

AFTER THE BREAKUP: ADULT PERCEPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS OF
POST-DIVORCE INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

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(ABSTRACT)

The purpose of this study was to examine the complex process adults traverse in their passage through divorce and in their establishment of post-divorce intimate relationships. The goal of this work was to describe how adults interpret their divorce experience, particularly in terms of how it connects with their ideas about intimacy and post-divorce intimate relationships.

Four theoretical frameworks guided this study. Social constructionism provided a framework for understanding that reaction to a divorce may be impacted by language, in terms of the explanations an individual makes, by social interchange with others, and by the cultural meanings of marriage and divorce that have influenced a person's thinking and perceptions. Attribution theory contributed a systematic approach to understanding how people may construe their divorce in ways that may damage trust, promote a sense of mastery and optimism regarding future relationships, or encourage creative change. Attachment theory provided a conceptual basis for examining the interplay between stability and change in adult conceptualizations of intimate relationships, processes that underlie how adults cope with changing interpersonal situations. Finally, theories of loss and renewal offered a conceptual basis for understanding how reactions to loss evolve over time, and enter post-divorce relationships.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 21 divorced men and women. Analysis of data was guided by the research questions and structured by a phenomenological approach to the analysis of themes and variations of themes found in the interviews. Peer review and triangulation of data were used to ensure trustworthiness in the findings.

This study contributes new understandings about the connection between divorce experiences and post-divorce intimacy. Three conclusions can be drawn from this study. First, data analysis revealed divorce served consistently as a catalyst for interpretation and personal growth. An important component of this interpretive endeavor was the social context within which divorce occurred. Because divorce still carries some stigma in our society, divorce provided a challenge to create positive meanings from this experience.

Second, the idiosyncratic understandings developed through the interpretive process shaped adults' post-divorce perceptions and experiences in intimate relationships. From the attributions made regarding causes of divorce, these adults claim to have made deliberate changes in communication patterns, interactions, attitudes, and expectations from self and partner in intimate relationships.

Third, during this process, some fundamental shifts in mental representations occurred. Changes were linked to gender, with women viewing themselves as more assertive in relationships, and men viewing themselves as more egalitarian and responsible for relationship maintenance.

DEDICATION

To my mother,
Vivienne Spitzer Podolsky,
whose joy in life,
extraordinary creativity,
and love for our family
is a source of sustenance,
always.

To my husband, Meir,
and children, Yoni and Ariel,
whose lively personalities
and razor sharp minds
have provided challenges and delights
every moment we are together.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Overview and Purpose of the Study

In the past three decades, divorcing couples have increasingly entered the national social consciousness. By the sheer magnitude of their numbers they have gained attention both in the popular consciousness and in formal research agendas (see Bumpass, Sweet, & Martin, 1991; Glick, 1989; Martin & Bumpass, 1989). A primary concern of researchers has been the impact of divorce on children's functioning (e.g., Amato, 1993; Arditti, 1999; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). More recently, studies have appeared that examine adults' adjustment to the divorce process (Arditti & Prouty 1999; Gray & Shields, 1992; Guttman, 1993; Kitson, 1992; Madden-Derdich & Arditti, 1999;). With a few notable exceptions, however (see Furstenberg & Spanier, 1987; Fine & Kurdek, 1994; Weiss, 1975), the literature has not examined the process that adults traverse when reestablishing adult intimate relationships, after the divorce.

This study examines divorced adults' perceptions, expectations, and beliefs about intimate relationships following a divorce. It focuses on the meanings adults attach to their divorce, and on how they believe the divorce has affected not only their current feelings and views about relationships, but also their experiences in intimate relationships. The study is concerned with the interpretive process through which people create understandings about their divorce and perhaps redefine what they seek in their closest relationships. As Riessman (1990) stated, "Through interpretation, we not only render events meaningful but also empower ourselves to go on, despite loss and change" (p. ix).

Many studies that examine adults' adjustment to divorce utilize a stress and coping framework, emphasizing the distressing aspects of the situation. These studies specify the events and life changes that are stressful in divorce, such as lowered income, loss of friends, moving (Wang & Amato, 2000), legal issues, and parenting challenges (Kitson, 1992). These studies also discuss the resources that help people cope with the stress of divorce, such as education, employment, supportive friends, positive perceptions of their situation, new intimate relationships (Wang & Amato, 2000), and psychological detachment from the former spouse (Kitson, 1992).

Madden-Derdich and Arditti (1999) offered an alternative point of view by suggesting that positive co-parenting experiences after a divorce may result in continuing psychological attachment. When a co-parenting relationship survives after a marriage ends, supportive interactions may encourage continued attachment as parenting partners, rather than spouses. Thus, psychological attachment may be beneficial or detrimental to the parent, depending on the post-divorce circumstances and the meaning the attachment has to an individual. For instance, continued attachment that consists of maintaining a fantasy of reunion with an ex-spouse might impede a person's ability to re-establish new relationships, but an attachment to a parenting partner might support the custodial parent's parenting role, thus reducing stress and promoting the parent's continued growth and development.

Of particular interest are findings that emphasize the importance of individual perceptions and of forming new intimate relationships in facilitating divorce adjustment (see Ross, 1995; Wang & Amato, 2000). From this perspective, the establishment of a new relationship is an event or a "coping strategy" following divorce. However, what remains to be explored is that process itself – how individuals move from the experience of marital dissolution into subsequent relationships. Furthermore, conceptualizing the formation of new relationships as a process, rather than simply a coping strategy, opens up the possibility that divorce creates

new options for thinking about and creating relationships. Thus, in contrast to stress and coping frameworks, an alternative perspective conceptualizes divorce as an emotional and cognitive process that has the potential to promote individual growth and self-renewal.

The research that extends analysis past the initial stress reactions to divorce, into post-divorce intimate relationships, has focused predominantly on remarriage, stepfamilies, and the stability of new family relationships. Emphasis has been placed on determining the structural factors that facilitate second marriage -particularly stepfamily- stability (Ihinger-Tallman & Pasley, 1997; Lewis & Spanier, 1979; Spanier & Thompson, 1984), and the interactional processes within stepfamilies that enable family members to form a viable family system (Ganong & Coleman, 1994; Ihinger-Tallman & Pasley, 1997; Pasley & Ihinger-Tallman, 1994). Within this literature, scant attention has been paid to how divorced individuals conceptualize intimate relationships or remarriage, or to the meanings these new relationships have for them.

There are some notable exceptions to the general literature, which include studies that have found that divorced people may perceive marriage less romantically and more pragmatically than people in their first marriages (Furstenberg & Spanier, 1987). Furstenberg and Spanier's study described one of many potential changes that can occur in people's perceptions of marriage or of intimate relationships, after a divorce. Exploring perceptions of relationships is not an abstract undertaking. The way people think and feel about relationships may help to shape decisions regarding the characteristics they will seek (or help to create) in their next intimate relationship. The tendency for divorced individuals to have a pragmatic rather than a romantic basis for these decisions may in part contribute to very different types of relationships. Additionally, perceptions and feelings may influence the decision of whether to realign in a new relationship, remarry, or remain single. If post-divorce intimate relationships have unique qualities, researchers and practitioners can benefit from a clearer understanding of the processes that promote those changes.

Some studies indicated that marital satisfaction is related to the degree the relationship conforms to a person's internal standard of what a relationship should be (see Fine & Kurdek, 1994). However, investigators have not described what those varying standards or definitions of relationships may be, and how divorce may help to shape those internal standards. Little is known regarding *how* terminated intimate experiences in adulthood connect with subsequent relationships. In a notable exception, Bakermans-Kranenburg and van IJzendoorn (1997), writing within an attachment framework, attempted to verify how relationship dissolution may affect adults' attachment representations. Their results indicate that some changes occur, but their results are tentative and somewhat inconclusive, as I will detail in the following literature review.

Robert Weiss (1975) also described some of the possible ramifications of divorce on post-divorce relationships, emphasizing that people choose diverse adaptations to this life change. Having lost an important attachment through divorce, adults may choose alternative or non-traditional relationships—they may prefer dating or cohabitation as forms of companionship that do not include the obligations of marriage. Weiss's research suggests ending a marriage may create the liberating effect of encouraging flexibility and innovation in the forms of relationship that are chosen. Weiss does seem to presume that happiness is connected to committed relationships and that singlehood is not an optimal choice. Missing in Weiss's work is a theoretical framework that would help explain why some people reinvest in close relationships, and others choose not to become reinvolved.

Thus, many kinds of growth and development are possible following a divorce. In terms of forming new attachments, it may even be that many people make better partner choices in a post-divorce relationship. For example, having learned what does not work for them in a former relationship, people may also be better equipped to know how to manage a relationship so that it will be satisfying to them (Weiss, 1975). The idea that divorcing individuals often work to transform family structure and to create stronger and more positive relationships is an intriguing albeit understudied perspective that informs the study (see Arditti, 1999b; Stewart, Copeland, Chester, Malley, 1997).

Attribution theory provides a framework that helps to understand post-divorce responses to intimate relationships. In attribution theory research, a framework is posited to explain how people may construe their divorce in ways that either damage trust or promote a sense of mastery and optimism regarding future relationships. Differing attribution patterns regarding the causes of marital failure are connected to people's decisions on whether to engage in new, intimate relationships. Thus, from within this theory an optimistic or pessimistic response to new relationships is linked to attributions and is not the result of chance, as it appears to be in Weiss's work.

Despite the recent literature that has begun to discuss post-divorce relationships, there is still much to learn about the processes that occur when adults consider or become involved in potentially intimate relationships. There is a dearth of literature regarding this transition period when adults may reappraise relationships and reevaluate themselves and their potential new partner. More in-depth work is needed that elicits the voices of divorced people describing how their experiences in their marriages and divorces have shaped their thinking about post-divorce relationships. The study herein is intended to help fill this need.

Research Questions

Two research questions identified the phenomenon to be studied and provided a framework to guide data collection:

- 1) How do adults describe the connection between their divorce and their current or anticipated relationship experiences?
- 2) What are the continuities and discontinuities with regard to thoughts, expectations, wishes, and feelings between pre-divorce and post-divorce intimate relationships?

This study explores the implications of the dissolution of marriage for subsequent intimate relationships. By contributing a thematic description of the cognitions and emotions of adults in regards to post-divorce intimate relationships, this study enriches the conceptual repertoire of family studies by adding a link between divorce and remarriage studies to the literature.

This study also has implications for therapeutic intervention, as it can contribute more specific understandings about how adults interpret their divorce in terms of post-divorce relationships. Following a divorce, many divorced adults encounter problems in redefining themselves and their close relationships that catalyze a decision to seek counseling. An improved understanding of the complex process of divorced persons building intimate relationships will aid therapists in formulating more accurate and constructive interventions.

There are educational implications for this study as well. Because it addresses the issue of how divorced adults rebuild significant relationships, this study can offer new information both to researchers of divorce and to individuals about their personal situations. Finally, because this study will include discussion of the strengths of individuals, and the potential for growth and renewal for men and women following a divorce, it offers a more hopeful research perspective

than many previous studies. It can also offer a new viewpoint to the lay public, thus potentially reducing the stigma attached to divorce.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Current Research

In the extant literature of divorce, many researchers have inquired into the impact of divorce on adult functioning. These writers have employed a variety of frameworks to explain post-divorce change in adults' sense of well being. (e.g., Madden-Derdich & Arditti, 1999, Gray & Shields, 1992). Adjustment outcomes such as reduction in stress and increase in perceived control of the life situation (Thiriot & Buckner, 1991), positive self-esteem, life-satisfaction, and physical health (Bursik, 1991), and more recently, the level of preoccupation with the former spouse (Madden-Derdich & Arditti, 1999, Masheter, 1997; Wang & Amato, 2000) are typically focused on.

Research describes the contributions of close relationships to divorce adjustment and to well being (Wang & Amato, 2000). Close relationships have been found to provide a reliable alliance, sense of companionship, comfort, reassurance of worth, and opportunity for nurturance (Weiss, 1973). A positive ongoing relationship is viewed as an attachment providing a safe base and a secure haven in the world (Johnson, 1996). Given the apparently central role close relationships can have on post-divorce well being, researchers have recommended that the effects of meaningful love relationships on the divorced adult be studied more in depth (Thiriot & Buckner, 1991). Because research consistently indicates that close relationships help people make positive post-divorce adjustments, an examination of how the divorce experience connects with these relationships may also enhance our understanding of post-divorce adjustment processes. The literature in this section was chosen for its theoretical contributions to the topic of the processes involved in post-divorce intimate relationships.

Theoretical Frameworks

Key concepts derived from several theories can be applied to elucidate the meaning of divorce in adults' thinking and experience of post-divorce intimate relationships. An integrative approach, based on theoretical and empirical studies, is utilized as a framework for the proposed study. In particular, the following areas of concern inform the proposed study: the interpretive process, stability and change, loss and renewal, and intimacy processes.

Interpretation and Meaning

Constructionism, considered as an epistemology, underlies the interpretivist frameworks of this proposed study. The constructionist epistemology was succinctly described by Michael Crotty (1998):

There is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed. In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. (p. 8)

Crotty continued his discussion by distinguishing between *constructivism*, which is subjectivist and concerned with the "meaning making activity of the individual mind," and *constructionism*, which is concerned with "intersubjectively shared, social constructions of meaning and knowledge" (p. 58). Both foci are pertinent to this proposed study – while the emphasis is on the interpretations and meanings that people bring to their divorce experience, personal meanings and social context are viewed as being interrelated.

Social constructionism, an interpretivist approach that includes social context, provides a helpful perspective for this dissertation. Often cited as the basis for many of the assumptions of

qualitative research (for example the definition of qualitative research in Bogdan and Biklen, 1998), social constructionism emphasizes the centrality of people creating knowledge and meaning through language interaction. K. Gergen (1985) emphasized that people construct meaning in a social and historical context: “The terms in which the world is understood are social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges between people” (p. 267). Furthermore, these understandings may change over time.

Thus, social constructionism provides a framework for understanding that meaning is relative to an individual’s language, and to social and historical context. This is particularly relevant to the proposed project, where I am focusing on the possible shifts of meaning regarding marriage, divorce, and intimate relationships. Social constructionism provides a basis for understanding that reaction to a divorce may be impacted by language, in terms of the explanations an individual makes, by social interchange with others, and by the cultural meanings of marriage and divorce that have influenced a person’s thinking and perceptions.

Within the individual interpretivist tradition, attribution theory is useful in examining how people understand their divorce, and how they connect their divorce to their current relationships. Attribution theory is concerned with how people explain the causes of life events. As stated by Benson, Arditto, Reguero de Atilas, & Smith (1992), “Attributions are the causal explanations or constructed perceptions for why an event occurred” (p. 451). Research shows that differing attribution patterns affect how people understand their own life situations. Specifically, the attributions that people develop regarding causes for relationship failure have been shown to influence their feelings and attitudes towards new or potential future relationships (see Grych & Fincham, 1992). As stated by Benson, et al. (1992):

With respect to intimate relationships, the experiences in previous relationships provide an important contribution to the causal schemata about close relationships. More specifically, attribution theory asserts that the positive or negative nature of an event, or valence, interacts with attributions to influence further cognitions, affect, and behavior. (p. 452)

According to these authors, the specific type of attribution employed promotes distinct understandings about relationships. For instance, in the dissolution phase of a relationship, positive qualities of the relationship may be seen as situational and fleeting, whereas negative qualities may be seen as dispositional or stable and enduring. This is viewed as an attribution strategy that increases negative thoughts and feelings about the relationship, thereby promoting the dissolution process.

The influence of attributions on perception of divorce and future romantic relationships was specifically discussed by Grych and Fincham (1992). They extended the discussion of attributions to the function and consequences of attributions during a divorce: “Explanations of the causes of events can lead to a *sense of control* over the events and can also serve to protect or enhance *one’s image*” (p. 159, authors’ emphasis). With a greater sense of control over events, people may feel they can make changes in their behavior or in a relationship, and thus have more optimism regarding a future relationship. With an enhanced self-image, they may be optimistic that a new partner will find them lovable (or, that they would feel fine without an intimate relationship.) These positive results are linked to *the degree* (author’s emphasis) in which an individual places responsibility for the marital problems on self, the partner, or the marital interaction.

Thus, in addition to individual attributions and situational or social attributions, the authors added another focus for attributions, and that is the marital interaction itself. It is the

distribution of attributions that will affect one's sense of control and self-image in current and future relationships. It should also be noted that there is also a distinction between attributions of responsibility and attributions of blame. For instance, an individual can take responsibility for contributing to a marital break-up, while thinking this was the only reasonable course of action. By making active decisions based on a reasoned assessment of their situation, people can achieve a sense of control, or mastery, of the changing marital situation.

Grych and Fincham (1992) provided a typology that represents the relation between attributions and sense of control and self-image. They note that these are categories that artificially divide explanations that exist on a continuum, but still capture the full range of possibilities. Additionally, it should be noted that these categories are based on the *degree of blame* attributed to self, partner, or marriage. Therefore, earlier distinctions between cause, responsibility, and blame, are not included in these categories. Nevertheless, the categories illuminate some of the reactions seen in people who are trying to understand their divorce situation.

The four attributional patterns include: 1) *Low Control, Low Self-Image*, 2) *Low Control, High Self-Image*, 3) *High Control Low Self-Image*, 4) *High Control, High Self-Image* (Grych & Fincham, 1992). Low control, low self image is an attribution pattern that blames the self for an unchangeable character trait; 2) Low control high self-image is an attribution pattern that places the blame on the spouse; 3) An attribution pattern that promotes a feeling of high control and low self image blames a changeable quality of the self, such as immaturity, for the marital dissolution.; 4) An attribution that promotes a sense of high control and high self-image places the responsibility for the marital dissolution on characteristics that are specific to the marital interaction. An assumption of attribution theory is that the greater the belief in the possibility of being able to solve the problem and master the situation, the greater the optimism will be towards future intimate relationships.

In a statistical analysis of the relationship between attribution of responsibility and post divorce adaptation, Newman and Langer (1981) found that interactive attributions such as lack of communication, changing lifestyles or values, lack of closeness, and money problems, were associated with better adaptation. Subjects who attributed divorce failure to interactive problems maintained a better self-image than subjects who blamed the divorce on the personal characteristics of their spouses. These findings, being relational, cannot determine whether interactive explanations lead to better post divorce adjustment, or whether better adjusted people make interactive explanations. Nevertheless, I think that in terms of application, these findings can be helpful to practitioners who work with divorcing clients. It seems likely that attributions that are less self-blaming or person-blaming, can promote a more objective assessment of the relationship, and a more optimistic sense that in the future one can create an improved relationship.

Thus, researchers utilizing attribution theory found that the explanations people use to understand divorce, emphasizing either internal or external characteristics, and changeable or immutable circumstances, connect to their feelings and expectations of both themselves and their partners in future relationships. Because of the detailed explication this theory provides, it offers a useful framework for the proposed research topic, which explores the connection of divorce to feelings and expectations regarding subsequent intimate relationships.

In sum, divorce serves as context and catalyst for the interpretive process. Divorce, in itself an event laden with social meanings, is a disruptive life event that motivates people to interpret and understand their experience (Riessman, 1990). Social constructionism encourages a

focus on how socially received meanings may influence our interpretations, and attribution theory provides a tool to examine the diverse ways in which individuals process their experiences.

Stability, Change, and Intimacy Processes

While emphasis on the interpretive process provides insight regarding how people make sense of their experience, examining the interplay between stability and change in adult conceptualizations of intimate relationships is important because these processes underlie how adults cope with a changing interpersonal situation (Feeney, 1999; Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994). Specifically, the hypothesis from attachment theory that individuals develop *mental representations* of self and other in intimate relationships that persist through time, along with the concept that these representations may change due to specific relationship events, raises many intriguing possibilities for exploration.

The concept of mental representations enriches our understanding of how adults maintain a stable relational style while evolving in their understanding and functioning in close relationships. In terms of stability, there is nothing startling about the idea that people develop patterns in their relationship styles – radical, daily changes would not be expected in most relationship functioning. The contribution of attachment theory is in explicating the mechanisms of this stability. Attachment theorists have long emphasized that it is from our earliest interactions with caretakers that we learn what to expect in close relationships. From repeated interactions with a primary caretaker, adults are believed to form mental representations or *working models* of relationships (van IJzendoorn, 1995). These mental representations include assumptions about how the self and other, (or the relationship partner,) will behave in a relationship. Because attachment research indicates that early relationship patterns tend to persist over time, these mental representations also account for the consistency and stability of behavior in relationships (Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994).

Although consistency and stability are important components for daily functioning, the capacity to grow and change is also of theoretical significance. Mental representations are flexible structures, amenable to change as a result of new relationship experiences. Of particular relevance to the proposed study, relationship breakups are among those experiences frequently cited in the attachment literature as having the potential to cause fundamental changes in mental representations (e.g., Bakermans-Kranenburg & van IJzendoorn, 1997; Feeney, 1999, Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994). Specifically, in a four-year prospective study, Kirkpatrick and Hazan (1994) found that relationship breakups were systematically associated with change from secure to insecure attachment.

Thus, the disruption of intimate relationships may affect individual *attachment categories*, with their attendant perceptions of self and other in intimate relationships. However, beyond categorization current attachment research does little to elaborate on the processual and qualitative aspects of these shifts. Researchers have not addressed the question of how change may occur following a disruption such as relationship dissolution, nor have they described the varieties of change that may occur. Open for future investigation are questions concerning the implications of relationship dissolution for individuals' feelings, opinions, and desire for future intimate relationships.

This study undertakes to address these questions that are left unasked or unresolved by previous research. Although the usefulness of using preconceived measures such as attachment categories to measure adjustment is limited in this study, the theory provides a conceptual basis

for looking at relationship dissolution and its effects on adults' thinking and feelings about themselves and their partners in current and potential intimate relationships.

In addition to processes associated with change and stability, this study will investigate those intimacy processes that may be affected by divorce. Processes that are involved in intimate relationships include commitment and interdependency (Arditti & Kaufmann, 2000), as well as confidence in the relationship, companionship, and nurturance (Weiss, 1974). While it is beyond the scope of this study to comprehensively explicate all aspects of intimacy, it is worth noting various processual elements that emerge in the divorce literature. For instance, Riessman (1990) found that intimacy in marriages is characterized by expressive talk about feelings, and daily conversations about work and mundane activities. Riessman also found that reciprocal nurturance and a partner's intuitive understanding of their feelings are components of intimacy for women, whereas emotional support, undivided attention, and physical expressions of closeness characterize men's descriptions of intimacy. These processes serve as sensitizing concepts for examining which aspects of a previous marriage people may want to maintain and which they may want to change, in their post-divorce intimate relationships.

Loss and Renewal

Researchers who utilize theories of loss and renewal focus their work on the process of recovering from the loss of a primary relationship. For instance, Gray & Shields (1992) have applied Bowlby's (1961) theory of mourning to divorce situations. They describe the three phases of mourning as being "(1) the urge to recover the lost object, (2) disorganization, and (3) reorganization" (p. 44). Each phase is associated with a defined group of feelings and cognitions. They state, "if one is to move to the reorganization phase behaviors and thoughts common to the first and second phase need to be eliminated" (p.51). Thus, included in this perspective is the idea that the stage of mourning the lost relationship may affect a person's feelings about self and other. If, for instance, a divorced person is preoccupied with wishes for reconciliation, clearly that person cannot simultaneously be investing energy in building alternative relationships. A salient contribution of mourning theory is that ideas and feelings change by traversing a mourning process, over a period of time.

