, from a divorced home, stated:

> "[this is] my mom because she is the one that takes care of us, and she really loves us. And, this is my dad, he really likes clocks because he talks a lot and the clock

ticks a lot and my little brother is like a sunshine, because he brightens up my day…"

This example reflects a pattern that many children followed, choosing many of their buttons based on personality characteristics.

Other children's comments were similar to Child 8, from an intact family, who had an obvious reason for picking each button as she states:

"This would be my mom because she likes red, and she always looks up at the stars a lot, and she likes stars a lot because they are mostly bright. And this is my sister, because she often likes playing with my cat Sneakers, and my cat's part of the family, but, he, he's like 8 years old . . . this is my dad, and he gave me a teddy bear that was blue, and he gave, he gave my, my sister when she was very little a blue doll, and so I thought he likes, he likes blue. And he had a red ball when he was a baby, when he was like a little kid, and I still go over to my grandma and grandpa's and look at that, that um, that like teddy, and he's like so old, his eyes are falling off."

Some children did even more than what they were instructed to do. For instance, Child J made the buttons come alive by using them to show actions and conversations between members of his family:

C: So they feel mad at each other (. . . inaudible) and they're there, they're turned

R: Ok, so you can leave that there, go ahead with the other ones and how they feel about each other too.

C: This one's my dad, he's upset at mom.

R: Ok, you picked this for your mom, right, this is grandpa Ed

C: Oh yeah, he and my mom are this way, and they're talking on the phone . . . My dad's yelling at my mom that she forgot to check some things for like, (inaudible) that we have, at least my dad has some, some um, things and I use those for clothes, those were the clothes I have, I'll put that here, then, and, this one's me, me and my dad hug, and …

It is obvious that this child wanted to express the true relationship dynamics and his life experiences rather than just to state that his parents do not have an amicable relationship.

Children also made choices based on the activities that the person enjoys. For example, Child 11, who works on cars with his dad, chose a button that looked like a steering wheel to represent himself. One child chose a teddy bear with a flute to symbolize her musical abilities while another chose a teddy bear button because he/she collects teddy bears. Meanwhile, some children chose buttons based on the appearance of family members. For instance, one child said he/she chose a brown button because it is the same colour as his/her mother's hair. Many children chose heart buttons to symbolize that the person, who was often their mom, loved them. At the same time other children picked buttons just because they liked them, and did not always know what made them choose that specific one.

Placement of the buttons. It was found that children of divorce did have a statistically significant tendency to place themselves or their siblings/relatives in between their parents, whereas children from intact homes had their parents beside each other or no one blocking that relationship, $\chi^2(1) = 10.58$, $p = .001$.

This phenomenon was noticed throughout the children's verbal responses as well. It seems that the children from divorced homes generally love both of their parents and

recognize that their parents do not get along, so they place themselves in between their parents. When Child 23 was asked to explain why he placed his mom and dad far apart and himself in between he said:

C: Cause my dad, he doesn't pay bills for my house, and my mom, and he still has a name on the house, but he doesn't pay.

R: Okay, so that makes mom a little mad?

C: Yeah, sad.

R: Sad, okay- that makes sense.

R: Okay, so you put your sister closer to your mom than to your dad?

C: Yep, because my sister is nice more and my dad's kind of grumpy sometimes gets mad.

This child saw the tense relationship between his parents and even knew intimate details about it. He felt like he was stuck in the middle. Other children placed themselves in the middle too.

Additional children found it difficult to place their parents on the page because they recognized that they loved both parents and were not sure where to place themselves. Child 19 discussed the relationship between himself and his parents:

R: And you're in the middle?

C: Mmhmm

R: Could you please explain how you put your buttons?

C: Well, they'd be usually right around here (farther apart), but since they're getting along really well now, I put them closer, and they're both really close to me, so I put them right there, cause I'm really close to both of them.

Furthermore, some children found it difficult to know where to place their parent at all. They seemed ambivalent because they understood the parental conflict and knew that their parents did not get along. Child R stated:

> C: . . . and I think that, um, well, um, we all love each other except for Dad, it's not that she doesn't love him but, well she give him (. . .inaudible), I guess she just likes him now.
>
> R: Mmhmm
>
> C: Hmm, so I don't know where to put him.

This child did not know how to express the parental relationship since the divorce. This was seen numerous times as Child 24 struggled with where to put his dad, knowing that his mom and dad do not have a positive relationship:

> "Okay, okay, um, there will be, so um, this is my dad, I like my dad, my mom I like, but... I know where to put dad, I just don't know how to put, um maybe I'll just put it this way then. I don't know if my grandma likes my dad, so, because I don't know if my grandma's ever even seen my dad, so, okay. There.
>
> . . . And my grandma and my mom, you know, are pretty close, and my mom and my dad- I don't think so (giggles) I don't think it's really good, I don't think they're like best friends."

