

PARENTS' EXPERIENCE OF CONTRADICTIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE  
PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP DURING MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

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## ABSTRACT

### **PARENTS' EXPERIENCE OF CONTRADICTIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP DURING MIDDLE CHILDHOOD**

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Parents constantly experience contradictions because children's development may lead to new or surprising interactions that fail to fit parents' current ways of thinking about their children. This qualitative study used a dialectical perspective of contradictions from social relational theory to explore how contradictions instigate parental change (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007; Kuczynski, Pitman, & Mitchell, 2009). Forty families with children aged 8-13 participated in open-ended interviews that were analyzed with thematic analysis. Results revealed that contradictions occurred because of parents' own incompatible or inconsistent thoughts and/or behaviours, and children's behaviours. Parents processed and managed contradictions with *description, information gathering and reflecting*, and *acting on contradictions*. The nature of the outcome of parents' contradictions included: *outcome not evident, outcome in process, partial strategy or temporary solution* and *contradiction is resolved*. *Surprise, sadness, anxiety, stress*, and *anger* were the emotions associated with contradictions. Analyses indicated that parents constantly experience contradictions and few are fully resolved.

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## Introduction

Relationships are complex, and multidimensional, and involve continuity and change (Collins & Madsen, 2003). During middle childhood, normative development leads to changes in children's cognition and behaviour. Parents respond to their children's development and change themselves. A developmental perspective on relationships argues that the changes occurring in both the parent and child influence the way these two individuals interact. Parents may embrace, ignore, or ponder the changes they observe in their children. Change does not come in a universal form, and can be positive or negative, or even a combination of both. Although continual change may be met with adaptation (Collins & Madsen, 2003) or transformations (i.e. new interactions replace previously existing interactions, Collins, 1997), changes may also create contradictions for parents. This study focused on the role contradictions, interpreted as uncertainty, played as a potential instigator for change in parental thought and behaviour while parenting during middle childhood (Kuczynski & Parkin 2007; Abbey, 2006). This exploration was guided by social relational theory, developmental contextualism, and cognitive appraisal theory with respect to their positioning on parent-child relationships and human development.

Minimal empirical research has focused on how parents think about, and react to the uncertainty that occurs while parenting during middle childhood. There is a need for data regarding how parents think and feel about the uncertainty they face. This study assumed a dialectical perspective to gain an understanding of the processes that underlie uncertainty while parenting. Specifically, this study assessed the sources and contexts of contradictions, the types of contradictions parents experience, how parents cognitively

process and manage it, the outcome of confronting contradictions, and the emotions expressed during contradictions. This study also focused on the new meanings that parents created when making sense of contradictions.

The following literature review includes four sections, all highlighting uncertainty caused by contradictions experienced in the parent-child relationship. The first section outlines the normative development specific to middle childhood. The second section provides an overview of the changes that occur in the parent-child relationship during middle childhood. The third section examines the issues and challenges in parenting during this developmental period. The last section presents theories on parental cognition relevant in understanding parental uncertainty. Specifically, social relational theory (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007; 2009; Kuczynski, Pitman, & Mitchell, 2009), developmental contextualism (Lerner, 1995; Richardson, 2005), and cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) will be discussed as the guiding theoretical frameworks for the present study.

### **Normative Development During Middle Childhood**

Middle childhood is the period of life between approximately five and 12 years of age. Although middle childhood is a less studied period of development compared to infancy, toddlerhood, or adolescence, a number of significant developmental changes occur. These changes include: increases in cognitive competencies and growth of knowledge, changes in self-concept and self-regulation, and an expansion of social contexts. Parents respond to their children's developmental changes in various ways.

**Cognitive Competence and the Growth of Knowledge.** The continual development in cognitive functioning during middle childhood increases children's

ability to reason and problem-solve (Collins et al., 2002). At this age, children begin to effectively organize tasks that involve planning, creating goals, and monitoring personal behaviours and cognitive processes. Children gain a better understanding of themselves, other individuals, relationships, and broader social contexts. Children's greater social understanding is one of the aspects that differentiates this period of development from younger stages.

**Parents' Response to Children's Increased Cognitive Competencies.** The cognitive changes children go through cause parents to alter their pre-existing ways of conversing, asserting control, influencing behaviours, and expectations for children. Children's ability to reason increases and parents begin to use explanations and justification to maintain control over children. Parents adapt to children's developmental changes by creating new expectations (Goodnow, 2002). For instance, parents may expect greater responsibility around the house, or an increased capability to self-regulate. Goodnow (2002) argued that the developmental transitions that occur in middle childhood lead to greater autonomy in adolescence.

**Self-Concept, Self-Regulation, and Social Responsibility.** The ability to self-regulate is complex and involves the accumulation of various developmental tasks. Such skills include a "knowledge of self, emotions, and cognitive capacities to focus on long-term goals" and the ability to consider the views and needs of others (Collins et al., 2002, p. 78). Self-concept changes as children's descriptions of themselves become increasingly consistent and are more comprehensive (Bryne & Shavelson, 1996; Damon & Hart, 1998). This change is also associated with an increased ability to exert self-control and to self-regulate. The ability to understand social rules increases as the child

ages. Children are also able to acknowledge that parents have authority over them, and have the right to use it (Damon, 1977).

**Parents' Response to Children's Development of Self.** A major developmental change occurring in middle childhood is the shift from parents' direct control of children to children controlling their own behaviour. As children become more capable of regulating their own behavior, the need for a parent to continually regulate and monitor his or her child's behaviour is lessened. According to Maccoby (1984) there is a shift from external regulation of children by parents to a process of co-regulation. This process involves children providing parents with information about what they are doing and where they are, while parents take on a supervisory role (instead of constant direct monitoring) and assist children in times of need.

**Social Context and Relationships.** Although most children spend at least some time interacting with others during infancy and toddlerhood, children in middle childhood spend a significantly greater amount of time with others while engaging in less frequent interactions with parents and other family members. This dramatic change in social contexts occurs because children enter school at the beginning of middle childhood. Peer relationships can play a complementary role to that of parents (Hartup, 1996) as children during middle childhood consider peer relationships as valuable sources of friendship and closeness. Interactions with peers foster skills that parents have limited influence on, such as learning about give-and-take and equality of power and status.

**Parents' Responses to Children's Changing Social Context.** A large change in the parent-child relationship during middle childhood is that interactions become less frequent. Parents and children spend about half as much time interacting during middle

childhood compared to earlier ages (Hill & Stafford, 1980). When children are in school they are no longer under the direct supervision of parents, and because of this parents have to influence children's behaviour in different ways. For example, instead of parents' direct involvement in their children's activities, parents now monitor their children from a distance (e.g. calling a child at his or her friend's house to find out what the child is doing). Middle childhood is marked by unique developmental changes. The next section outlines the qualities of the parent-child relationship and how changes in the child may impact the parent-child relationship.

### **Parent-Child Relationship during Middle Childhood**

The parent-child relationship has features of any close relationship including friendship, affection, interdependence, and conflict (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). An important aspect of all relationships is that they involve both continuity and change (Collins, 1997). A unique aspect of the parent-child dyad is that it is an involuntary relationship, and therefore both individuals endure pressures to adapt to developmental changes (Collins, 1997; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Transformations are a type of change important for the parent-child relationship because both partners need to adapt to the development of each partner. Collins (1997) describes *transformation* as the process of relationship change that results in the continuity of interaction despite changing elements. Collins (1997) argued that developmentalists are trying to discover how changes occur. The contradictions parents experience while parenting during middle childhood are an important contributor to transformations in the parent-child relationship.

The parent-child relationship provides a foundation for other relationships and involves a long history of interactions (Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997). These interactions

assist in the development and understanding of the relationship, and create a context for future interactions (Hinde, 1979). The relationship past also assists both individuals in forming behavioural expectations of each other (Lollis & Kuczynski). The expectations for future behaviours are formed when past interactions are categorized into individual mental structures of memories and affect (Fletcher & Fincham, 1991). Both parents and children are viewed as agents in the parent-child relationship. Agency is the ability to “make sense of the environment, initiate change, and make choices” (Kuczynski, 2003, p. 9). Uncertainty may arise when parents experience contradictions because their children’s behaviour violated parents’ expectancies. Parenting during middle childhood involves adapting to the maturation of the child. The following two sections provide a broad overview of parenting during middle childhood.

### **Parenting During Middle Childhood**

**Effective Parenting.** Holden and Ritchie (1988) argue there are three requirements for being effective and successful parents; caregiving, managing behaviours, and nurturing children. The first characteristic, *caregiving*, involves parents meeting their children’s needs by providing physical and emotional resources. The responsiveness, sensitivity, consistency and warmth of caregiving creates a secure environment for the child. The second characteristic of effective parenting is *managing* children’s behaviour and their environment, and promoting children’s development. Maccoby and Martin (1983) argued that an important part of effective control is monitoring, whereby parents pay close attention to the behaviour of their children. According to these researchers, monitoring is a child-centered technique that involves parents tailoring their behaviour based on the child, rather than from their own wishes

and desires. The last characteristic of effective parenting is *nurturing children*.

Nurturance includes providing guidance, protection, and care with the over-arching goal of encouraging development (Fogel, Melson & Mistry, 1986). Holden and Ritchie argued that nurturing a child's healthy development is the most demanding and complex parenting role and involves numerous instances of problem-solving. A common outcome of studying parenting is that variations are observed among and within parents and families.

**Variations in Parenting.** Parents use a multitude of methods while parenting, based on the goals they wish to attain and the context in which the interactions occur. Parenting can change from day-to-day and even moment-to-moment. Variations in parenting can occur in the number of interactions with the child, beliefs about acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, goals for the child, discipline, control, and closeness and affection (Richardson, 2005).

The ways parents respond to developmental changes in middle childhood are not universal. Richardson (2005) suggested that this inconsistency of responses may be a result of individual characteristics, such as: gender of both the parent and child, attachment style, and expectations and beliefs. Parents face increased risks and stressors associated with middle childhood compared to earlier stages of child development because children become more independent and spend a greater amount of time away from parents during this developmental period (Collins, et al., 2002). These challenges may create contradictions and uncertainty for parents and impact the way they respond to children, thus influencing the parent-child relationship.

All relationships involve continual change where one or both partners accommodate the behaviour of the other. Parenting during middle childhood creates challenges for parents because they have to respond to the continual developmental changes of their children. Because the parent-child relationship is involuntary, it is helpful to gain an understanding of the process by which parents adapt to the developmental changes that occur in middle childhood (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Challenges arise for parents who have to respond to the changes in children's cognition, development of self-concept, ability to self-regulate, acceptance of social responsibility, and in children's social context. The exploration of parents' experience of uncertainty and contradictions was guided by various theoretical frameworks.

### **Theories on Parental Cognition**

Contemporary theories guide research on parent-child relationships and contradictions because they provide a framework for dynamic conceptualization of the processes and outcomes of socialization (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007). The following section provides a brief overview of four theories that offer useful frameworks for understanding parental cognition. These theories are: meta-parenting, social relational theory, developmental contextualism, and cognitive appraisal theory.

**Meta-parenting.** Hawk and Holden (2006) argued that parental cognitions provide different functions including: "filtering experiences, influencing interpretation of behaviors, setting the stage for actions, and prompting change in behavior" (p. 21). Thoughts can be conscious and effortful, or unconscious and automatic, and usually occur before or after interactions with children. Hawk and Holden argued that the majority of the research on parental cognitions has focused on the implicit (automatic and

effortless) thought. Based on their research, Hawk and Holden created the construct of meta-parenting in order to understand the conscious and intentional thoughts and reasoning processes used by parents during childrearing. The four components of meta-parenting are *anticipating* (intentional consideration), *assessing* (evaluation of self, child, and environment), *reflection* (reassessment of self, child, and dyad), and *problem solving* (locating problem, choosing a remedy, carrying out the plan, and assessing results). Hawk and Holden indicated that effective parents use meta-parenting and can occur in any aspect of parenting. By consciously thinking about parenting, a parent can assess his or her own behaviour and then alter it to be more effective in the future.

Hawk and Holden (2006) discovered that all mothers meta-parent on a daily basis, but with varying frequencies. These researchers speculated that meta-parenting leads to effective behaviours for some parents and ineffective behaviors for others. The benefit of using the theory of meta-parenting for studying parents' experience of uncertainty is that it provides a framework for understanding the effortful thought processes that parents engage in while faced with contradictions. However, the weakness of this theory is that it fails to consider how parents accept or deny thoughts of uncertainty without participating in an effortful thought process. Social relational theory fills in this gap by providing a framework for assessing the micro-processes within socialization.

**Social Relational Theory.** Parents and children are involved in constant change as both react to and interpret the behaviours of each other. The study of parent-child relationships should be approached by a theory that considers parents and children as both separate *and* connected elements of the parent-child relationship (Collins, 1997). Kuczynski and Parkin (2007) proposed *social relational theory* as a framework for

studying the micro-processes in socialization. Social relational theory consists of three complimentary assumptions: 1) parents and children are both human agents, 2) the parent-child relationship is the context for interaction, and 3) there is a dialectical model of bidirectional causality.

**Agency.** Parents and children are considered human agents in social relational theory. Individuals think and behave both proactively and reactively according to their own will (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Parents and children not only have the ability to think about and assess their own behaviour, but also interpret each other's behaviours during interactions. Both parents and children create and respond to the interactions that occur in the parent-child relationship (Kuczynski et al., 2009). When a child exercises his or her autonomy, parents may experience uncertainty. Although parents and children are equal agents, there is an imbalance of power between the two individuals.

**Relationship as the Context for Interaction.** Dyadic interactions include both the parent and child, *and* the combination of the two individuals (Collins & Madsen, 2003). Both parents and children need to be understood as intertwined parts that make up and influence the parent-child relationship. From a dialectical perspective, the relationship is more than the sum of its parts (i.e. parent, child). The parent-child relationship impacts how parents and children understand and respond to each other (Kuczynski et al, 2009). Parents and children influence and are influenced by each other which can lead to change in their relationship.

**Dialectics.** Dialectics is a dynamic model of causation. The main idea of dialectics is that, "everything and every process consists of opposing forces that actively relate through a process of contradiction, therefore producing unending qualitative

change” (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007, p. 250). In other words, dialectics is concerned with the contradictions that occur within a system, which create an opportunity for change. Change leads to the creation of new meaning, through self-reflection and problem solving, which resolves the contradiction until a new one emerges (Kuczynski et al., 2009). The concept of dialectics means that change occurs through interactions, and each new outcome paves the way for future change as the process of contradiction continues (Kuczynski et al., 2009). One type of change is *qualitative change* which is the creation of new meanings, thinking, and behaving (Kuczynski et al., 2009). Sameroff (1975) argued that the mental representations that parents and children have of each other are constantly changing and developing through interactions.