It is not my intent, however, to focus on a mechanical delineation of the stages of mourning, which would be a rather reductionist approach to a multi-faceted process. Rather, the focus will be on how people retrospectively interpret the loss and change incurred in a divorce, and how they integrate this experience into new understandings and expectations regarding future relationships. This alternative approach incorporates the components of a time related process that is found in theories of mourning, without a strict adherence to stage theory.

In her qualitative study *Divorce Talk*, Riessman (1990) used a similar approach: "I began to see divorce as an interpretive process, not a series of stages. I became intrigued with the imaginative enterprise itself – how individuals, through talk, construct meaning out of loss" (p. 227). Stewart, et al. (1997) extended this idea of constructing meaning out of loss to include the possibility of growth and renewal: "Thus, considering parental separation a process helps refocus our attention on divorce as providing opportunity to change negative or destructive features of their lives and to replace them with more positive, growth-promoting ones" (p. 241).

An additional assumption of traditional mourning theories is that one must relinquish an attachment to the lost love object in order to reinvest in new relationships. However, more recent conceptualizations include the idea that people do not relinquish an attachment to a lost loved one (which implies an emotional erasure of the other person); rather, an internal relationship with the lost loved one may continue, albeit in a transformed form. (see Baker, 2001, for a discussion

of this process). The lost relationship may continue to have meaning, and to influence responses to new and future relationships. Similarly, manifestations of mourning may not connect to negative outcomes. For example, Madden-Derdich and Arditti (1999) found some divorced people with positive adjustment were found to be experiencing preoccupation in regards to their former spouse. Thus, it is the reinterpretation of former relationships, rather than loss itself, which becomes paramount in how divorced people experience themselves and a partner in a close relationship.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study is a qualitative investigation. The research questions were designed to elicit the participants' understandings regarding their experiences and feelings during their marriages, divorces, and subsequent intimate relationships. According to Merriam (1998), "Qualitative research focuses on process, meaning, and understanding" (p. 6). Because this study inquires precisely into the meanings individuals attach to their divorces, the processes they undergo when rebuilding close relationships, and the understandings they have about the relationship between their divorce and their current experience, the qualitative approach is well suited to this endeavor.

Research has shown that divorce means many things to many people. For example, people may respond to divorce in terms of stress and crisis (Kitson, 1992; Wang & Amato, 2000), or in terms of coping, growth, and renewal (see: Arditti, 1999b; Stewart et. al., 1997; Weiss, 1975). The divorce experience is connected to diverse outcomes in terms of well-being, which may in part depend on the perceptions of what caused the divorce (Grych & Fincham, 1992). Also of interest is that the meaning of divorce often differs for men and for women (Riessman, 1990). A qualitative study on divorce contributes to the literature by its emphasis on the interpretive process of people constructing meanings from their experiences (Riessman, 1990).

Although quantitative studies have contributed to our understanding of the relationships between various antecedents and post-divorce outcomes, qualitatively informed research is being applied increasingly to divorce as researchers acknowledge the importance of subjective experience. For example, in a study that examined divorce effects on adults and children, Stewart, et al. (1997) integrated quantitative data from questionnaires and qualitative data from interviews into a conceptual framework that emphasized the transforming aspects of divorce for adults and children.

Riessman (1990) began examining adult divorce adaptation through quantitative methods, and switched to a qualitative examination because it enabled a "more intensive study of the ways women and men talked and made sense of their experiences" (p.x). Her methodology consisted of a qualitative analysis of participants' interviews, supplemented by a quantitative analysis of symptoms of psychological distress. Emphasizing interpretation and theoretical integration, her qualitative methodology includes an integration of "three theoretical traditions – personal meanings, social context, and gender relations in the family" (p. 15).

Most recently, Arditti & Prouty (1999) used qualitative methodology to explore relationships between divorced fathers and their young adult children. By using social constructionism and theories of loss and renewal, they aimed "to challenge conventional beliefs about the desirability of divorce, attributes attached to 'children of divorce,' and definitions of successful father-child relationships" (p. 62). Through qualitative methodology they were able to reexamine culturally sanctioned definitions of the divorce experience. This study, guided by the aforementioned literature and methodological approach, explored the diverse ways in which people interpreted their divorce in relation to their thinking and experiences in post-divorce intimate relationships.

Phenomenology

A phenomenologically informed research design was utilized for this qualitative study. This framework meshes well with inquiries of a psychological nature, which focus on the

meanings individuals construe from a phenomenon. As Creswell (1998) stated: “The phenomenological study . . . focuses on a concept or phenomenon . . . and this form of study seeks to understand the meaning of experiences of individuals about this phenomenon” (p. 38). Thus, for this research on how men and women understand the meaning of divorce on their current intimate relationships, phenomenological methodology is well suited.

Phenomenological methodology is also consistent with the theoretical framework of this study, particularly constructionism, because it provides a methodology to investigate the meanings individuals create from their experiences, through language. It is constructionist in its notion of the essential relationship between conscious subjects and their objects. Indeed, in phenomenology, “Consciousness is always consciousness *of* something. An object is always an object *for* someone. The object, in other words cannot be described adequately apart from the subject” (Crotty, 1998, p. 79).

Phenomenology can also inform a critical stance towards socially received constructs, by requiring researchers to *bracket* culturally received notions in order to avoid imposing presuppositions or personal biases on the participants’ descriptions of their experiences. Thus, the participants’ descriptions of their divorce and subsequent relationship experiences may stand in contrast to cultural expectations and definitions. “Lying behind this attempt to put our culturally derived meanings in abeyance . . . is a deeply rooted suspicion of culture and the understandings it imposes on us” (Crotty, 1998, p. 81). In this spirit, Nelson (1990) applied the critical/phenomenological stance to feminist research. She intentionally *bracketed* patriarchal structures and discourse in order to describe women’s experience as lived and communicated by women. In the study herein, bracketing is consciously used as a tool to separate my preconceived notions of marriage and divorce from the participants’ understandings of their experience.

Problematic within the phenomenological approach is the emphasis on finding *essences* or an essential structure within the participants’ experience. The phenomenological researcher uses variations of themes in order to glean the essential structure of an experience. This is their interpretive leap, in which there is often unrecognized researcher bias. (As an example of such a leap, see Nelson’s 1990 description of a study in which Daly, 1978, researches Chinese foot-binding, African clitoridectomy, European witch burning, and American gynecology in order to find an essence of female oppression and genocide.) Given this possibility, the study uses a modification of this technique by describing common themes that are found throughout the participants’ interviews, as well individual variations and exceptions to these themes. Viewing description as a form of interpretation, these themes illustrate participants’ interpretations of their experiences, as I reinterpret their interpretations in order to discover commonalities and differences among their experiences.

Collecting the Data

Seidman (1998) stated, “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meanings they make of that experience” (p. 6). For this study, semi-structured in-depth interviews lasting 60-90 minutes were the primary tool for data collection (see Appendix A for the interview guide). This interview guide was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Virginia Tech (see Appendix C for the IRB research protocol). The semi-structured interview provides a good qualitative framework, because it poses set questions and issues to be explored, but provides flexibility in the order and wording of questions (Merriam, 1998). The long interview is a powerful research tool that takes us into the mental world and the life world of an individual (McCracken, 1988). Additionally, a

long interview provides the opportunity of inquiring in depth about the pertinent issues and obtaining rich description from the participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

The interview began with some preliminary remarks to create a relaxed and trusting atmosphere, followed by a standardized opening statement introducing the purpose of the study, the guarantee of confidentiality, and the right for an interviewee to withdraw at any time. The participants were then asked to read and sign an informed consent form (see Appendix D for the consent form used in this study). They kept one copy of the consent form, and I retained the other for my records. I also requested that participants choose a pseudonym to be used throughout the dissertation and any subsequent publication or presentation of this material to protect their identity. The purpose of these opening comments was to provide a uniform beginning to the interview and to again convey the general purpose and intent of the interview.

During the interview, I asked the same open-ended questions of each participant, but follow-up questions varied according to the flow of each interview, in order to investigate thoroughly the areas emphasized by each participant. Participants' follow-up responses were expected to provide rich information and open up new avenues of inquiry in future interviews. I also provided participants an interview guide before the actual interview. This gave them an opportunity to reflect on the issues and enhanced their comfort level and their responses.

A supplementary technique for data collection was observation. I observed the affect, body language, and comfort level of the participants. I noted when they appeared to be open, enthusiastic, hesitant, guarded, or when they had difficulty answering a question. According to Rossman & Rallis (1998), observation is an important supplementary technique for research that is based on interviews. It can guide the interviewer in the process, helping to inform which questions may need further exploration, when it might be helpful to encourage the participant or when to abandon a line of questioning. As a therapist, this attunement is integral to my approach in discussing sensitive issues

The use of self is an important element in this study. As a practicing psychotherapist, I am accustomed to monitoring my own reactions, values, and biases while working with my clients. I took the same stance into my research, where I also monitored my reactions to their narratives. This stance lends itself to the bracketing procedure of phenomenological research, which requires setting aside our preconceived ideas about the phenomenon.

Arditti (1999) emphasized that a researcher's background, experiences, and opinions about divorce may shape methodology and results. Personal experience, opinions, and emotions are particularly salient when a researcher contends with sensitive topics involving loss (see Kitson et al., 1996). Kitson and her co-authors advocated striving for objectivity by "clarifying and classifying the values underlying a study" (p.183). In order to clarify the effects of my own experiences and values on the proposed study, I wrote descriptive field notes with observer comments as I collected data through interviews. The observer comments comprised subjective reactions during the interviews. These comments helped to discern how I might have influenced the direction of the interviews, and contributed to bracketing during subsequent interviews. During data analysis, I also wrote memos regarding my developing ideas. These procedures are founded in the work of qualitative researchers (e.g., Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Gilgun, 1992; Merriam, 1998). Monitoring my subjectivity provided one method of promoting objectivity in data collection and interpretation.

The self as instrument can also contribute meaning to the study. McCracken (1988) recommended that researchers use their own experiences to connect with and understand those of the participants. This parallels the concept of empathy, in which one's own background is used

to facilitate understanding another person's experiences. Using one's own experience to enhance understanding also corresponds with the feminist concept of *reflexivity* (Allen and Walker, 1992) in which personal experience, reflection, and a critical examination of the research process constitute integral parts of a qualitative study. My personal background, which includes living and working internationally, will also provide a flexible point of view for interviewing and interpreting the interview data.

Sampling

The number of participants required in a qualitative study “depends on the questions being asked, the data being gathered, the analysis in progress, the resources you have to support the study” (Merriam, 1998, p. 64). Samples for qualitative studies are often small in order to allow an in-depth, detailed examination of a specific issue (Patton, 1990). In phenomenological research, specifically, Polkinghorne (1989) cited studies having from 325 participants to just 3 participants. This supports Merriam's contention that there is no defined sample size in qualitative research. The standard is that the sample must provide enough information to answer the research questions. Lincoln and Guba (1985) introduced the idea of sampling until *saturation* is reached. Sampling is terminated when additional interviews provide no new information regarding the research questions. Thus, an initial decision on sample size is tentative, and may change as the project develops. Betreux (1981) found that 15 participants was the minimum required to find substantive relationships between cases or participants. In this study 21 participants were interviewed.

Sampling procedures included *purposive* and *snowball* techniques. Purposive or purposeful sampling was based on selecting a sample from which the most could be learned about the research question (Patton, 1990). Snowball sampling is a technique connected to purposive sampling – the researcher asks participants to recommend other individuals who may provide rich information regarding the research questions.

Description of Participants and Selection Process

The general criteria for participants included a sample of men and women who had been divorced at least one year, and who had not yet remarried. This time period was chosen in an attempt to eliminate individuals who were in the initial reaction or adjustment phase of divorce, or whose remarriage may have been the salient factor in what close relationships mean to them. The length of time elapsed since divorce was not given an outer limit, because this proposed study is a retrospective interpretation of the divorce experience as it relates to current attitudes towards close relationships.

The criterion of selection, therefore, focused on finding participants who were interested in understanding the meaning of their divorce in relation to their current thinking and feelings about intimate relationships, and who were willing to participate in the interview process. This approach is supported by Polkinghorne (1989) who emphasized the importance in phenomenology of choosing participants who can provide rich descriptions of the experience being examined, and who have the capacity to provide full and sensitive descriptions of that experience.

I chose to interview both men and women, because of the possibility that there might be gender specific differences in responses to divorce. Additionally, Glaser and Strauss (1967) reasoned that a qualitative study would be more conceptually dense and potentially more useful when based on widely varying instances of the phenomenon being studied. Methodologically, a variety of descriptions regarding the experience being researched is considered necessary to explore the nature of the experience (Nelson, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1989). Therefore, I located a

diverse range of participants in terms of age, gender, and socio-economic status. A demographic table of participants is included in Appendix B.

In order to locate participants for this study, several methods were used. I located some individuals through my professional contacts in the New River Valley. I also had permission to solicit participants through the Children of Divorce Class given through the Mental Health Association of the New River Valley. Announcements were created that incorporated the suggestions of Dillman (1978) in terms of how to elicit interest and volunteers for a research study. Announcements were posted in libraries, bookstores, list-serves of the university, health food stores, counseling services, physicians' offices, beauty shops, Laundromats, and supermarkets in the local area. I also spoke to the Roanoke chapter of Parents Without Partners in order to find additional participants. A \$25.00 gift certificate was offered as an incentive for participation in the interviews. For purposes of convenience, a local sample was used in this study.

A pre-interview telephone conversation was used to determine if the volunteer fit the criteria for this study. Additionally, it helped introduce the study, and gave the participant an opportunity to begin thinking about the research questions. It also was a time to arrange a mutually convenient place and time for the interviews. Following this conversation, I mailed each volunteer a copy of the interview guide (without the specific follow-up probe questions). This was done to encourage reflection about the questions prior to the interview. Interviews took place in participants' homes, coffee shops, the Roanoke public library, and my office.

Preparing to Conduct the Study

I piloted this study, using a preliminary interview guide with five men and women. According to Seidman (1991),

The pilot can alert them [interviewing researchers] to elements of their own interview techniques that support the objectives of the study and to those that detract from those objectives. After completing the pilot, researchers can step back, reflect on their experience...and revise their research approach based on what they have learned from their pilot experience. (p. 30)

Because I obtained data from the interviews, I began to interpret the results, and gained experience formulating codes and categories. Initial categories were based on the areas covered by the interview questions. Categories included explanations for relationship failure, wishes and hopes regarding intimate relationships, worries regarding intimate relationships, expectations of self and partner in a relationship, losses due to the divorce, gains or growth due to the divorce. Responses regarding wishes, worries, and expectations were also divided into what has remained stable, and what has changed.

This early preliminary set of categories is important for focusing the research and stimulating interpretive ideas (Merriam, 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1994). This process results in what Miles and Huberman (1994) termed a *start list* of codes. "That list comes from the conceptual framework, list of research questions, hypotheses, problem areas, and/or key variables that the researcher brings to the study" (p. 58). In this case, the pilot study made important contributions to the start list.

Although this was a pilot with a small sample, some themes or patterns were found. For instance, a theme that emerged from all the interviews was "bad communication" as a contributor to marital dissolution. Many researchers consider "communication" to be a rubric for the entire relationship. For instance, Riessman (1990) stated, "Like women, some men blame divorce on 'lack of communication' – a phrase that is commonly used to explain a flawed

relationship” (p. 36). Nevertheless, participants’ emphasis on the communication aspect of their relationship heightened my awareness of it as a central term in their narratives, and enabled me to explore this term as a window into the meanings it has for its participants. Another pattern that emerged in this process was the growth process involved in divorcing. Four of the five participants felt they had grown personally in this process, with all three women talking about feeling stronger and more self-sufficient, and one man talking about increased awareness of what he needs from a relationship, and what he needs to do differently, in his next relationship.

In this small sample, a tentative pattern of gender differences was found in the definitions of intimacy, with women expressing a wish for greater equality as being important for an intimate relationship. The issue of equality did not appear as a concern for the men in this study. Also, regarding communication problems, men used more interactional attributions, and women more self-blame and partner-blame attributions. These emerging patterns heightened my interest in understanding gender differences in reactions to divorce, and to more carefully consider the work of Bernard (1972) and Riessman (1990), who emphasized gender as an important lens through which individuals interpret the divorce experience.

Because a qualitative study involves a continually evolving understanding of the research question, this pilot study increased insights into the phenomenon that is being studied. However, I am also aware of the importance in a phenomenological study of bracketing my preconceptions and beliefs, in order to be receptive to the participants’ description of their experiences. So, I was also aware of the possibility that these early findings might influence my expectations of what I am looking for, and thus potentially create a bias in my observations. I was careful to note these expectations, and to be open to new findings that did not coincide with previous findings.

Organizing and Analyzing the Data

The analysis was guided by the study’s conceptual framework (interpretive constructionist epistemology as applied in theories of attribution, attachment, and loss and renewal), the research questions, a phenomenological method of data analysis, and my own evolving understanding and recoding of the data.

I view the analysis of data as a process that is ongoing with the collection of data. As Merriam states, “The right way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it *simultaneously* with data collection . . . The final product is shaped by the data that are collected and the analysis that accompanies this entire process” (p. 162). My first review of the interviews was listening to them repeatedly. Then the interviews were transcribed and read three times. The initial review of the transcripts increased my familiarity with the material, aided in determining which topics need to be pursued further, which interview questions were generating information pertinent to the research questions, and what changes needed to be made for a more effective interview protocol. Most important, reviewing the transcripts soon after the interview helped generate “a set of tentative categories or themes – answers to [the] research questions from which to work” (p. 162).

For reviewing the transcripts and delineating themes, Wertz (1993) provided guidelines for rigorous analysis. He delineated seven operations to apply for organizing and analyzing data, and these operations organized my approach to the data. These operations include: 1) Reading (or listening to) the data openly; 2) Noting changes in meaning and specifying constituent units of meaning 3) Eliminating irrelevant repetition; 4) Discarding descriptions not relevant to the phenomenon; 5) Naming the theme of each constituent meaning; 6) Placing descriptive material pertaining to the same theme together; 7) Ordering material in manner that best expresses the situation as lived, including contradictions and ambiguities.

Reviewing the transcripts several times provided a thorough knowledge of the data. After the third reading, an initial coding scheme was formulated, using each interview question as a preliminary code. From the responses to these questions, I decided on a series of content areas to be examined. These content areas were based on the areas of inquiry in this dissertation, including “intimacy”, marriage”, “divorce”, and “current relationships”. Within these content areas, codes were formulated for themes derived from interviews. These themes exemplified the participants’ views and experiences in these areas, and excerpts from the interviews were chosen to illustrate those themes. Themes were chosen on the basis of participants’ predominant concerns and variations of those themes within the interviews were also detailed. Exceptions and ambiguities in the themes were also presented. Additional elements guiding the formulation of these themes were the research questions and theoretical framework of this dissertation (see Appendix E for the coding schema).

To understand the above procedures, it is helpful to understand the reasoning behind them. Phenomenological analysis generally involves procedures of description, reduction, and interpretation (Nelson 1990). Reduction is the process of moving from an interview, to a transcribed text, to an interpretation. A different relation to the material occurs at each stage, with some detail lost, and an increasingly sharper focus on the meaning(s) of the experience. Riessman (1993) considered this to be integral to the interpretive process, because at each stage choices are made regarding what aspects of the described experience are attended to and which are represented.

Description is the process of representing the informants’ experiences, in their own words. Thematization occurs at this time, also, as the researcher makes conscious choices of which experiences to represent in the report. Nelson (1990) reported looking for eight to ten thematic topics for each respondent. Some thematic topics entailed subtopics that allowed subtle nuances of meanings to emerge. She also cross-checked the themes with other respondents. This served as a model for my method of analysis.

Interpretation follows thematization, “to discover meanings which are not immediately apparent in the description and reduction” (Nelson, 1990, p. 237). I agree with Riessman (1993) that the entire process described above is an interpretive one. The contribution of phenomenology is in offering a systematic process for formulating a sound interpretation.

In the spirit of phenomenological research, the method used in this dissertation included finding common themes across interviews, variations on those themes to bring depth and complexity to the work, and indicating unique or unusual themes within a particular interview. Furthermore, the dissertation moved beyond description to interpretation by linking the findings to theoretical and empirical research.

Quality Assurance

The Institutional Review Board approved this study. A request for approval, synopsis of the protocol for the study, and informed consent form are included in Appendix C.

As an alternative to the quantitative criterion of internal validity, Lincoln and Guba (1985) coined the term *trustworthiness* to be the standard by which to judge qualitative research. Merriam (1998) listed several methods for ensuring trustworthiness. A primary technique for the proposed study was *peer examination*, defined by Merriam as “asking colleagues to comment on the findings as they emerge.” Several procedures were used for peer examination. Primarily, I will be consulting with my research advisor throughout the process of designing the study and analyzing the results. Additionally, the account of findings must seem coherent and credible to a

committee of five professors who are reading it. This involves reaching a consensus of opinion that the research is plausible.

To contribute to trustworthiness, I kept an organized file of field notes and observations to supplement the interview texts. For instance, my observations included descriptions of the setting, of the participants' comfort level, my feelings at the time of the interview, as well as preliminary thinking about emerging themes and unique qualities of the interviews. The field notes were part of a *reflexive journal* detailing my responses, thoughts, concerns, and interactions, after each interview. The purpose of this was to monitor my personal reactions, problems encountered, and to describe methodological decisions made during the course of the research. Lincoln and Guba emphasize the importance of the journal for data about the *human instrument* and *methodological decisions* (p. 327). The journal helped to locate possible researcher bias or blind spots and also to evaluate how decisions are made during the research process. This process helped shape future interviews, and it also contributed to an *audit trail* which documented the process involved in collecting and interpreting data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to describe participants' interpretations of their divorce experiences and their current intimate relationships. This chapter will introduce the participants and present a thematic analysis of their previous marriages, divorces, and post-divorce intimate relationships. Also included in these results are the participants' reflections on how their cultural and familial backgrounds have shaped their current views and responses to their experiences. These results are based on interviews with 9 men and 12 women, age 21-63, who live in the New River Valley, Roanoke County, and Floyd County. All participants had been divorced and were currently unmarried; however, many were involved in monogamous relationships of varying durations (demographic table available in Appendix B). In the spirit of phenomenology, which endeavors to define through multiple perspectives the primary characteristics of a phenomenon, I chose from the volunteers a group of individuals with a diversity of backgrounds and experiences to illuminate the topic of post-divorce relationships.

In order to provide a background for this study, participants discussed their views of intimacy and marital relationships. Their responses provided a context for the continuing discussion of how their thinking had developed over time, and how their divorce entered into their current views.

Intimacy and Marriage

The men and women in this study valued intimate relationships. They sought and thrived in relationships that they perceived to be honest, respectful, mutual, and open. Having experienced an estrangement and divorce from a partner, they responded by affirming the centrality in their lives of strong, confirming relationships. Rather than looking for a specific structure, such as marriage, or viewing the partner as a vehicle for emotional and physical security, they emphasize the value of the emotional quality of a relationship. This resonates with Weiss's (1975) assertion that, while often taking non-traditional forms, post-divorce intimate relationships provide essential companionship and emotional sustenance. With their varied backgrounds and experiences, these participants illuminate from their multiple perspectives the phenomenon of intimacy.