This was a common denominator that perhaps, parents could take note of. It may be important for parents to understand that their children feel stuck in the middle. Parents must, therefore, make a conscious effort to let their children know that it is okay to still love both of their parents.

The placement of the buttons was interesting especially when children of divorce did not have a positive relationship with one of their parents. For instance, child 41 placed his father as far away from the rest of the family as possible and basically said that he did not like his dad at all.

Summary

In summary, children of divorce and children from intact homes did tend to make different button choices on the whole. Children of divorce were more likely to omit a parent and also more likely to include extended family members in their button sort while children from intact homes were more likely to include pets. Children of divorce were also more likely to place themselves or siblings in between parents or to block that relationship rather than depict the united front that the children from intact homes displayed. Children from intact homes also rated themselves as more balanced in cohesiveness according to their scores on FACES-III (Olsen et al., 1985). The following chapter will explore why this may be so and what implications can be drawn from the differences seen.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Interpretation of the Results

The present research highlights the value of the FRBS as a projective technique. It seems that children do tend to respond to the buttons and they are able to project their views of their family onto the page. Even those who may not have fully understood their feelings, such as Child 31 who was mentioned previously, are able to show the clinician that they may have unresolved feelings toward their parent to contend with. A really obvious example that the children used the FRBS to project their true feelings is found in those who omitted their parent, even though they had a relationship with him/her. It was most interesting to see what button choices they made for the parent after being asked by the assessor to choose one. Child 39 chose a red button with swirls on it because her dad "makes [her] angry." The fact that she ignored this relationship gives the clinician a hint that there may be some issues to work on, but when prompted to choose a button it really opened the door to discuss her feelings towards her father.

The fact that children of divorce were more likely than children from intact families to omit a parent was a fascinating discovery. This may mean that children unconsciously struggle with their feelings about that parent and the role of the parent-child relationship in the children's lives. Because all of the children who were included were those who have an ongoing relationship with that parent, one may want to question the unconscious and conscious processes that happen for the child when they leave that parent out. All of the children really had nothing to lose by mentioning their parent to the assessor, because as a stranger, there would be little fear of repercussions by the parent that they live with. Although naturally this could be a real fear for children who do not

want to hurt the parent that supports them the most. This brings into question some of the previous research done by Yau (1989) who found that children did not choose significant buttons for their fathers. Perhaps, children do choose buttons of significance, which we do not fully understand, or children omit their fathers because it is too painful to discuss that missing relationship.

This research, along with various others such as Wallerstein and colleagues (2000), shows the profound impact of a child's lost relationship with their parent, who is generally their father. Adult children of divorce discuss their skewed views of fatherhood and relationships as a result of the loss of their father (Wallerstein et al., 2000). One adult child expressed his anguish when his father adopted his two step sons and stopped seeing him altogether, while another discussed the fact that his relationship with his father seemed to get worse as he aged, while his friends from intact homes expressed the opposite (Wallerstein et al., 2000).

Whether adults ignore it or not, children are consciously or unconsciously attempting to show us that they are missing a part of their family. When making a decision to include a parent as a member of their family, children are in a double bind. If they include their father they may be worried that the clinician will not know they are from a divorced home. If they do not include their parent it may imply to clinicians that they do not care about that relationship. Perhaps they have so much anger toward that parent that they cannot include them as a family member, or maybe their "other" parent is treated as an outcast at home. Whatever the case, children of divorce do not know how to define their family, and therefore, rather than explain the impossible, some choose to ignore the parent all together.

The significant differences between children from intact families and children of divorce are telling and have many implications. One of the main insinuations of these results is the fact that children of divorce experience "family" quite differently. Not one child from an intact home chose to leave a parent out of the button sort, while a significant number of children from divorced homes did. This implies that once the parent has moved out, children may no longer view them as a part of the family or they may be in too much pain to admit that the parent ever existed. This is not to say that when questioned, the children would not speak of their relationship with that parent, but it does lend some insight into children's views. Perhaps children were projecting their sadness about the divorce by "pretending" that their parent did not exist, or perhaps children were angry with that parent, blaming him/her for the divorce, and projecting all of the hurt onto that person. For whatever reason, children have the tendency to "ignore" rather than face their negative feelings.