**Contradiction: The Instigator of Change.** The dialectical concept of contradiction in social relational theory provides a framework for studying the uncertainty that parents face while parenting during middle childhood. Parents constantly face contradictions because children’s development may lead to new or surprising instances that fail to fit parents’ current ways of thinking about the child. Although it is evident that contradictions can occur on the part of the parent and the child, the proposed study will focus on the contradictions from the perspective of the parent. Kuczynski and colleagues (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007; Kuczynski, Pitman, & Mitchell, 2009) identified four types of contradiction: conflict, ambiguity, expectancy violations, and ambivalence, which all involve the common state of uncertainty.

*Conflicts* arise when parents’ needs, goals, and interpretations of events are different from those of children. *Ambiguity* can occur when individuals detect little or conflicting signals from the environment around them (Mitchell & Kuczynski, 2010).

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) describe ambiguity as the deficit of clarity. *Expectancy violations* occur when parents' existing view of the child are breached during an interaction. *Ambivalence* occurs when events, emotions, and meanings concurrently push parents in two different directions. Contradictions constantly occur in parenting because parents occupy multiple roles at one time. Parents are authority figures, caregivers, and provide security while simultaneously desiring closeness and a long-term relationship with children (Harach & Kuczynski, 2006). However, a large source of contradiction for parents is developmental change.

Abbey (2006) created a triadic model to explain the experience of ambivalence. The triadic model of ambivalence was described as: (1) *what is now* ↔ (2) *what could be* → (3) *what is the 'new' now*. The *what is now* is in ambivalent tension with *what could be* which creates a 'new' *what is now*, and the process continues as this creates a new *what could be*. Abbey argued that mean-making results from the creation of signs and mental representations from the tension that exists between *what is* currently known, and *what could be* in the future. Abbey argued that ambivalence is a component of all meaning-making processes, and not a periodic occurrence. Each new meaning is not the end of the process, but instead creates a new opportunity for meaning-making. This researcher also indicated that not all instances of ambivalence lead to meaning-making, as some are met with resistance. Contradictions create opportunities for change.

Dialectics argues that opposing forces (contradictions) constantly occur and lead to change. This perspective is useful for the current study because the developmental changes taking place during middle childhood may create contradictions for parents. The resolution of contradictions is continually in process as new meaning-making leads to

new forms of uncertainty and the process continues. In summary, the specific ideas of parents and children as agents in an interdependent relationship context that constantly endures contradictions provides a framework for studying the uncertainty that parents face while parenting during middle childhood. In addition to social relational theory, this study was guided by specific aspects of developmental contextualism.

**Developmental Contextualism.** Developmental contextualism is a framework for studying human development “as being composed of changing, and reciprocal relations between individuals and the multiple contexts within which they live” (Richardson, 2005, p. 24). The three components of developmental contextualism are that: 1) individuals are active in their own development, 2) development occurs throughout one’s life, and 3) development occurs within social contexts (Lerner, 1995). Development is a continual process that occurs throughout one’s life. This is an important idea because parents develop as they respond to the developmental changes that children go through during middle childhood. Development occurs in social contexts indicating that the parent-child relationship needs to be considered as existing in larger social contexts. This perspective explains that the parent-child relationship consists of bidirectional influence where both parents and children mutually influence each other. Influence is dependent on past interactions, and the unique personalities that guide individual behaviour.

Using two theories, social relational theory *and* developmental contextualism, was useful for the present study because both theories have unique, similar, and complementary ideas. The unique aspects of social relational theory are twofold. First, social relational theory asserts that every thought and interaction has opposing forces, and second, although parents hold more power in the relationship, there is still

interdependence in the dyad. The unique aspect of developmental contextualism is that human development is viewed as a constant process that occurs throughout one's life. Both theories are similar because they conceptualize development as occurring within the context of the relationship. Social relational theory and developmental contextualism complement each other with their conceptualizations of agency. Specifically, combining the two theories allowed for the assessment of parents' experience of contradictions based on the fact that individuals *have* the ability to act (social relational theory) and *exercise* the ability to influence their own development (developmental contextualism). Social relational theory and developmental contextualism provided a framework for gaining an understanding of parents' experience of uncertainty that leads to change while parenting during middle childhood. Cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) compliments social relational theory and developmental contextualism by providing a framework for understanding how internal thought processes related to contradictions can lead to change for parents.

**Cognitive Appraisal Theory.** Cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) provides a framework for understanding the stressful nature of contradictions. Stress is defined as the relationship between a person and the environment that is appraised as taxing and endangering well-being (Lazarus & Folkman). Cognitive appraisal is more than a stimulus - response model because of the importance of individual's evaluations and subjective meaning-making processes that intervene between an interaction and a reaction. Cognitive appraisal is "the process of categorizing an encounter, and its various facets, with respect to its significance for well-being" (Lazarus & Folkman, p. 31). Cognitive appraisal theory consists of two types of appraisal. *Primary*

*appraisals* are evaluations of an event as presently or potentially harmful or beneficial. *Secondary appraisals* are evaluations of what can be done in attempt to reduce the stress of the situation. How a person interprets an interaction influences his or her response which emphasizes the importance of meaning-making. People vary in their sensitivity and vulnerability to, and interpretations of, events. The way people interpret events impacts emotional and behavioural responses (Lazarus & Folkman). Understanding individual differences in comparable situations involves the consideration of cognitive processes that intervene between an event and reactions. Cognitive appraisal theory provided a framework for understanding parents' evaluations and interpretations of the parent-child interactions that lead to contradictions.

In summary, middle childhood is marked by a period of unique developmental changes which require parental response. These new changes in children may create challenges for parents because they are unsure how to think about or react to them. Despite research describing the changes that take place in parent-child interactions, there is minimal research on *how* dyads change and adapt over time. Collins (1997) argued that research lacks a focus on the process of change. In addition, existing models of development have yet to focus on the specific factors and processes that contribute to change in relationships (Collins & Madsen, 2003). Social relational theory, developmental contextualism, and cognitive appraisal theory are useful frameworks for studying the under-researched area of parental thought and change. This study focused on the role that contradictions play as a potential instigator for change. This study aimed to gain a detailed understanding of parents' perspectives of contradictions leading to change while parenting during middle childhood.

The specific research questions were:

1. What are the sources and contexts surrounding the contradictions parents experienced?
2. What types of contradictions did parents experience?
3. How did parents process and manage the contradictions they experienced?
4. What were the outcomes associated with parents management strategies?
5. What emotions did parents express during contradictions?

### **Method**

The present study is a part of a larger study on Socialization in Middle Childhood (SIMC) study funded by SSHRC (Leon Kuczynski, Principal Investigator). The research methodology was approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Guelph (REB# 06FE028). The method section will include a description of the participants, recruitment strategies, study procedure, measures (i.e. open-ended interview questions and the ending parent interview), and data analysis (e.g. thematic analysis).

### **Participants**

Participants were 40 English-speaking families living in a medium sized Canadian city. Families consisted of at least one parent and one child between the ages of eight and 13. Mothers from all 40 families participated in the study and had a mean age of 44.4 years. Fathers from two of the families also participated and had a mean age of 51.9 years. The majority of parents (98%) had completed college or university. The majority of mothers were employed either part- or full-time, and few were unemployed. All fathers were employed full-time. Of the 41 children who participated in the study, 22 were females and 19 were males. The breakdown of age and sex is as follows: 21

children aged 8-11 (12 females and 9 males), and 20 children aged 12-13 (10 females and 10 males).

### **Recruitment**

Several recruitment methods were used for the SIMC study. The majority of the participating families (24) were recruited from a database of families who had been contacted based on birth announcements in a small southern Ontario city and consented to be contacted regarding university research. Eight families were recruited through local elementary schools, five families were acquaintances of the research team, two families were referred by another participant, and one family responded to an advertisement for the study. Parents received a telephone call asking for volunteers to participate in a study about parents' and children's experiences of family life, particularly in relation to rules, responsibilities, routines, and disagreements.

### **Procedure**

In the SIMC study, each family participated in seven types of interviews; five were semi-structured interviews (i.e. family interview, family game, beginning child interview, child ending interview, ending parent interview) carried out by the researchers either in the participants' home or at a designated laboratory at the University of Guelph. Two of the interviews were completed individually by the participants (i.e. parent daily reporting, child daily reporting) in their homes. Data were collected between April 2007 and March 2009. All participants received the same interview questions. The present study used the data collected from the Ending Parent Interviews. Parental uncertainty and contradictions were an area of interest during the conceptualization of the SIMC study. However, the specific research questions and analyses for the present study were original.

## Measures

**Open-ended interview questions.** Open-ended interview questions were developed for the SIMC study to gain a better understanding of socialization during middle childhood. The present study focused on parental uncertainty and contradictions from the perspective of parents in the Ending Parent Interviews. The questions for all interviews were developed with theoretical sensitivity to existing concepts concerning socialization. The primary goal of the present study was to produce descriptive accounts of the nature of uncertainty and contradictions that parents experience while parenting during middle childhood.

**Ending parent interview.** The ending parent interview was developed to obtain in-depth information about the socialization challenges that parents experience. This interview was semi-structured and probed four general areas: 1) rules and expectations, 2) resistance to requests and disagreements, 3) experience of closeness, and 4) behaviour away from home, at school, or with peers. Two broad questions were asked in relation to each of the four areas: how things have changed since the child was younger, and what are the current concerns and struggles associated with parenting during middle childhood. Additional questions were asked to probe parents' thinking about their parenting and the importance of the parent-child relationship. The questions on experiences of closeness were included to provide information on how parents manage the more personal component of the relationship. Questions about behaviour away from home elicited parents' thoughts on managing children's developing autonomy and independence.

## **Data Analysis**

Qualitative methodology was used in this study because it allowed for identification, description and understanding of phenomena from open-ended responses. This methodology was important for the exploration of parental uncertainty and contradictions for two reasons. First, qualitative methodology allowed the study participants to speak freely about their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Second, qualitative methodology played an integral part in the process of generating theory because the researcher assigned meaning to the data (Kuczynski & Daly, 2003). The qualitative software program MAXQDA was used to assist in the analysis of data and to keep track of memos regarding decisions and emerging ideas during the coding process.

**Coding System Development.** The development of the coding system occurred within the framework of interpretive induction. In this framework the data were analyzed with sensitivity to existing concepts, ideas and theories as well as being open to what may have come out of the data (Kuczynski & Daly, 2003). This approach highlighted the role that both the participants and the researcher added to constructing the data (Kuczynski & Daly, 2003). Interpretive induction is both inductive and deductive. This approach is inductive because theory is derived from the participants' experience and the meanings they associate with their experiences. This approach is also deductive because the researcher used theoretical sensitivity to existing knowledge and personal experiences to guide data analysis.

Abduction was important for the present study because it focuses on how the initial conception of an idea comes about and provides an explanation for phenomena (Kuczynski & Daly, 2003). Abduction is a way of explaining surprising results that are

not predicted or cannot be understood using existing theory. This concept was particularly useful for explaining the emotions experienced during contradictions which was an unanticipated result of the data analysis. Induction involved narrow generalizations from the data, whereas abduction involved searching for an explanation by means of analogy from a variety of sources, including experience and literature not necessarily in a researcher's current discipline. Coding categories were developed based on parents' experiences of uncertainty and contradictions and guided by previous knowledge of theory and research in the area of parent-child relations.

**Thematic Analysis.** Thematic analysis was used in this study to identify, examine and document themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes and sub-themes were developed when they captured an important aspect of the data that related to the purposes of this study. The steps of thematic analysis included familiarization with data through actively reading the transcripts and taking notes, creating initial categories based on noticeable themes within the data and relating to theories, searching for themes, evaluating themes and labeling and conceptualizing themes. Themes were then categorized based on conceptually similar categories that reflected parents' experiences. All themes that were generated through thematic analysis created the thematic category system. Once the category systems were developed, each transcript was individually analyzed using the constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2003). This method involved comparison of the similarities and differences within and between the identified themes. New themes were developed when when a subset of parents' narratives reflected a concept that was different from the original themes. Existing themes were combined when it became evident that two or more themes reflected the same concepts.

Five distinct thematic category systems (Figure 1.) were developed to address the five research questions. First, the source and context of contradiction themes were based on parents' description of the parent-child interaction that led to a contradiction. The themes for the source and context of each contradiction were mutually exclusive and exhaustive. Second, the type of contradiction themes were based on the four types of contradictions proposed by Kuczynski and colleagues (2009), ambiguity, ambivalence, parent-child conflict, and expectancy violations. The flexibility associated with an interpretive induction framework (Kuczynski & Daly, 2003) allowed for the emergence of a new type of contradiction that was evident in parents' narratives: intrapersonal ideas and/or behaviours. A single contradiction episode may have contained more than one type of contradiction and therefore the identification of the type was based on the first contradiction the parent discussed. Third, the processing and management of contradictions themes focused on parents' interpretations and coping strategies. In attempt to best capture what parents did to process and manage their contradictions, the development of the themes represented a hierarchy of what parents did to process and manage their contradictions. Fourth, the outcomes of contradictions themes encompassed the result of parents' efforts to resolve the contradictions they experienced. Categories were mutually exclusive and exhaustive, however, developing mutually exclusive categories posed difficulties because outcome themes periodically overlapped with processing and management categories. Last, the emotion themes reflected the emotions parents expressed during the contradictions. Typically, more than one emotion was discussed during an episode of contradiction and therefore all emotions were tracked.

Memo writing (Charmaz, 2003) was done throughout data analysis to keep track of ideas and questions that emerged during each stage of coding. Memo writing was also important to document changes that were made to the coding system. Advisory consultations were conducted to review and critique the research questions, procedure, and coding systems that emerged during data analysis. Memos of the advisory consultations were also documented. All memos were recorded in the logbook in MAXQDA.

### **Results**

The analyses of the data were based on thematic analysis of points in the narratives where parents expressed contradictions. These points, called “contradiction episodes” were identified and then became the unit of analysis for thematic analyses. In total, there were 160 contradiction episodes. A mean of four episodes of contradictions were identified for each parent, with a median of four, and a range of zero to eleven (Table 1).