The participants in this study viewed intimacy as a multifaceted phenomenon. From the interviews, several themes emerged. They described intimacy as being based on honesty, trust, and an equal relationship, sustained by shared interests and mutual enjoyment, and fortified by commitment and a respectful tolerance of differences.

Honesty and Trust

Trust nourishes relationships and is viewed as being connected to positive experiences within the relationship. Merlin, a 51-year old landscaper, described trust as promoting mutual growth in a relationship. Although he had been married and divorced three times, he thrived on being involved in intimate relationships and viewed them as a vehicle of personal satisfaction and growth. The issue of mutual continued growth within a relationship was essential for him.

Probably the most important thing for me about an intimate relationship is one that has a level of trust that is sufficient for both people to feel like they can be completely open with each other in communication. That would be the essence of it . . . The level of trust would allow for thoroughly open communication and might also allow for each partner spurring the other partner into kind of an open ended perpetual growth. I don't think that anything can remain in stasis and be healthy. . So for me intimacy would imply a

relationship that would encourage health which means growing. I mean, personal growth for each partner and each partner can challenge the other. I think that's absolutely necessary.

For this participant, trust enables the partners to support individual growth within the relationship. The components of honesty and trust in a relationship are often viewed as being intertwined. For instance, Gloria, a 44-year old administrator, connected the two qualities.

Intimacy is based on the ability to trust what's being expressed to me as honest. And I think that, that's really what it is. Commitment to that in terms of how it plays out in a relationship. For example, it could be I might be involved with someone who is not wanting to be exclusive in that relationship but if they're telling me about it and I agree to that, then that's all right and the conflict's over. That would not be my preference but it would depend on the person and the individual that I was involved with. I guess that's it really, the trust.

The commingling of honesty and trust creates a relationship that feels safe and that fosters intimacy. This was described by Phoebe, a 54-year old teacher.

I think that if you're intimate with someone, you feel real comfort with them, you feel safe to be who you are. I mean you feel totally able to be yourself and know that you won't be judged by who you are, but you'll be appreciated for who you are as an individual. And someone I think, you couldn't be intimate I don't think with somebody that wasn't just a best friend . . . I think that you have to have a real sense of trustworthiness in an individual that you're in an intimate relationship with. And there has to be complete honesty and respect.

This sense of safety enables people to achieve a more genuine connection than they have in their daily social interactions. Carla, a 35-year old designer, described the relief and the richness of a satisfying intimate relationship.

In thinking about this, I thought, well I have an intimate relationship so to speak with my best friend. Obviously it's not physical. But I think the common things that I have in my relationship with my boyfriend and in my relationship with my best friend are that I can be exactly who I am without any kind of social façade that we all kind of put up around other people. I can show bad parts of myself in both lives, ugly thoughts I might have about situations without fearing rejection. And then obviously what I have with my boyfriend along with that would be the physical . . . and *we share* a spiritually intimate relationship which is something I have never had with anybody with whom I've had a relationship with.

Curly, a 47-year old graduate student, was also currently involved in a committed relationship. He talked about how honesty builds intimacy, through meaningful communication. I like a very honest and open communication. I don't know, I enjoy the situation where myself and the person in the relationship are able to discuss their feelings and circumstances that are ongoing as well the ability to discuss things about the relationship. And also I find it desirable if not necessary that the person is able to discuss things that are of a real I guess we would say intimate nature. Or just sort of inner feelings about what they're thinking and about life and things that people don't normally discuss with casual acquaintances. And to me that's very important to sort of get inside the other person's head and be able to allow that person to get inside.

Many participants talked about the need for honest, expressive communication. For Curly, this communication involves the expression of ideas and feelings as well as the sharing of

life events. For Barry, a 36-year old academic, and Gayle, a 46-year old nurse, honest communication promotes clarity between partners.

There should be, I think open communication. (pause) Open, honest communication. I don't think everything each person thinks needs to be communicated. But certainly there should be enough communication to where the people understand each other, there's not lots of surprises.

Gayle extended Barry's discussion to describe the beneficial results of clear communication. She believed that clear communication strengthens commitment.

I think an intimate relationship involves commitment and communication – there's a commitment on both parties' part to the relationship and their communication skills are good. And in addition to that there's a friendship and a mutual attraction and a reason two people want to be together . . . I think the couple needs to communicate about what their expectations and level of commitment is to the relationship and that it's probably only going to go forward successfully if they're both committed to the same thing to a fairly equal degree . . . Just clear communication where both parties feel free to talk to each other about whatever comes up, if both are good listeners and that they check things out with each other and support each other, don't operate on a lot of assumptions.

Clearly, no one element of intimacy exists in isolation. For Gayle, communication was connected to building commitment. She also associated this to the development of a friendship.

Friendship and Equality

These participants talked about the importance of friendship, rather than of passion, or romantic love, as the heart of an intimate relationship. The importance of an equal friendship within an intimate relationship appears frequently in these interviews. Although expressed more frequently by the women, several men also articulated the importance to them of having an equal relationship. For instance Robert, who is 52 years old and has been married twice, described what he values within an intimate relationship.

Well, a number of things. I guess one would be a high level of comfort with the other individual who I would be able to trust and a willingness to share with the other person basically anything about oneself. This is ideal now (quiet laugh). And a consideration of the other person as equal to oneself. A respect for the other person. I guess that's, those are probably the most important things in my mind.

This wish for an equal relationship was found in interviews with younger participants, also. Rachel, a 22-year old secretary and student, described intimacy as based on an equal friendship.

I would say that an intimate relationship is one that is mutual. It's not me before you or you before me, it's equality, it's you put the other before yourself and they put you before them . . . I'd say that a good intimate relationship has to start as a friendship and that it would have *stayed* that way but there was a deeper connection that both of you knew and so that's what made it more than just being friends.

Molly, a 27-year old student and mother of two children, also described the importance of friendship for an intimate relationship. She described trust as the basis of building commitment and friendship.

I think at first it should start out as a really good friendship, really close, one that you develop where you don't feel that need to hide anything, or you feel like you could tell him something and not feel like you're hurting them because that is your opinion. People

are different, so they're going to have different opinions, they're not always going to be the same. I think the biggest thing is I want to be their friend so that if the relationship doesn't work, I still have a good friend out of it.

For Molly, an intimate friendship includes accommodating individual differences. Her interview also provided a segue into the importance of accommodating differences within a relationship.

Respecting Differences

Some participants emphasized the importance of respecting one another's autonomy within a relationship. These men and women emphasized the importance of maintaining individual goals, activities, and finances, even in their most intimate relationships. Also emphasized was the idea that relationships should allow both partners to grow as individuals.

Jean, a 51-year old business woman, discussed the importance of incorporating differences in a mutually respectful intimate relationship.

Well, I think it's important that the people respect each other. That they respect each other. It is important to respect each other's values. I don't think that it's important to agree on everything as long as you can live with the disagreements. Like politics and so forth and even sometimes religious differences and those kinds of things as long as you can agree to disagree and it doesn't disrupt your relationship.

Gloria, a 44-year old administrator, was less worried about having disagreement disrupt a relationship. Although she did not favor focusing on differences, she viewed disagreement as an integral part of an intimate relationship.

A willingness to work on conflicts towards resolution and at times being willing to agree to disagree. Ability to agree, and the ability to overlook some things. I think that conflict's essential to continuing to develop as a couple because it's inevitable that conflict exists. It's just a normal part of life and so you just have to go through that kind of process to begin to understand yourself and another person, that those things are how we begin to know who we are and who that other individual is. I think that's where it comes from with me – it's just that need to, that's how a relationship develops and grows and over time becomes a very closely rich friendship.

Here, Gloria described contending with disagreement and conflict as a natural way of discovering who the other person is, and as a means of actually enriching the relationship. This view is corroborated by empirical research showing that conflict resolution is vital to healthy relationships. Notarius and Markham (1999), for instance, claimed that how couples coped with conflict is the single most important factor in a successful marriage, overshadowing personality, common interests or even love and commitment.

Merlin extended this discussion about conflict by connecting conflict, individuality, and personal growth within a relationship

It has to do with people who are committed to their own growth and to the growth of their marriage and who are willing, who expect the marriage by definition to involve difficulty, otherwise there's no intimacy. If you get close, there's going to be clash. Expect difficulties and when you can really stand back from them and not be so emotionally impacted directly, then have a perspective where you even welcome them. Because by definition, that's the opportunity for growth. And without difficulties you're not really growing, I don't think. So to me that's the definition of a successful marriage, where both people are willing to embrace growth as they embrace each other.

Gayle, who had been in a committed relationship for many years, illustrated how her relationship allows for space and incorporates the differing personalities and expectations of her and her partner, by describing the house they were building together.

And it's a fun process because we're kind of building our perks into the house and we're going to have two sinks for the kitchen for example, so we don't have to worry about each other's messes (laughs) . . . And we're building space, we each have, even though we have a bedroom that we share, we each will have our own space in terms of office and where we keep our personal things and retreat to when we want some alone time . . . (In my first marriage) I can remember that everything, it was like two becoming one and everything needed to be mingled more or less.

After dissolving a traditional marriage based on an idealized vision, "two becoming one", Gayle was involved in a post-divorce relationship that emphasizes the collaboration of two distinct personalities in the project of constructing an enduring relationship. It is interesting to note that most of the participants who viewed differences as natural and beneficial in relationships were older participants, above age 40 (Molly was the only younger participant who expressed this viewpoint). They were a group of people who had defined themselves as individuals, apart from a relationship, and who valued relationships that would include respect for their mature identities. As Merlin stated, the desire was for intimacy that included "space within the togetherness."

Shared Interests and Enjoyment

Although tolerating or even enjoying differences is described as an important element of intimacy, the participants (particularly the older interviewees) also emphasized the importance of sharing common interests, and having fun. Jean talked about the importance for her of enjoying shared activities.

I think it's important that there are some shared things that you enjoy doing together, like that you enjoy dancing together or that you enjoy going out to dinner with friends or you enjoy going to church or you enjoy taking walks together or traveling or going to the movies. I think it's important that you have some shared activities that you like to do together. And I think that as you get older that's even more important because such a big time consumer in your early life is children but see, I'm an empty-nester now and so are most of the men that I date, well a lot of them are empty-nesters and so there's more time, we have time to ourselves to do what we want to do except for when we're working. And so I think that doing one of, wanting to do things together makes a big difference.

Becky also described the importance of shared activities for building the friendship of an intimate relationship.

You need to have similarities. You need to have a lot of commonalities. Things that you share that are interesting to you because as the relationship goes along those are the things that stand out those are the things that last . . . I think you should be each other's best friend. No doubt about that. You should really enjoy being together. You should find the same things funny. Enjoy doing the same things together and just being each other's best friend.

These excerpts were typical of the participants' aspirations for relationships that were strengthened by enjoying a shared companionship. Riessman (1990) discusses this aspiration – the *companionate ideal* – as one based on an American ideology of equality in relationships and pandemic in contemporary relationships, whereas Schwartz (1995) believed that shared

companionship as a cornerstone of an equal partnership is a newer phenomenon that challenges traditional relationship paradigms.

Influences

Many of the participants felt their ideas about intimacy had been shaped by observing their parents' or their friends' relationships and marriages. Thick description was found in their statements about their friends' influence. Observing their friends helped them to formulate their own stance regarding close relationships. Lee, a 45-year old professional, described her negative feelings about her friends' attitudes.

I can see friends of mine who went through the *exact* same experience that I did - as I said we all went through divorce together. So I watched their relationships and how they pursued new relationships and I could see where they were making mistakes more so then I could see where I was making mistakes. And a few of them, most of them, stayed back in my town and their main focus in life has still been finding another man, whereas I've gone on, pursued a career and moved according to jobs and things like that. And it just makes me worry about them a little bit, it's influenced me in that I can see that their futures are a little more precarious because they are still so dependent on having that relationship and wanting to get married again and having that extra income and depending on men for their well-being. And I don't think I do that anymore.

In this situation, she contrasted herself to her friends who still view themselves in a dependent relationship to a man. She recoiled from this model of a relationship, and asserted her self-image of being strong and in control of her own life. She focused on herself instead of hoping to improve her life situation through a male companion.

In a contrasting account, Merlin described how he learns from his friends and their relationships. He is involved in an intentional community where people talk together about their personal lives.

So anyway, getting back to your question, I think peers have influenced me a lot and some of those peers, not all by any means but some of those peers have had some successful marriages. They're open enough about what their issues are rather than a lot of times outside of the community, unless you have close friends who share what their issues in a marriage are, you don't really have that opportunity. And in this case people are open enough that they share those issues, at least to a great degree, and so you witness people that are having difficulties and working through them and having a successful marriage but not without working on it. So I think a successful marriage requires a commitment to work on it. And I never hear that, that's not the Hollywood version of what a successful marriage, you know, you never have to work. You just fall in love and you're in love forever and that's it.

After having left several relationships, Merlin had demystified his views regarding intimacy and marriage. He had replaced the romantic "Hollywood" view of love is ephemeral, with another cultural value that marriage and relationships require work by both partners.

Some participants talked about how their views about intimacy are based on religious convictions. Ralph, a 43-year old school employee, talked about conforming to the Bible's pronouncements about intimacy. He believes the most profound intimacy occurs in marriage.

I try to take a biblical view of it, it's not what I think it's what the Bible says. And it's not that I have to conform it to fit what I want it's that I have to conform to what it says.

I: So is there anything that you can think of in the bible that pertains to you?

R: Um, well one thing, there's several things especially in a marriage relationship. The bible talks about a husband giving, husbands loving their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it, and I didn't do it. And a lot of them don't do it. If people really understand what that means, they might not be so quick to do some of the things that they do. And, I did not understand that concept for a number of years. When a person really gets a handle on that concept it changes the whole way they think. And that was probably one of the biggest influences the way I viewed it there.

In Ralph's discussion devotion, which is portrayed as a Christian version of commitment, is considered to be essential for an intimate relationship. In the continuation of this interview, he faulted himself for not having been devoted to his two previous marriages, thus carrying partial responsibility for the marital failures.

Marriage

In describing the importance of their marriages, some of the participants viewed marriage as embodying those characteristics they sought in an intimate relationship. For them, marriage was an extension of a courtship, and the expectations from the relationship did not change due to the institutionalization of the relationship. For instance, Susan described marriage as a vehicle to sustain intimacy.

I was married for two years. And at the time it was somebody exciting and somebody fun to share things with, and I'd love to travel and my husband when I met him at the time loved to travel. And, somebody to go out with, do fun things with, go to movies with, somebody...you know, the physical intimacy was important to me then so obviously it was somebody that was attracted to me and I was attracted to them. That was important at the time, but as we stayed married I was more interested in communication and that was the one thing that wasn't really there . . . It became less fun because it, we started to take each other for granted, and that's a big thing in marriages and any relationship when you're together for a long time. So I started not to value marriage after a while.

Susan, however, was the exception among these participants. Among the other men and women in this study, companionship and physical intimacy were viewed as partial components of a more complex relationship. They frequently interpreted the importance of marriage through the traditional notions of providing a sense of security, permanence, a family unit, and an accepted role within the social structure. Barry, for instance, described valuing both intimacy and security in his marriage.

Well, it meant a lot because I loved the person I was married to and I liked being with them, I liked the idea of spending our life together and building a family together, building our life together. I liked having someone around, the security of knowing there was always going to be somebody there for you, and I liked being able to provide that in return. It was the companionship, it was nice having someone that's intimate that you could share things with and you wouldn't share with other people, and even a spouse you can share things with that you wouldn't even with your own parents. I guess those were a lot of emotional things that I liked.

For Barry, there was a seamless fusion of his wishes for intimacy and a secure family unit. Despite an acrimonious divorce, he interpreted his marriage as having provided both these functions for him. The importance of building a family unit is repeatedly emphasized in these interviews, and this enterprise is often linked with loving feelings towards the spouse. Phoebe described her love of family and of her spouse.

I just felt safe, I still believe that children need both their mother and father and I felt like the unit was just something that was so sacred and so precious to me, and maybe that's why I didn't see all these things coming, because I just had tunnel vision. But I think that I loved loving someone, I mean it was very easy for me to, I remember once thinking about that just right before I found out that he was having an affair. I liked to do little things, I liked to surprise him in different ways and I just got a lot of enjoyment out of being loved, I think.

James, a 54-year old sales representative, talked further about this and connects the establishing of a family unit to the intention of maintaining a loving, permanent commitment to the spouse.

I guess the family environment was really an important thing and I miss that. When we were married, doing things as a family unit was important and having someone there to be committed to was also important, trying to build for them and for the future, which I don't think, even though you're in a serious relationship or a relationship, unless you're planning for the future, unless it's somebody you're really in love with, it's not going to be something that is permanent. So a sense of permanency.

In contrast to those marriages in which building a family unit was synonymous with emotional commitment to a spouse were the marriages in which the family unit was valued but the marital relationship was devoid of emotional significance. Lee described this situation.

At that time, I guess it was an easy out for me. I was thinking too of going into psychology and counseling and I just had this whole career planned for me. I never planned to get married, I was never a little girl who dreamed of being married and having children. When I became pregnant, the child just became my number one priority and it continued that way. So the marriage was never about me and what I wanted, it was about raising a child.

Lee sacrificed her personal goals and career to maintain a marriage that provided physical security for her child. However, because she was not heavily invested in her identity as a spouse, she left this relationship with no regrets. This is a pattern supported in the divorce literature (De Garmo and Kitson, 1996).

Becky, who felt her marriage was bad from the beginning, maintained it for 32 years also primarily to provide security for her children.

It meant that I was honoring my vows. I promised to love honor and obey (slight laughter) those things were all in there. And it wasn't a good marriage from the start . . . But within two years we had the first baby. And then within two years after that we had another one. And then when they were about ten or so – nine, ten, something like that I realized that I really had to look to my future in a different way and started looking to possibilities. I was pretty slow about it. I thought I would just wait until the kids were just a little bit older. And then I got pregnant. So then I stayed a little bit longer. Because I have three kids. I didn't have a complete education and I knew that I was going to have to go back to school and I did not want to have to leave my children the way my mother had to leave us to go to work and I didn't have any options – I had no where to take them. You know she took us to my grand mother's house and I couldn't do that with them. So I stood by them.

In these cases, the women interpreted their marriage as a vehicle to provide physical and financial security for their children. Motherhood, with its implied value of nurturing and protecting the children, was of such importance that these women subordinated their needs for

happiness and intimacy with a spouse in order to fulfill this ideal. Clearly, they expressed a gender related expectation, encouraged by traditional expectations that women are the primary caretakers of children.

In addition to motherhood, marriage provided other roles that bridged the social and the personal realms. Jean talked about what was important to her about being in a marriage.

Ok well it gave me the opportunity to be a mother. And that was very important to me. It gave me the opportunity to be part of a couple, which was also very important to me. I liked being part of a couple and having a man of my own. And having somebody think that I was their woman. I liked that. And so much of society is based around couples. And I like being part of a couple – that was important to me . . . It was nice to have someone to do things with. It was nice to have someone to go places with . . . It was nice to have a sexual partner, I've always been, I guess highly sexed, it's kind of hard to tell. It's kind of hard to compare yourself to other people, because you know, well, adults don't really talk about that kind of thing really. And it was good to have a regular sexual partner that I loved and that I felt comfortable with and I felt safe with, you know.

In this statement, Jean described the importance to her of fitting into socially sanctioned roles. Her satisfaction, however, extended beyond conforming to a preconceived family role, because these roles were imbued with personal meaning when they were associated with providing fun companionship and sexual intimacy in the marriage. In this segment, it is possible to see how a social role is energized by an intensely individual and idiosyncratic interpretation.

Conforming to social norms can also bolster personal satisfaction. For instance, rather than primarily seeking personal happiness, some participants described the satisfaction of being “on time” in terms of the expected chronology of life-events. Annie, a 30-year old teacher, described this process.

I think a lot of what it meant to me was feeling that I had done the right thing. It made me feel more respectable to be married and to have a child. It has been difficult sometimes not to have that. I think socially people think better of you if you're married. And to feel like I did the right thing. I got married very young, I was 20, and I felt very good about getting married. I felt I was on the right road, right away. And it wasn't that anybody ever said this is what is expected of you, at all. It was something that I wanted for myself, to feel respectable, and that was a really big part of it for me.

In this statement, Annie described her identification with the dominant social norm. Her self-esteem was filtered through the socially sanctioned action of getting married and becoming a mother. When she conformed to this norm, she felt validated and her self-image was fortified.

Gayle described a similar process of shoring up her self-esteem by marrying.

I was just, I'd finished my freshman year in college when I got involved with the person I ended up marrying and we lived together for two years, and at the time I just thought that's what I needed to do, you know, I needed to grow up, finish my school, go to college and get married and the fact that I had the opportunity to get married before I was finished with college didn't disrupt that plan in my mind too much. I also had been in a serious relationship in high school and in my freshman year of college both which didn't work out but both of which had been pretty crushing to me and I think at the time I felt like I'd had two chances and this was my third chance and I better take it.

Both Annie and Gayle describe the experience of feeling good about themselves because they conformed to the social norm of marrying in early adulthood. In addition to choosing an

intimate partner, their self-esteem was bolstered by choosing a culturally sanctioned path that which they seemed to have internalized to create positive feelings about themselves.

Divorce

Whereas marriage is an expected, supported personal development and social milestone, divorce challenges a cultural norm that values marriage as a permanent commitment (Riessman, 1990). Divorce also disrupts life courses, as individuals who assumed they were entering a permanent couple relationship find themselves in radically altered circumstances. Because divorce disrupts a personal situation in complex ways, divorced adults often feel a need to make sense of what has happened to them.

In the view of social constructionists, individuals create meanings about their lives by filtering personal experience through received social meanings and languaged interactions. Their cultural and personal backgrounds shape interpretations of their personal experiences. Because social constructionism forms part of the conceptual basis of this study, I inquired into what attitudes and messages about divorce these participants had been exposed to prior to their own divorces. I was interested in exploring how participants' cultural and family backgrounds had entered into their responses to the divorce experience.

Familial Influences

In the families of most of these participants, divorce was discussed in traditional, negative terms. Only in two instances were participants' families supportive of divorce as a solution to marital problems. Often, it was assumed that divorce was not a valid option for anyone. Families disapproved of divorce in general, and certainly did not want to see their children divorce. In one instance, a mother believed that divorce was always the wife's failure. Carla, who had been in a traditional marriage, described this situation.

The family attitude was, "Well, that's a failure." And we never really talked about it that much. And not that many people I know *are* divorced or have been divorced. And then as I got older, some friends had gotten married before I did, and maybe there was one breakup or so. And my attitude was "What was wrong with her? She couldn't keep her man happy." I mean, that was really mean, but I guess maybe my parents, I remember my mother saying something once upon a time about "You better watch out because some woman will come along and voodoo your husband." So it was always, you know, if your marriage breaks up, it's the woman's fault. Which I don't think is very fair, because that's not true . . . And I think it makes men look like idiots, that they can't, that they're so helpless and stupid that . . . they would not be responsible? But it's the woman's job to keep it going and keep it together . . . Well, and let me just follow this up with something else that just occurred to me. My mother, when she was going nuts, when I was still too weak to not realize that I could hang up the phone on her, would call me and start on these rants, and basically the reason I failed as a wife, was: a) because I didn't cook enough red meat for my husband and b) because I pulled up all the carpet in our house and had the floors refinished.