Some children also made negative statements about their parent when describing why they chose a particular button. Child 39 chose a red button and then when asked what made her choose it she said "because he makes me angry." These children tended to see their parent in a negative light. Perhaps it is too difficult to think of the parent that the child lives with in a negative way, or perhaps, as in many cases, the child blames the parent that left.

As well, the FRBS gave a thorough picture of the important role that extended family members and friends play in the lives of children. Children of divorce were more likely to include extended family members into their button sort as a part of their family than were those children from intact homes. Children chose grandparents, aunts, uncles,

close family friends, and cousins while sometimes choosing only one member and sometimes choosing many to represent their family members. This is remarkable because on the one hand, many children seemed to ignore a parent, but then in turn, seemed to replace that parent by adding additional extended family members or family friends to their button sort. These results strengthen ecosystemic play therapy as a theoretical model because they not only demonstrate the value and influence of the family system, but they also celebrate diversity, as all inclusions were based on the child's perspective.

The definition of family changes for the children, becoming anyone that they love or feel close to/supported by. This is not to say that children do not love the parent that they do not live with, but it does raise a question as to why the children would include others who do not live in the home while still leaving their parent out. Many children from divorced homes included a grandparent in their button choices, likely because they have had to share the responsibility of raising them more for economic reasons. Most single parents lose a significant amount of income and therefore, appreciate the free childcare and help that their retired parents can provide.

Also out of the ordinary, some children included people like teachers, nannies, counsellors, and psychiatrists as members of their family. These people seem to play a significant role in children's minds for them to introduce them as family. The common phrase made popular by former first lady Hilary Clinton, "it takes a village to raise a child," brings on a new meaning when observing the children of divorce. Children see these people as "family" which is especially important to counsellors and others who care for children, who not only have to take this connection seriously and try not to disappoint the child, but it shows the lasting impact that counsellors, teachers, and child care workers

have on children. Counsellors not only have to take this responsibility seriously, but they must also continually remind the child that this relationship is a temporary one so that children of divorce do not end up feeling hurt and abandoned twice.

Furthermore, children from intact homes included extra family members too. However, their extra family members were their pets. This inclusion may be because children from intact homes are more likely to have pets. One could assume that children from intact homes have more people and financial resources to care for pets. However, it was assumed that children from intact homes would feel secure in their family and therefore not "need" to include pets as family members, as would children of divorce. Perhaps children of divorce do not include pets because they are already preoccupied with what they must say about their parents. Or, in all likelihood, children from intact homes have fewer emotional adjustments to make, leaving them with more time to think about their pets. Pets can be of extreme importance to children and family, therefore, these additions may want to be explored in further research.

Although colour was anticipated to play a large role in projection, contrary to the findings as stated in previous studies done by the Therapeutic Tools Research Group (Carter et al., 2000), the dark colours were not found to be related to negative feelings and the bright colours to positive feelings. This may be because the amounts of children in this study were too few to allow for the emergence of more subtle processes. This is also likely because this analysis did not pair the buttons with positive and negative statements. However, there may need to be an evaluation of the emphasis that clinicians place on colour and button type when using this assessment tool. If the effects are subtle, counsellors may overemphasize the importance of colour when using this tool and this

could be an error. As well, concreteness versus abstraction did not play a significant role in the results. This was largely because the majority of the children chose concrete buttons, and this result suited their age range. There may be some question as to the effectiveness of using abstract buttons with children in the "concrete thinking" stage. If colour or concreteness does not play a primary role then perhaps the button choices need to be re-evaluated to look more at size, complexity or other features.

Furthermore, children of divorce were also more likely to place themselves or their siblings in between their parents when placing their parents on the page. This may indicate that children feel caught in the middle. Some children feel the pressure to side with one parent or feel that it is their responsibility to bring their parents back together (Wallerstein, et al., 2000). These children may see themselves as mediators and therefore place themselves "between" their parents to "keep the peace." Placing themselves in the middle may be the child's way of recognizing their parent's anger and hostility or an acceptance of the fact that they are no longer together. This finding was significant as this supports the literature that claims that children want to bring their parents together and that they feel responsible to "choose" between parents (Wallerstein et al., 2000).