Table 1  
*Frequency of Contradictions*

Number of Contradictions	Number of Participants	Proportion (%)
0	2	5.0
1	5	12.5
2	9	22.5
3	4	10.0
4	4	10.0
5	6	15.0
6	2	5.0
7	3	7.5
8	2	5.0
9	1	2.5
10	1	2.5
11	1	2.5
Total	40	100

Results are presented in five major sections (see Figure 1) corresponding to the principal themes of the episodes of contradictions: a) type of contradictions, b) context/source of contradictions, c) processing and management of contradictions, d) outcome of confronting contradictions, and e) emotions associated with contradictions. The first four themes were identified in each episode of parental contradictions. The fifth theme (i.e. emotions) was only coded if emotions and feelings were expressed. Each section includes descriptions of the theme and sub-themes that reflect both what the

parents stated and the interpretations made by the researcher. Verbatim quotations from the parent interviews are provided to support the interpretation. The selected quotations best represent the themes described by the majority of participants.

Frequencies of the themes were identified as an additional step to support the qualitative analyses. All themes and sub-themes were mutually exclusive therefore allowing for the prominence of each theme to be documented. Major themes were quantified in the Tables in the following ways: a) the total number of times the theme was mentioned, and b) the proportions of each theme in comparison to the total number of contradictions parents discussed.

### **Types of Contradictions**

The first goal of this study was to identify the contradictions inherent in parent-child relationships during middle childhood. The analyses were initially sensitized by Kuczynski, Pitman, and Mitchell (2009) who proposed four types of contradictions (two interpersonal and two intrapersonal) based on their interpretation of the dialectical idea of contradictions. The two types of intrapersonal contradictions consist of *ambiguity* and *ambivalence*. The two types of interpersonal contradictions include *parent-child conflict* and *expectancy violations*. The four types of contradictions were used as sensitizing concepts to identify types of contradictions as expressed by parents. Each time a parent described a contradiction, an episode was tracked.

Analyses of the narratives confirmed that parents do experience the four proposed types of contradictions. However, analyses of episodes indicated that contradictions could be better defined with the addition of a fifth type of contradiction, *Intrapersonal Opposing Ideas and/or Behaviours*. Parents described experiencing

conflicting thoughts on the same topic, and discrepancies between a thought and behaviour during an interaction. Table 2 provides the prominence of type of contradictions that emerged from parents' narratives.

Table 2

*Type of Contradictions*

	Frequency	Proportion
Intrapersonal	129	80.6
Ambiguity	75	46.9
Opposing Ideas and/or Behaviours	36	22.5
Ambivalence	18	11.2
Interpersonal	31	19.4
Expectancy Violations	20	12.5
Parent-child Conflict	11	6.9
Total	160	100

***Ambiguity.*** Ambiguity was the most common contradiction experienced by parents in this study, with 47% of episodes consisting of this type. Parents who expressed ambiguity described this type of contradiction as a lack of clarity or vagueness about a specific interaction. These descriptions are consistent with literature that describes ambiguity as occurring when individuals detect few, or conflicting signals from the environment around them (Mitchell & Kuczynski, 2010) or a deficit of clarity (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Ambiguity was also expressed as the difference between what is already known, and what is unknown.

Parents described ambiguity when they experienced a lack of clarity during an interaction with children. For example one parent stated, “I’m not even sure why she wants to battle it” (F41, Mother of 9 year old female). A lack of understanding was another way parents described their experience of ambiguity. One mother said, “I don’t really understand why he would want to listen to it in the first place” (F5, Mother of 11 year old male). Ambiguity was also described as an inability to explain the events that occurred during an interaction. One parent said, “She’s never been one to have kids in and I don’t know why” (F41, Mother of 9 year old female).

**Intrapersonal Opposing Ideas and/or Behaviours.** This theme represents the contradictions that occur in parents’ ideas and/or behaviours. Nearly one-quarter (22.5%) of all episodes of contradictions are in this category. Two sub-categories were apparent. First, parents described this type of intrapersonal contradiction as two conflicting ideas on the same subject and second, parents discussed a discrepancy between a thought and behaviour during a specific interaction.

***Opposition in Thoughts.*** Parents experienced this type of intrapersonal contradiction when describing two simultaneous opposing thoughts. Parents described experiencing an opposition in thoughts when disliking, but understanding children’s negative behaviour. An example of a discrepancy in thoughts is, “You’re encouraging independence and you’re encouraging independent thought but at the same time you’re also watching your influence dissipate so it’s really hard. It’s really hard I think” (F18, Mother of 13 year old female). This parent described her experience of an opposition between her goal of encouraging independence and struggling with the reality of

implementing her goal. Another parent said, “I’m not thrilled, but I can see the reason and I can see he’s busy” (F30, Mother of 11 year old male).

***Opposition Between Thoughts and Behaviour.*** Parents described an opposition in their thoughts and behaviour when they experienced a conflict in how they felt about a particular situation and how they actually acted. For example, one mother said, “If I’m yelling at them and they don’t want to respond to me, I can appreciate that one, because it isn’t --that’s not acceptable behaviour from me. I can’t help it, but that doesn’t make it okay” (F36, Mother of 10 year old female). Another mother described her experience of an opposition between her thoughts and behaviour when she said, “And sometimes the answer is just “because I said so” and I hear myself say that and I think that’s not really an answer” (F17, Mother of 13 year old female). This mother is experiencing a contradiction because she was simultaneously behaving in a way that contradicted her thoughts.

***Ambivalence.*** Ambivalence occurred in the narratives when events, emotions, and meanings concurrently pushed parents in two different directions. One-tenth of the episodes of contradictions in this study involved ambivalence. Parents described ambivalence in two distinct ways. First, parents discussed experiencing ambivalence when interpreting and making sense of parent-child interactions. Alternatively, parents experienced ambivalence in their own behaviour when determining potential courses of action.

***Two Interpretations of Parent-Child Interactions.*** In these instances of ambivalence, parents were unable to determine a single interpretation of their child’s behaviour, but instead experienced two opposing interpretations. For example:

“You are not always sure how much is his perception, how much he has let it fester, and then you are kind of caught in the trying to decide whether it is something that has been blown out of proportion, or something that you need to, you know, really focus in on and help him work through” (F11, Mother of 13 year old male).

This mother described the ambivalence she experienced when attempting to make sense of the interaction with her child.

***Two Courses of Action.*** Parents experienced contradictions in determining how to act. Although ambivalence was caused by something the child did, or when attempting to make sense of a parent-child interaction, parents described ambivalence about their own actions following an interaction with children. Ambivalence was mainly described by parents as the tension that arose when contemplating to react or not to react to a situation. For example, one mother said, “I thought, well I can make a big issue about it or let it go” (F36, Mother of 10 year old female). Another parent said “whether I need to or not” (F23, Mother of 13 year old female) when referring to the ambivalence she experienced about providing more instructions for her children.

**Expectancy Violations.** Expectancy violations caused contradictions for parents because these experiences went against parents’ pre-existing views of the parent-child relationship. This type of contradiction occurred in nearly 13% of parents’ episodes of contradictions. Consistent with Collins and Luebker’s (1993) definition of an *expectancy violation*, parents in the current study experienced this type of contradiction because of physical, social, and cognitive changes in their children that went against their expectations.

Differences between how children used to act and recent interactions with children led to expectancy violations for parents. For example, one mother said, “Then all of a sudden it was kind of a surprise when he started to be a bit defiant” (F10, Mother of 12 year old male). This mother described her experience of a contradiction between her son’s previous behaviour and his emerging behaviour.

Parents periodically described children’s unexpected behaviours as contradictions because parents felt that their views of the child no longer matched how the child behaved. For example, “Well, it’s difficult because I’ve been so used to like being with him continuously and now all of a sudden it’s like, who are you?” (F21, Mother of 12 year old male). This mother described that her son was behaving in new ways that violated how she thought her son would act.

Some parents discussed expectancy violations occurring because of surprising behaviour that was not necessarily negative. For example a mother said, “That really surprised me. I didn’t think she would be thinking about something like that” (F34, Mother of a 12 year old female). This mother discussed the contradiction she experienced when her daughter behaved in an unexpected way.

**Parent-Child Conflicts.** Parent-child conflicts were the least prominent contradiction experienced by the parents in this study, with only 7% of episodes of contradictions falling into this category. Interpersonal conflicts were defined by parents as the contradictions that occur between parents and children. This type of contradiction occurred when parents’ needs, goals, or interpretations of events conflicted with those of their children.

Parent-child conflicts were described by parents as disagreements occurring because of children's desires that contradicted those of parents. For example, one mother said, "Probably the biggest area where we are disagreeing is the homework issue. Like just getting the homework done" (F13, Mother of an 11 year old male). Another parent said, "I guess another struggle that we have is dressing. She would never let me dress her. Nothing I pick out is good enough" (F40 Mother of nine year old female). In this particular example the child's preferences went against those of the mother's preferences.

In summary, the first goal of this study involved the identification of contradictions that parents experienced while parenting during middle childhood. The types of contradictions identified in parents' narratives were based on sensitizing types from research and included *ambiguity*, *ambivalence*, *parent-child conflict*, and *expectancy violations*. Further analysis of contradictions indicated that parents experience a fifth type of contradiction, *intrapersonal opposing ideas and/or behaviours*.

### **Source and Context of Contradictions**

The second goal of the study was to describe the source of the contradiction that parents experienced while parenting during middle childhood. The source was defined as the event in the parent-child relationship that led to parents' experience of ambiguity, ambivalence, parent-child conflict, expectancy violation, or intrapersonal opposing thoughts and/or behaviours. The consideration of the parent-child relationship as the overarching context is important to social relational theory because parents and children are viewed as interconnected partners in their relationship instead of individuals existing independent of each other.

Two overarching sources of contradictions were discovered from the thematic analyses of parents' narratives: *internal sources* (originating from within the parent) and *external sources* (originating because of the child). These categories are consistent with dialectics which highlights the inherent contradictions that exist *between* (outer dialectics) individuals and *within* (inner dialectics) individuals (Riegel, 1976). A third, and rarely mentioned, source was *study participation*. The major themes of the source of parents' contradiction are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

*Source/ Context of Contradictions*

	Frequency	Proportion
Parental (Internal) Sources/Contexts	97	60.6
General Worry	33	20.6
Parental Control	28	17.5
Out of Sight Behaviour	23	14.4
Parental Adequacy	13	8.1
Child (External) Sources/Contexts	52	32.5
Transgressions & Rule-Breaking	27	16.9
Expression of Preferences & Desires	25	15.6
Study Participation	11	6.9
Total	160	100

**Internal Sources of Contradiction (Parental Sources).** Internal sources were described by parents twice as frequently compared to external sources of contradictions. Internal sources of contradictions stemmed from parents' own incompatible or inconsistent thoughts and/or behaviours. Sixty-one percent of contradictions occurred

within the context of the parent. Four sub-categories emerged from parents' narratives including: *generalized worry*, *parental control*, *out of sight behaviour*, and *parental adequacy*.

***Generalized Worry.*** In this theme parents described the source of contradiction as chronic parenting issues or generalized worry. Generalized worry was the most common source of contradiction for parents and accounted for one-fifth of the episodes in this study. Generalized worry consisted of frequent and constant concern for children or the parent-child relationship. Chronic parenting issues included long-lasting and recurring concern for parenting and the parent-child relationship.

Parents discussed worry about the effects of parental actions and specifically long-term implications of their actions. For example: "Like every family, they want the best for their kids and to be safe and happy and to turn into good kids, but you never know" (F8, Mother of 11 year old male and 12 year old female). Other parents discussed the source of contradictions in terms of everyday worries. One parent said, "Every day you have a different worry" (F30, Mother of 11 year old male).

***Parental Control.*** This theme represented parental control processes and disciplinary practices for governing children's behaviours. The context of parental control led to almost 18% of the episodes of contradictions experienced by parents in this study. This theme encompassed what parents did to manage children's behaviours. Developmental changes occurring during middle childhood foster changes in the way parents and children interact and often spawned contradictions in parents. Parents experienced contradictions relating to parental control in terms of: consistency and

harshness of discipline, routines and responsibilities, and encouragement and management of children's independence.

Parents' consistency and harshness of discipline led to internal contradictions when parents reflected on parent-child interactions involving contradictions when the parent had to exert control over the child's behaviour. For example, a parent referred to her inconsistency in disciplining her children when they swear. This mother said, "I probably let some words or something slide that I probably shouldn't" (F33, Mother of 10 year old male). Parents also described contradictions caused by parental control because of reacting to children's behaviours without thinking first. A mother stated, "My problem is that I can be in the moment and I can just kind of be reacting and it might come across as a little bit more harsh than it should" (F42, Mother of nine year old female).

Parents described parental control relating to routines and responsibilities as a source of contradictions. For example, one mother said, "Whether I necessarily want them to set the table everyday regimented, I'm not sure" (F11, Mother of 13 year old male). This parent, like other parents, indicated that chores were continually incomplete and therefore parents considered making changes to the existing expectations for children's routines and responsibilities. However, parents struggled with contradictions because of problems associated with deciding exactly what to do.

Children's increasing independence led to contradictions for parents because parents were forced to alter their control processes that met both their own and their children's needs. For example one mother said, "I have to let him go, but I mean I don't want to let go" (F42, Mother of 12 year old male). This mother experienced an internal

contradiction because her son was becoming more independent as he transitioned through middle childhood. The mother discussed that she needed to allow her son to have independence, but did not want to because the less dependent he was on his mother, the less she felt she knew him.

***Out of Sight Behaviour.*** The theme of out of sight behaviour caused contradictions for parents because of either children being away from the parent, or the parent's lack of knowledge about children's inner thoughts. This theme represented 14% of the causes of parents' contradictions. Parents discussed experiencing contradictions when they were unable to directly observe their children's behaviour. For example, "The struggle is just not knowing how they're going to behave... it's totally out of your control and that's what I struggle with the most - not knowing when they go out how they're actually going to behave." (F1, Mother of 10 and 12 year old females). Another parent said: "I would love to be a fly on the wall sometimes to see if she's listening to me or if some of the things I tell her is really sinking in. I don't know, it scares me to let her out on her own." (F40, Mother of nine year old female).

Parents also indicated that contradictions stemmed from not knowing what children were thinking about. Although children communicated with parents, some parents thought that their children may have held information back despite communicating. For example: "I guess it's hard to know whether she's telling you everything." (F23, Mother of 13 year old female).