Participants had varying responses to their parents' disapproval of divorce, with many talking about how difficult it was for them to take actions that were not acceptable within their family systems. The negative experience of divorce was intensified by the feeling of failure to conform to family expectations. Bob, who had married to gain his family's approval and to please his fiancée, described this experience.

I'm the only person in my family ever to have gotten divorced. And even during this miserable time I was divorced, I was *not* going to get a divorce, because that is *not* what

people do in my family. You stick it out. And I had a lot of shame involved with it. Divorce is *no* fun. It is a horrible thing to go through . . . And if divorce would've been commonplace in my family, it might not have been such a huge power for me, it might not have been. But it wasn't commonplace and it made me feel even more like the black sheep.

Several participants' families conveyed that there was a social stigma associated with divorce. Gayle described a conversation she remembers having with her mother about a divorced mother in their neighborhood.

Nobody in my neighborhood was divorced and then finally this family, a mother and two children moved in across the street – the mother had moved back with her parents. And I remember that's the first I knew of divorce, that was like elementary school. My mother explained it to me, and I don't remember what she said only that it was a really bad thing. Divorce was a really bad thing and if your parents were divorced, people talked about you and didn't accept you. That came through in my mother's explanation. So in the back of my mind I always had that too, that it just wasn't something that you did.

Becky, whose mother had divorced and remarried, also talked about receiving a message about the stigma of divorce.

We were never allowed to speak about my natural father. That was a forbidden subject. So you know how bad it was (slight laugh). I mean we weren't to tell anybody or any of my friends. It always rankled me when some people would say you look like your father – my stepfather – because nobody was supposed to know he wasn't my father. And that just maddened me because I didn't look anything like him. And other people would say you don't look any thing like him. And then what was I supposed to say – “I look like the milkman?” That is what my mother told me to say. “Just say you look like the milkman.” Oh Gosh (laughter). I look like my father as a matter of fact. But I didn't really know that for many years . . . It was a secret. Because back in those days divorce wasn't a popular thing to do. It was a reason for being sort of blackballed from society. So there was a stigma attached to it that you felt all your life because it was swept under the carpet and denied.

By forbidding her children to talk about the divorce, and by using the metaphor that the children look like the milkman, the mother conveyed to her children that divorce carries a stigma and is a dirty family secret. Several of the participants felt that there is currently still a stigma about divorcing. Becky continued the above description by talking about how she felt shunned socially when she divorced her husband of 32 years.

When I divorced my husband, I finally realized things came to a head and I had to get out. I thought it is either I am going to end up in St Albans or something else something horrible is going to happen so I decided that I was going to divorce him and am asked him for a divorce. And because I didn't want people talking about this behind my back, I went around to all my neighbors and I told them that I was getting a divorce. And I called all my friends and all my relatives. And it is a really hard thing to do to tell people about this. And it was extra hard when people didn't react the way I expected them to react. I thought they would be sympathetic or at least “that's really too bad,” and life would go on. But I found that (pause) a lot of people just walked to the other side of the street and just turned their head away (slight laughter). That was the end of a lot of friendships and relationships in this area.

In these excerpts, participants described family interactions and discussions that caused them to view divorce as unacceptable and even shameful. Through discussions with their families and by observing family interactions, they learned that divorce was unacceptable. Therefore, divorce deviated from their family's expectations and was laden with negative received meanings. This affected their experience of the divorce. In another study, Harvey & Hansen also found that the difficulty of the divorce experience often seemed to depend on internalizations of negative social messages regarding divorce.

Religious Influences

Like family interactions and discussions, religion exerted a powerful influence on how participants viewed divorce. When a family was deeply religious, the negative messages regarding divorce were based on strong religious and moral values. Rachel described how difficult it was to divorce when adhering to a religious stance towards the world.

For me, I was brought up in a Christian home and have never known any other way to be, you know with my values that I have. I knew that a husband was supposed to love his wife as Christ loved the church. So I knew the Biblical stand on divorce and so I think that's one reason I stayed so long was because it made me uncomfortable, it went against my values there. But what I also know about God is I know he loves me enough to where he doesn't want me in a situation like that.

In this situation, religious values permeate and are inseparable from the family's functioning. Family life is viewed as an extension of Christian principles, and divorce clashes with the assumptions of this world view. When Rachel decided to divorce her abusive husband, she took a more personal approach to religion, and broadened the church's teachings to include the notion of God's love and benevolence towards her.

When religious doctrine requires a permanent marital commitment, individuals may find themselves in the difficult situation of making a personal decision that contradicts their own belief system. Maddie described the process she went through when deciding to divorce.

I guess some of my views were very slanted because I was raised very strict Baptist. My brother's a minister, my parents are fanatical . . . The attitudes I grew up with were if you divorced and you remarried, then you were committing adultery. That there was not divorce. Which I know that's lightened as lots more people have divorced, but that was pretty much an unforgivable sort of sin. And a lot of what you hear now is how horribly divorce affects children. And probably one of the biggest reasons I ended up leaving my husband is what a horrid mother I'd become, and not abusive but just always sad, always angry, you know, I yelled a lot, I had no patience.

In addition to the religious message of divorce as sin, Maddie also contended with the current social message that divorce harms children. She was making her decision in what she perceives to be an unsupportive cultural environment. In fact, she was so worried about her family's reaction that she waited until a late night hour on the day her husband left the house to tell her family that she had decided to divorce. Her commitment to being a good mother to her children gave her the strength to leave her marriage without any anticipated support. Molly described a similar situation, particularly in terms of her struggle with the church.

So by the end, I think I felt I had to stay more out of obligation and he felt he needed to stay out of obligation. Not to our children, which is sad to say, but more to the fact that we attended church and the pressure of, you can't be a Christian and be divorced because you're not saved and, and that was a lot to deal with. But then we finally got to the point

where we said this is silly, neither one of us is happy. And church or no church, we can't do that.

Individualistic thinking and a quest for happiness clash with received values from family, church, and society. However, even in this separation of self from social institutions, larger social norms are influential. In our society, divorce has become commonplace and it is now acceptable to place the self and pursuit of happiness above commitment to a spouse. Robert described how this cultural change affected him.

You know, most, if I could count, I think most of the people I associate with have been divorced. I guess when you average in the older population, you know, like my parent's generation, where the divorce rate was much lower, then it brings the average closer to 50%. But if you just take this present, my generation, I'm sure it's much higher. And along those lines, I heard something or read something somewhere that made a lot of sense to me in terms of divorce in terms of the way that different generations look at divorce. In my parent's generation, I don't think people got married necessarily expecting that the marriage would make them happy. I'm sure that was some component but I think a larger component might have been for security. That's the way that society functioned best at that time. And, you know, with women not having full rights, they were more dependent and it was just, you know, more a part of the culture and somewhere along the line people got the notion that they had the right to be happy in their lives and if the marriage didn't provide that I think they were more willing to look elsewhere.

An increasingly positive social valuation of the quest for personal happiness and fulfillment along with increasing possibilities for independence for women, enables these participants to reassess their values of marrying for security and long term commitment. When the marriage does not work emotionally for the partners, they are likely, within the current social culture, to choose individual happiness over a difficult or demeaning relationship.

Interpreting the Divorce

Causes of Divorce

Interpretation is a key element in understanding experience, and individual interpretations are embedded within a larger social context. I will now focus on the participants' interpretations of their divorce experiences from within a cultural context. The main themes that emerged among these participants as causes for divorce were: the marriage was bad from the beginning, emotional distance developed in the marriage, a lack of equality in the marriage, and dishonest communication. Often, both men and women placed the responsibility for the breakup on the husband's inability to be emotionally supportive or responsive to the wife.

Flawed from the beginning. Six participants described marriages that were flawed from the onset. For instance Rachel, who at age 20 married her boyfriend of six years but remained married for only 17 months, described the dramatic difficulties ensuing from the day of their marriage:

You know before we got married he was so sweet and so kind and you know, generous and affectionate and I *swore* there was a reaction to gold on his finger . . . Because he was totally the opposite. You know we get back from our honeymoon and I'm like "Who are you are where's the guy I married?" I'm like what have you done? It was a exactly a Dr. Jeckle and Mr. Hyde but what I really found out, it wasn't just Dr. Jeckle and Mr. Hyde from the year before to now it was Dr. Jeckle and Mr. Hyde within the space of a *day*. It was almost like he was bipolar.

After this bad beginning, Rachel's husband became increasingly controlling and abusive during the marriage, causing her to eventually decide to divorce. Two other women discussed how they ignored early problems that would eventually undermine their marriages. For instance Jean, who stayed in her marriage for twelve years, described her husband's preoccupation with an expensive hobby that eventually caused her to feel alienated from him, and unable to remain in the marriage.

And then there were the horses. He had always loved horses, and had the desire to show horses and I don't know how much you know about that world but it's a very pricey world. And he didn't get me a diamond ring for our engagement because he would have had to sell his horse. I should have known right then (laughs), should have said, "Sell the horse." Or I should have thought, you know, this is not going to work out well.

As her husband became increasingly involved with showing horses competitively Jean found herself correspondingly more isolated and lonely, which eventually caused her to terminate the marriage.

Molly, whose marriage lasted seven years, also described her misgivings before marrying:

I think in some form I felt obligated to him and I have talked about this with the man I'm dating now. My husband felt obligated, because the family had gone so far, and we both admitted that we sat down the night before and said, "Wow, should I do this? Should I not?" And this time if I'm to get married, I would know before the day before my wedding that this was meant to be.

Robert's situation mirrored that of Molly:

I knew from the get-go that it wasn't a good marriage. I was depressed for a couple of weeks after the actual marriage. You know, that was a big indicator for me that I had done the wrong thing, I'd married the wrong person, and I knew it at some level. But for some reason I had the notion at the time that I wanted and needed to be married, and I made some bad decisions in a moment of weakness. She was interested in getting married, and in a moment or moments of weakness, I agreed, really against my better judgment and gut feeling.

Although Robert wanted to marry, he feels he entered marriage with his first wife not because he wanted her, specifically, but because she pressured him to make a commitment. It is interesting to note that two additional women participants (Carla and Becky) also felt their husbands had married them due to pressure from them or from family. A reappearing theme is that women wanted a marital commitment, and the men felt obligated to respond. This gender split of responses was found in all interviews describing the situation of one person marrying due to a partner's pressure.

Emotional alienation. Another important theme in the attribution of causality was emotional distance that developed in the marriage. Women particularly became dissatisfied with their relationships when they experienced their spouses as being unsupportive. They looked for help from their husbands when they were experiencing either severe life stresses or dissatisfaction in the relationship. When emotional support was withheld, these women felt alienated from their husbands. Maddie, who was married for 11 years, described a particularly dramatic example of this.

I probably have battled depression a large portion of my adolescent and adult life. And depression wasn't something he understood very well. And probably with the birth of my kids, all of a sudden my life came to a screeching halt and he just kept on his merry way,

which to me was not a lot of emotional support . . . And it culminated to the point, you know, we fought and argued, I tried to tell him things I need, I begged him to go to counseling. And I was just told that counseling was bull and that he could fix it and we didn't need to go to a-pretty much it just got to where I quit asking. I guess a lot of it culminated in my best friend committed suicide, which after that I became extremely suicidal, which he didn't know that, but . . . his attitude with her was, the day after she died, 'Get your head out of your ass and be a good mother and get out with us.' And that pretty much describes the emotional support I got. And it just went downhill fast after that.

In several critical situations, Maddie sought support from her husband and was rebuffed. She experienced his behavior as an expression of his emotional limitations and malevolent intent towards her. His repeated pattern of dismissing her concerns caused her to lose interest in the relationship. Gayle described a more benign but similar experience.

I knew, I really felt something was missing but when I tried to talk to him about that, he just didn't get it at all and there were a number of issues that came up for me. I had two miscarriages before I did have my son and I just, I felt they were pretty emotionally devastating for me, and I just didn't feel like my husband got it at all and why it was upsetting to me . . . I just didn't feel that we were going to get closer emotionally because we were different almost intellectually, it seemed like we were on different intellectual levels as well

Gayle perceived her husband as being incapable of understanding her concerns about the marriage or her emotional distress regarding her miscarriages. She described this as a problem of her husband's mentality.

The men in this study also faulted themselves for being unavailable emotionally to their wives, but ascribe their inattentiveness at least partially to situational constraints. In a brief statement, Ralph summarized his marital problems as resulting from his being a workaholic.

I brought home a paycheck, but I was not there for them. I made the same mistake in both marriages, I pretty much was totally consumed by the business. I did bring home a paycheck, but that was about it. None of the other things that they should've gotten did they get from me.

Often, men viewed the emotional distance as a serious problem, but only a partial explanation for the cause of the divorce. James blamed his "inattentive nature" as contributing to the emotional break down of his marriages, but he also described how economic pressures eroded the relationship between him and his wife.

I was a traveling salesman and I was on the road a lot, I was gone from Monday till Friday and that put a tremendous strain on the relationship, because it's up to her to do a lot of things that we might have shared. So probably I didn't appreciate what her problems were. If I had to put blame on it, I'd say it's probably 50/50, maybe more my fault than hers, because of my inattentive nature . . . I think I didn't know how to, maybe what to look for when she was depressed. You say, 'What's wrong?' and you hear, 'Nothing,' and you knew something was wrong but you didn't know how to get to it and just not being there, you know, I think being there would have been a lot better. A traveling job is difficult.

It is interesting to note that James's attributions for the marital failure included both personal self-blame and blame of circumstances. Curly also viewed his lack of support for his wife as an important component, but not the unique cause of his relationship unraveling.

I think probably two, maybe three big factors [for my divorce]. Number one, I think that both myself and my wife at the time really had some innate need if not desire to mature further. Grow, if you will, independent of our relationship, our marriage at the time. I don't think either of us necessarily recognized that but I think that that was really there for both of us. Number two was the specific need that my wife had for my attention and my emotional support, which I felt unable, which she did express explicitly and which I was unable to give her, and which I explained that I was unable to do at that time due to other commitments, particularly graduate school at the time, which was challenging to me.

It is noteworthy that although both men and women placed the responsibility for failed intimacy on the man's lack of emotional responsiveness, the attributions for this failure were connected to gender. Women used dispositional and global attributions – they blamed the men's character or personality for the emotional impoverishment of the marriage, and they felt that this was an unchangeable characteristic. Men used mostly situational attributions to explain their distancing behaviors, and also stated (although not cited here) that they felt they have worked to change this behavior in subsequent relationships.

These participants confirm a principle of attribution theory that most people tend to use a range of attributions to explain marital failure, the purpose of which is to protect or enhance one's self-image. Therefore, a woman who blames her husband's character or personality flaws for the marital demise protects herself from feelings of failure. A man who attributes his behavioral problems to a situational context buffers himself from feeling that he is incapable of intimacy.

Emotional distance often caused these participants to feel the partner did not value them. This theme is found in the interviews of several participants who complained of an emotional disconnection. Rachel described the situation.

It was, you know I didn't feel like I was important to him at all. I was absolutely *the* last priority on his list and I knew it. And he would say, "Well I come home from work, don't I?" (nervous laugh) And I thought 'you'd come home from work to let your dog out too!' So, it was just, I didn't feel that love, I did not feel cherished.

Outside interests sometimes prevailed, and distracted the partner from the marriage. Robert encountered this problem in his marriage.

Her practice took precedence over the marriage, always took priority and she was basically available 24 hours a day to all of her clients. She didn't just handle the birth itself, she handled pre-natal, um, pre-natal stuff, you know, weekly visits, and was always available on the phone for anything, you know, sometimes just emotional support. 24 hours a day, got calls, you know, in the middle of the night, and I tried to encourage her to separate her personal life, which was tied with my personal life, from her professional life. And she wasn't willing to do that.

These excerpts illustrate a principle found in Stephen Marks' (1986) qualitative work in which he developed a theory of marital relationships as comprising a triangular structure, with the *three corners* representing the inner self, the partnership corner, and the third corner of interests outside of the relationship. A successful relationship involves balancing these corners in a way that satisfies both partners. When there was an over-investment in the third corner, or outside interests, as with these and other interviewees, Marks found that the result was usually to sap vitality from the emotional partnership (the partnership corner).

Communication problems. Eight participants attributed their marital problems to severe communication problems. Several talked about a lack of expressive communication. This difficulty was intertwined with the theme of emotional distance discussed above. Problematic communication was the mechanism that reinforced emotional distance. Bob described this connection.

Drug use and lack of communication. And they probably go hand-in-hand. There was no communication and we weren't really intimate. We didn't talk about our feelings at all. And I take large responsibility for that . . . Our marriage was extremely material and we didn't talk about how we felt about things or what we had hoped or dreamed (pause). And the drug use had a lot to do with it, I'm sure, because it turned her off and closed her up and when I did that I got in my own little world and I didn't talk. And I imagine it was very lonely for her, extremely lonely for her. But that's probably it – lack of intimacy, lack of communication, and drug use.

In addition to impoverished communication, several participants described an inability to resolve conflicting opinions or difficulties, which eroded the marriage. Robert described his frustration with this situation in his second marriage.

What bothered me about her was that when we'd have an issue and we were working things out, she would readily agree, make agreements. And I thought we had things worked out. But she would just as readily drop them. Just unilaterally, you know, no discussion and that just irritated the hell out of me. So we were continually working things out and I was thinking we were coming to agreements, and you know, it just never materialized. So that was frustrating for me. Just part of her nature, I guess.

In this situation, Robert felt that his wife's inauthentic agreements also conveyed disrespect towards his values and viewpoint, a situation that eventually became intolerable for him. In a differing dynamic, Jean described how she and her husband avoided conflict. This was a theme that occurred frequently in the interviews.

And I think that both of us were very unrealistic about the give and take of marriage. Both of us hated conflict and so we both wanted to always get along well and not have disagreements about things. But we did of course, as anyone would and we didn't handle the disagreements very well. There tended to be stuffing going on that we would just stuff things instead of bringing them up.

In Jean's situation, the inability to discuss and resolve disagreements caused her to feel emotionally isolated and dissatisfied in the marriage. In another version of stuffing disagreements, Sam described his frustration with attempting to discuss controversial topics.

In a lot of our conversations, I would say "We need to sit down and talk about this." I would maybe open with a statement and she would come back with a statement that didn't seem to have anything to do with what I just talked about. So then I would respond to her statement, and the example I used a lot is we might start it off with what the punishment should be for the kids for something they did and we'd wind up discussing what color to paint the garage door. I mean, and after an hour of that I'd get a headache, and I walked away wondering, what did we just do? What just happened here?' By the time we got to the end, we were so far removed from the topic at the beginning, I had no idea what took place in between and that was typical of the way the conversations went.

Sam reacted to this frustration by ceasing to discuss important issues with his wife and eventually distancing emotionally from her. It is fascinating that these interviewees express frustration corroborated by many empirical studies showing that marital distress ensues precisely

when partners avoid conflict or engage in a pattern of pursuit-withdrawal; i.e., one partner initiating discussion and the other withdrawing from it (e.g., Allen, Baucom, et al., 2001).

Dishonest communication was a problem in some marriages. At times, a spouse would misrepresent his intentions. For example, Carla's husband agreed to work on improving their relationship, but betrayed her instead. Five years later, Carla was still feeling traumatized by this situation.

I felt like I was suffocating and in a fishbowl, and [my therapist] suggested, "Why don't you kind of do a 3 month sabbatical where you get your own place for 3 months and you and your husband do some marriage counseling, and have a date once a week, and really get some structure to this, and you can kind of clear your head?" So we did that. We set up the structure, and I moved out. Moved into my own place, and then I didn't see my husband for 6 months . . . He decided he didn't want to do it after I moved out. And *those* were the *terms* under which I did this . . . He disappeared. He is good at creating emotional distance. So that was when the real trauma, that was when that really started. Because I had believed, I trusted him to do this.

Ralph echoed this theme, when he described the importance of a partner's behavior as a form of communication.

Well, verbal [honesty] as well and sometimes what a person does speaks more loudly than what they say. Sometimes people's talk doesn't match their walk. So it's communicating more than just verbally.

I: So, physically trustworthy also?

R: Right.

Dishonest communication and betrayal are linked, and also occur frequently when a partner is having an affair. Phoebe described this connection, and her reactions.

I didn't even know my husband was having an affair. I didn't have a clue, because I trusted him completely and someone called and told me about it, and I confronted him. He lied, of course, and you know, eventually the truth came out, and I'm sure it wasn't the first time that he'd had an affair. I mean, I had had suspicions before we lived in other places and I just, I don't know, I can't tell you why I didn't address it, but I just kind of shoved it under the (voice trails off). And I was just aghast.

Another participant, Molly, complained about her husband's lies. Although he did not have an affair, she felt he was unfaithful to her because he lied to conceal unacceptable behaviors.

He wasn't intimate with someone in that standpoint, but for me, when you're 7 months pregnant and you feel it, and you're self-conscious about the way you look, you don't want your husband going to the strip club every night. That tears you apart, and for me that was very degrading

For these participants, when communication was insincere, duplicitous, or incongruent with behavior, trust and love were fatally damaged. These findings are supported by clinical literature that emphasizes the importance of honesty and trust in relationships. Jackson (1968), for instance, discussed the importance of relational trust sustained by clear and honest communication interactions. For trust to exist, such communication patterns must also be consistent with manifest behavior. In contrast, relationships lacking trustworthy communication and behavior are unviable.

Inequality in the relationship. In terms of causing the divorce, being disturbed by inequality in the marital relationship was a theme that appeared in women's interviews, only.

Eleven women felt an unequal partnership was a partial reason for their divorces. Four of these women stated that they experienced inequality in the expectation that they would assume the majority of the responsibilities in the marriage. For instance, Susan described how this situation motivated her to end the relationship.

I felt like I was the person holding things together, I was the glue, and he was sort of just along for the free ride. He was working full-time and I was working full-time but I was commuting every day, I had a two-hour drive each day, plus I was working 10-hour days. And he essentially refused to do the housework and wouldn't go grocery shopping without me. He'd become dependent on me to do those things with him. So I started to really see him as lazy, and that's not something that I value in people. So, I think that I didn't respect him, I lost respect for him, and that was hard to get back. Once I made the decision that I wanted him to move out, it was really hard for me to respect him again.

Gayle also felt that carrying too many responsibilities was a burden that caused her to question her commitment to the relationship.

My husband was very dependent on me for decision-making and managing finances, planning, and I guess part of what went wrong in the very end is that I had a child and suddenly I felt like I had two children to take care of.

Gloria stated that an unequal distribution of responsibility constituted part of her motivation to leave the marriage.

I had always mowed the grass and all the house activities I had handled the budget and everything else so I was still, there was no change inside the house of those things. And that was a point of tension 'cause I felt like I was doing a lot of work and it wasn't shared. This is an area that was really important to me that we start to share responsibility some more.

Another form of inequality was experienced when husbands were perceived as being domineering or controlling. Rachel, whose marriage was of short duration, remembered this behavior vividly.

It was pretty much his way or the highway according to him . . . There was a sharing I that I wanted so bad that he didn't want to have. You know, it was an issue for me to write a check, and my name wasn't even on the deed to the house, Nothing was in my name – it was all in *his* name and I don't want any of that, I don't want any of it at all. Molly, also in her early twenties when she married, described her experience with a controlling husband.