In addition, when investigating FACES-III scores, they indicated that children from intact homes were significantly more likely to perceive their families as more balanced in terms of cohesion. This means that children from intact homes view their families as close but not too enmeshed or disengaged, rather slightly separated or connected. On the other hand, the children of divorce were more likely to see their families at unhealthy extremes of enmeshment or disengagement. This was expected as children from divorce may feel disengaged from their parents because one does not live

with them and the other likely has to work full time, take care of the household responsibilities, and be a parent. This leaves little time for a "quality" relationship. On the other extreme, children of divorce may also become enmeshed with their parents because boundaries are diffuse, as children have to take on some extra responsibilities, and some may even take on the role of a "parent" (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Wallerstein et al., 2000). The children may become the parent's confidante, and in some cases, the parent may try to fulfill their emotional needs through the child (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Wallerstein et al., 2000).

However, although there was a significant difference found in the children's views of cohesiveness, no differences were found when examining adaptability. This is because children from both intact and divorced homes were closely rating themselves towards the chaotic or flexible type of family, rather than the rigid family. There are many reasons why the children view their families as chaotic. First of all, these are chaotic times. People are busy, the world is constantly changing, and people fear for their lives as a result of bullying and terrorism. There is just little certainty in this world and families are starting to recognize that more and more. As well, the things that are tolerated now were not tolerated years ago. Parents are more accepting of their children's wishes and are more likely to include their children in family decisions. What is seen as chaos may actually be reality in the new millennium. The norms that FACES-III is based on were completed in the early 1990s and the researchers used children from the Midwestern United States. Perhaps children from the west coast, who experience more poverty and a higher divorce rate than those from the Midwest, are more exposed to different experiences and thus, less prone to rigidity ("National Center," 2002). Children's views

of family adaptability in the new millenium may need to be reviewed by doing more current research.

The FRBS is promising as a discrimination tool, based on the results of the percentages of agreement between raters. Raters were able to discriminate between these two groups 79% of the time when observing the button sort picture alone. When the raters read the transcripts and looked at the pictures the percentage of their ability to discriminate between the two groups improved to 86%. When *kappa* statistics were used in order to correct for chance agreements (Howell, 1997), the respective levels of agreement were 58% and 62%. This may be a more accurate reflection of rater agreement. One must explore what the disagreements are among the raters, investigating incremental validity and improving upon what is recommended.

Limitations of the Study

There were a number of limitations in this study that need to be addressed. One of the most interesting findings was that when the raters were given the FRBS picture and the grid which showed the child's score on FACES-III, the raters percentages of agreement actually decreased. This finding is likely due to the fact that most children in this sample scored higher on the adaptability scores than the comparison norms, making it look as though the families were quite chaotic. This distorted the picture of the children's families making it more difficult to tell whether the children were from intact or divorced homes. The raters were likely to believe that more children were from divorced homes, which counselling students would assume, as the nature of these homes are generally more chaotic.

One of the problems with this finding, however, is that one cannot receive an accurate picture of the FRBS as a discrimination tool because FACES-III skewed the results, making the FRBS look weaker as a discrimination measure than perhaps it is. If this study were replicated, it would be recommended that the independent raters also try to differentiate between children of divorce and children from intact families when observing the transcripts alone and when looking at the FACES-III grid alone. This may give a more accurate reflection of the FRBS as a discrimination measure and may show how much FACES-III actually detracted from the discrimination abilities of this technique. It was assumed that FACES-III would validate the FRBS, not take away from it. Certainly another objective family measurement could have been used, unfortunately there are no measurements for children under the age of ten that would have worked with the time constraints of this project.

In addition, FACES-III also limited the study because, although it claims to have been used with children aged six and up, it was difficult for children aged six to eight to understand and respond to the questions without repetition. There needs to be some development among objective family assessments for use with children under the age of ten as there were very few options with any norms. On the other hand, FACES-III did contribute towards validating the FRBS because the scores on the cohesion scales were comparable to the visual pictures of the child's FRBS button placement. Perhaps another projective technique such as the *Kinetic Family Drawing* (Burns, 1982) would have been a better comparison measure.

Implications

There are many implications to using the FRBS as a therapist. For instance, it is definitely a tool that can be used for projective purposes and therefore, using it would be helpful to gain insight into the clients' lives. This also tells counsellors that there is more to people's feelings and thoughts than what clients share with a therapist. When counsellors ask a child about his/her family, they should expect that they will not hear everything that the child feels or thinks. Children might, in fact, ignore the most painful part, as they did in the FRBS, and counsellors must therefore, search deeply for projections that children share. Counsellors must also be careful to explore how a child defines family before placing importance where there should not be or omitting someone who might be an important person to the child.

Another thing that can expected from children when talking about family members is the inclusion of extended family members or pets. This can give therapists both ideas about the types of families that these children are from, but can also let counsellors know that the people children talk about are obviously an important part of their lives. Therapists must not ignore these people as significant because they may influence the child in some positive and negative ways. If they are included, they are discussed for a reason.