***Parental Adequacy.*** Parents faced contradiction because of their views of how to effectively parent. This category was the least prominent cause of parental contradictions and accounted for 8% of the episodes. Parental adequacy was inferred when parents

described the inability to predict short-term and long-term child outcomes in relation to parenting efforts. These results are consistent with literature which defines *parenting self-efficacy* as a parent's estimations of his or her competency in the parental role (Coleman & Hildebrandt-Karraker, 2000). Parents faced contradictions relating to parental adequacy in specific areas such as meeting children's needs, fostering development, and providing appropriate discipline.

In response to the interview question: "Do you have any particular concerns about being a parent?," one parent stated, "I'm always worried if I'm doing the right thing... that's my biggest fear. Am I leading them up the right path?" (F3, Mother of 11 year old female). This parent was expressing her experience of ambiguity because of parental adequacy in relation to meeting the needs of her children. Other parents discussed parental adequacy in terms of the appropriateness of parents' own behaviour. For example a parent said: "I caught myself when I did that and I cannot believe I was that insensitive." (F18, Mother of 13 year old female). This parent was describing how her own behaviour led to a contradiction about her adequacy of parenting.

**External Sources of Contradiction (Child Sources).** Contradictions arose from external sources when children behaved in specific ways that generated contradictions described by parents. External sources of contradictions occurred 1/3 as often as internal sources. Children's expression of agency was the overarching external source of contradiction for parents. Kuczynski's (2003) definition of agency considers "individuals as actors with the ability to make sense of the environment, initiate change, and make choices" (p.9). Sub-categories of agency include children's *behavioural transgressions*

*and rule-breaking*, and of agency, and *expression of preferences and desires*. Both types of agency expressed by children occurred at the same frequency.

***Children's Expression of Preferences and Desires.*** Parents discussed this category by describing their child's expression of preferences, requests for something, or negotiation. Parents described that they experienced contradictions when children expressed their preferences for items such as food or clothing and determining how and when to complete a chore regardless of parental requests. For example: "I've noticed that she likes to do things when she is ready to do them. And that's not necessarily when I am ready to have them done." (F26, Mother of 13 year old female). Another mother said: "She might just say, 'Can I stay up?', 'Can I watch this?', or 'Can I watch this with you?'" (F41, Mother of nine year old female). Another mother described her daughter's behaviour as a source of contradiction when she said, "Her attitude is getting stronger. Her will is getting stronger. I can tell that she wants more decisions on her own" (F28, Mother of nine year old female). This mother described how developmental changes in her daughter were causing the parent-child relationship to change and the mother to experience ambiguity because she was unsure how to react to the changes.

***Behavioural Transgressions & Rule-Breaking.*** This sub-type of agency was described by parents' as children's behavioural transgressions and rule-breaking. In this theme parents described rule-breaking as children's misbehaviours that defied parents' wishes and included non-cooperation. Parents described children engaging in behavioural transgressions if children were uncooperative, directly or indirectly refused a parent's request, or behaved inappropriately. Failing to complete household chores was the most common form of rule-breaking that caused contradictions. For example one mother said,

“The bed was not made” (F21, Mother of 10 year old male). The son’s defiance was the context that led the mother to experience an intrapersonal conflict about a lack of understanding for her son’s defiant behaviour. Children’s inappropriate behaviour was also a common type of behavioural transgression that led to parents’ experience of contradictions. One mother explained:

“I said, ‘why don’t you say hello to your friends’ and I said, ‘did you not hear me say to you that she was there?’. And she said, ‘well of course I heard you, I’m not deaf’. I just went, ‘you did not just say that’. (F9, Mother of eight year old female).

In this example, the daughter’s defiance was the context that led the mother to experience ambivalence about why the daughter behaved the way she did.

**Study Participation.** Although participation in this study led to only 7% of parents’ episodes of contradictions, it was important to describe this source category because study participation and tracking behaviours brought parents’ attention to specific issues in the parent-child relationship. For example, one parent said, “I guess we reflected on whether {child’s name} has enough interactions with some friends from school or in the neighbourhood” (F11, Mother of 13 year old male). Another parent said, “But I noticed it more in the study, that maybe I wasn’t doing as well as I could be” (F40, Mother of nine year old female). Both mothers discussed how participating in this study caused them to reflect on their parenting which caused contradictions.

In summary, the second goal of the study addressed the source and context of parents’ contradictions that occur while parenting during middle childhood. There were two main sources of contradictions for parents: *internal sources* (originating from within

the parent) and *external sources* (originating because of the child), and one infrequent source *study participation*.

### **Processing and Management of Contradictions**

The third research question concerned the processing and management strategies that parents engaged in when confronting the contradictions they experienced in the parent-child relationship. *Processing and management of contradictions* represents parents' interpretations, reactions, and coping strategies associated with experiencing contradictions. Processing and managing the contradiction was a major factor in bridging the event that caused the contradiction and adaptational outcomes. Processing and management do not imply success or failure, but instead encompasses parent's efforts to manage the contradictions they experienced regardless of effectiveness.

According to dialectics (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2009), contradictions create opportunities for meaning-making and change. One of the goals of the present study was to determine if this notion was true. Evidence from the analysis of how parents in the current study process and manage contradictions indicated that parents do engage in meaning-making. However, some parents did not go beyond description of the contradiction and therefore did not engage in managing the contradiction. Analysis of contradictions resulted in three distinct processing and management categories: *description of the event, information gathering and reflection, and acting on contradiction*. Table 4 represents the prominence of each major theme associated with how parents processed and managed the contradictions.

Table 4

*Processing and Management of Contradictions*

	Frequency	Proportion
Description	27	16.9
Information Gathering and Reflection	58	36.2
Acting on Contradiction	75	46.9
Cognitive	18	11.3
Behavioural	33	20.6
Future Intentions	24	15.0
Total	160	100

**Description of the Event.** Seventeen percent of parents described the nature of the situation or event that caused a contradiction without processing and managing the contradiction at a higher level. This sub-category of processing and management of contradictions was interpreted as representing the lowest level of processing because although parents acknowledged the contradiction, they had not begun to process or manage the contradiction.

**Information Gathering and Reflection.** A greater degree of processing and managing that parents described while experiencing contradictions was *information gathering and reflection*. Approximately 36% of contradictions involved parents gathering information and reflection as a method for managing their experience. Parents drew upon their knowledge of their child or reflected on past experiences in the parent-child relationship, or engaged in self-reflection in attempt to gain an understanding of the current situation causing the contradiction. Parents' reflections demonstrated that parent-

child interactions are influenced by the history of the relationship that has been created by the two individuals interacting over time. Parents described information gathering and reflection in two ways: *reflection on the history of the parent-child relationship* and *self-reflection*.

Reflection on the parent-child relationship was evident in parents' narratives when they discussed consulting their knowledge base relating to their child and the parent-child relationship. Parents reflected on their child's age, gender, birth order, siblings, personality and preferences, abilities, and how parental decisions impact them. For example one mother said, "He really pouts and mopes, like really plays it up. I know he doesn't like it but I think some of it's an act to make me feel bad" (F6, Mother of 13 year old male). This parent reflected on how parental decisions impact her child, and reflected on the knowledge she had of her child based on past interactions.

Parents who engaged in self-reflection used their own interpretive abilities as a source of information in attempt to understand the contradiction they experienced. Parents reflected on: their own childhoods and compared them to their children's, their ability to parent, and their perceived lack of control over potential influences outside of the parent-child relationship. One mother reflected on her own childhood and comparing it to her child's said:

"I don't ever remember my life being like that where it was like, I'd just come home from school, maybe do a little school work and just play. But with him it's like you have to do this, you have to do this and this and this..." (F13, Mother of 11 year old male).

**Acting on the Contradiction.** Almost half (47%) of the contradictions parents reported were acted upon in some capacity in attempt to resolve them. This category included parents' strategic efforts to manage contradictions. *Acting on the contradiction* contains three sub-categories: *cognitive strategies* (reframing thoughts), *behavioural strategies* (altering own or child's behaviour), and *future intentions* (plans to change in the future).

**Cognitive Strategies.** Eleven percent of contradictions involved cognitive strategies as attempts to manage the contradictions. These strategies focused on what parents did to alter and reframe their thoughts in attempt to manage contradictions. Parents engaged in two main types of cognitive strategies: explaining and giving reasons, and justifying or rationalizing contradictions. The theme of cognitive strategies was further divided into two sub-categories: *parents' justification of their child's behaviour*, and *parents' justification of their own behaviour*.

Justification of child's behaviour emerged from parents' descriptions of their processing of contradictions whereby they provided reasons why the contradictions existed. For example, "{Child's name} is not a perfectionist. He would rather do volume than quality and so, you know, the teacher requires a certain degree of perfection for the conservatory so he gets bored, he loses interest" (F22, Mother of 13 year old male). This parent experienced conflict with her son because of his piano practice. However, the mother used her knowledge of her son's personality to account for his lack of perfectionism that caused the parent-child conflict.

Parents also provided explanations and reasons as justification for their own behaviour that originally caused contradictions. For example, one mother said: "The

other day we had the scene that I slapped her and I felt terrible. But she crossed the line” (F3, Mother of 11 year old female). Although this mother described feeling terrible, she justified her behaviour by explaining that her daughter had crossed the line.

**Behavioural Strategies.** Behavioural strategies tended to involve problem-solving techniques whereby parents identified the contradiction, and then determined a behavioural solution to manage their contradictions. Twenty-one percent of parents processed and managed contradictions with behavioural strategies. Parents discussed using behavioural strategies as attempts to influence interpersonal and intrapersonal contradictions through action. Two subcategories emerged: parents altered their children’s behaviour, and parents altered his or her own behaviour. These results are consistent with Lazarus and Folkman (1984) who argued that problem-focused coping involves strategies to alter the environment and those to alter the self.

Parents described altering their child’s behaviour when the parent confronted the child in attempt to manage the contradiction and there are three sub-categories. First, parents stated the use of *direct commands* which involved explicitly telling the child what to do. Second, parents attempted to alter children’s behaviour through *punishing the child* as a consequence for specific negative behaviours. Last, parents discussed *direct communication with children* such as reassuring the child, providing encouragement, providing information, and preparing the child for adverse situations.

In an example of a direct command, one parent said, “I just explain to her ahead of time that she needs to allow other people to be a part of the conversation and that, you know, not to be too hyper and people will want to have you back” (F40, Mother of nine year old female). This mother described the ambiguity she experienced about her

daughter's social interactions because of her intense personality. In an attempt to manage the situation the mother provided advice about socially acceptable behaviour to her daughter to reduce the mother's experience of ambiguity.

Parents described altering their own behaviour when they provided a description of the behaviours they engaged in as an attempt to manage the contradictions they experienced. Parents discussed seeking information from others, forcing undesired behaviours from self, and surveillance of child. One mother said, "I do the [internet] history search every once in a while" (F15, Mother of 11 year old female). This mother discussed the actions she engaged in as an attempt to resolve the contradiction she faced because of her daughter's out of sight behaviour. Another mother described monitoring her child when she was away from home. This mother said, "I've got up in the middle of the night and driven past where they are" (F35, Mother of 10 year old female). In attempt to reduce the ambiguity this mother experienced when her daughter was not home, this mother went out to check on her child.

**Future Intentions.** This sub-theme emerged from parents' narratives when future goals and plans to change were discussed as a method for managing contradictions and occurred in 15% of the episodes of contradictions. Future intentions included plans for both cognitive and behavioural changes. Two variations of future intentions were evident: *future intention to change*, and *specified plan to be carried out in the future*.

Parents discussed that future intention to change was a necessary step for managing contradictions in the parent-child relationship. Although these parents lacked specific plans, they were able to acknowledge that a change was necessary and imminent. For example, one mother said, "I need to find a way to manage that as a parent" (F28,

Mother of 11 year old female). Referring to her daughter's personality, this mother explained how change was necessary as an attempt to alter future contradictions because of similar situations. Another parent said, "We need to work this out" (F36, Mother of 10 year old female). This particular mother discussed her daughter's lack of chore completion and that the mother desired to tackle this issue to reduce her contradiction.

Parents discussed specific plans for change that would be carried out in the future in attempt to manage contradictions. For example, "I need to have more rules to start pushing them to do the rules a little bit more" (F25, Mother of 13 year old female). This mother discussed how participating in this study made her realize that she did not have as many rules as she thought she had. However, in attempt to tackle this discrepancy the mother, like other parents, had created a specific plan for future action. Another mother said, "I am going to try to be more conscious and sensitive" (F18, Mother of 13 year old female). This specific mother explained how she periodically responded to her children in an undesired way and therefore made a plan to change her own behaviour to reduce the contradiction she experienced.

In summary, this research question addressed the ways parents process and manage contradictions. Although all parents described the source and context of the contradiction that they experienced, not all parents went beyond this description. Three process and management categories emerged from parents' narratives and included: *description of the event, information gathering and reflection, and acting on contradiction.*

### **Outcomes Associated with Confronting Contradictions**

The fourth research question in the present study addressed the nature of the outcome of parents' experience of contradictions. The contradictions reported by parents were categorized according to the outcome of each instance. Five sub-categories emerged from parents' narratives and included: *outcome not evident* (parents have yet to confront the contradiction), *outcome in process* (parent was still confronting contradiction), *partial outcome or temporary outcome* (intensity of contradiction may be reduced, but still remains), *ambiguity remained despite attempt to resolve it*, and *contradiction was resolved* (contradiction has been reframed, accepted, or resolved). Outcome and processing and management of parents' contradictions sometimes were described similarly and therefore components of specific categories overlapped. Table 5 provides the prominence of each major outcome category associated with parents confronting contradictions.

Table 5

*Outcome of Confronting Contradictions*

	Frequency	Proportion
Not Evident	46	28.8
In Process	21	13.1
Partial/Temporary	40	25.0
Ambiguity Remains	11	6.9
Resolution	42	26.2
Reframed	18	11.2
Accepted	18	11.2
Resolved	6	3.8
Total	160	100

**Outcome Not Evident.** Not all parents (28.2%) had engaged in confronting or managing the contradiction and therefore not all contradictions had outcomes. Some parents had yet to, or were not going to, move beyond acknowledgment of the contradiction. Quotations are not provided for this particular category but codes were used to keep track of how many parents discussed the event and type of contradictions without processing and managing therefore resulting in a lack of an outcome.