He was so consuming, he was so controlling and so overbearing that I felt smothered, and so any chance of freedom that I got, I took it. Any time I could get away from him, I took it. Any time I could get him away from me, I'd make him take it because we couldn't even be in the same room together. So we had just gotten to the point where we were completely miserable because neither one of us was getting from the relationship what we wanted or what we needed to get.

Other women viewed the inequality as stemming from an imbalance over who made decisions for the couple, or whose needs were considered important. Carla described her discouragement over this issue in her marriage.

We never had a fight, he was never ugly to me, he never raised his voice but he had certain, I think preconceptions, like after dinner we're supposed to kind of do the normal evening thing when I would want to go and work on a project in the basement, and not go to bed when he went to bed. And as mundane as that sounds, he didn't . . . *I mean, it was*

like he in some subtle way had the last word in what we did and I went along. (Carla's emphasis.)

Carla found that her husband dominated their relationship by deciding how they would spend leisure time, thus ensuring that his desires or personal needs took precedence. He expected her to accommodate his wish for continuous company in the evening and did not acknowledge her individual need to complete a work project. According to feminist writers, one of the insidious mechanisms of perpetuating inequality in a marriage is precisely this imbalance of in decision making and accommodation. (See Knudsen-Martin & Mahoney, 1998). Annie connected this lack of influence over decision making to fostering feelings of incompetence.

I think that not because it was his fault or my fault or anybody's fault, but I don't feel like my previous marriage was very equal, you know. He had a lot more power about decisions, and how things were going to be, and even just the physical how to mow the lawn, how to do that, etc. I didn't have a lot of confidence, and that may have been my own fault, like learned helplessness, I felt I don't know how to do this, or do that. I don't know how to pick up a hammer, and nail something into a wall, and that lack of competence is something that I don't want repeated.

Thus, for Annie, the inequality in the marriage damaged her self-image and reduced her sense of mastery over the environment. Her sense of autonomy and competency was threatened by the power imbalance in her marriage.

Aftermath of the Divorce

Difficulties Following the Divorce

For these participants, divorce created financial and emotional difficulties. The main themes in this category were those of straitened financial circumstances and divorce's harmful psychological effects on children. These findings confirm the work of Arditti & Madden-Derdich (1995), whose qualitative analysis of 80 divorced women's written responses found that central concerns included their financial vulnerability and worries over how divorce affected their children.

Financial problems. By far the most common practical problem was a worsened financial situation. Financial decline particularly for women has been well documented (Amato, 2000; Arditti, 1997). This is particularly pronounced when women are custodial parents (Roberts, 1994; Wallerstein, 1998; Thiriot & Buckner, 1991). In this sample, women who had been dependent on their husband's income had to adjust to an altered life style. Men, on the other hand, often were devastated by legal expenses and mandated support for their spouses. Following are a few excerpts from the interviews regarding the men and women's perspectives on their changed financial circumstances. Lee describes how her life changed following her divorce.

When I got divorced I lived in – my parents have a duplex in Ohio – so I lived in half of that house and didn't really have to pay rent or anything. That's the only way we *made* it because I got as I said no alimony, and I ended up working full-time for the health club after my divorce but still only made twelve or thirteen thousand dollars a year.

In contrast to Lee's perspective, from a man's point of view, payment of alimony and child support is often a burden. Sam described his situation.

Initially (the main difficulty) was financial for the first three years, definitely, but probably maybe for the first 5 or so and then I've slowly been rebounding and getting it back together . . . It was more than 50% of the income I was paying for the first three years, 1300 dollars a month. At the time they didn't call it alimony, so then it dropped

back to 800 . . . And state law says she's entitled to alimony 'till she dies or remarries. As my attorney said, "She can't afford to get remarried." I said something about, "Well maybe she can remarry," and he said, "She can't afford to. She'd lose that 800 dollars a month."

Sam continued to pay this alimony, and to resent the financial strain it imposed on him. This expressed resentment is one of several instances in which male interviewees complained about the court system discriminating against them. It corroborates Arditti and Allen's (1993) finding that men often perceive the legal system as biased towards women in divorce situations.

Although many participants complained about financial problems, the thickest description came in regards to the difficulties the decline in finances caused for the children of these divorced families. Three women talked about their ex-husbands' refusal to pay child support. This failure is widespread in contemporary society, and has been a focus of concern in policy regarding divorce (Kamerman & Kahn, 1988; Roberts, 1994). In this sample, fathers' failure to provide financial support was particularly problematic when children wanted to attend college. Phoebe described this situation

And I think it upsets me a little bit that he's in town and he sees them when he wants but he doesn't help us at all financially. And even though the divorce said he'd pay half the college, he's never done that. You know, he just chooses. I don't think you can make someone love their kids . . . My kids went to school on financial aid and they had loans and they had work studies and everything and I said to both my older two at different times, "I'm sorry it's been so rough" A lot of their friends are ones whose parents pay the car insurance, buy the car, and I said 'I'm sorry we have to do it differently.'

Phoebe's children were able to attend college, but she expressed concern about how the necessity of paying back college loans would affect her children's future financial status. Additionally, in this excerpt and elsewhere in her interview, she worried about how the father's lack of involvement affected her children. A qualitative study of 80 divorced mothers by Arditti and Madden-Derdich (1995) found that one of the women's primary concerns was how fathers' lack of involvement would affect their children.

In a different situation, Jean was able to get financial help from her parents when her husband refused to help pay college tuition. She described her anger over this.

He was supposed to give spousal support and child support. Spousal support wasn't very much, just a few hundred dollars a month, child support was only for one child so it wasn't too much. And then he was supposed to pay, he had to pay their insurance and he was supposed to pay half of anything not covered by insurance, and so he stopped doing that, years before he was supposed to and that was a problem. But then when they went to college, he just refused to pay for them to go to college and didn't have to, see that can't be forced by law. I will never forgive my ex-husband for that, I mean, he had the children just like I did, no matter how the marriage turned out they were his to educate, at least to pay half their education, and he has not chosen to do that.

These two women managed to help their children attend college, but they worried about how the lack of the father's financial support would affect their children's future development. Her concerns are substantiated by Wallerstein's (1998) findings that post-divorce economic decline often harms children's self-esteem and lowers their personal aspirations.

Custody and parenting issues. Contending with a changed parenting situation constituted a difficulty for ten participants. The participants' primary complaint regarding custody changes

after the divorce was about reduced time with their children. Sometimes, this reduction was due to decisions imposed by the legal system. Robert described his frustration with this situation:

I felt I definitely got the short end of the stick, and I lost a lot of respect, any that I had anyway for the court system. The law, you know, it's a pretty impersonal . . . it was a major life issue for me and I'm sitting in front of this judge that I've never met before and he's going to make a major life decision *for* me. On the spot in a matter of minutes, and you know, I barely got to say two words to him. You know, that's not right. So, I realize that even if you're not married and you have a child you're still subject to that system by virtue of the fact that you have a child. And in theory I think it's good in that the state has a responsibility to protect children, but you know, I feel government is pretty inept about everything.

In this excerpt, Robert was reacting to the court decision to have his son reside with him during the summer months, only. The reduction of time with his child, which was a theme echoed in Merlin's interviews (also a non-custodial father due to his divorce) affected him deeply. The bitter court experience caused Robert to doubt whether he would marry again, thus affecting his future life course.

This assertion of the profound impact of reduced parental time is corroborated in the empirical literature about post-divorce adjustment. For example, Amato (2000) found that losing contact with children was a process (mediator) that affected people's emotions, behavior, and health. Arditti (1993) provided a more detailed analysis of how men respond to legal decisions that limit their parenting contact. Emphasized are men's perceptions of inequity regarding legal decisions about custody and visitation. Robert reacted to this inequity by fighting to maintain a meaningful relationship with his son. Merlin decreased his involvement with his daughters, which is a prevalent response of non-custodial fathers (Arditti 1993).

Bitter custody battles affect women, also, as seen in Gayle's description of her court experience.

I'd say the main difficulties (from the divorce) are all custody-related because originally my ex-husband and I had made this agreement to try to continue to be friends and to try to really have a sound co-parenting situation for my son and we pretty much did everything equal in the beginning in terms of our son spending equal amounts of time with us, and for about 6 months that worked really well and then my ex-husband got involved with somebody else and she just really took over the relationship even before they got married. And she was really trying to dictate having more time with my son, their having more time and eventually that lead to their challenging the custody arrangement. They wanted to get full custody and things just went from bad to worse. Similarly to Robert, this experience affected her entire life trajectory. Although she wanted to have more children, the painful court experiences caused her to abandon this plan. Well, I guess I just have a lot of ambivalent feelings about working with attorneys and the legal system after going through some of the custody issues over my son. And that made me, when there was a time when I thought maybe I would get back into a relationship and have another child that I had a lot of anxiety about that. I did want a second child but I just was really afraid of ever trusting a co-parent in a relationship again. And I guess in the back of my mind, I was afraid that if I have a child and that marriage doesn't work out, then I'm going to get drawn through this all over again

Throughout these interviews, men and women complained about court decisions limiting visitation or custody with children. As seen in the above excerpts, the painful experience of missing their children while they were residing with the ex-spouse was at times combined with anger at a legal system they perceived as making arbitrary and often short-sighted decisions about custody and visitation. Wallerstein (1998) addressed this issue when she discusses problematic court decisions given as permanent orders and which therefore do not address a child's evolving developmental needs over time. However, as a child advocate she also contends that parents' litigation for visitation often distort court outcomes by overshadowing the best interests of the child.

Although court decisions affected many of these participants' relationships to their children, other life situations ensuing from the divorce also impacted the parenting relationship. For instance, when women changed from maintaining a singular role of homemaker to assuming multiple roles, there was a dramatic change in their parenting relationships. Molly described this situation.

A lack of time with my kids. I was a stay at home mom, and so when he left we had to change everything. We had just moved into a new house, and I couldn't afford it, I stayed there as long as I could so we had to move from there. Our whole life changed. Everything about our life changed. Change has been really hard. The adjustment to being a single mom to not having enough time with my kids to having to do everything by myself . . . I'm working right now, I'm having to work and go to school full-time, so the balance of time, when do I have time to study? I've gotta write this paper, I got to get time to research that paper and, you know, I've also got to get the kids.

Molly described how difficulties encountered with a combination of financial stress and role overload (custodial parent, full-time worker, full-time student) reduce her parenting time with her children. These problems have been confirmed in other empirical studies as being among the major difficulties encountered by women post-divorce, and connect also with feelings of exhaustion and frustration for women in their post-divorce lives. (Arditti & Madden-Derdich, 1995; Richards & Schmiede, 1993).

Participants viewed the changing custody situation following a divorce as being harmful to the children. Merlin stated this succinctly.

Primarily in the divorce with my second wife, with whom I had two daughters, um, we had a very bitter custody battle that went on for years and years and years. And yeah, it impacted me, it made me *extremely* cynical about the court system. I retain that sense of cynicism . . . I didn't think it served the children well. Number one. And I don't think it really served either of the adults well. It's not a question of winning and losing, I think everyone loses ultimately in the system when it becomes, when lawyers become involved in a way that they're only representing the interests of their clients, then I don't think that someone can win coming out with that. And I think what the children need is a win there.

Whereas Merlin identified the court as causing harm to his children, other participants focused on the conflict and the stress of the divorce as causing damage. There was no particular dominant theme that emerged in this area – the difficulties varied in each case. For instance, Jean, whose children were young teenagers when she divorced, stated that her children began having serious problems with substance abuse as a reaction to the stress of the divorce. Phoebe, who also parented teenagers during her divorce, stated that her children suffered emotionally from their father's unpredictable behavior and minimal involvement with them during and following the divorce. Gloria and Gayle described temporary acute responses of their younger

children to the divorce, which subsided as their family situation stabilized. These findings are supported by empirical studies showing younger children adjusting to divorce within two years, (Hetherington, 1989) whereas adolescents have a particularly difficult time with divorce. (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989).

Loss and loneliness. Fourteen participants described painful losses incurred during the divorce. The predominant themes among both men and women included loss of physical support and loss of friendship with the spouse. Several people stated they suffered multiple losses in the divorce.

For some participants, the loss was felt on the pragmatic level. Without a spouse, they were deprived of support in accomplishing their life tasks. Maddie, who divides her time between full-time work and mothering two young children, describes the strain of coping alone.

It's hard, usually I worked 7:00 to 3:00, so days I worked kids would have to get up at a quarter of 6:00, when they look at you and say, 'Mommy, why can't we just sleep later, daddy lets us sleep.' And they're 6 and 7, so they're still really young. It's hard to not have any support with your kids. It's hard to physically not have another person here to, if you're having a bad day they can do the child care. Does that make sense? Somebody else to pick the kids up so you can get dinner going, somebody else to throw a load of laundry in so you're not doing it at midnight.

The fatigue and burden of sole responsibility for children has been found to be a major strain for custodial mothers (Amato, 2000, Arditti & Madden-Derdich, 1995). Other participants, not as pressed by role strain in their parenting and work roles, also react negatively to the loss of support. Robert, who initiated his divorce, described how this affected him.

Living singly, you have to do everything. And a lot of those things that you have to do you don't necessarily like to do or want to do and in a marriage you have the potential of tradeoff. You know, you can do more of the things that you prefer to do and the other person has the same option . . . I get overwhelmed a lot of times by the amount of stuff I have to deal with, and, both wives, you know, took on tasks that they didn't mind doing and did well that I that I hated to do or didn't do well.

Robert reacted to the increased pressures of daily obligations by feeling overwhelmed. Susan also describes strong reactions to being single and having to cope with every aspect of daily living.

It was just the strain of knowing that I had to do it by myself, even though I could. And knowing that, Oh gosh, I don't have somebody here to help me with things that I need help with anymore. You know, taking care of cars by yourself and just sometimes the fear that comes with living alone. And I'd never lived alone before I got divorced. I had lived in a couple of relationships but I had never lived alone. So there was a new fear that came with that.

A partner's physical support provided Susan a sense of security. Without this, she was vulnerable to anxiety and fearfulness.

Several participants were saddened by losing a friendship they had developed with their former spouses. Susan, who had been dissatisfied with her husband as a partner in marriage, valued his friendship and was distressed when this dissolved.

We stayed friends, actually very good friends for a year. And we would still see one another, we would still go out and have a beer together, we would still go and watch football games together because we both really liked to do that. And then he met his present wife, and suddenly we stopped talking. Just like that. It just ended. And I

understand that. I felt more a loss of his friendship than I ever did anything. Because he was my best friend, he just really was never my husband.

Similar reactions were found in many interviews. However, when a couple also shared a child, losing the friendship could have serious results for the children. Annie's situation exemplifies this problem.

And here more recently it has been more difficult, because Gary and I were friends for a long time after we split up, because it is too difficult for his wife, and so I feel like I lost him in two stages, because there was the divorce – we were friends for a very long time before we got married, and that friendship doesn't exist right now, he can barely be cordial to me, and it feels funny to talk about my *ex*, and his *new wife*, and she has a terrible time with me, so that has been a lot of trouble . . . It's really a poor relationship right now. I mean there's almost no communication about our son, other than yeah, we'll meet at the library at 5:00 on Friday . . . And I am in the process of thinking about going to mediation, or if that doesn't work, going to court because he [my son] is 5, and he should be able to talk with his mother, no matter where he is.

In this interview, Annie described a deteriorating situation with her husband, due to his remarriage. This was limiting her ability to have a consistent relationship with her son. Whereas previously they had been able to co parent in a cooperative and mutually supportive manner, currently there was increasing animosity, and she was deciding to litigate the custody issues. As seen in the work of Garrity and Barris (1994), a parenting situation characterized by conflict and litigation can have negative consequences for children by creating anxiety or depressive symptoms, compromised identity formation, and loss of basic trust. Furthermore, with ongoing conflict, these problems may persist into adulthood, emerging in the areas of intimate relationships, difficulties with conflict resolution, and self-identity. In Annie's situation, the father's post-divorce intimate relationship was affecting his parenting relationship and his child.

Some participants described multiple losses incurred in divorce. In their interviews, loss of financial status, social role as a couple, social networks, and parenting partnership were highlighted as being painful losses. Kitson (1992) observed that divorce, like widowhood, includes a pile-up of losses that must be contended with, over time. Rachel described how multiple losses affected her.

You know, it wasn't just the hurt from him. I lost my independence too because I had to move back home. So I mean there was that, and I'm a *very* independent person and when I lost my marriage, my house, my job, everything, well that was a huge hurt there . . . I lost everything (nervous laugh) pretty much. And the other difficulty for me is, I can't trust people. I have a very hard time trusting people and I don't really much more trust *myself* either because I don't want to make another promise that I can't keep. So that's pretty . . . I'd say those are the biggest things I really deal with from that.

Among the many losses, divorce resulting in lost trust in others or in oneself was a theme in many interviews. However, the description regarding lost trust is not thick. Participants would mention the loss and move on, almost as if this topic was too painful to discuss in an interview situation. Although descriptions were brief, they were often very powerful. For instance Ralph, a mild-mannered devout Christian, used a striking metaphor to describe his loss of trust.

Yeah, it's made me very guarded. In other words, Russians have an old saying you don't play with a wounded bear. It's made me very guarded and it's made me not nearly so willing to trust people. It's made me very suspicious, not really cynical but it's just made me very guarded and suspicious and it takes me a lot longer to trust people than it used to

Description was thicker when the participants linked loss of trust to their current hesitancy to enter another committed relationship. Fred made a direct connection between damaged trust and reluctance to make a commitment in a current relationship.

I'm not as trusting a person as I was, I guess when you're burnt real good, you don't really wanna trust anybody. And you know, that may be one of the reasons that I really don't, like I said, I'm in a relationship now that she's a wonderful person, but I have a hard time even trusting anybody . . . And to tell you the truth, I didn't want to be in a relationship. Since the divorce I've dated a few people, and I've broken them off. The fear of getting close and the one I'm in now, I wished I really hadn't have gotten into.

Fred gave a vivid description of what several participants felt regarding new relationships – they desired companionship but they feared deep emotional involvement or commitment. Other participants described their hesitancy to enter new relationships due to fear of repeating past experiences. James described this perception:

Now as far as a relationship, I guess I would get married again if I found what in my mind was the ideal person, but there's a fear, an overriding fear that you're going to make that same mistake again. I don't want that to happen because that would be the bitterness all over again.

Another example was given by Susan, who felt trapped in her marriage.

To me there was a certain feeling of entrapment that I had when I was married and I don't know where that came from, but I have the feeling that if I were to get married again, I would feel that way: And part of it is I feel like my husband changed when, we got married. Suddenly, you're bound by this agreement, and you feel that, well, I'm married to this person now, and it's going to be hard for them to leave me, and unfortunately that's a view that a lot of people hold. So I think it's more a fear to get married again than not wanting to do so.

The fear of repeating maladaptive patterns from a previous marriage is a common post-divorce anxiety, according to Weiss (1975); however, Weiss also stated that in reality adults often create relationships that are markedly different and better than their previous difficult marriages.

Benefits from the Divorce

Current literature focuses on divorce as a stressful process and on how individuals cope with the stress. (e.g., Wang & Amato, 2000). Yet the participants in this study consistently described benefits deriving from their divorces. Previous qualitative studies (see Arditti, 1999, 1999b, and Riessman, 1990) consistently found that men and women often experienced benefits from divorce, including personal growth, greater happiness, and more rewarding lives. Some of the richest description came as participants described the positive changes catalyzed by divorce. Particularly emphasized was the theme of personal growth. Participants defined their growth in terms of developing emotionally, spiritually, and forging a stronger personal identity. Men generally emphasized spiritual growth and the emotional benefit of becoming more expressive, empathetic, and flexible, whereas women emphasized a greater sense of confidence and competence following the divorce.

Emotional and spiritual growth. Barry, whose divorce devastated him financially and ruined his social and professional networks, described how divorce also promoted emotional and spiritual growth. Although he states that his wife deliberately undermined many of his

friendships and church connections, he used her betrayal as an impetus to change his own approach to his personal life.

All my social networks had been *devastated*. All of them. And I feel like I've been strengthened spiritually because I've reached outside of this small group that I once had, instead of being very active in this one little denomination, I have a much more universal view. It's made me address emotions like anger and jealousy which I didn't really have before that . . . so I feel tremendous spiritual growth. And, that spills over into other things too. I feel like my relationships with the people I work with are better now. The new people that I meet, I'm much less controlling, much less demanding, much more accepting. And the people that work under me, I think have the ability to be creative now that they didn't use to, they had to get what I wanted done. I didn't control my wife, but I think I was controlling in the workplace.

I: So how would the divorce be linked to that? What's the connection?

B: Well, there came a point where I had to step back from life and change some of the, my moral underpinnings and the very basic foundations of the way I viewed the world, I had to.

Divorce caused Barry to become more empathic and flexible in interpersonal relationships. More profoundly, it caused him to reexamine his basic assumptions about relationships and about his faith. Rather than remaining mired in unproductive anger, he adjusted to a radically changed reality by interpreting his experience to expand his spiritual, emotional and interpersonal worlds.

Bob, whose divorce was uncomplicated by legal trauma or personal vendettas, described the divorce almost enthusiastically.

It changed me. I mean, it turned me around 180 degrees. It's also made me more open too, I mean this whole process has made me find out my feelings find out I've *got to* express them and that it's much easier to deal with them when it happens than to suppress them and suppress them and suppress them and all of a sudden expect somebody to intuit what you're feeling, and it's just changed so much, the process of divorce is what opened my eyes. I *get* it, I feel like I *get* it now. I *get* what life is about and I had no clue beforehand.

I: So what did you get?

B: I got that it's not about what people, what you think about me is none of my business, and I don't care what you think of me. No matter what, I've gained some type of spiritual sense about the world is what I've gained.

Bob, who believed that his substance abuse problems ruined his marriage, decided that attaining greater emotional awareness and communicating this with a partner was his top priority. Merlin also decided personal growth was paramount; however, he described the impetus as deriving more directly from the emotional experiences within his marriages.

For me the main benefits are the opportunity to be able to see myself more objectively outside of the dynamic of the marriage, not always bouncing off the other person in terms of how I see myself. Um . . . not having the convenience of someone else to blame (laughs) so I have to take more responsibility for what's going on in my life rather than blaming someone else for it and that's an opportunity for growth. That's number one [benefit] I think.

Becoming stronger. Women also talked about emotional and spiritual growth following a divorce, but they repeatedly emphasized feeling stronger by developing new competencies. Jean, for instance, described having to strengthen her independent functioning.

Well, I was always pretty independent and I was independent by the time my ex and I met each other, but I think that I have become even more so because I had to make the decisions, I had to arrange for the repairs to be made, I had to decide whether to go on vacation or not, I had to decide how the punishment was going to be handled because my ex was not a participating parent, he took the kids when he could get them, but he didn't help me, he didn't say, 'You boys mind your mother.' He didn't say that kind of thing and so I had to become independent.

Jean, by expanding her areas of competence, felt increasingly independent. Annie connected increasing her areas of competency with a stronger sense of self-esteem. She stated, "I think in some ways it made me a lot stronger. You know, I've been in positions where I've needed to be more capable. I have a much better self-esteem now than I did when I was married."