As well, the FRBS (Carter et al., 2000), as a projective technique, can enhance therapy because it can give the therapist an idea of the child's perception of their family within ten minutes. This assessment tool will help the therapist gain insight quickly, but also helps build rapport because it gives the child a fun and easy way to express their feelings.

Recommendations

FACES-III for children proved to be difficult to administer with younger children. It could be recommended that children under the age of seven or eight, depending on their maturity level and academic ability may have difficulty with this task. There was an obvious gap in both the children's ability to process and answer the questions depending on their age. Children aged seven and under, first of all, had difficulty understanding the scaled responses and how to do that, and second of all, could not answer as quickly; questions had to be repeated a number of times and explained further. It is also recommended that more current research be completed on levels of adaptability in families, particularly in different areas, such as on the west coast.

In addition, although the FRBS proved itself to be an effective tool for giving therapists a good picture of children's views of families, there can always be improvements made. One of the main recommendations that can be given for the FRBS is that throughout the sessions children had difficulty comprehending what the assessor meant when she asked the children to place the buttons in a way that showed the family members feelings towards each other. Giving them a number of concrete examples may help with this situation. For instance, children responded better when they were told "Show me a picture of how everybody feels about each other with your buttons. Some people place everyone in a group because they all get along, sometimes children place family members in a line, or children may put one or two people further away because they don't get along as well." This seemed to help those that had difficulty.

As well, many children requested more variety in their buttons. When Child 24 was asked what he liked least he responded by saying "the buttons." His response was as follows:

R: The buttons? What did you not like about them?

C: Putting them in the right place was hard because I like all of them but they don't all get along. I almost needed two buttons to show the feelings

R: So choosing and placing the buttons was hard?

C: Choosing them was easy, placing them was hard.

R: Well that's good, it's honest, and what did you wish you had?

C: Well, a more variety of buttons, because most of those buttons are, similar, like, there's about five of the same (pointing to the stars).

This child felt that there were far too many similar buttons, as seen in the extra availability of hearts, stars, pets and teddy bears. Other children felt distracted by the number of buttons that were the same, particularly frustrated about the number of non-target buttons. These children felt that having so many buttons that were the same was a waste because they still wanted to look at and choose more different ones.

As a result, a recommendation could be to reduce the number of non-target buttons and instead, add different buttons of varying shapes and sizes. This may be beneficial because it is less distracting, but may also add to the projective nature of the instrument. The fact that most of the buttons are the same size seems rather counter-intuitive. In most other projective techniques, such as the *Kinetic Family Drawing* (Burns, 1982), size is an important factor in exhibiting many things such as power differentials, control issues and self-esteem concerns.

Another possible recommendation would be to have the children choose the buttons similar to the way Yau (1989) presented them. The children were not exposed to every button because they were turned upside down and sometimes camouflaged. Some children were afraid to really "explore" the button choices, and therefore, may have missed out on something they really wanted to convey about their family members. Another minor recommendation would be to change the colour of the tray that the buttons get placed on from white to another colour so that children can more easily see the white buttons.

Future Research

There are many future research endeavors that could be done. One interesting study would be to look at entire families, all doing the same activity and seeing if there would be any value in using this assessment tool in family therapy. This would be interesting because it seemed that children living in the same family still had different perceptions of the family as a unit, thus, the entire family could use this as a stepping stone to discuss how people feel about each other.

As well, other populations should be observed doing the FRBS. This study was just a small sample of children from either intact or divorced homes. This study did not do comparisons between males and females or between different ethnicities. This could be intriguing because different ethnic groups do view family in different terms. For instance, in non-western cultures such as Asia, collectivism and interdependence is highly valued and therefore family closeness is extremely important; whereas, in North America, individuation is a primary goal (Baron, Byrne, & Watson, 1995). This view of family

might make an enormous impact on the button sort data, particularly when looking at the positioning of the buttons.

Other studies could focus on the FRBS in both adolescent and adult samples, perhaps using different buttons for each population. It would also be interesting to use and adult version of the FRBS with couples, particularly in pre-marital counselling where couples explore family of origin issues. As well, children from various types of families could benefit from research on the button sort. Children from alcoholic homes, children in foster homes, and children who have parents with mental illnesses could all show different results. Other clinical populations that deserve some exploration could be observing children's view of family when they suffer from depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, sexual abuse, PTSD, ADHD or behavioural problems. All of these studies may allow for a better understanding of these children's problems and the roles that families play in these disorders.