**Outcome in Process (Contradiction Under Construction).** This category captured parents' experience of contradictions while they were still involved in processing the contradiction. The *outcome in process* category involved future intentions (i.e. future plans or desire for change) and waiting to determine the result of altering the situation causing the contradiction. Thirteen percent of parents indicated that they were

currently processing the contradictions they had experienced. Outcomes in process had overlapped with parents' active processing and management of contradictions. One mother said, "They need to pick up some responsibilities. So we are working on that" (F36, Mother of 10 year old female). This mother described how she was currently working on providing more responsibilities for her children but has not reached the stage where she could evaluate her efforts to manage the contradiction.

Parents also described an inability to determine the effectiveness of their efforts for managing contradictions because not enough time has passed since parents implemented their strategies. For example one parent said, "Well, I think it will make me watch next time because often I'd go about doing something else. But I think not I'm going to ask and then check five minutes later to see if it's done" (F26, Mother of 13 year old female). This mother described the contradiction she experienced because of her daughter's lack of compliance for completing chores. The mother indicated that checking-in with her daughter may encourage her to complete the chores. However, the mother has yet to implement her new strategy and therefore could not determine its effectiveness.

**Partial or Temporary Outcomes.** This category represents parents' experiences of contradictions that have been partially or temporarily resolved. Although parents have made attempts to confront or manage the contradictions experienced in the parent-child relationship, they remained. Parents described *partial outcomes* of contradictions when the intensity of the contradictions that parents experienced had been reduced. *Temporary outcomes* were described by parents as resolutions of contradictions that were effective

for a limited amount of time before the situation recurred and therefore caused parents to experience the same contradiction.

Parents discussed partial resolutions of contradictions if the magnitude of the contradiction had been lessened due to attempts to manage it. Parents described communication with their children or other adults as the main way to manage contradictions that led to partial resolutions. For example, one mother said, “And I think I don’t want them to get into trouble, but are they normal? Are they normal? I worry about that” (F18, Mother of 13 year old female). After consulting with other adults about the normality of her children’s behaviour, this mother still experienced a contradiction. Although this mother appreciated that her daughters had exceptional behaviour, the mother still experienced ambiguity because she continued to question if her children were normal.

Temporary outcomes were described by parents as outcomes of contradictions that although effective, it was for a limited amount of time before the same situation occurred again. Parents did not have specific strategies for managing contradictions that recurred, but instead would attempt to resolve the contradiction each time they experienced it. For example, one parent said “All I can do is tackle the issues as they come up” (F42, Mother of nine year old female). This mother, like other mothers in similar situations, concluded that certain situations needed to be dealt with as they occur because they cannot be prevented.

Although parents made attempts to resolve their contradictions, they were still present. *Partial resolutions* may have reduce the intensity of the contradiction but they were still present. *Temporary resolutions* involved a strategy that is effective for a limited

amount of time but the situation was reoccurring and therefore the parent continued to experience the contradiction.

**Ambiguity Remained.** Parents in the study described how ambiguity periodically remained the same after efforts were made to resolve the contradiction. Almost seven percent of parents indicated that ambiguity remained after attempting to manage and resolve the contradictions. Ambiguity tended to remain in situations where parents experienced contradictions because of children's out of sight behaviour. Parents discussed that attempts were made to raise children properly, but there was still ambiguity because of potential influences outside of the parent-child relationship. For example, "But you never know. You never know. Like we put so much effort and we put so much energy" (F8, Mother of 11 year old male and 12 year old female). Another mother said, "You can raise them the best you can. You can set all the moral standards you want. Where are other peoples' standards?" (F21, Mother of 12 year old male).

Parents discussed that they have faith in their children, but still experienced ambiguity about situations they may be involved in. For example one mother said: "I think um she's got a good head on her shoulders so that she knows what she should and what she shouldn't do... as a parent I still worry when I don't see her when she's out with friends" (F38, Mother of 11 year old female). This mother described that, although she admired her daughter's choices and trusted her, the mother still experienced ambiguity because of her child's out of sight behaviours and friendships.

**Contradiction Resolved.** Parents described contradictions as resolved in terms of complete resolutions, or accepting the contradiction and reframing the situation in attempt to be comfortable with the contradiction because of an inability to completely

resolve it. Approximately 22% of the contradictions parents experienced were accepted or reframed. In contrast, only 4% of the contradictions were completely resolved. Parents described a complete resolution when the contradiction no longer existed because of efforts implemented to resolve it, or the resolution of contradictions because of other factors (e.g. children altering their behaviours) therefore eliminating the contradiction.

*Acceptance of Contradiction.* Eleven percent of the contradictions parents experienced were accepted for two reasons. First, parents expressed acceptance of contradictions because of the realization that contradictions were inevitable in the parent-child relationship during middle childhood. Second, parents indicated that they accepted contradictions because of the inability to have control over certain situations and interactions in the parent-child relationship. Despite parents' acceptance of the contradictions, ambiguity remained to a certain degree.

Parents accepted situations but remained worried because of the uncertainty of what children were thinking. For example one mother said, "He's his own person and if he chooses not to tell me I cannot force him" (F37, Mother of nine year old male).

Another parent said:

"And I have resigned myself to know that I just don't know. I can only, I don't want to use the word pray, but I can only hope that whatever I've taught them, that's what they're going to do. And that's all I go by. There's nothing else I can really do" (F1, Mother of 10 and 12 year old females).

This mother referred to the ambiguity she experienced because of her children's of out of sight behaviour.

Parents also discussed accepting the situation and hoping for the best-case scenario. One mother said, “You just shut up and you suck it in and just hope for the best that you’ve taught them properly” (F21, Mother of 12 year old male). In reference to the generalized worry she experienced because of peer influences, one mother said, “That’s why we work so hard in trying to make her independent and as independent a thinker as possible because when it comes right down to it, it’s completely up to her how it’s going to be” (Mother of 13 year old female).

***Reframing of Contradiction.*** Parents described reframing of contradictions as the changes in cognition associated with new ways of thinking, and changed meanings about a parent-child interaction after confronting the contradiction. Although 11% of the parents in the study indicated that the situation remained the same, they perceived it in a different way which reduced the intensity of the contradiction. Parents expressed reframing contradiction two ways: viewing the child differently, or viewing themselves as parents differently.

Parents discussed reframing contradictions by thinking about their behaviours in different ways. One parent said, “I think it’s legit I guess. It’s building character, personality” (F30, Mother of 11 year old male). This mother changed the way she felt about her son’s resistance and therefore was able to reduce the contradiction. Another mother faced a contradiction because of her son’s participation in a specific school trip, she reduced the contradiction to a manageable level after reframing her thoughts about this situation. The mother said, “I saw how fixated he was on being with his friends and I thought that was more important than saying, ‘no you have to obey rules’. So we kind of went with that” (F11, Mother of 13 year old male).

Parents described reframing contradictions by altering the way they thought about themselves as a parent. One parent said, “You live with it, and you make the best of whatever situation you’ve made in your home” (F30, Mother of 11 year old male). This parent referred to the ambivalence she experienced because of routinizing household chores. Another parent described reframing her situation when she said:

“My father said something interesting to me about three weeks ago. He said that he recognizes that it’s always been tough for me because I’ve always been the mom and the dad, even when I was married because my ex-husband was not a disciplinarian, he always was not a provider and he wasn’t a nurturer. So he was just kind of there for brief periods of time and so in shaping the boy it was interesting to have my dad put it that way because I hadn’t really thought about it but he’s right -- I’ve always been the provider, the nurturer, the comforter, the one with the rules and the one with my eye on their future” (F2, Mother of 10 year old male).

This mother experienced a contradiction because of the ambiguity she felt about her adequacy as a parent.

***Contradiction Fully Resolved.*** After evaluating contradictions and implementing strategies to manage them, very few (4%) of contradictions were fully resolved. Contradictions were resolved after the parents told their children specifically what to do, parents implemented a strategy that removed the contradiction, or the child altered his or her own behaviour spontaneously. For example, one mother said, “I’m really not comfortable, I’m going to say it and I’m going to put my foot down and I’m really not comfortable with you having a boyfriend and you can’t, no. And she said, ‘okay’.” (F36,

Mother of 10 year old female). This mother described a situation where her daughter continually dated and broke-up with a boy that the mother did not approve of. The most recent time the boy asked the daughter out the mother said she was not allowed to date the boy and the daughter complied and therefore resolved the contradiction.

Parents also described how contradictions were resolved after altering their own behaviour. For example one mother said, “It was just that little change in sort of not being on their back all the time I think really helped... I’ve noticed that it’s helped to be too naggy” (F1, Mother of 10 and 12 year old females). This parent indicated that after she changed her behaviour she was able to eliminate the interpersonal contradictions (i.e. parent-child conflicts) she previously experienced because of her daughter’s lack of completing chores.

In summary, this research question assessed the outcomes of parents’ actions to manage the contradictions they experienced while parenting during middle-childhood. Five outcome categories emerged: *outcome not evident*, *outcome is in process*, *partial outcome or temporary outcome*, *ambiguity remained despite confronting the contradiction*, and *contradiction was resolved*. Analysis of this category indicated that very few contradictions were fully resolved.

### **Emotions Expression of Contradictions**

Thematic analysis of parents’ narratives made it apparent that emotions commonly accompanied parents’ descriptions of their experiences of contradictions. This result was an unanticipated finding, but proved to be important because of the 160 episodes of contradictions, 65% (n=104) contained expressions of emotions and 35% (n=56) did not contain emotions. Emotions were interpreted as signs of dialectical tensions

that highlighted the discomfort parents experienced during contradictions. This discomfort may motivate people to reduce or eliminate the contradiction (Planalp & Fehr, 1988). Parents described a variety of emotions and five major categories emerged from the thematic analyses of parents' narratives: *anxiety*, *stress*, *surprise*, *anger*, and *sadness*. Some parents described more than one emotion in a single episode of a contradiction and therefore all emotions were tracked. Table 6 provides the prominence of the major emotion categories that emerged from parents' experiences of contradictions.

Table 6

*Emotional Expression of Contradictions*

	Frequency	Proportion
Anxiety	61	40.9
Stress	41	27.5
Surprise	20	13.4
Anger	15	10.1
Sadness	12	8.1
Total	149	100

**Anxiety.** Anxiety was the most common emotion expressed by parents when describing their experiences of contradictions while parenting during middle childhood. Nearly 41% of all emotions described were anxiety-related. Parents expressed anxiety with such words as: “fear”, “terror”, “afraid”, and “worry”. The most common anxiety-related emotion was worry, which represented 28% of all described emotions associated with parents' descriptions of contradictions.

Parents discussed feeling anxiety because of an inability to know what was happening in children's minds. For example one mother said, "Yeah, that's a bother. It's something that always worries me as a mother is not being able to look into their hearts and seeing the true feelings" (F37, Mother of nine year old male). Another mother expressed her ambiguity of out of sight behaviour when she said, "You do want to know what's going on in their mind, you know? I just worry that she's holding back stuff that you should be told about. That's what scares me" (F3, Mother of 11 year old female).

When referring to a lack of knowledge about her daughter's safety when away from home, one mother expressed anxiety in terms of fear when she said, "I don't actually worry about that because I think they will do the right thing. It's whether they'll be safe... I have a real problem with that, not a problem, but I have a real fear" (F35, Mother of 10 year old female). Parents also described anxiety in terms of worry for children's behaviour. For example: "I worry that somebody will lure her into some wrong decisions. I worry that she'll make errors in judgment... my anxiety goes way up when she's not home (F40, Mother of nine year old female).

**Stress.** The second most common emotion experienced by parents was *stress*. Almost 28% of all emotions were stress-related. Parents described stress as: "hard", "challenge", "stressful", and "frustration". For example, one mother described her experience of ambivalence as frustrating, she said: "It's frustrating, it's frustrating because you are not always sure..." (F11, Mother of 13 year old male). Parents described contradictions as difficult. One father said: "That's the hard thing as a parent is to make sure you don't come down too hard" (F18, Father of 13 year old female). This father was

describing the ambiguity he experienced because of chronic worry in disciplining his daughter.

**Surprise.** Surprise was expressed by 13.4% of parents while experiencing contradictions. Parents described surprise with words such as: “stunned”, “surprise”, “embarrassment”, and “shocked”. For example, one parent said, “All of a sudden it was kind of a surprise when he started to be a bit defiant” (F10, Mother of 10 year old male). This mother described an expectancy violation as surprising. When her son refused to comply, a mother of a nine year old male said, “It stuns me”.

**Anger.** One tenth (10.1%) of the emotions expressed by parents describing contradictions was associated with anger. Parents described feelings of anger with words such as: “fed up”, “annoyed”, “mad”, and “irritated”. For example one mother said: “She’s driving me crazy and I don’t like that” (F40, Mother of nine year old female). This mother was describing how her daughter’s attitude and will were getting stronger and wanted to make more decisions on her own. This mother experienced anger because her daughter used to be cooperative but had not been recently. The mother experienced ambiguity because changes in the daughter led to changes in the parent-child relationship and the mother did not know how to react.

**Sadness.** The theme of sadness was identified when parents used descriptive words such as, “crushed”, “sad”, and “I feel bad”. Sadness was the least expressed emotion with only eight percent of parents describing their experience of contradictions as sad. Feelings of sadness accompanied parents’ experiences of contradictions because of both parents’ own behaviours, and children’s behaviours. One parent said, “...that is a little disappointing because it seems like a part of what you want gets robbed a little”

(F11, mother of 13 year old male). This parent referred to the loss of physical closeness with her son as he aged.

A parent described experiencing sadness caused by her child's reaction to discipline. This parent said, "When you discipline your child and you hear, 'you're mean', you know, its crushing" (F9 Mother of eight year old female). Another mother described sadness as heart-breaking when she said, "That breaks my heart, you know you always want your kids to have friends" (F35, Mother of 10 year old female). This mother referred to the ambiguity she experienced because of her daughter's "over the top" behaviours when she was socializing with peers.

Parents described a variety of emotions related to the contradictions they experienced while parenting during middle childhood. Parents described five major feelings: *anxiety*, *stress*, *surprise*, *anger*, and *sadness*. Consistent with research, emotions were indications of the dialectical tensions that parents experienced. Emotional words accompanied the discomfort that parents experienced during contradictions.