Phoebe also found that her self-esteem improved, following her divorce. She felt she changed as an act of defiance towards the husband who demeaned and betrayed her.

Well, I think one thing that divorce did was it brought me back my self-esteem. I think at first I plummeted but then the more I was able to make things work, I thought, "I can do this! I can do this." He's not going to ruin my life or my children. There's a lot of single women, I went to support groups. Other people, this happened to other people. And I keep wondering if there wasn't a divorce, would my kids be as close and supportive of each other as they are now? I don't know. You know, there's blessings that I come from difficult times, I think. Hang in there. But I think I learned to believe in myself, and I did learn to be tough. I learned to stand up for myself. And that was good, I needed to learn that. Um, I learned to rely on myself and I learned how to be financially independent.

Phoebe connected becoming tough, or strong, to her improved self-esteem.

Carla described a similar process, and illustrated how this was fueled by her anger at her husband's abandonment of the marriage. The theme of anger at a disappointing husband creating the impetus for change is found often in these interviews.

I guess I went through grieving stuff, and then I finally got really angry and decided I was going to make myself into someone who was never going to be in this position again. *Ever.* (pause). It just, it totally changed my life and who I am. I don't know the person I was before. I don't know who that was. But I'm better now, I wouldn't go back. But it was a heck of a way to have to become that . . . I put my life back together in a way that makes sense for me, am *completely* independent and self-sufficient. A nuclear bomb could eradicate everyone on this earth, and I would be okay. I'm very educated on how to handle my finances, how to get my car fixed. And I just can't imagine women would get themselves in a position where they're dependent about things. I will not ever depend on anyone again for anything material. *Ever.*

For Carla, the divorce (in which she was abandoned) created an unbreachable schism – she felt transformed by the experience and disdainful of the person she was – a woman who depended on an unreliable man. Rachel also talked about growing by enduring a painful divorce. I learned that I can make it through the worst possible thing. I mean, to this point in my life that is *the* worse experience that I ever had, that was my worst *nightmare*. You know, being married and finding out that he didn't really love me after all, and you know that he

was going to be ugly to me and that was probably the way it was going to be and you know, finally facing the fact that I'm going to have to get out of here. And you know, dealing with all the repercussions after that, I mean I learned that I get through that and I can put my life back together, you know, whether he's there to stop me or not.

Molly, who also talked about growing through enduring tough times post-divorce, connected her increasing strength to greater independence in her thinking.

I feel like when I got married I lost some sense of myself. And so now, I feel stronger. I feel, I'm not invincible, which I know but I feel I've learned to stand up for myself, I've learned to say to the people in the church who do not agree with my marriage, 'Well, I have to make the best decisions I can for me and my family and I'm sorry you don't agree.' And that was always hard for me before because I always worried about what people thought of me. And now I can't worry about what people think. I have to worry about what my kids think of me. I worry more about their opinion of who I am than anybody else around me. I don't ever want them to feel that mom has sold them out because she was too scared of how others would think.

In all these excerpts, women emphasized becoming more independent (and independent minded), competent, and self-reliant, all of which bolstered their self-esteem. Riessman (1990) discussed this common response of women to divorce by embedding it in social context. She stated that because self-reliance is highly valued in American culture, becoming increasingly self-reliant is one way to construct positive meaning out of divorce, which has carried a negative value in our culture.

Freedom to learn and grow. An interesting sub-theme within this group of women who felt they had become stronger through the divorce is that of returning to school. Seven women in this study returned to studies to further their education and their careers. They described the excitement of returning to school, and the pride they took in their accomplishments. Gayle, for instance, described the contrast of being in a stagnant marriage to being in school and defining her personal goals.

I felt like when I was in the marriage, I was just kind of blindly plodding along without any plans for myself and I started looking out for my career more closely. I went back to school, I had an associate degree when I divorced and got my bachelors and I continued to get my master's. I basically had somewhat of a career change, and I started really developing a lot of personal interests too – I hadn't ever made time for that. I had been pretty absorbed in the marriage and spending time with my husband . . . When I went back to school I had a lot of pride in the fact that I was a single mom juggling a career and a child and I returned to school and keeping all those plates spinning

Molly, who was working full-time and raising two young children, described briefly the connection between her divorce, gaining strength, and returning to school for her undergraduate education

I think it's helped me to know that this divorce and everything, I can do it alone. It's not easy and I don't like it, and there are times I'm so tired I can't even see straight, but I'm making it and I'm stronger for it, and I'm proud of myself. I'm paying my way through school, and my ex-husband would say I couldn't do it, I could not do that and be a full-time parent and I'm proud of myself because I have come a long way.

Molly was among several women who described husbands that demeaned their intellectual ability and discouraged their pursuit of education. Rachel described this vividly. She returned to school as a way of coping with her divorce, and building a future for herself.

Yeah, I mean he didn't want me to go to college, pretty much barefoot and pregnant-type is what his and his family were after and they were a *whole* big issue for me. And they, he tried every way to keep me from going to college you know, so when I left first thing I did was get in college. And so that's given me something to *do* to keep me busy to where I'm not constantly you know, going over and over and *over* the scenarios in my mind. I'm too busy for that. So keeping busy and doing research and being really involved in my church has helped a lot.

These women were exhilarated when they returned to school and were successful. Becky described the conversation that convinced her to return to school, and her experience with her studies.

The therapist said, "Do you have any plans that you have been thinking about for the future?" and I said, "Yes I have been wanting to go back to school but he wont let me" and she said, "Go back to school. Go back to school immediately." And so I (nervous laughter) did. I went over to Radford. They had a wonderful program for adults who could be in their adult degree program. And that was where I went and that's where I graduated from magna cum laude after my husband told me all those years that I shouldn't go back to school for one thing because I would never make it. But he was wrong (slight laughter) as he was wrong about a lot of things.

One participant, Lee, described how studying and entering a new career changed her focus from being relationship-centered to being career-centered.

And I think it takes having a career to have another focus in life besides having a relationship, at one time that was main goal in life to have a great intimate relationship. And then as I got my degree and started working that was no longer my major focus in life.

Feminists consistently describe the stifling effect on women who live in oppressive marital relationships (e.g., Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, (1998); Schwartz, 1994). For Rachel, Becky, and Lee, leaving an oppressive marriage freed them from subordination and enabled them to choose new pathways for growth and fulfillment.

Repeatedly in these interviews, women reported a stronger sense of competence and a stronger sense of self following marital dissolution, a theme that Riessman (1990) also found in her qualitative study. Not a single woman in this study felt she had been defeated or diminished by divorce. Despite economic hardships and some loneliness, they thrived by becoming more self-reliant and discovering new intellectual, creative, and managerial abilities

Thus, in both men's and women's interviews, there were multiple descriptions of growth, including expanded emotional and spiritual horizons, increased self-confidence and independence, development of new interests and friendships, and even increased closeness between the custodial parent and the children Although not denying the pain of divorce, most (18) of the participants felt they had grown in beneficial ways due to the divorce experience.

Current Relationships

The interviews in this dissertation were designed to explore how divorce connects with people's current intimate relationship. I inquired about how people's expectations and hopes regarding close relationships may have remained stable through the divorce process, and how they may have changed. This section examines the issue of stability and change in divorced persons' expectations of intimate relationships.

Commitment

Most of the participants in this study were involved in monogamous intimate relationships and ten of the participants discussed long-term commitment as being part of their view of an ideal intimate relationship. This expectation persisted through marriage, divorce, and post-divorce experiences. Jean, a 50-year old woman who had been divorced 12½ years, described this view.

I guess I feel like that at least for me, I don't know if hope will spring eternal or not, but hope is springing still now for me that I will become involved in a relationship that will last for another hopefully 20 or 30 years or preferably until I die, and like I said I don't know how good the chances of that are but I'm not willing to give up yet, I think it would make me very sad to give up.

Annie, who divorced due to intimacy problems based on her changed sexual preference, entered a lesbian relationship following her divorce. However, very little had changed regarding her fundamental expectations of relationships.

I think it has all just about stayed the same. I mean I have the same hopes and dreams that Susan and I will be together to the end, and that was what I had hoped with Bruce. I feel that a lot of my needs are met better in this relationship, and I don't think that has anything to do with whether I'm with a woman or with a man, that's just who it is, and I don't think my expectations have changed.

Merlin, who had been divorced three times, still valued a committed, long-term relationship. He was currently developing a serious intimate relationship.

What's remained the same in terms of what I would expect is a deep level of caring, mutual. That in some sense would be an expression of love that is the kind of love that should be able to be sustained while being in love kind of comes and goes. The deep level of caring is part of commitment. And heartfelt commitment, not just an abstract notion. And I guess almost as an outgrowth of that level of caring, an agreement to be monogamous within the context of that relationship.

Companionship

Another expectation that persisted was the desires for companionship and friendship within an intimate relationship. Barry describes his wish for both these qualities within an intimate relationship.

I'd certainly be looking for someone who needs companionship, who *craves* it. And women typically do, are much more intimate beings than men are. So, certainly somebody that's looking for companionship, looking for at least the idea of progressing towards an intimate relationship eventually. Someone that I share some interest with, or at least can develop some shared interest . . . I've always been attracted to people that are independent, that have their own ideas, their own mind. That's stayed the same. I've always wanted someone who's not dependent on me, but needs me at least a little.

Because everybody I think, wants to feel needed. That stayed the same.

Companionship was often defined in terms of sharing interests and enjoying similar activities. Robert describes his wish for a companion in fun.

I really think it's important that you have some of the same interests. If a guy's sport minded then hopefully he'll find a gal that's the same way. In my case, I like the outdoors, I like to go on long trips, and drives and things like that and I want somebody who at least will enjoy what I enjoy and not just be putting on an act. So that's pretty important to me, it's one of the most important things.

There were additional descriptions of companionship and commitment in intimate relationships. However, these were so fundamental to the participants' views of relationships that those descriptions can be found in the section detailing participants' definitions of intimacy.

There were several fundamental changes in expectations connected to the divorce. The primary changed expectations included expecting greater equality in the relationship, increased honesty and openness in communication, and for women, the self-expectation of being more assertive in a relationship.

Equality in the relationship.

Both men and women described wanting greater equality in a relationship than what they had experienced in their marriages, and both genders stated they expected themselves to change in order to assure this would happen. Men and women, however, differed on what changes were important. Men, for example, expected themselves to demonstrate more caring and concern for their partners while women expected themselves to be more assertive and take less responsibility for the partner. It seems that in their marriages caretaking or nurturing had been linked to the partners' gender, and this in turn was connected to a power imbalance within the marriage. This gendered role expectation needed to change in order to promote an equal relationship.

Robert described his hope for a more equal relationship.

Ideally, I'd consider the other person my partner, as important as myself. I mean, that's kind of, the traditional marriage vows reflect that, you know, two become one. The other person becomes part of yourself, or not part of yourself but a team. The team is just as important as each individual member, and it hasn't always been like that for me. For a long time, I think especially in the first marriage, I was number one, you know, and my needs came first. That's a big lesson for me, even though intellectually I knew, I just didn't, I didn't really learn that till later. But I feel like on a continual growth path, and it's a process. It's a process.

Robert expects himself to view a partner's needs as equal to his own. He also stated that it requires conscious work for him to change from viewing his needs as having priority in the relationship. Barry held a similar point of view.

My expectations were much more materialistic, much more grandiose, I think. They've changed now, they're much more relationship centered, I think. If I was in a relationship, it would be I think the intimate sort of things that women tend to be more interested in, I'm more interested in that. My partner? I don't have as high of expectations but that sounds bad, but that's not the way I mean it. I – my expectation is more for them to feel good about themselves and to be happy than it is for them to meet all of my needs.

Women stated that a more equal relationship for them would mean taking less responsibility for their partner. Phoebe, a 54-year old woman, described how she reacted when she dated older men who expected this from her.

Well, I don't want to be someone's caretaker. I'm really worried about that, I don't want to feel responsible for someone's happiness, for their well being, I want to meet someone that's independent and can take care of themselves. I was in this one relationship that kind of went somewhere and they did their wash and I did mine, I didn't feel like I had to wash their clothes or anything, and I mean, I wondered if they would ask me, "Would you do something," but I like someone that's self-sufficient and I suppose I need to find someone that's lived alone. And is comfortable with that . . . I need to find someone that's

independent and likes what they're doing and is driven by it. He shows an interest in me, you know, wants to spend time with me but won't suffocate me.

In her interview, Phoebe also stated that when she found a man she was dating expected her to assume caretaking responsibilities, she would feel relieved to terminate the relationship. Gayle also described the corrosive effect she experienced in assuming the caretaking role in intimate relationships.

I think the thing that it took me a long time to get straight for myself was personal boundaries, and I tended to give or do until I felt overwhelmed and then I'd get resentful because I didn't feel like the other person was giving back to me on the same level. And that especially in the marriage now looking back, I can see how I set that up, I set it up because I didn't define my boundaries because I didn't even, that wasn't even a concept that had been in my awareness at the time. And that continued through future relationships . . . I would start out a relationship not having a lot of expectations of the other person and I was willing basically to do it all, to carry the relationship, to take on responsibility, even sort of carry the emotional weight of the relationship, it felt like. And I don't see that as an issue in my current relationship

In this excerpt, Gayle implied that in order to build a strong relationship, she had to relinquish the role of caretaker or nurturer in order to establish greater equality. In fact, in her current long-standing relationship, she had maintained a separate home, schedule, and income independent of her partner. She considered her current relationship to be equally balanced between their needs and personalities.

Women also felt that in order to build more equal relationships, they would need to be more assertive about their expectations. This theme was not found among the male participants. Lee, a woman who had been abused in her marriage, was emphatic about this necessity.

Whereas before I would make sacrifices for that person or make accommodations and say 'well I can take that, the good with the bad,' where now I wouldn't be as likely to take the bad. I would say "sorry, this isn't working out, goodbye." Whereas before I would probably say, well, we're having good sex or we're having a good time fifty percent of the time so that's okay. Now I wouldn't do that. I would expect someone to respect me . . . I expect probably to be more true to myself if I would go into another relationship. I would expect that I would respect myself more and not let anyone take advantage of me as they have in the past. So I've definitely grown in that respect. I would expect myself to stand up for my rights.

At the time of this interview, Lee took pride in being single and career centered, rather than relationship centered. Rather than conforming to a man's expectations, she now felt able to demand that he behave respectfully towards her. Another participant, Jean, had always felt fairly independent, but she also described a greater comfort level with being assertive in intimate relationships.

They (men I've been involved with) think that I'm not very satisfied with the amount that they give back to me because I tell them that I'm not (laughs). I say, "Say something nice here!" Because I have gotten bolder about getting what I need, I finally have realized that they are clueless and they're not going to figure out what it is that I want (laughs) so I'll go on and tell them what I want, which may or may not be good. And I think that I'm not at all a good game player, I'm not subtle

Carla, who when interviewed was involved in a committed relationship states a similar need to demand respect. She describes it as a need for the partner's support.

What has changed is how important I have realized that it is for me to be supported, not financially, but in what I want to do with my business and (pause) just things that are going on in my life, I need support in them. My needs need to be accommodated.

In the interview Carla stated that she had changed this pattern, and in her current relationship she expected her partner to be equally accommodating of her needs and independent goals.

Open and Honest Communication

Many of the participants felt that their marriages had been marred by superficial or dishonest communication. They had more demanding expectations from themselves and their partners in current relationships. Bob, who had been uncommunicative in his first marriage, stated how his self-expectations have changed.

I expect an open and honest exchange of feelings and um... hopes and dreams and desires and problems. Discussions about things. That has really changed. I think . . . I expect that talking things out will work things out, or get me to a point or us to a point, whatever it is, to either agree to disagree or agree to agree or we're at an impasse where we can't move. Right now, I'm a little bit overly honest, and I might have gone a little bit overboard from the other way that I was, not saying anything that I felt. Sometimes I shoot straight from the heart so it might be a little bit difficult instead of it filtering through my brain, and thinking this might not be the best thing to say at this time, I say it.

Gloria also demanded from herself more open and spontaneous communication. Among other benefits, she viewed it as a method of resolving conflicts and, similarly to Bob, of evaluating the relationship.

I'm better able to handle conflict. I don't take responsibility for the other person as much as I used to. I guess for me what shifted is that I understand myself so much more so if something happens, I'm looking at my own reaction to that thing and sharing, just communicating what my feelings are about that much quicker and I don't just shut down on that process, you know? And if it wasn't working out well, I would get out of the relationship, I would divorce again if it wasn't working out.

During her divorce, Gloria was surprised to learn that her husband had harbored resentments for many years prior to their separation. Because this was among the dynamics that undermined the relationship, she learned from this experience to value prompt communication of feelings and disagreements. Similarly, Molly believes that communication problems contributed to the demise of her marriage. She insists on changing those patterns in her current relationship.

The one I'm in now, we talk any time something comes up at all. If one feels like it then we sit down and talk about it because I don't want anything hidden. I don't want any secrets, I don't want any type of deception whatsoever. If he's feeling uncomfortable about something, I want to know about it right then. If I feel uncomfortable, I want to express it to him and not feel the fear of not being able to know or I can't tell him because I'm worried about his reaction. I want there to be an openness.

After their divorce, participants reflected on the problems in their marriages and assessed their communication patterns. They made deliberate, thoughtful changes that would promote healthy intimacy in their post-divorce relationships.

Problems in Current Relationships

Participants were asked what their ideas were regarding strengths and difficulties in current relationships, and if these might be connected with their divorce experience. Their

answers connected with their stated changed expectations in ways that were both consistent with those expectations and surprisingly different from them.

For instance, surprising was the finding that, despite their wish for a serious committed relationship, most (13) of the participants had some difficulty making this commitment in their current relationships. Hurt, skeptical, bitter, or frightened, many were fearful about entering another deep emotional engagement.

Rachel, who had been single for one year, described her difficulty developing an emotionally close relationship at this time.

But as far as difficulties, it's really hard for me to trust someone completely . . . Oh, I mean, there's nothing more that I'd love to do then to just be able to be in an all-out *I love you* kind of relationship but there's that *Ohhhh my goodness I don't think I can do this*, it's almost like it's like every time it gets to be something close I'm like, *wait just a minute* and I pull back. It's kind of like a rubber band kind of effect.

Rachel almost literally rebounds from emotional contact. Carla, who had been single five years at the time of these interviews was beginning to think she may have found a new permanent partner (Bob in this study). She described her attempts to fight her own recoiling.

The difficulties I would think would be on my end, they would come probably from me, in that every once in a while I lapse into that old terror again, [from when my husband left me] but I can pretty much stop it. And more so I'll lapse into the relationship I had before with the controlling boyfriend. That was almost as bad as the divorce. I will be afraid to say something to Bob, and I relive this whole thing in my head, and Bob's not going to accuse me of anything. So that kind of, that causes some problems but I can pretty much snap out of it and say, "I'm doing it."

Gloria, single for years and also currently in a relationship, questioned the degree of commitment she wanted with her partner. Although they had been a couple for several years, they had agreed to maintain a certain physical and emotional distance within the relationship. She gave voice to her intense ambivalence about making any changes.

Now he wants to move here and we discussed lots of things related to that in terms of what that would mean for us and our relationship. "Well, what if you move here and I meet someone and I fall in love with someone? How's that going to feel and what would happen at that point?" So for me, I haven't decided what I want with that I think that it would cause me to have a harder time to meet someone else. Really truly opening up to someone if I met them and I do want to have the experience of that you know . . . But it might not ever happen that I meet someone and I am okay being on my own (laughs).

These excerpts exemplify the range of ambivalent responses to post-divorce intimacy expressed in these interviews. The ambivalence was based on difficulties with trust and commitment. Weiss (1975), found that post-divorce couples often contend with these issues, and structure their relationships to accommodate their changed attitudes in such non-traditional relationships such as "going together" or cohabitation, which require less commitment than a legal marriage. Furthermore, empirical evidence shows post-divorce relationships change over time. Some relationships evolve into permanent commitments, whereas others remain an alliance of independent partners, and still others fail. From data of 6,913 respondents, Kim & McHenry (2000) documented eight different patterns of such post-divorce relationship transitions.

Strengths in Current Relationships

Men and women described strengths in current relationships that were lacking in their marriages. Often, interviewees described relationships based on honest and expressive

communication. Susan, for instance, described the pleasure of building a strong relationship through talk.

We have a lot of strengths too, my boyfriend is just the most patient, patient, patient man he really stuck with it, and he's sensitive and he's completely into communication and if we haven't talked for a while he says, "Let's sit down. Tell me what's on your mind and how've you been feeling? How're you feeling about me? How're you feeling about us? Have I done anything that's upset you?" He *wants* to hear the bad. A lot of people often say, you know, "Talk to me, tell me what's on your mind," but as soon as you bring something up that they think is harming their character somehow then they get defensive. But, our strength is that he's really open to communication and I am too.

Similarly, Bob described talking about vulnerable feelings for the first time in his current relationship.

Some strengths are that we both know who we are because we've been through divorces and she has done a lot of work, and I've done a lot of work. Probably one of the strengths and one of the difficulties is that we're both a little bit opinionated. We're both also a little bit sensitive, that's one of the difficulties, one of the strengths is that we talk through it, and when our feelings get hurt, we say our feelings are hurt, and we get into why and all that stuff, which is something I have *never* said to anybody before I got clean and changed my life. It was like I was just *mad*, not "You hurt my feelings."

Whereas Bob and Susan privilege emotional expressiveness, other participants emphasized being more honest with their partners. Maddie contrasted her marriage in which she often lied to her husband, to her current relationship

The main strength, the one thing that truly I thank him for because most of my life was based on lies, because you don't tell people stuff you've done, there's not a thing about me he doesn't know I mean we're talking about the affair, and there's nothing about me that he doesn't know . . . And I appreciate the freedom to be able to do that with him, which to me is essential – if I can't be completely honest with him then I don't need to be with him. And that was some of my thoughts when my marriage ended. I can't be honest with this man, I lie to him I have no business being here. There's the complete sharing, there's the complete equality.

Gloria also emphasizes honesty, but she presents communication from another perspective. Rather than idealizing the relationship through the prism of glorious talk, she perceives communication as a tool that helps both partners remain realistic and honest about their interactions. The following excerpt provides a snippet of how they communicate.

I think the strength is that we do talk a lot and so we're able to talk through most things. I'm pretty straightforward and he's a little more manipulative in a way and that's not necessarily a bad thing but we've had to learn how to work through that and we have. He's here now and he said, he had just bought some stuff at the farmer's market, and I was just about to be going so I know it's going to be when I have to leave, so "Well, you're going, let's just look at the vegetables I got at the market," and he wanted to divvy them up and I said, "We can do this later, and I would prefer to do it later and I've told you that I need to go so I'm going." And he said, "Oh, this is just like you, you just draw the line."(laughs) So I said, "You're being manipulative, you know, I love you, but you realize this is an example of what we've been talking about and when you don't want me to go you create these scenarios." So he just looked at me and said, "So you're saying that I do this on purpose," and I said, "I think so, or maybe it's not conscious but it goes on." I

never would've done that before that kind of communication and so he said, "Okay, go when you come back, I'll be more aware of that, I'll try to look at that." And he does.

Another common strength described was the sharing of common interests and pleasurable activities. The following excerpts represent a theme found in many interviews. Fred, for example, contrasted the dynamics in his current relationship to his marriage.