Conclusions

In closing, this preliminary study tested the effectiveness of the Family Relations Button Sort and FACES-III when used with children aged six to eleven, from either intact or divorced homes. Divorce can have a devastating impact on children, as observed in much of the literature available today, but it more specifically changes the way that children view their families. Although children may recognize that there are positive aspects about their family, there certainly seems to be an underlying negative tone towards the parents that were omitted among children of divorce.

Children of divorce also see many extended family members as "family" broadening the definition of what people used to call a "nuclear family." These children

tend to place themselves in between their parents, perhaps, not knowing where to place two parents that do not have a positive relationship. These children may be expressing their feelings of being caught in the middle, not knowing which parent to side with. These children also expressed unhealthy levels of cohesiveness in their families, giving clinicians a concern to approach in these families, exploring for both disengagement and enmeshment.

Children from intact homes, on the other hand, were more likely to include pets in their FRBS and also more likely to see their family as balanced when looking at family cohesiveness. However, even these children were able to express some of their negative feelings through the button sort, discussing both their parents' relationship, the fact that they missed their dad when he went to work, and most of all negative sibling relationships.

The Family Relations Button Sort is, indeed, an expressive tool in which children from intact, divorced, and other homes can safely express their feelings, both positive and negative, towards their family members. This study strengthens the validation of both the FRBS and the process of projection. Although many children experience trials in their lives, it is nice to know that there is a medium that can be used for children and therapists to gain insight into the child's inner world. The Family Relations Button Sort can not only increase a therapist's understanding of children's views of family members and family dynamics, but also allows the children to express their experiences without feeling intimidated. The Family Relations Button Sort is an incredible technique that strengthens the fact that projection exists, that is a medium of expression for children, and that allows children to explore their families in order to heal. Most therapists are aware that healing

can begin with the family or be hindered by the family (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2000). This research is evidence that the Family Relations Button Sort can reveal what children think about their families, and thus, can contribute to the healing process.

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APPENDIX A: PICTURE OF TARGET BUTTONS

APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Gender: M F

Age: Birth date: Grade:

Parents: Married, divorced, re-married

Siblings: Names and Order of birth from oldest to youngest.
Please indicate whether the sibling is a biological or step sibling
Oldest:_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Mini-genogram placement:

APPENDIX C: LETTER OF RECRUITMENT FOR SCHOOL DISTRICT/AGENCIES

Study: The Family Relations Button Sort with Children from Divorced Families and with Children from Stepfamilies

Investigators: Carissma Nance Coelho, M.A. candidate, Dept. of Counselling Psychology (538-3353)
Shannon Thiessen, M.A. candidate, Dept. of Counselling Psychology (888-3054)
Trinity Western University

Supervisor: Dr. Joanne Crandall, Department of Counselling Psychology, Trinity Western University (524-2225)

Thank you for the opportunity to share this letter with you. We are two students from the Master of Arts Counselling Psychology program at Trinity Western University. Both of us are currently in our last semester of studies, and are now in the process of doing a joint study for our Theses. Our study will be done using the Family Relations Button Sort. This is a new assessment tool being developed here in the lower mainland by four Psychologists at the Therapeutic Tool Research Group, and is currently in the process of being trademarked. We are excited to be working with this group and their new assessment tool, as we believe the Family Relations Button Sort can be a fun and valuable tool to use when working with children and their families. The Family Relations Button Sort can measure family feelings towards each other and their relationships from the child's perspective, by the types of buttons they choose and how they organize the buttons in relationship to one another. It can provide valuable information to the therapists using it, showing family dynamics and relationships, and helping to make therapy more focused. It allows children in verbal and non-verbal ways to tell what their family life is like, giving them an active part in the therapeutic process.

We are going to be studying how children from divorced families and children from stepfamilies, as well as children from intact families, complete the Family Relations Button Sort. We are seeking permission from the School District to pursue our research with students' grades 1 to 5. We will also seek teacher and parental permission. We wish to work with 90 children, 30 children who are currently from divorced families, 30 children who are currently from stepfamilies, and 30 children from intact families. We will need approximately 30 minutes with each child during the school day and we will need about three weeks to finish our data collection. For each child we will administer the Button Sort and the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales for children, known as FACES-III for children, which is a family assessment that asks basic questions about the family. The sessions will be audio taped (not videotaped) for study purposes. We will be the only ones to have access to these tapes and these tapes will be kept locked up during the study and destroyed at the end of the study. Confidentiality will be maintained at all times, and the parents may withdraw their children and the children may withdraw themselves at any time if they wish to do so. If there are any problems as a result of this study Dr. Joanne Crandall has offered to meet with the child and/or family to debrief the situation. Our study proposal has passed through and been approved by the Ethics Committee at Trinity Western University, to ensure that no child or person will be harmed in any way by our study.