In conclusion, this qualitative study examined parents' experience of contradictions while parenting during middle childhood. Research questions addressed five areas of contradictions: type, context and source, processing and management, outcome, and emotions. Results revealed that contradictions were experienced as: *ambiguity*, *ambivalence*, *interpersonal conflict*, *expectancy violations*, and *intrapersonal opposing ideas and/or behaviours*. Contradictions occurred because of parents' own incompatible or inconsistent thoughts and/or behaviours, and children's behaviours. Parents processed and managed contradictions by *description*, *information gathering and reflection*, and *acting on contradiction*. The nature of the consequence of parents'

contradictions included: *outcome not evident, outcome is in process, ambiguity remained despite confronting it, partial strategy or temporary solution* and *contradiction resolved*. *Surprise, sadness, anxiety, stress, and anger* were the emotions associated with contradictions. Analyses indicated that parents constantly experience contradictions and few are fully resolved.

### **Discussion**

The main contribution of this study is the comprehensive description of the nature of parents' experience of contradictions consisting of source and context, type, processing and management, outcomes, and emotions. The overall conclusion of this study was that contradictions were a common experience in the parent-child relationship. Parents constantly experience contradictions because children's development creates new or surprising interactions that may fail to fit parents' current ways of thinking about the child.

Valsiner (2006) argued that each imminent moment in one's life is ambiguous because of the gap between *what is already known* and *what is still unknown*. Abbey (2006) indicated that ambivalence is the tension between *what is* and *what could be*. Both researchers argued that meaning-making and change emerge from the discomfort created by contradictions. Research has focused on parental concerns, worries, and stressors but typically has not described parental responses to these experiences. Another goal of the present study therefore was to determine if parental cognition and behaviour changed in response to contradictions experienced in the parent-child relationship. A dialectical perspective of contradictions from social relational theory was used to explore the

ongoing syntheses leading to qualitative change in attempt to better understand parents' experiences of contradictions.

The following discussion will focus on six areas of parents' experience of contradictions, including 1) the nature of contradictions, 2) the importance of considering sources and contexts, 3) levels of processing and managing contradictions, 4) potential explanations of why almost all the contradictions parents experienced were not fully resolved, 5) the motivating forces of emotional expression of dialectical tensions, 6) the multifaceted model of parents' experience of contradiction. Finally, the discussion will conclude with the practical implications of the findings, the limitations of the study, and direction for future research.

### **Nature of Contradictions**

A contradiction is the experience of discordance or conflict (Riegel, 1976). Based on their interpretation of dialectics, Kuczynski, Pitman, and Mitchell (2009) proposed four distinct types of contradictions: *ambiguity* (lack of clarity), *ambivalence* (simultaneous pull in two directions), *parent-child conflict* (opposition between two people), and *expectancy violations* (child contradict parent's expectancies). To determine the types of contradictions that parents experience while parenting during middle childhood, the thematic analysis of parents' narratives was sensitized by Riegel's definition and the types suggested by Kuczynski and colleagues. The analyses confirmed that parents experienced the proposed types of contradictions in varying frequencies with *ambiguity* (46.9%) occurring most often, followed by *expectancy violations* (12.5%), then *ambivalence* (11.2%), and lastly *parent-child conflict* (6.9%). However, these four types

of contradictions captured only three-quarters of contradictions as discussed by the parents in this study.

One-quarter (22.5%) of the contradictions parents experienced in this study had not been conceptualized or discussed in the parent-child relations literature but fit Riegel's definition of discordance or conflict. To reflect the nature of this new type of contradiction, it was titled: *Intrapersonal Opposing Ideas and/or Behaviours*. Parents described this intrapersonal type of contradiction in two distinct ways. First, parents described two simultaneous opposing thoughts on the same topic. Second, parents described an opposition in thoughts and behaviour when they experienced a conflict in how they felt about a particular situation and how they actually acted.

Intrapersonal opposing ideas and/or behaviours differs from the other two types of intrapersonal contradictions (i.e. ambiguity and ambivalence) in the literature. Parents described ambiguity as a contradiction between what is known and what is unknown. Ambivalence was discussed as a contradiction between events, emotions, or meanings that concurrently pushed parents in two different directions. Although intrapersonal opposing ideas and ambivalence both capture the experience of simultaneously conflicting ideas, these two concepts are different. *Ambivalence* was described by parents as a "this" *or* "that" experience where the parent felt internal conflict because of a need to choose between two opposites. However, intrapersonal opposing ideas was described by parents as a "this" *and* "that" experience where the parent described two different perspectives or ideas during a single interaction. The other subtype of this newly discovered contradiction was the experience of an opposing idea and behaviour where the parent thought one way, but behaved in a different way.

Intrapersonal opposing ideas and/or behaviours is an important addition to the dialectical view of bidirectionality in parent-child relationships because it describes the contradictions parents experience when they have two conflicting ideas on the same subject or the opposition between thoughts and behaviour during a specific interaction. Interactions between parents and children lead to both internal and external contradictions that feed into the dialectical process (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2009).

### **Source and Context of Contradictions**

In the current study, source and context were not conceptualized as the cause of parents' contradictions; rather, they were a description of the parent-child interactions in which contradictions occurred. Through the analysis of parents' narratives, two main sources of contradictions were identified: *internal sources* (originating from within the parent) and *external sources* (originating because of the child). Internal sources consisted of *generalized worry*, *parental control*, *out of sight behaviour*, and *parental adequacy*. Parents described one source of external contradiction: *children's expression of agency*. Parents described internal sources of contradictions twice as often as external sources of contradictions. An additional theme was described infrequently by parents as *study participation*. This theme captured how involvement in the study brought parents' attention to specific interactions that parents had not considered prior to study participation.

Researchers (e.g. Kuczynski, Pitman, & Mitchell, 2009; Valsiner, 2006; Valsiner & Abbey, 2006) have argued that contradictions occur in the context of the parent-child relationship but had not identified the type of interactions where they occur. The present study adds to the literature by providing empirical data on the types of parent-child

interactions that were the context for parents' experiences of contradictions. From a dialectical perspective, the tension from a contradiction creates opportunities for change and development, therefore, identification of the types of contexts that lead to contradictions is useful for providing support to parents. Although some parents experienced similar contradictions, not all parents described them the same way therefore indicating that there are individual differences in the cognitive processes during the evaluation of parent-child interactions. However, helping parents to understand that contradictions are common in the parent-child relationship may encourage them to seek support. Perhaps identification of the types of parent-child interactions that lead to contradictions will help prepare parents for unexpected interactions which may reduce the likelihood of experiencing discomfort resulting from contradictions. Although awareness of potentially eminent interactions does not automatically eliminate a contradiction, it has the potential to prepare parents and therefore perhaps reduce the intensity of the contradiction. The extent to which a specific parent-child interaction was considered a source and the context of a contradiction was determined by parents' evaluations and descriptions.

### **Processing and Managing Contradictions**

The changes parents went through were particularly evident during the processing and managing of their contradictions. The *processing and management* category represents parents' interpretations, reactions, and coping strategies associated with experiencing contradictions. Parents were not directly asked if processing and management of contradictions involved different levels. However, it was possible to interpret parental narratives as a sequence of initial to higher levels of processing and

managing in attempt to manage or resolve the tension contradictions entailed. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) cautioned against using an invariant sequence of stages for the coping and therefore the present study utilizes levels of processing and managing contradictions with caution and the understanding of individual variability. Thematic analysis of contradictions resulted in three distinct processing and management categories. First, parents provided a *description of the event* that caused the contradiction. Second, parents described *information gathering and reflection*. The last level parents described was *acting on the contradiction*.

The way parents processed and managed their contradictions was similar to the coping process outlined by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). These researchers defined coping as the continuous change in cognitive and behavioural efforts in attempt to manage a stressful encounter. Lazarus and Folkman argued that the person's interpretation of a stressful situation influences the cognitive and behaviour responses. The results of the present study support this idea because most parents fit Lazarus and Folkman's definition of coping. All parents provided a *description of the event* that caused the contradiction, however, not all parents went beyond this first level of processing and management. Parents attempted to make sense of the contradictions cognitively through processes such as identifying their perception and interpretation of the contradiction.

A higher level of processing and management involved *information gathering and reflection* where parents reflected on past parent-child interactions or reflected on self, to gain an understanding of the current situation causing the contradiction. Reflection typically involved consideration of the child's traits and characteristics and

how they had changed, demonstrating that a relationship is based on a history of interactions because parents consulted their knowledge base in attempt to make sense of the contradiction. Information gathering and reflection and the associated cognitive strategies demonstrated that parents were engaging in the process of meaning-making. These results are consistent with dialectical research (e.g. Riegel, 1974, Valsiner, 2006) which argues contradictions lead to meaning-making which produces change. The last stage of processing and management of contradictions was *acting on the contradiction*. Half of the parents in the present study discussed strategic efforts to manage contradictions such as a) cognitive strategies to alter thoughts, b) behavioural strategies to change the child's or parent's own actions, and c) future intentions (plans to change the situation causing the contradiction). Although cognitive strategies and behavioural strategies are distinguished analytically, both should be considered as parts of experiencing contradictions.

The strategic efforts parents used to manage contradictions are consistent with the social cognition construct of *meta-parenting* (Hawk & Holden, 2006), and the psychological theory of *stress, appraisal, and coping* (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Parents who engaged in cognitive or behavioural strategies to process and manage contradictions did so in a way that was intentional and not automatic. Intrapersonal contradictions rely solely on parents' cognitive processing capabilities. Some parents used more coping strategies to manage internal tensions rather than attempting to change the external reality. This result was evident in the cognitive strategies parents described as a way to alter their thoughts thereby reducing the contradiction. Interpersonal contradictions also involved cognitive processing, but were more likely to also involve

behavioural strategies to manage the contradictions. These results are similar to those found in previous research conducted by Holden and Hawk (2003) who demonstrated that parents who assess, problem-solve, and reflect were more likely to introduce new behaviours that were context-dependent and led to effective parenting.

The interdependent nature of parent-child relationships added another layer of complexity for processing and managing contradictions. A component of social relational theory is that the interdependence between parents and children is a source of “mutual receptivity and mutual vulnerability because each person’s behaviour matters to the other” (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007, p.273). Parents demonstrated their agency by initiating and strategically selecting purposeful behaviours. Parents’ expression of agency was particularly evident during their discussion of how they processed and managed contradictions.

### **Unresolved Contradictions**

This category represents the outcome of parents’ actions used to manage the contradictions they experienced while parenting during middle-childhood. Parents described five different types of outcomes: *outcome not evident*, *outcome in process*, *partial strategies* or *temporary strategies*, *ambiguity remained despite confronting the contradiction*, and *contradiction is resolved*. Of all the episodes of contradictions, 28.8% did not have an outcome, 45.0% involved incomplete resolutions, and 26.2% were resolved. These results add to the literature on parents’ internalizations processes which Kuczynski and Parkin (2007) argued are under-researched.

**Outcome not Evident.** Each episode of contradiction included an acknowledgment and description of the contradiction from the perspective of the parent.

Approximately one-third of the episodes of contradictions did not involve a discussion of an outcome. There are three potential explanations for this result. One likely explanation is that parents had yet to begin to process and manage the contradiction and therefore outcomes were not yet evident. Another probable explanation is that parents may not have fully discussed the episode of the contradiction during the interview. Kuczynski, Pitman, and Mitchell (2009) argued that from a transactional perspective, contradictions need to be deemed “perturbing or stressful” in order to be acted upon. However, results of the current study indicated that this may not always be true. An additional explanation for the lack of an outcome for many contradictions is that some contradictions may never be acted upon and resolved despite the discomfort associated with them. A consequence of unresolved contradictions may be a continual sense of discomfort which may lead to parents’ experiencing helplessness.

**Incomplete Outcomes.** Although attempts were made to resolve the contradiction, some were not completely resolved. These types of resolutions occurred in three ways. First, *outcomes currently in process* captured parents’ experience of contradictions where the parent indicated that an outcome was inevitable during an indefinite period of time. This category consisted of two main themes: future intentions (i.e. future plans or desire for change) and lack of time to determine if attempts made to alter the contradiction were completely successful. Second, despite attempts to resolve the contradiction, parents described *partial outcomes* that reduced the intensity of the contradiction, and *temporary outcomes* that were effective for a limited amount of time before the situation reoccurred. Last, parents in the study described how ambiguity periodically remained after efforts were made to resolve the contradiction.

Incomplete outcomes accounted for almost half (45.0%) of all outcomes associated with parents experience of contradictions while parenting during middle childhood. Parents who described that outcomes were in process, were unable to indicate what the specific outcome of the contradiction would be. Kuczynski and Parkin (2007) argued that even if the exact outcome cannot be determined, parents still influence the interactions with their children, relationship quality, and the general trajectories of children's development. This idea is important because it highlights Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) idea that appraisal and coping intervene between an interaction that caused stress and one's reactions to the situation. Outcomes in process may be particularly vulnerable to parents' evaluative and meaning-making processes because of the amount of time between the interaction that leads to the contradiction and the outcome of the efforts to resolve it. The more time between the onset of the contradiction and the outcome, the more time the parent has to evaluate and re-evaluate the tension.

Perhaps certain contradictions may never be fully resolved because of the nature of the contradiction and the nature of coping. Parents who described temporary outcomes indicated that they did not have specific strategies for managing contradictions that reoccurred, but instead would attempt to resolve the contradiction each time it was present. The anticipation of facing the same contradiction in the future may allow parents to cognitively prepare themselves for the same or similar type of parent-child interaction that could potentially cause a contradiction. Anticipation may reduce the severity of the contradiction because although it is inevitable, it is expected. Ambiguity tended to remain when parents experienced contradictions because of children's out of sight behaviour. A potential explanation for this is that parents will never fully be aware of what their

children do when they are not with the parents. Even if children voluntarily disclosed information, or responded to parents' requests for information about out of sight behaviour, parents questioned if they had received all of the information. A parent's perception of inadequate knowledge of his or her child perpetuated feelings of ambiguity.

**Contradiction Resolved.** Parents described contradictions as resolved in terms of accepting or reframing the contradiction, or complete resolution. *Acceptance of contradictions* occurred when parents realized that certain contradictions were an inevitable part of the parent-child relationship during middle childhood. Contradictions were also accepted when parents realized they were unable to have control over certain situations and interactions in the parent-child relationship. Parents described *reframing of contradictions* as the changes in cognition associated with new ways of viewing the child, or viewing themselves as a parent, and changed meanings about a parent-child interaction after confronting the contradiction. Approximately one-quarter (22.2%) of the contradictions involved resolutions associated with changes in cognition. *Acceptance of the contradiction* and *reframing of the contradiction* encompass the changes in parents' interpretations of the parent-child interaction that caused a contradiction. Although ambiguity remained to a certain degree when parents accepted or reframed their contradictions, the tension had lessened.