I think the relationship I'm in now is somewhat different than my marriage. We didn't share a lot of the things – I go out of my way to do stuff together now, and I think a lot of the things we did in the marriage we took for granted after a while and didn't do stuff together like we should have. There's always a reason not to do stuff, always a reason not to go on a vacation – she wouldn't go. And I think after a while it takes a toll. Now I won't do that, now I'll take a road trip in a minute.

James's interview repeated this theme, and he described the importance to him of shared interests.

I really think it's important that you have some of the same interests. Whether it's, if a guy's sport minded then hopefully he'll find a gal that's the same way. In my case, I like the outdoors, I like to go on long trips, and drives and things like that and I want somebody who at least will enjoy what I enjoy and not just be putting on an act. So that's pretty important to me, it's one of the most important things

Molly also believed her relationship was strengthened by sharing activities both she and her boyfriend find enjoyable.

When we are together, it's our time alone. And that's been a real change. And we do things, we go hiking or we'll go hit golf balls or baseballs, we're active and we bond by, a couple weeks ago, we went riding through the country, just talking and enjoying each other's company and that's been nice because it builds that bond.

The strengths in current relationships are consistent with statements interviewees made regarding post-divorce changes in their expectations. At the time of the interviews, they were creating relationships markedly different from their previous marriages.

Summary

In this chapter, I have described participants' views of intimacy and marriage, their interpretations of their divorce experience, and their views and expectations regarding current intimate relationships. Participants had strong opinions regarding what constitutes a positive intimate relationship. They believed such a relationship must be based on trust and honest communication, and that both partners needed to be committed to one another. They expanded this basic definition to include the importance of equality and friendship as bases of ongoing intimacy. This friendship was sustained by sharing common interests and activities, and fortified by the ability to accept their differences and resolve conflicts.

Although marriage was viewed as containing some components of intimacy, many participants felt that marriage was not synonymous with intimacy, and described their marriages through more traditional terms of providing security, a sense of permanency, specific family and social roles, and providing a family unit.

Divorce was viewed always as a major event in the participants' lives. The main themes regarding the causes of divorce included an unequal relationship, poor conflict resolution skills, and emotional alienation within the marriage. Both men and women thought men were often the party responsible for creating the emotional distance that undermined the marriage.

Responses to the actual divorce were connected to participants' religious background, their family's attitudes towards divorce, their peer group's attitudes, and the quality of their

marriage. Their own thinking about divorce evolved over time, as they weighed the problems and the benefits that ensued from their divorce experience. Heaviest among the problems was the divorce's negative effect on some of the children. Additional painful consequences were financial difficulties and experiences of loss and loneliness. Among the strongest benefits, male participants described emotional and spiritual growth, and the women described an increased sense of independence, competency, and self-esteem.

Divorce was a strong but not an isolated experience that shaped these participants' current intimate relationships. Strongest among the direct connections between the divorce and their current relationships was the participants' wish for a more equal relationship and for more expressive and honest communication. Again, men and women differed in their definitions of an equal relationship. Men felt they needed to be more concerned about their partner, and to put her needs on a par with their own. On the other hand, women stated emphatically that to be equal, they needed to be more assertive about what they required in a relationship. They also stated that they no longer wanted to feel responsible for a partner's happiness.

When speaking about their current relationships, participants also noted that despite their wish for a fulfilling relationship, they had difficulty trusting and committing after the divorce. This ambivalence was a strong and poignant theme in these interviews. Although they were often cautious in their current relationships, many felt that, due to their failed marriages, they made a conscious effort to keep communication open and honest. Furthermore, many participants felt these relationships were valuable because they provided enjoyable and reassuring companionship.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the complex process adults traverse in their passage through divorce and in their establishment of post-divorce intimate relationships. The goal of this work was to describe how adults interpret their divorce experience, particularly in terms of how it connects with their ideas about intimacy and their post-divorce intimate relationships. I achieved this goal through conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 21 adults who reflected on their former marriage(s), divorce(s), and current intimate relationships.

In this qualitative study, there is an interplay between a focused attempt to answer the study's research questions, and an openness to the rich data collected from in-depth interviews, which conveyed information beyond the original focus of this inquiry. As Chenail (1995) indicated, the data in qualitative work becomes the "star" and can lead the researcher to new discoveries. Or, as another celebrated author stated, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in your philosophy." (Shakespeare, 1604). Therefore, the following discussion will include an examination of themes pertaining to the original research questions and "philosophy" or conceptual frameworks of this study, as well as themes that emerged from the participants' descriptions and interpretations of their divorce experiences.

The research questions that guided the study were:

- 1) How do adults describe the connection between their divorce and their current or anticipated relationship experiences?
- 2) What are the continuities and discontinuities with regard to thoughts, expectations, wishes, and feelings between pre-divorce and post-divorce intimate relationships?

Guided by these questions, and the theoretical frameworks of the study, themes to be discussed in this chapter include: 1) divorce serving as a context and catalyst for interpretation and growth, 2) interpretations and attributions regarding the divorce experience, 3) loss and renewal in divorce, and 4) implications of divorce for intimacy in post-divorce relationships. The emergent finding to be discussed in relation to these themes is the connection between gender and interpretations of the divorce experience.

Discussion of Findings

Divorce as a Context and Catalyst for Interpretation

Because divorce terminates a crucial relationship, it disrupts many structures of meaning associated with the relationship, often including multiple family roles, social status, and a self-conception of being a loved and valued spouse. It also alters many routines and assumptions of everyday life. Within this changing situation that affects habits, self-perception and social standing, individuals work to understand what has caused this event, and how they can reconstruct their mental representations of self and partner in intimate relationships.

Responses to divorce do not occur in a vacuum. A strong theme in this study developed as participants described cultural influences that were powerful in shaping their thinking and reactions to divorce. Several interviewees were reluctant to divorce partly because they had internalized the social and religious norm of marriage as a permanent commitment, and the positive social valuation of family roles such as wife, husband, mother, and father. Beyond positively reinforcing the marital bond, however, participants recall social and familial attitudes towards divorce that were negative and stigmatizing. Religious institutions also discouraged divorce, and often rejected church members who did decide to leave their marriages. These

negative attitudes were sometimes directed towards participants during their divorces, when friends and family members criticized or rejected them due to their decision to end an unsatisfactory marriage.

From these interpersonal experiences and the social attitudes engendering them, participants' responses to divorce were affected by negative attitudes in their social and personal systems. When participants divorced within a disapproving, rejecting, context, they described experiencing tremendous pain, guilt, and confusion. They sometimes felt marginalized or completely dismissed, when friends, neighbors, and family distanced themselves or ignored them. Thus, their individual feelings could not be separated from the culture surrounding them. As posited by Gergen (1985), personal experiences were embedded in social contexts. And, as found by Harvey and Hansen (2001), their divorce experiences were more painful when they internalized negative, stigmatized messages about divorce from their environments.

On the other hand, the current high rate of divorce has begun to change some social norms, and as several participants noted these changes facilitated their decision to divorce. Although marriage is still viewed as the desirable condition for adults (Riessman 1990), the increased frequency of divorce allowed interviewees to more readily consider this option. Older participants, for instance, discussed the changing social context from the 1950's to the present, and talked about feeling more comfortable about divorcing within the current social climate. Thus, again as posited by social constructionism (Gergen, 1985), historical changes were internalized by these interviewees and were involved in shaping more accepting and optimistic responses to this most personal event.

From within diverse backgrounds, most of these participants believed their marriages would be permanent, and the marriage's end shattered this belief and challenged their self-image in relationships, as well as their understandings about intimacy. In this section, I will discuss how confronting the problems in their former marriages and the losses incurred in divorce served as a catalyst for interpretation and personal growth.

Attributions and Changed Perceptions of Intimate Relationships

Through developing attributions about the problems that caused their divorces, participants analyzed their former marriages and constructed new expectations and mental representations of themselves and their partners in intimate relationships. It is also in this process of transforming their expectations that some gender linked interpretations become apparent.

For instance, women often cited inequality in their relationships as contributing to their decision to divorce – no men cited this cause. Women experienced different forms of inequality in their former relationships, variously complaining of assuming more of the household responsibilities, having less decision making power and less freedom of action than their husbands, or being obliged to cater to their husbands' personal needs. Some women also complained about domineering husbands, and in two instances, of abusive husbands. The list is long, but also substantiated by feminist writings that document the unequal relationships experienced by many married women (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Knudsen-Martin & Mahoney, 1998; Riessman, 1990; Schwartz, 1995). The women in this study who had experienced a power imbalance in their relationships not only felt they could change this dynamic, but also voiced strong conviction they would never again invest emotionally in an unequal relationship.

In another attribution, both men and women often stated they divorced because their marriages were devoid of emotional vitality. Consistently throughout these interviews, both men and women blamed men for creating emotional distance in the marriages. However, the interpretation of why men were not emotionally available in the marriages is linked to gender.

Women expressed repeatedly the conviction that their spouses were incapable of maintaining intimacy; therefore, they believed that with a more willing partner, they would be able to create a more gratifying relationship. Men, on the other hand, believed much of their behavior was due to circumstances, not to a flawed character. Particularly, they attributed blame to overly demanding work schedules diverting their attention and energy. Having made this mistake, these men felt willing to reorder their priorities with relational concerns and expressive communication heading their list.

This process of defining causes for divorce created the potential for changing mental representations of self and partner in intimate relationships, and these changes were also linked to gender. In thinking about building intimate relationships, several women talked at length about viewing themselves as currently being more assertive in relationships, which helped assure their needs would be met.

Several men, on the other hand, described consciously becoming more attentive and democratic in relationships, recognizing the need to consider a partner's priorities as equal to their own. They often considered themselves to have been previously too rigid, controlling, or domineering. The realignment of both genders' representations would tend to encourage a relationship less confined by traditional gendered expectations and more encouraging of an equal relationship, which Schwartz (1994) termed "peer marriage".

Another area attributed as a cause for divorce was dishonest communication or an avoidance of communication regarding conflictual situations. This finding is corroborated by empirical studies that have considered the quality of conflict resolution as predictive of marital outcomes (see Gottman, 1994; Notarius and Markham, 1993). Cutting across gender, men and women stated they were changing communication patterns in their post-divorce relationships, and these changes were aimed at correcting specific problems experienced in their previous marriages. The conviction they could change communication patterns is again explained partially by attribution theory, which posits that when adults ascribe responsibility for relationship failure to interactional problems rather than to a character flaw in themselves or their partner, they preserve a positive self-image and are optimistic they can succeed in a future relationship (Newman and Langer, 1981).

Although attributions of causation for divorce varied, it was noteworthy that most participants felt they could change what had been problematic in their marriage. As would be expected within attribution theory (see Grych & Fincham, 1992) both men and women formulated attributions that helped preserved their self-image and their optimism regarding their ability to engage in intimate relationships. Both perceived themselves as being capable of change and of building successful future relationships. This provided a basis for persisting in the establishment of intimate relationships. It also provides a clear link between divorce, the interpretive process, and changed expectations in post-divorce relationships.

Striking within all these findings was how divorce catalyzed a change process. The experience of marital dissolution created a sense of urgency to understand the causes of divorce and to create new ways of interacting in close relationships. Motivated to correct past mistakes, divorce propelled these adults to interpret the divorce, and to make dramatic changes in their perceptions of themselves and partners in post-divorce intimate relationships.

Loss and Renewal

For many participants, loss was a painful, central experience in the divorce process. In addition to losing a spouse, participants mourned multiple losses, including the loss of a family unit, a sense of security in the world, physical support in contending with daily life tasks, and the

friendship provided by the marital relationship. According to theories of loss and mourning, the meanings of an experienced loss may change over time, and may continue to influence responses to new and future relationships (Baker, 2000). Indeed, in relationships and in their individual development, the meanings interviewees retrospectively ascribed to these losses were integrated into their post-divorce development.

For women, losing a husband often meant losing the person they had relied on to make decisions, physically aid in raising the children, and provide financial security. Forced to contend alone with supporting themselves and often a family, and to make independent decisions about all aspects of their lives, women described surviving by becoming more independent and competent. Many also strengthened their sense of control and mastery by returning for further education to improve career options and improve their financial future. When divorce was due to or accompanied by abusive behavior, as it was for 7 interviewees, the loss also meant coping with feelings of anger, abandonment, and rejection. This experience consistently motivated women to prove their ability to accomplish new goals and expand their social networks, in an effort as they indicated to disprove their spouses' negative valuation of them.

As self-reliance is a strong American ideal (Riessman, 1990), becoming increasingly self-reliant increased women's self-esteem. Several discussed multiple responses to loss, expressing continued feelings of deep sadness and anger from their divorces, while also discussing the benefits of becoming more autonomous. . These findings are consistent with other empirical studies that describe the benefits of divorce for women (Arditti & Madden-Derdich, 1995, Marks, 1996, Riessman, 1990.) Marks (1996) found divorced women as a group to be more depressed than married women but also to have greater autonomy – a characteristic considered to be an important criterion of adult development (Blank & Blank, 1974; Erickson, 1950; Levinson, 1986). Divorced women were also found to be more open to new experience than married women, and to express more personal growth.

It should be noted there were some male interviewees who also reported emotional abuse during marriage or divorce proceedings. Among these four male participants, the response to abuse or abandonment was not consistent, with two men stating their response was to avoid commitment in new intimate relationships and two men stating the devastating results of their divorces spurred them to strengthen intimate relationships and pursue new personal goals.

For many men, losing a wife meant losing an intimate attachment that was not replaceable in their daily work and social interaction. Men who were parents also complained about stress involved in losing time with their children. They also missed the closeness provided by a family unit. These perceptions of loss and stress have been confirmed in many empirical studies (Amato, 2000; Arditti & Allen, 1993, Riessman, 1990). Thus, for men, the loss of a context for enjoying meaningful intimacy was a central distressing experience in their divorces. In response to these losses, men repeatedly reported growth in terms of developing greater emotional awareness and spiritual depth.

Because men often blamed themselves for creating emotional distance in their former marriages, they were conscious of taking responsibility for changing and becoming more talkative and expressive in relationships. A major area of growth was in their expressed desire to contribute to a mutually nurturing relationship. Repeatedly, men spoke of valuing expressive communication within an equal partnership, and of wanting to “open up” to a close partner. In valuing expressive talk and self-disclosure, men focused on a processual element of relationships considered to be a defining characteristic of intimacy (Riessman, 1990). An additional change in mental representations occurred in this process. In their post-divorce intimate relationships,

several men changed by viewing themselves as expressive partners, equally responsible for developing connection and promoting intimacy.

Some participants reported little regret at the loss of a marriage. Those who had felt trapped in unsatisfying relationships, or subordinated by controlling or abusive spouses, sometimes felt relief as a dominating emotion. For these participants, the loss of a relationship was outweighed by the benefit of gaining freedom to develop outside an oppressive relationship. In larger empirical studies (Arditti, 1999b; Stewart, Copeland et al., 1997), findings indicate children and adults often experience relief at the dissolution of a highly conflictual marriage.

Thus, in both men's and women's interviews, there were rich descriptions of marital endings interpreted as a catalyst for personal growth. Although not denying painful losses in divorce, most (18) of the participants also interpreted divorce as creating an opportunity to transform their interactions with intimate partners, friends, colleagues, and family members and to create new avenues for personal development.

Implications for Intimacy

In this section I examine the connection between divorce and post-divorce intimacy. Divorce did not completely alter views and expectations of intimate relationships. An expectation expressed by most participants, and which remained unchanged due to divorce, was the aspiration towards a permanent, committed relationship as a cornerstone in life. Within a committed relationship, interviewees repeatedly stressed a theme emphasizing importance of basing close relationships on honest, trustworthy communication and behaviors. This also was not changed by divorce experiences. Thus, in their interviews participants affirm characteristics considered to be key elements of intimate relationships (Kelly & Thibaut, 1983; Marston, Hecht, Manke, McDaniel, & Reeder, 1998). Furthermore, in a culture that continues to value personal commitment and marriage (Riessman, 1990), these participants maintained personal views that are positively reinforced by our social values.

Despite the continuity of hopes for intimacy, many participants described major changes in their expectations of intimate relationships, due to their divorce experiences. For example, men and women repeatedly expressed the changed expectation for more egalitarian relationships. They expressed the objective of building relationships based on a strong friendship between equal partners. This view again had different meanings to men and women. Men interpreted their difficulties in previous relationships as meaning they needed to work towards becoming more democratic, considerate, and expressive in their current relationships. Women, on the other hand, approached equality from almost the other end of a relationship spectrum. Rather than wishing to be more considerate, they almost uniformly stated they needed to be more assertive about getting their needs met in relationships. They also repeatedly stated they did not want to feel responsible for a partner's happiness.

Each gender recognized their contribution to a power imbalance that had hindered a gratifying intimacy in their marriage, and each formulated corresponding behavioral remedies. In this specific area, types of growth and changed expectations were specific to gender, and men and women were growing in complementary fashion. Post-divorce intimate relationships were conceptualized as less defined by traditional gender roles, and more by influenced by contemporary and feminist views of egalitarian relationships

Many interviewees also stated they expected more autonomy within an intimate relationship. Instead of becoming a merged unit, as many had expected in their first marriages, many of these adults wished to create space in their relationships to maintain separate interests and friendships. The importance of a *third corner* of outside interests (see Marks, 1986) was

prominent for these interviewees in their post-divorce relationships. They viewed interests apart from the relationship as an important avenue for personal growth (conceptualized by Marks as the *first corner* of relationships) and as creating dynamism in their interactions (Marks's *second corner* or relational corner). Thus, maintaining autonomy was seen as beneficial to sustaining and nurturing intimacy.

Autonomy was also defined as including and even encouraging the expression of divergent opinions and ideas, in order to more fully understand the partner. Within the partnership envisioned by these interviewees they emphasized the expectation that they and their partners should communicate clearly and resolve conflicts effectively. Many described frustrating patterns in their previous marriages of withdrawing from contentious discussions or avoiding conflict entirely. Because several participants viewed this problem as undermining their former marriages, they built post-divorce relationships characterized by a self-conscious creation of clear, open discussion.

Also noteworthy are the high standards expressed repeatedly by both men and women participants. As stated by Fine and Kurdek (1994), satisfaction in a marital relationship is related to the degree the relationship conforms to a person's internal standard of what a relationship should be. Expectations of honest communication, firm friendships, and equality were pervasive in these interviews. This finding raises the question as to whether actual relationships could fulfill these high standards or would tend to be disappointing in comparison to these idealistic criteria.

Some participants interpreted their divorces less optimistically. Some men and women reported feeling less secure about intimate attachments. Divorce had eroded some trust in self and partner, and reduced confidence in their ability to maintain a relationship. These participants spoke of hesitancy to invest emotionally in a committed relationship. Women who had felt trapped or demeaned in relationships felt insecure in current relationships. Feelings of insecurity were particularly noted by men and women who had been involved with former spouses in child custody litigation and by older women (above age 50). Several of the parents who had been involved in acrimonious litigation, actually decided not to remarry because they felt they could not trust a future partner with their children. Additionally, older women described feeling insecure based on repeated disappointments in relationships. Some also felt limited by a smaller pool of potential partners, and were insecure regarding their attractiveness as a potential romantic partner.

Finally, although divorce was an important force in shaping their post-divorce intimate relationships, interviewees indicated this was not a monolithic influence. Divorce seems to have precipitated growth in many areas of personal development, which resulted in rich, post-divorce experiences. For instance, post-divorce experiences of meaningful friendships, intimate relationships, professional advancement, and the acquiring of new skills and interests, also shaped their views, expectations, and experiences of intimacy. There were also developmental influences on expectations from post-divorce relationships. Younger participants (age 20-35) expressed more optimism about establishing long-term relationships than did older participants (age 40- 65). The post-divorce experiences of younger adults included meeting multiple potential partners. Additionally, their future stretched before them, and they viewed their lives as containing many possibilities for personal development, including that of building satisfying intimate relationships. Older adults, on the other hand, found themselves with a more limited pool of potential partners. Furthermore, many had experienced disappointments in their post-divorce relationships that caused them to be cautious about entering a fully committed

relationship. They also had formed firm ideas of what they expected from a relationship, and often found their expectations were not fulfilled in their current relationships.

In sum, a mixed picture emerges of divorce in relation to post-divorce intimacy. While many participants discussed the benefits of personal growth following a divorce, this did not always transfer to optimism regarding intimate relationships. Although many participants felt their divorces had precipitated positive changes and more egalitarian views and expectations of self and partner in intimate relationships, men and women who had experienced traumatic circumstances in their former marriages or divorces felt less secure about their post-divorce intimate relationships. Also, older adults often felt less optimistic regarding their ability to create long-term, meaningful intimate relationships.

Methodological Observations

In positioning myself while doing this research, it was helpful to think through the implications of the *emic* or insider and *etic* or outsider perspectives in the research process (see Merriam, 1998; Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Literature on qualitative methodology views the participants as holding an *inside* perspective on their own experience, and the researcher as the outsider, attempting to understand the emic perspective of the participant. This dichotomy is particularly pronounced in quantitative research, in which the researcher imposes outside structures and models on an experience in order to understand pre-defined components or variables of the experience (Merriam, 1998). In qualitative research, the relationship is not so polarized. Although maintaining an objective stance, the researcher attempts to understand the phenomenon under study through the eyes of the participants; thus, the attempt is to elucidate the participants' point of view. However, there is another salient issue involved in thinking through one's stance in a research project – the extent to which one has participated in the experience studied. That is, how much of an insider or outsider is the researcher, and what are the implications for the research itself?

In defining my own stance in this research, I believe the dichotomy does not hold. As a never divorced, married adult, I am clearly not an insider to the divorce experience. On the other hand, as a practicing psychotherapist with a specialty in divorce situations, I have worked closely with many adults, families, and children, coping with divorce situations. Thus, I would define myself not as an outsider, but as an invited guest. I have been invited to share many divorce experiences, without having actually participated in the lived experience of divorce. My dissertation advisor is also single, following a divorce, and her insights as an insider to the experience, and a researcher, enriched my understandings. It should also be noted that my being married may have entered into the focus of this work. Issues regarding intimacy, and personal autonomy within a relationship caught my attention, both because these were central to the participants' experiences, and because they are issues that interest me. A researcher who had been divorced may, for instance, have found the focus of coping with loss and anger to be of greater interest.

From within this stance, the phenomenological perspective has guided my work. The notion of *bracketing*, or setting aside preconceived notions, has been particularly helpful. Because my thinking about divorce had been shaped by clinical work, I needed to bracket clinical hypotheses and be open to hearing new perspectives and ideas voiced by the participants in this study. Particularly, I endeavored to understand a range of responses to divorce that I had not previously encountered, including responses of delight at the prospect of freedom from unsatisfying relationships. My professional background complemented this phenomenological approach, because as a therapist I have learned to suspend judgment while trying to understand

new people and situations that come to my attention. The new effort was in bracketing those understandings I had developed through many years of clinical work, in order to portray a richer tapestry of experience.

Kitson (1996) discussed the need to train researchers on how to contend with difficult emotional topics while engaging in qualitative research. The advantage to having been an “invited guest” in many divorce situations was that I was prepared for the emotional intensity that often accompanies divorce narratives. Participants told stories of emotional and physical abuse, abandonment, social rejection, false accusations of child abuse, substance abuse, lies, and infidelity. For an inexperienced interviewer, much of this information could have been overwhelming. In fact, one transcriber working with me often felt this way while listening to the taped interviews. Having heard similar accounts from clients over the years, I did not feel overwhelmed and could maintain an empathic stance without losing my focus in the interview. The disadvantage to this stance was in having to breach the gap between my personal history and that of these divorced adults. I was conscious of having to work hard to enter imaginatively into the participants’ experience.