The only potential risk associated with this research is the small possibility that in some children emotions such as anger or sadness may be elicited. All efforts will be made to help the child work through any negative feelings.

Potential benefits for your children include gaining a greater awareness of their family situation, their feelings towards family members and their perspective of the family as a unit. Families can feel free to discuss the child's experience at home in order to gain an understanding of their child's views.

If you are interested in letting the children from your school district participate in this study, please call Cris at 538-3353. You can also contact our supervisor, Dr. Joanne Crandall, at 524-2225. We look forward to working with you in the near future.

Regards,

_____ _____

Shannon Thiessen Carissma Nance Coelho

APPENDIX D: LETTER FOR PRINCIPALS/TEACHERS

Study: The Family Relations Button Sort with Children from Divorced and Stepfamilies

Investigators: Carissma Nance Coelho, M.A. candidate, Department of Counselling Psychology (538-3353)
Shannon Thiessen, M.A. candidate, Department of Counselling Psychology (888-3054)
Trinity Western University

Supervisor: Dr. Joanne Crandall, Department of Counselling Psychology, Trinity Western University (524-2225)

Thank you for the opportunity to share this letter with you. We are two students from the Master of Arts Counselling Psychology program at Trinity Western University. Both of us are currently in our last semester of studies, and are now in the process of doing a joint study for our Theses. Our study will be done using the Family Relations Button Sort, which is a new assessment tool being developed here in the lower mainland by four Psychologists at the Therapeutic Tool Research Group. We are excited to be working with this group and their new assessment tool, as we believe that the Family Relations Button Sort can be a fun and valuable tool to use when working with children and their families. The Family Relations Button Sort can measure family feelings towards each other and their relationships from the child's perspective, by the types of buttons they choose and how they organize the buttons in relationship to one another. It can provide valuable information to the therapists using it, showing family dynamics and relationships, and helping to make therapy more focused. It allows children in verbal and non-verbal ways to tell what their family life is like, giving them an active part in the therapeutic process. We are going to study how children from divorced families and children from stepfamilies complete the Family Relations Button Sort, as well as children from intact families.

To be a part of this study, the children need to be ages 6 to 11 and:

1. Currently from a divorced family
   - the parent has been separated and/or divorced for 6 months or more

or

2. Currently from a stepfamily
   - the parent has remarried or is living common-law, and the stepfamily has existed for 6 months or more

or

3. Currently from an intact family
   - the child's family has never experienced any kind of separation, divorce, or remarriage

We will need approximately 20-30 minutes with each child during class time. The Family Relations Button Sort, as well the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales for children known as FACES-III for children, will be administered. All sessions will be audio taped (not video taped). Confidentiality of the tapes and of the children will be maintained at all times. The tapes will be locked during the study, and destroyed after the study is finished. The parents may withdraw their children and the children may withdraw themselves at any time if they wish to do so.

If you know of any children in your agency that fit one of the three categories, **please call Cris at 538-3353.** You can also contact our supervisor, Dr. Joanne Crandall, at 524-2225. We will then contact the children's parents for permission. Agency participants will be entered into a draw for a $50.00 dinner gift certificate to Charlie Don't Surf, along the beach in White Rock. We look forward to working with you in the near future.

Regards,

_____ _____

Cris (Carissma) Nance Coelho Shannon Thiessen

APPENDIX E: AGENCY PERMISSION SLIP

Study: The Family Relations Button Sort with Children from Divorced and Stepfamilies

Investigators: Cris (Carissma) Nance Coelho, M.A. candidate, Department of Counselling Psychology (538-3353)
Shannon Thiessen, M.A. candidate, Department of Counselling Psychology
Trinity Western University

Supervisor: Dr. Joanne Crandall, Department of Counselling Psychology, Trinity Western University
(524-2225)

I, _____, have read and understand the description of the study, and I willingly allow the children attending this agency/school to participate in the study on the Family Relations Button Sort done by Cris (Carissma) Nance Coelho and Shannon Thiessen. I understand permission will be obtained from the children's parents, that the children's identity will be protected, and that the children can choose not to participate at any time without consequence.

Signature _____
Date _____ Phone _____

I understand that in order to obtain results of this study, I must leave a mailing address or e-mail address below:
_____
_____

-

There will be a draw for a $50.00 dinner gift certificate at Charlie Don't Surf, along the beach in White Rock, for staff giving permission for children attending their organization/school to be involved in the study. If you are interested in the draw, please leave your name and number. The winner will be notified by phone.