Very few (4%) of contradictions were *fully resolved*. Parents described full resolutions of contradictions after the parents told the children specifically what to do, parents implemented a strategy that removed the contradiction by altering his or her own behaviour, or the child altered his or her own behaviour spontaneously. This result is

consistent with Valsiner (2006) who argued that uncertainty is not a solvable problem, but instead provides the opportunity for the creation of new meanings and thus change.

The type of contradiction parents experience may impact the outcome.

Interpersonal contradictions (i.e. *parent-child conflicts* and *expectancy violations*) involved both the parent and the child. Perhaps contradictions between two people are more likely to be resolved because one or both individuals have the potential to alter their behaviours. The opposite may be true for intrapersonal contradictions (i.e. *ambiguity, ambivalence, and intrapersonal opposing ideas and/or behaviour*). Intrapersonal contradictions involve more complex processing and managing strategies because resolutions depend on parents' cognitive processing capabilities. If contradictions are not processed and managed, an outcome will not occur. Results of the present study indicate that it was easier for parents to alter their child's behaviour, or the situation that led to the contradiction, rather than altering their own thoughts.

In summary, parents described the outcome of contradictions as: lack of outcome, incomplete outcome, and complete outcome. The results of the present study are surprising because of previous assumptions (e.g. Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Holden & Hawk, 2003) that stressful or uncomfortable feelings motivate change. Although parents desired to eliminate the contradictions they experienced, change did not always happen at a level high enough to fully resolve the contradiction. Results from the present study support the idea that contradictions allow for opportunities to create new meanings that temporarily resolve contradictions and set individuals into new trajectories for interactions. Contradictions are best understood as producing a range of trajectories rather than precisely determined results.

## **Emotional Expression of Contradictions**

The exploration of the specific emotions parents experienced during contradictions was not proposed during the conception of the present study. However, during the thematic analyses of the other proposed research questions, it became apparent that parents explicitly described their emotions. In response to this unanticipated finding, this research question was added to augment the study: What emotions are associated with parents' experience of contradictions while parenting during middle childhood? Sixty-five percent of the episodes of contradictions involved parents' discussion of at least one emotion. Five categories of emotions were evident in parents' narratives: *anxiety, stress, surprise, anger, and sadness.*

Lazarus and Folkman (1985) argued that the intensity of emotions indicates what is important to individuals during specific interactions and as one's interpretation changes, so will the emotions. Individual differences between parents were apparent because of the variety of emotions they expressed. Interestingly, specific emotions were expressed during certain types of contradictions. Anxiety was commonly expressed when parents described experiencing ambiguity. Anger and surprise were often described when parents shared their experience of children's expectancy violations. Parents experienced a variety of emotions related to the contradictions they experience while parenting during middle childhood. Research (e.g. Valsiner, 2006; Kuczynski et al., 2009) has highlighted the discomfort associated with contradictions. The results of the present study add to the literature by describing the functional role that emotions play as a motivator to resolve contradictions. Parents who described experiencing negative emotions during

contradictions were not just motivated to resolve the contradiction, but were also driven to eliminate the emotional discomfort associated with the contradiction.

**Conceptual Framework: Contradictions as an Instigator of Parental Change in the Context of the Parent-Child Relationship During Middle Childhood**

The proposed model of parental change is based on thematic analysis of parental narratives and provides a useful framework for understanding how contradictions instigate change. Parents' descriptions of the type, source and context, processing and management, outcome of contradictions, and emotions in the parent-child relationship helped to reveal the nature of parental change and development. *Development* is systematic or organized change, but not all change is equivalent to development (Raeff, 2011).

Child development is a common topic in the parent-child literature. Holden and Ritchie (1988) argued that a model of parenting should include the conflicts and contrasts that occur in the parent-child relationship. Holden and Hawk (2003) indicated that there is a lack of research that focuses on, and describes, the factors that contribute to changes in parenting behaviour. Various sources suggest that parents adapt to children's behaviour (e.g. Collins, Madsen, & Susman-Stillman, 2002) and dialectics (e.g. Sameroff, 1975) asserts that individuals constantly endure conflicts which motivate change and that individuals are changing in a changing social world. However, there is a lack of empirical research that focuses on exactly how parents change because of the contradictions they experience in the parent-child relationship.

Social relational theory (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007; 2009; Kuczynski, Pitman, & Mitchell, 2009) and developmental contextualism (Lerner, 1992/1995) focus on a

dialectical model of the parent-child relationship and a dynamic perspective of change respectively, but neither specify exactly how development occurs. Cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) compliments these two theories by providing a framework for understanding how an individual can change because of intrapersonal and interpersonal contradictions caused during parent-child interactions. These three theories and the results of the present study were integrated to create the model of parental change and development.

As shown in Figure 2, parental change and development is a dynamic process in which the context of interactions is the parent-child relationship. All parents in the present study identified the interaction that led to a contradiction and the type of contradiction (specifically determining if the contradiction was intrapersonal or interpersonal) as well as what the parent was struggling with (e.g. lack of clarity, torn between two potential reactions). However, not all parents went beyond identification to actively process and manage the contradiction. Engagement in processing the contradiction determined if parents participated in management techniques to alleviate discomfort and potentially resolve the interaction that led to the contradiction. In the proposed parental change and development model, active involvement is viewed as necessary for change, but is not always sufficient to alleviate the contradiction.

Contradictions began in the context of the parent-child relationship but parents' management of the contradictions may have been directed inward, toward the child, or toward the relationship as a whole. Parents who processed and managed the contradictions typically engaged in *information gathering and reflection* in attempt to understand the situation prior to attempting to alter the situation through cognitive and/or

behavioural strategies. Parents who experienced interpersonal contradictions tended to engage in behavioural strategies to alter self behaviour or the child's behaviour in attempt to alleviate the contradiction. In contrast, parents who experienced intrapersonal contradictions engaged in cognitive and behavioural strategies in attempt to alleviate the contradiction. Cognitive strategies typically resulted in *reframing* the situation or *acceptance of the contradiction* which did not resolve the contradiction but instead lessened the severity. Behavioural strategies were usually followed by *partial or temporary outcomes* because the parent was able to successfully alter the situation in some way. Behavioural strategies also led to *outcomes in process* because not enough time had passed for parents to evaluate whether their efforts to eliminate the contradiction were successful after they had implemented their strategies.

The proposed model confirms the usefulness of a bidirectional conception of interactions. The results of the present study indicate that influence is not deterministic where interactions cause specific outcomes. Instead, this study has shown that parent-child interactions consist of bidirectional causality because both partners are engaged in complex interactions that are influenced by each other. Change may be major or minor, and permanent or temporary.

The parental model of change and development adds to the literature because it contributes to the understanding of processes that have concerned developmental psychologists for decades. The model describes *causes of change* (i.e. generalized worry, children's out of sight behaviour, perceptions of parental adequacy, disciplining and controlling children, and children's expression of agency), *how parental change occurs* (information gathering and reflection, cognitive and behavioural strategies, and future

intentions), and *types of change* (no change, change in process, partial or temporary changes, reframing thoughts, accepting situation, and complete resolution).

### **Application of Results**

The results of this study add to literature on parent-child relationships in numerous ways. Most importantly, this study provides empirical support for parents' experience of contradictions. Although previous research has focused on theoretical aspects of a dialectical conception of contradictions, research had not provided empirical support. This study described the sources and context, types, processing and management, outcomes, and emotions associated with parents' experience of contradictions while parenting during middle childhood.

This study identified a new type of contradiction (i.e. intrapersonal opposing ideas and/or behaviours) which highlights the internal conflict between ideas, or between an idea and a behaviour. Kuczynski and Parkin (2007) argued that parental internalization processes have been largely unexplored in the parent-child literature. This study adds to the literature by providing empirical evidence on the internalization processes associated with contradictions.

The findings of this study may be useful for education and intervention programs that focus on parent-child conflicts, managing negative feelings associated with interpersonal and intrapersonal contradictions, and preparing parents for the contradictions they may experience. Modifying parental behaviour could have important implications for parent-child and family interventions by promoting effective parenting strategies. Based on the findings of this study, education and intervention programs could follow the proposed framework of how contradictions instigate parental change. Helping

parents to describe the context of the contradiction is an essential first step for managing the contradiction. Identification of negative feelings associated with the contradiction is also important because of the functional aspects emotions play as motivator for change. Providing parents with information about the process of confronting contradictions should focus on acknowledging and describing the contradiction, gathering information and reflection on self, the child, and the parent-child relationship to help understand the contradiction. The last level of processing and managing the contradiction is acting on the contradiction in attempt to resolve it. Another aspect of providing support to parents is to inform them that outcomes associated with confronting contradictions are not based on success or failure, but are based on change. Very few contradictions are fully resolved, but outcomes may be in process (under construction) for a period of time, and partially or temporarily resolved. The model of parental change proposed in this study provides an organizing framework for educational and intervention programs for parents.

### **Study Limitations**

The findings from this study are limited in specific ways. First, the participants consisted of non-clinical parent-child dyads that were presumably members of well-functioning families therefore impacting the generalizability of the results to all parents. Second, very few fathers participated in this study, also impacting the generalizability of the results. Last, parents' internal thought processes cannot be directly observed and therefore the results of this study are dependent on parents' interpretations of their contradictions.

The parents in this study described their relationship with their children as normal and their children's development as typical. These homogeneous characteristics of the

participants are not a limitation, but, they influence the generalizability of the results. The results cannot be generalized to parents who have negative parent-child relationships or children with developmental or behavioural problems. Interpersonal and intrapersonal contradictions would likely be more severe and occur at higher rates in parents who are experiencing more intense family stresses. Families volunteered to participate in the study may be different from the general population.

The gender composition of the participants was skewed with forty mothers and only two fathers taking part in this study. This imbalance of mothers and father presents as a limitation to the generalizability of the results of this study. The two fathers who participated in the study may not be representative of the general population of fathers. Despite very few fathers participating in this study, their involvement is highly valued as important for understanding how parents experience contradictions while parenting during middle childhood.

Another limitation relates to the data used for the study; data were comprised of parents' narratives and not direct observation. Parents' experience of contradictions involved internal thought processes that cannot be directly observed. Parents' interpretations of parent-child interactions leading to contradictions have the potential to change as time passes and may not adequately reflect the nature of parents' contradictions. Parents may also have ignored or avoided disclosing specific contradictions. The results of this study are based on parents' verbatim experience which may or may not have provided an accurate description and explanation of the contradictions that they experienced. It is difficult to determine if parents' processing and

management of contradictions occurred because of involvement in this study or because of the natural experience of contradictions.

### **Future Directions**

A dialectical perspective on contradictions while parenting during middle childhood allowed for the discovery of the sources and contexts, types, processing and management, outcomes, and emotions related to contradictions. To add to the current understanding of the contradictions experienced while parenting, future research should address four specific areas. First, this study focused on families of children during middle childhood. Future research should focus on parental contradictions that occur while parenting during infancy, early childhood, and adolescence to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the contradictions that parents experience. All stages of childhood and adolescent development are unique and therefore parents' experience of contradictions may differ during each stage. Second, all families in the present study were well-functioning and the children were developing normally. Perhaps future research could focus on the contradictions parents experience in ill-functioning families and children with developmental or behavioural problems. Third, future research should target fathers in order to gain a better understanding of fathers' experience of contradictions while parenting. Last, the parents in the present study described neutral and positive outcomes associated with managing contradictions. Holden and Hawk (2003) argued that rumination may be unproductive and therefore exploring how excessive processing and management of contradictions may lead to negative outcomes such as anxiety, over-controlling, and unnecessary intrusion into children's lives may help to further understand contradictions. Future research should extend beyond

parenting during middle childhood and focus on other stages of development, families who faces problems, target fathers, and explore how excessive processing and management may be unproductive for parents.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the results of this study, it is evident that contradictions are an inevitable part of the parent-child relationship during middle childhood. Parents described experiencing five types of contradictions: ambiguity, intrapersonal opposing ideas and/or behaviours, ambivalence, parent-child conflict, and expectancy violations. The source and context of parents' contradictions were described by parents as the specific parent-child interaction that led to the contradiction. Processing and management represented parents' interpretations, reactions, and coping strategies associated with experiencing contradictions. Parents described three different types of outcomes: outcomes not evident, incomplete outcomes, and complete outcomes. Five categories of emotions were evident in parents' narratives: *anxiety*, *stress*, *surprise*, *anger*, and *sadness*. Dialectics assumes that individuals are constantly changing (Holden & Ritchie, 1988) because contradictions create opportunities for meaning-making (Sameroff, 1975) and this perspective is useful for understanding the little understood, but common aspect of contradictions while parenting during middle childhood.

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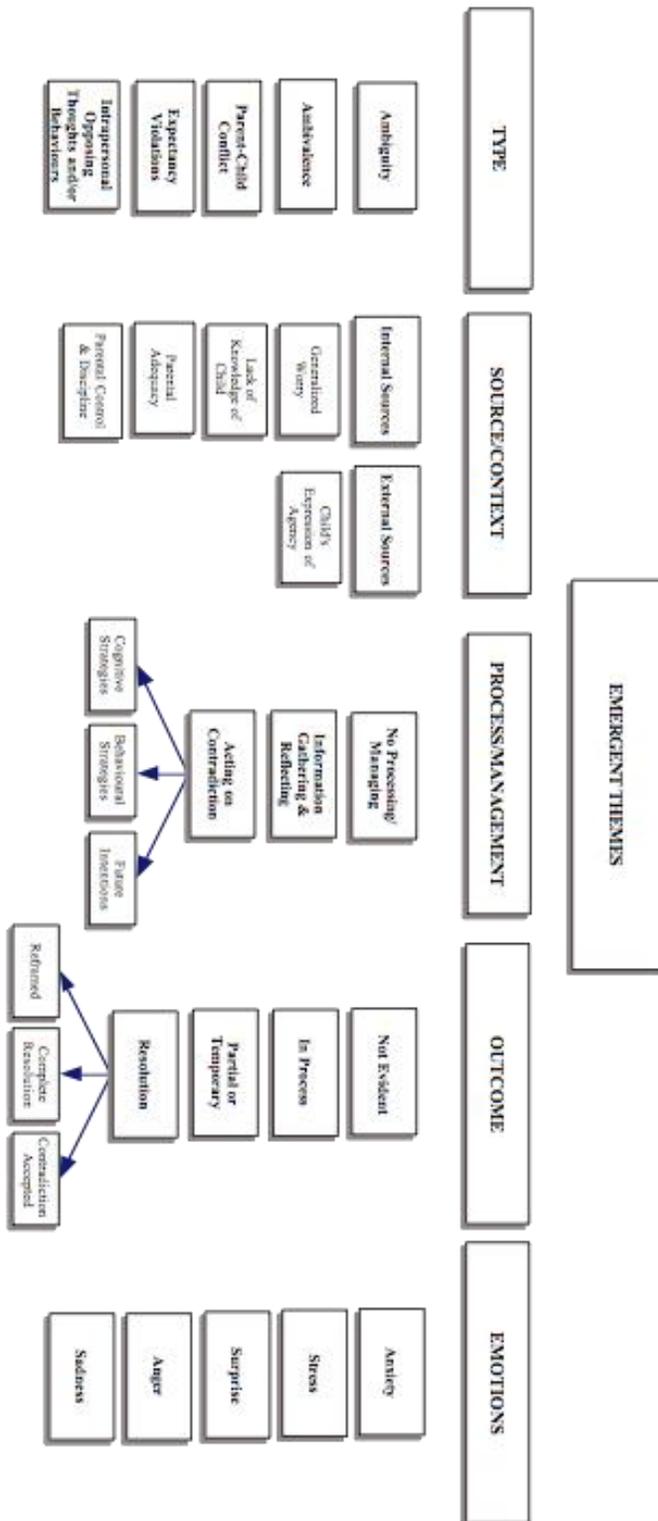
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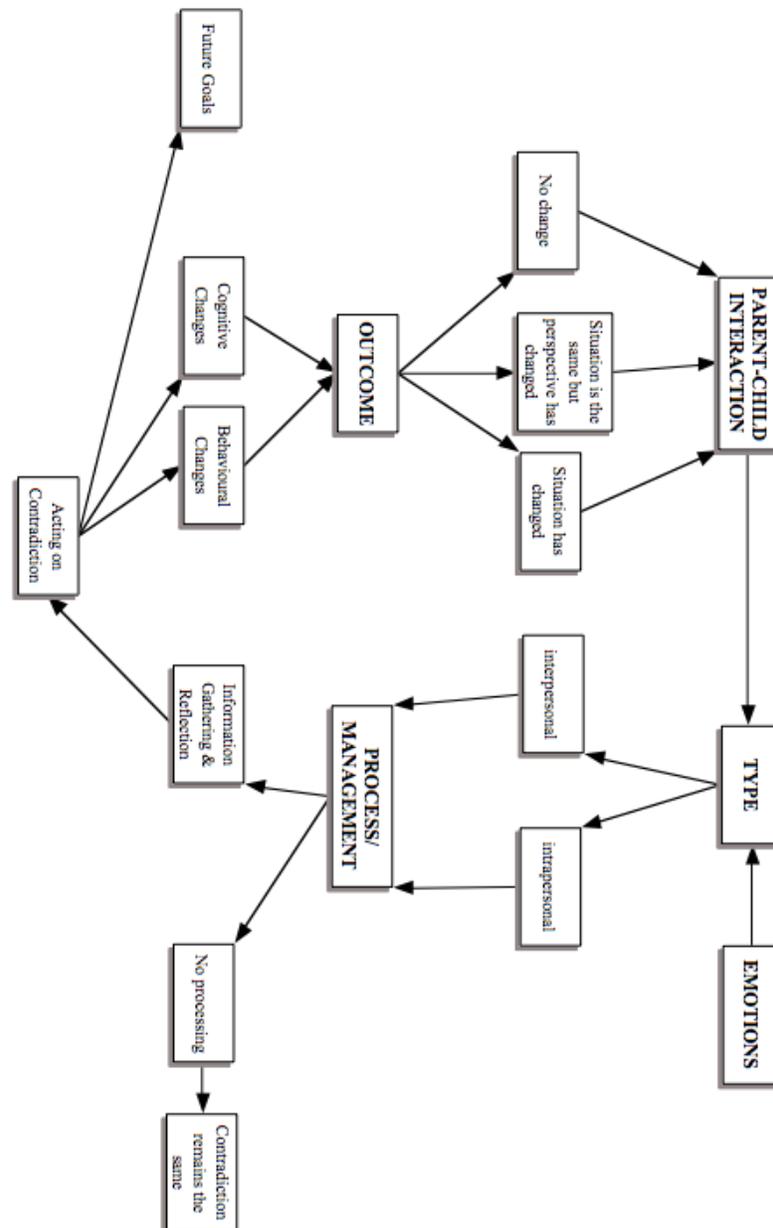
Appendix A

Themes in Parents' Narratives of their Experiences of Contradictions



## Appendix B

Conceptual Framework: Contradictions as an Instigator of Parental Change in the Context of the Parent-Child Relationship



## Appendix C

	<b>RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD</b> Certification of Ethical Acceptability of Research Involving Human Participants
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**APPROVAL PERIOD:** April 6, 2006 to June 30, 2009

**REB NUMBER:** 06FE028

**TYPE OF REVIEW:** Delegated Type 1

**RESPONSIBLE FACULTY:** LEON KUCZYNSKI

**DEPARTMENT:** Family Relations & Applied Nutrition

**SPONSOR:** SSHRC STANDARD RESEARCH GRANT

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** Socialization in Middle Childhood and Adolescence

The members of the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board have examined the protocol which describes the participation of the human subjects in the above-named research project and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement.

The REB requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and approved by the REB. The REB must approve any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please complete the Change Request Form. If there is a change in your source of funding, or a previously unfunded project receives funding, you must report this as a change to the protocol.

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Responsible Faculty, the safety of the participants, and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and approvals of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored by, at a minimum, a final report and, if the approval period is longer than one year, annual reports. Continued approval is contingent on timely submission of reports.

**Membership of the Research Ethics Board:** F. Caldwell, *Student Health Services*; J. Dickey, *HHNS*, M. Dwyer, *Legal Representative*; M. Fairburn, *Ethics and External*, B. Ferguson, *Economics*, C. Harvey-Smith, *N.D. and External*; J. Minogue, *EHS*; L. Trick, *Psychology*; P. Salmon, *SETS*; J. Tindale, *FRAN*, T. Turner, *Sociology & Anthropology*.

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

per

Chair, Research Ethics Board

## Appendix D



COLLEGE OF SOCIAL AND APPLIED HUMAN SCIENCES  
Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition

**Consent to Participate in Research (Parents)****Title of Project: Socialization in Middle Childhood**

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by **Dr. Leon Kuczynski** from the Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition. This research is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. If you have questions or concerns about the research please feel free to contact Leon Kuczynski at **824-4120, ext. 52421** or project coordinator Amy Oliphant at **824-4120, ext. 53861**.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of some common occurrences in family life. Specifically we are interested in positive family interactions as well as the routine challenges of being a parent.

**Procedures**

If you volunteer to participate in this study we would ask you to do the following things. We would first ask you to participate in an initial interview and training session (60-90 minutes). The main part of the study is to complete a self-administered interview daily, for 5 consecutive days (10-15 minutes per day). Finally, there would be an interview as well as a questionnaire to complete (30-45 minutes) after the one week tracking period is over. Interviews will ask about some common occurrences in family life, including conflict and challenges, as well as pleasurable family times. The questionnaire will ask about your child's behaviour.

Although there are no direct benefits to being involved with the study, in our past research parents have reported enjoying the opportunity to reflect on the joys and challenges involved in being a parent. In addition, this research will contribute in depth knowledge to the parenting research literature about parents' experiences. Your family will receive a small compensation of \$50.00 in gift certificates (Chapters, Zehr's, Galaxy Cinemas) in appreciation of your participation in the study. In addition, each of the children in your family will receive a small prize.

For parents and children, the interview involves speaking into a digital voice recorder. The recordings and transcripts will remain strictly confidential, except as required by law, and will be kept only until the results of the study are published. All identifying information will be kept in a locked cabinet. The only people who will have access to the recordings and transcripts are the researchers directly related to this project.

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in the study you can refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without consequences of

any kind. You may exercise the option of removing your data from the study. Published forms of the research will in no way identify individuals, but your responses may be used as verbatim quotation in the publication, if you consent.

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

Research Ethics Coordinator  
EXT.  
University of Guelph  
437 University Centre  
Guelph ON, N1G 2W1

Telephone: (519) 824-4120,  
56606  
E-mail: [sauld@uoguelph.ca](mailto:sauld@uoguelph.ca)

I have read the above information and had all my questions answered. I agree to participate in the socialization in middle childhood study according to the stated procedures. I have been given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Witness**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I would like to receive a summary of the findings of this study. Please send these findings to:

Mailing

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E



COLLEGE OF SOCIAL AND APPLIED HUMAN SCIENCES  
Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition

**Consent to Participate in Research (Parents)****Title of Project: Socialization in Middle Childhood**

Your child is being asked to participate in a research study conducted by **Dr. Leon Kuczynski** from the Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition. This research is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. If you have questions or concerns about the research please feel free to contact Leon Kuczynski at **824-4120, ext. 52421** or project coordinator Amy Oliphant at **824-4120, ext. 53861**

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of some common occurrences in family life. Specifically we are interested in positive family interactions as well as the routine challenges of being a child.

**Procedures**

If you allow your child to participate in this study we would ask him/her to do the following things. We would first ask him/her to participate in an initial interview and training session (60-90 minutes). Second, the main part of the study is to track events in the family by completing a self administered interview daily for 5 consecutive days (5 minutes per day). Interviews will ask about some common occurrences in family life including conflict and challenges, as well as pleasurable family times.

Although there are no direct benefits to being involved with the study, children sometimes enjoy having the opportunity to reflect on their experiences in the family. In addition, this research will contribute to science more in depth knowledge about how children get along with their parents.

The self administered interview will involve speaking into a digital voice recorder. Voice recordings will be transcribed at a later time. The recordings and transcripts will remain strictly confidential, except as required by law, and will be kept only until the results of the study are published. All identifying information will be kept in a locked cabinet. The only people who will have access to the recordings and transcripts are the researchers directly related to this project.

You can choose whether your child will be involved in the study or not. If you allow her/him to be in the study he/she can refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without consequences of any kind. You may exercise the option of removing your child's data from the study. Published forms of the research will in no way identify individuals, but your child's responses may be used as verbatim quotation in the publication, if you consent.

You may withdraw your consent at any time and your child can discontinue participation without penalty. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of

Guelph Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

Research Ethics Coordinator  
EXT. University of Guelph  
437 University Centre  
Guelph, ON N1G 2W1

Telephone: (519) 824-4120,  
56606  
E-mail: [sauld@uoguelph.ca](mailto:sauld@uoguelph.ca)

I have read and understand the above information and agree to participate in the socialization in middle childhood study according to the stated procedures. I have been given a copy of this form

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Witness**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix F



COLLEGE OF SOCIAL AND APPLIED HUMAN SCIENCES  
Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition

**Consent to Participate in Research (Children)**

Principal Investigator: Dr. Leon Kuczynski 824-4120 ext. 52421

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of what goes on between parents and children at various ages. I will be asked about the fun stuff I do with my parents as well as the times we disagree with each other. My participation in this study involves three components:

1. I will be asked to attend a short interview and training session to learn how to use my digital recorder and how to answer questions.
2. I will be asked to report daily for 5 days about things that sometimes happen between children and grown-ups. I will record answers into a digital recorder.
3. I will be asked to attend a final interview to talk about participating in the study and to complete a questionnaire.

I have been told **I can choose whether or not I want to participate in the study**. If I choose to take part, I know that I can decide not to answer any questions that I might not want to. Also, I can stop answering questions if I don't want to take part in the study any more. I have been told that no one else besides the researchers will know what my answers were, except if the researchers were very worried that I was going to seriously hurt myself or someone else. This means that my mother and father will not hear my answers. I have been told that the researcher will be glad to answer any questions that I may wish to ask about the study.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read the above statement and had all my questions answered. I agree to participate in this study according to the stated procedures.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix G

### End Interview for Parent

In this interview, we would like you to reflect on the last week that you were tracking your interactions with your child. As we stated in our initial interview with you, we think of parenting and parent-child relationships as more complex than is generally recognized. This interview is to get a more in depth look at some of the particular struggles of being parents to a child of this age.

First, could you tell us about your experience of being in this study this week?

Is there anything that surprised you or was unexpected?

How difficult was this to do?

Now I would like to review each of the areas that we were tracking. For each area we are interested in:

- your current concerns and struggles
- whether both parents have the same perception of what is going on
- whether you detect changes in your interactions in this area from a period when your child was younger. (Ask regarding 3 year developmental period prior to current age group as defined in this study (i.e. preschool period, young childhood (grades 1,2) middle elementary (grades 4-5)).

#### 1) Rules and expectations.

- a) What are your current struggles in this area?
- b) Are your views the same or different? (*mother versus father*)
- c) Think back to the previous developmental period. Have you noticed any changes regarding your rules and expectations or your child's reactions to them?

Probe for out of sight behaviour, behaviour away from home, at school with peers.

- a) What are your current struggles in this area?
- b) Are your views the same or different? (*mother versus father*)
- c) Think back to the previous developmental period. Have you noticed any changes regarding Child's behavior out of home

#### 2) Resistance to requests.

- a) What are your current struggles in this area?
- b) Are your views the same or different? (*mother versus father*)
- c) Think back to the previous developmental period. Have you noticed any changes regarding Child's resistance to your requests or your reactions to them?

#### 3) Disagreements

- a) What are your current struggles in this area?
- b) Are your views the same or different? (*mother versus father*)
- c) Think back to the previous developmental period. Have you noticed any changes regarding Child's resistance to your requests or your reactions to them?

**4) Experiences of closeness, enjoyment.**

- a) What are your current struggles in this area?
- b) Are your views the same or different? (*mother versus father*)
- c) Think back to the previous developmental period. Have you noticed any changes regarding Child's resistance to your requests or your reactions to them?

**5) General Concerns about parenting. What you think or worry about.**

- a) What are your current struggles in this area?
- b) Are your views the same or different? (*mother versus father*)
- c) Think back to the previous developmental period. Have you noticed any changes regarding what you find yourself thinking about or worrying about.

Thank you so much for your participation in this study. Do you have any other thoughts that you would like to share or questions you would like answered?