_____ _____
Name Phone Number

APPENDIX F: LETTER TO THE PARENTS

Study: The Family Relations Button Sort with Children from Divorced and Stepfamilies

Investigators: Cris (Carissma) Nance Coelho, M.A. candidate, Department of Counselling Psychology (538-3353)
Shannon Thiessen, M.A. candidate, Department of Counselling Psychology (888-3054)
Trinity Western University

Supervisor: Dr. Joanne Crandall, Department of Counselling Psychology, Trinity Western University (524-2225)

Thank you for the opportunity to share this letter with you. We are two students from the Master of Arts Counselling Psychology program at Trinity Western University. Both of us are in our last semester of school and are now doing a study together for our Theses. We are doing our study on a new assessment, which is being made here in the Vancouver area, and is called the Family Relations Button Sort. It is a fun and valuable tool to use when working with children and their families, and can show how people feel about each other and the family relationships from a child's point of view. It can also help counsellors when they work with children and their families. We are looking for children to be a part of our study. To be a part of this study, your child needs to be ages 6 to 11 and :

1. Currently from a divorced family
   - the parent has been separated and/or divorced for 6 months or more
2. Currently from a stepfamily
   - the parent has remarried or is living common-law, and the stepfamily has existed for 6 months or more
3. Currently from an intact family
   - the child's family has never experienced any kind of separation, divorce, or remarriage

`We will spend about 20-30 minutes with your child during class time. Your child will be asked to do the Family Relations Button Sort. We will also have them answer questions from another family assessment, called the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales for children, or FACES-III for children. All the sessions will be audio taped (not video taped). The tapes will be kept private and locked, and will be destroyed at the end of the study. Your child's identity will be kept private at all times. You may take your child out of the study at any time, or your child may remove him or herself from the study at any time. If there are any problems as a result of this study, Dr. Joanne Crandall has agreed to meet with your child or with the family to debrief the situation. Our study has been approved by the Ethics Committee at Trinity Western University, to ensure that no child or person will be harmed in any way by our study.

The only potential risk associated with this research is the small possibility that in some children emotions such as anger or sadness may be elicited. All efforts will be made to help the child work through any negative feelings.

Potential benefits for your children include gaining a greater awareness of their family situation, their feelings towards family members and their perspective of the family as a unit. Families can feel free to discuss the child's experience at home in order to gain an understanding of their child's views.

If your child participates in the study, his or her name will be entered into a draw for a $100.00 and $50.00 gift certificate at Toys R Us. If you are interested in letting your child participate, please call Cris at 604-538-3353. **If you have any questions please call Cris at (604) 538-3353.** You can also contact our supervisor, Dr. Joanne Crandall, at (604) 524-2225. We look forward to working with your child.
Regards,

_____ _____

Cris (Carissma) Nance Coelho Shannon Thiessen

APPENDIX G: PERMISSION SLIP FOR CHILDREN

Permission Slip

October 1, 2001

Study: The Family Relations Button Sort with Children from Divorced and Stepfamilies

Investigators: Cris (Carissma) Nance Coelho, M.A. candidate, Department of Counselling Psychology
(538-3353)
Shannon Thiessen, M.A. candidate, Department of Counselling Psychology (888-3054)
Trinity Western University

Supervisor: Dr. Joanne Crandall, Department of Counselling Psychology, Trinity Western University
(524-2225)

I, _____, have read and understand the description of the study, and I willingly allow my child,_____, to participate in the study on the Family Relations Button Sort done by Cris (Carissma) Nance Coelho and Shannon Thiessen. I understand that my child's identity will be kept private at all times and only the researchers will have access to identifiable data. I understand that my child can choose not to participate at any time without consequence.

Signature _____
Date _____ Phone _____

Please circle:
My child is from a(n): Intact Family Divorced/Separated Family Step Family Other:_____

I understand that in order to obtain results of this study I must leave a mailing address or e-mail address below:

_____
_____
_____

Check any that apply:

_____ I do not consent to my child's participation in the study

_____ I do not wish to be entered into the draw

There will be a draw for a $100.00 and a $50.00 gift certificate to Toys R Us. If you would like your child to be entered into the draw, please leave his/her name and phone number below.

_____ _____
Name Phone Number

APPENDIX H: RECRUITMENT POSTER

APPENDIX I: VISUAL CUE CARD FOR FACES

APPENDIX J: PICTURES OF CHILDREN'S BUTTONSORTS