To my surprise, within these emotional interviews, some participants felt they benefited personally from telling their stories. Although I drew clear boundaries in this situation, and did not take on a therapeutic role, as noted previously, divorce motivates people to find meaning in their experience. Because much of this quest occurs in dialogue with others (see Gergen, 1985, Riessman, 1990) the research interview sometimes became part of the interpretive process, helping participants integrate their emotions and cognitive understandings about their divorce.

Conclusions

From the theoretical frameworks and research questions guiding this study, and from the analysis of themes emerging from 21 interviews of divorced men and women, this study contributes new understandings about the connection between divorce experiences and post-divorce intimacy. There are several conclusions to be drawn from this study.

First, data analysis revealed divorce served consistently as a catalyst for interpretation and personal growth. Although precipitating distressing emotions, the end of a primary intimate relationship also motivated adults to make sense of this loss. From a major ending, all the men and women in this study sought to understand the causes of their divorce and what they could learn from it to help them in their future relationships. An important component of this interpretive endeavor was the social context within which the divorce occurred. Because divorce still carries some stigma in our society, divorce provided a challenge to create positive meanings from this experience.

The idiosyncratic understandings developed through the interpretive process shaped adults’ post-divorce perceptions and experiences in intimate relationships. From the attributions made regarding causes of divorce, these adults made deliberate changes in communication patterns, interactions, attitudes, and expectations from self and partner in intimate relationships. During this process, some fundamental shifts in mental representations occurred. Changes were linked to gender, with women viewing themselves as more assertive in relationships, and men viewing themselves as more egalitarian and responsible for relationship maintenance.

Although not built into the research questions, gender became an important lens for this study. As I read and reread the interview transcripts, thematic patterns related to gendered experiences of divorce emerged from the data that had not been anticipated in the research questions. This emerging thematic pattern suggests that men and women often view divorces differently, a finding that is corroborated by several empirical studies (Arditti & Allen, 1993;

Lund, 1990; Meyer, 1989; Riessman, 1990). For instance, a glaring difference between men and women was evident in the discussion of causes for divorce. Many women talked about being in a frustratingly subordinate role in their former marriages, and some had experienced verbal and physical abuse. These women blamed the inequality in their marriages as an important cause for divorce, whereas no men discussed this as a problematic issue. This finding is supported by feminist writers who maintain that due to gendered marital roles, women often assume a subordinate role in marriages. (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Risman, 1998; Schwartz, 1994). In marriages characterized by socially sanctioned roles of the husband as head of the household, and the wife as a source of support to husband and children, inequality becomes nearly inevitable. In more egalitarian relationships, couples may struggle with inequalities due to economic discrepancies in which the husband has greater earning power, and due to social biases which devalue the importance of a wife's career (Risman, 1998).

When men and women agreed, they were still dissimilar. They seemed to be saying the same words, but talking different languages. An example of this was seen in the strong theme regarding desired changes in post-divorce relationships. Both men and women hoped for more egalitarian relationships. However, women interpreted this as meaning that to address the power imbalance in their previous marriages they would need to be more assertive and less solicitous of their spouses' needs, whereas men interpreted this as meaning they would need to be more involved, democratic, and empathic.

Although both men and women described painful feelings of loss, the meanings associated with the loss also differed by gender. For women, losing a marital partner often meant losing financial and physical support. The financial consequences of divorce for women can be severe, as seen in studies estimating women's income declining from 30 % (Weiss, 1984) to 70 % (Weitzman, 1985) following divorce. The women in this study responded to this change by developing greater competence and autonomy in their daily functioning, and by pursuing new professional goals that increased their earning power.

For most men, losing a marital partner also had financial ramifications, but the most meaningful loss for them was that of a partner in intimacy, and the loss of a family unit. Particularly painful and sometimes embittering was their lessened contact with their children. In other empirical studies, pervasive sadness connected with this loss has been linked to men's post-divorce adjustment (Amato, 2000; Meyers, 1989; Riessman, 1990). The men in this study responded to this loss variously by litigating for parental rights, developing greater emotional awareness, and placing greater value on building and maintaining intimate relationships in their lives.

From within these differences, however, a clear consensus for change in post-divorce relationships was discerned in this sample. Divorce generated greater egalitarianism in the approach of men and women to intimate relationships. Relationships were less tied to traditional gendered expectations of women catering to men, and relationship possibilities expanded to include a respectful friendship of equals. The finding that these adults felt equality would improve the quality of their relationships, confirms feminist writings indicating men and women find greater satisfaction in more egalitarian relationships (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1998; Schwartz, 1994).

A change that cut across gender was the wish to incorporate greater personal autonomy into post-divorce intimate relationships. This included the notion of accepting differences of opinion and personality, and working on developing conflict resolution skills as a component of

maintaining dynamism in a mature relationship. Along with this, many people emphasized the importance of sharing mutual interests and pleasurable activities to nourish relationships.

Divorce also affected the structure adults chose to impose on relationships. These divorced adults also did not limit intimate relationships to marital relationships – they often preferred to date or cohabit, confirming Weiss’s (1975) finding that post-divorce relationships are diverse in structure.

Thus, divorce shaped post-divorce relationships in multiple ways. As detailed in the findings and discussion, loss of a relationship precipitated an intense interpretive process which shaped notions about communication, power, and structure of post-divorce relationships.

Implications for Therapy

Therapists often work with clients who are experiencing the immediate aftermath of divorce, when emotions are intense and personal situations are changing in many ways. Sometimes clients undergo an emotional crisis as many of their feelings about their spouses and expectations about their lives undergo radical change. In the face of the external and internal upheaval of divorce, this study offers some insights into the divorce experience, which can help the “generalist” practitioner develop expertise in what I will term “divorce therapy”.

This study highlights how divorce serves as a catalyst for diverse changes in adult expectations and experiences in intimate relationships. The process of moving from the initial reactions of divorce to reflecting on and making changes in post-divorce relationship underlines the process of change and development that is inherent in the entire divorce trajectory.

Within this process, therapists should be sensitive to issues of loss that occur throughout the process. Loss is a salient issue, both because of the multiple external losses previously described, and because in human development, personal change implies discarding some ideas and habits that are no longer viable, thus often precipitating feelings of loss and insecurity.

Discussion of reactions to losses incurred at the time of marital separation and in the aftermath of divorce may perhaps constitute one of the most significant areas of intervention with clients in divorce situations. Of particular importance is the specific meanings clients ascribe to the losses. For instance, the loss of role as spouse may have very different meanings to a woman who has derived much of her self-identity from the relationship and a woman who has not invested emotionally in the marriage (De Garmo & Kitson, 1996). Or, as seen in this study, the loss of a relationship that once provided an important source of friendship will have different implications for future relationships than leaving an abusive marriage. Furthermore, as noted by Baker (2001), the feelings regarding losses may become less intense over time, but the loss continues to operate as a component of affective experience, and should be attended to consistently in the therapy process. Over time, initial mourning reactions to divorce may subside, (see Bowlby, 1961; Gray & Shields, 1992, Kitson, 1992) but the changes occurring in clients’ lives can reactivate earlier feelings associated with loss, requiring a “working through” to enable the reinvestment of energy and enthusiasm into new relationships and personal goals (Freud, 1917).

Because feelings associated with loss may accompany post-divorce experiences, therapists should be aware that positive development may be occurring simultaneously with expressed feelings of depression and confusion (Marks, 1996). Because empirical studies find outcomes of divorce often include greater autonomy and growth – particularly for women – (Arditti & Madden-Derdich, 1995; Riessman, 1990) it is important to incorporate this hopeful viewpoint into the therapy process. Narrative therapists refer to this as clients *restorying* their lives. If the therapist is aware of this potential for positive growth, he or she can help clients

incorporate a more hopeful point of view into their outlook on their current and future possibilities, which in my experience may also serve as an antidote to depression. Because attribution theory holds that a more optimistic viewpoint is important in establishing post-divorce relationships, this intervention may also support positive experiences in post-divorce relationships.

Therapy would also benefit from examining the connection between clients' social contexts and their current reactions. This is an area often ignored by therapists. In this study, findings indicate divorce is still not a benign situation, with adults receiving many negative messages about their decision to divorce. Clients who have internalized critical or stigmatized attitudes may have to cope with another source of pain and discouragement (Harvey & Hansen, 2001), and this should be attended to in the therapy. Because theoretical and empirical studies show clients can restore or recreate meanings in their lives through languaged interactions (Gergen, 1985; White & Epston, 1990), conscientious attention and discussion of the impact for clients of cultural bias against divorce can strengthen therapy's ability to help clients deconstruct stigmatizing attitudes and create new points of view.

Limitations of the study

This study would have been strengthened by studying a more diverse group of participants. Although a conscious attempt was made to locate a diverse sample, geographical realities limited the sample to a mostly Caucasian, middle-class group. Because phenomenology emphasizes illuminating a phenomenon from a multitude of perspectives, (Wertz, 1993), and because the social context of individual experience is emphasized in this study, the addition of other ethnicities, religions, and geographical locations would have enriched the results.

Positioning myself as an invited guest in the experiences of these participants also created some limitations for this study. Never having experienced divorce myself created some distance from the issues studied, and posed some challenges in entering imaginatively into the participants' experience. Although I worked to bridge the gap, I am also aware of the limitations my own experience imposed on understanding participants' post-divorce relationships.

Interview formats also pose inherent limitations, because they offer a subjective account without additional observations to verify participants' statements. For example, a participant may describe having made substantial changes in relationships, but this could not be checked against the perceptions of a partner or close companion. The interpretation of the interviews is also limited by the lack of member checking in this study. As recommended by Chenail (1995) the data is the "star" in this study; however, the analysis of the participants' words should be understood to represent my interpretation of their descriptions, rather than an understanding gained by a mutual construction of meaning.

Finally, this study explores an area of divorce in which there is a paucity of research. Therefore, results from this study should be confirmed or challenged by future research projects. Because I studied an area only recently emerging in the divorce literature, part of this enterprise included forging a conceptual framework for examining the phenomenon. This was challenging and exciting, but tentative in nature. Future theoretical contributions could strengthen understandings of processes involved in post-divorce intimate relationships. Using feminist theory as a framework for examining post-divorce relationships seems a particularly promising approach.

Suggestions for Future Research

There is great potential for research in the area of adult post-divorce intimate relationships. This study emphasizes the processes involved in developing post-divorce

relationships. Therefore, longitudinal studies that followed adults for several years following a divorce could contribute information regarding how time affects coping with loss and redefining oneself in a changed personal and social context. Because these participants indicated their views regarding relationships changed over time, it would be informative to examine more precisely what changes, and how the passage of time shapes their perceptions and responses to intimate relationships. Within this endeavor, it would also be fruitful to explore how other post-divorce experiences are interwoven with the divorce experience to affect post-divorce intimacy.

Additionally, in this study there are initial findings that participants' attitudes towards relationships shifted as they grew older. The expectations of younger participants were often more optimistic than those of older participants who had sometimes experienced several disappointments, and who faced a more limited field of potential partners. The way in which cohort experiences and developmental life stages shape responses to post-divorce relationships also affords a rich potential for future research.

Finally, future research aimed at understanding the diversity of attitudes and experiences in post-divorce intimate relationships would be beneficial. Current research indicates adults often are more inventive and flexible in post-divorce relationships, and are accepting of a wider range of relationship structure. For instance, relationships involving less legal obligation and incorporating more freedom for the partners are often preferred (Weiss, 1975). Therefore, future research could aim at describing the range of relationships created, and could also explore the connection between divorce and this more open, flexible approach.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

ADULT PERCEPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS OF POST-DIVORCE INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

Interviewer: I am going to be asking you some questions about your divorce and about your feelings concerning close relationships at this time. I realize that we will be talking about your personal life and your reflections on your closest relationships. If at any time you feel uncomfortable answering a question, please feel free to refrain from answering. I hope today will be an opportunity for you to reflect upon your own experiences in a comfortable manner.

1. First, I would like to give you a checklist of background questions: (see separate sheet for demographic questions)

Now I will be asking you some questions about your divorce and current close relationships

Questions Regarding Divorce and Intimate Relationships

1. How would you define an intimate relationship? What do you think needs to be present in a good intimate relationship?

(Probes may include asking about commitment, companionship, reliable alliance, emotional support, mutual caring, communication, intuitive understandings, care and protection, exclusive attention, physical expressions of intimacy, trust).

2. What was important for you about being in a marriage – what did it mean to you?

3. What kinds of things have influenced your view of divorce?

(Probes may include their family background, religious/cultural background, their previous marriage(s).)

4. Can you tell me in your own words what were the main causes for your separation and divorce?

5. Describe the experience of your divorce and how you believe it may have affected you?

(Probes may include feeling optimistic or pessimistic regarding future relationships, changes in self-image in a relationship, possibility of changing what was problematic in the marriage in a future relationship)

6. What are the main difficulties that have come from the divorce?

(Probes may include explaining this in terms of considering close relationships)

7. What are the main benefits that have come from the divorce?

(Probes may include personal growth, clarifying what you need/want in a relationship)

8. When your marriage ended, did you feel you lost an important relationship?
9. What is your current relationship with your former spouse?
(Probes may include: spouse still important, preoccupation with spouse, thinking about reuniting, good friends, parenting partners, hostile feelings, hurt feelings, spouse not important any more, feeling very separate.)
9. What is it like for you to be single? What meaning does it have for you?
11. What other influences in your life have affected the way you look at close relationships?
(Probes may include family background, cultural or religious background, other relationships or friendships)

Interviewer: Now I am going to be asking you about current views and experiences in intimate relationships.

Current Views of Relationships

1. When you meet a potential romantic partner, what do you anticipate will happen? (What are your expectations?)
(Probes may include how they anticipate being responded to, what behaviors they anticipate from the other person, what degree of emotional intimacy they anticipate, hopes, fears, wishes, sense of security/insecurity in a relationship, what has remained stable?)
2. What has changed or what has remained the same in terms of your expectations from the relationship?
(Probes may include what is expected from self and from partner?)
3. What is it like to be in a relationship with you?
4. What aspects of your previous marriage(s) would you like to, or have you incorporated in a current relationship?
5. Which aspects of your previous marriages would you not like to incorporate in a current relationship?
6. Could you tell me about the strengths/difficulties in your current relationships?
7. Is there anything else that you would like to say about your divorce or your views of close relationships that we haven't talked about?

Interviewer: Thank you for your participation in this study. Again all your responses are confidential. Your tape will be transcribed and then destroyed. Your pseudonym or code number will be the only way your responses will be distinguished. If you would like a copy of the results please put your name and address on this envelope and I will send the conclusions to you as soon as the project is finished. Any questions? Thank you again for your time and your responses to this interview.

Demographic Questions

1. What is your Age? _____

2. What is your Race?

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| _____ 1. Caucasian | _____ 4. Native American |
| _____ 2. Hispanic | _____ 5. Asian |
| _____ 3. African American | _____ 6. Other (please specify) _____ |

3. Gender: _____ 1. Male _____ 2. Female

4. Highest year of schooling completed?

- _____ 1. 1-8th
- _____ 2. High School
- _____ 3. College
- _____ 4. Vocational school
- _____ 5. Some College
- _____ 6. Other (please specify) _____

5. How long have you been divorced? You may indicate the exact amount of time.

- _____ 1. One year
- _____ 2. Two years
- _____ 3. Three years
- _____ 4. Four years
- _____ 5. Five years
- _____ 6. Other (please specify) _____

6. How many previous marriages?

- _____ 1. One
- _____ 2. Two
- _____ 3. Three
- _____ 4. Other (please specify) _____

7. Are you currently?

- _____ 1. Divorced
- _____ 2. Cohabiting
- _____ 3. Involved in a committed relationship for _____ (length of time)
- _____ 4. Single
- _____ 5. Other (please specify) _____

8. Are there children from your previous marriage?

- _____ 1. Yes
- _____ 2. No

9. What is the custody arrangement:

- _____ 1. Sole legal/physical custody (____ Mother ____ Father)
- _____ 2. Joint legal custody
- _____ 3. Joint physical custody
- _____ 4. Other (Please explain)

10. What are some actions you have taken to cope with the divorce?

- 1. Talking with friends
- 2. Talking with family members
- 3. Psychotherapy/ Counseling
- 4. Support Groups
- 5. Spiritual guidance/prayer (please specify)\
- 6. Physical exercise
- 7. Drinking
- 8. Drugs
- 9. Other (Please specify) _____

APPENDIX B

Description of Participants

Annie is a 30-year old elementary school teacher. She had been divorced for two years, and was currently involved in a committed lesbian relationship. She had a son from the marriage, and was currently experiencing stress from co-parenting with her ex-spouse and his new wife.

Barry is a 36-year old researcher, who was married 5 ½ years and had been divorced one year. He had a son from the marriage. There had been a long period of acrimonious court battles regarding custody, initiated by his ex-spouse. During the divorce, Barry's church group disowned him, and he was forced to rebuild his social and spiritual resources. He also became politically active as an advocate for fathers' rights.

Becky is a 57-year old director of a social services program. She was married 32 years and had been divorced six years. There were adult children from the marriage. She had been engaged in a long-term relationship after the divorce, and had only recently separated from that partner. After her divorce, she returned to school for her B.A. degree.

Bob is a 41-year old businessman who was married two years and had been divorced five years. He was currently cohabitating with a girlfriend whom he anticipated marrying.

Carla is a 35-year old interior designer who had been divorced five years. She was currently cohabitating with her boyfriend, in a committed relationship. She was also alienated from her family of origin, due to their responses to her divorce.

Curly is a 47-year old graduate student, who had been divorced 20 years. However, he had maintained a close relationship with his ex-spouse, including living together as friends (platonic relationship) for 15 years after the divorce. He described the emotional divorce as occurring five years ago. He was currently dating one person, but was not sure of the level of his commitment.

Fred is a 52-year old employee of the Roanoke municipality. He was married 25 years and had been divorced three years. He was currently dating a woman, but he still felt emotionally tied to his ex-spouse. He did not feel he had accepted the reality of the divorce.

Gayle is a 46-year old mental health professional. She was married nine years and had been divorced for 15 years. There was one child from the marriage, and there had been acrimonious court battles over custody. She was currently in a long-term committed relationship. After her divorce, she had gone back to school for her M.A. degree and further specialization.

Gloria is a 44-year old community program director who had been divorced seven years. There is a child from the previous marriage, and Gloria was having difficulty getting child support payments from her ex-spouse. She was currently in a serious long-distance relationship, and was ambivalent regarding further commitment.

James is a 54-year old sales representative, who was married 22 years and had been divorced five years. There were two adult children from this marriage. After his divorce, he also had to change employment, and became ill with cancer, which was in remission. He was currently dating a woman, but did not feel it would be a permanent commitment.

Jean is a 50-year old businesswoman, currently unemployed. She was married 12 ½ years and had been divorced 2 years. There were two children from the marriage, who were teenagers at the time of the divorce. Both children developed substance abuse problems during the divorce. She was not currently dating or involved in an intimate relationship.

Lee is a 45-year old director of a social services program. She was divorced 11 years. There was a child from this marriage, who was a teenager at the time of divorce. She returned to school after her divorce for her B.A. and M.A. degrees. Currently, she was not involved in an intimate relationship.

Maddie is a 37-year old nurse, who was married 11 years and had been divorced 1 ½ years. She was raising two young children, and working full-time. She felt there was a cooperative co-parenting relationship between her and her ex-spouse. She was currently involved in a relationship with a man who was also divorced and raising his children.

Merlin is a 51-year old specialty gardener, who has been married three times, and had been divorced for 14 years. He had two grown children from one marriage with whom he had difficulty maintaining contact. He was currently in a committed relationship.

Molly is a 27-year old student, who was married seven years and had been divorced one year. She was raising her two small children, working full time, and being a full-time student. She had recently begun dating a man, whom she enjoyed.

Phoebe is a 54-year old elementary school teacher who was married 20 years and divorced 10 years. There were three children from the marriage, and Phoebe had difficulty receiving child support for them. She was not currently involved in an intimate relationship, nor was she dating.

Rachel is a 21-year old student who was married 1½ years and divorced one year. She had begun college after the divorce. She was currently dating casually.

Ralph is a 43-year old school bus driver who has been married twice, for three and five years, and divorced eight years. There was a child from one marriage, whom he saw infrequently. He was not currently involved or interested in an intimate relationship.

Robert is 52-years-old and had been married twice, for 2 ½ and 3 years. He had been divorced 10 years. There was a son from one marriage, and there had been acrimonious court battles regarding custody and visitation. He felt bitter about his legal experiences and reduced contact with his son. He was not currently involved in an intimate relationship.

Sam is a 63-year old retiree, who was married 32 years and divorced 14 years. There was an adult child from this marriage. He was currently dating in a serious relationship.

Susan is a 27-year old graduate student, who was married two years and had been divorced two years. She was currently cohabitating with her boyfriend.

Table 1

Demographic information

Name	Age	Gender	Education Level	How long married (Years)	Number of marriages
Robert	52	Male	Some college	2.5, 3	2
Rachel	21	Female	Some college	1.5	1
Lee	45	Female	M.S		1
Susan	27	Female	B.A.	2	1
Bob	41	Male	Some college	2	1
Annie	30	Female	B.A.		1
Barry	36	Male	B.A.	5.5	1
Jean	50	Female	B.A.	12.5	1
Maddie	37	Female	B.A.	11	1
Curly	47	Male	M.S		1
Becky	57	Female	B.A.	32	1
Merlin	51	Male	M.A		3
Gayle	46	Female	M.A.	9	1
Ralph	43	Male	High school	3, 5	2
Carla	35	Female	B.A.		1
Sam	63	Male	Vocational school	32	1
James	54	Male	B.A.	22	1
Fred	52	Male	Some college	25	1
Gloria	44	Female	M.A.		1
Phoebe	54	Female	M.A.	20	1
Molly	27	Female	Some college	7	1

Table 1- Continued

Demographic information

Name	How long divorced (years)	Marital Status	Children	Custodial parent
Robert	12, 10	Single	1	No
Rachel	1	Single	0	N/A
Lee	11	Single	1	Adult child
Susan	2	Single, in relationship	0	N/A
Bob	5	single, cohabitating	0	N/A
Annie	2	single, cohabitating	1	Joint
Barry	1	Single	1	Joint legal
Jean	12	Single	2	Adult children
Maddie	1.5	Single, in relationship	2	Joint
Curly	20	Single, in relationship	0	N/A
Becky	6	Single	2	Yes
Merlin	14	Single, in relationship	2	No
Gayle	15	Single, in relationship	1	Yes
Ralph	8	Single	1	No
Carla	5	Single	0	N/A
Sam	14	Single, in relationship	2	Adult children
James	5	Single, in relationship	2	Adult children
Fred	3	Single, in relationship	2	Adult children
Gloria	7	Single, in relationship	1	Joint legal
Phoebe	10	Single	3	Yes
Molly	1	Single, in relationship	2	Joint

APPENDIX C

IRB Research Protocol

AFTER THE BREAKUP: ADULT PERCEPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS OF POST-DIVORCE INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

Justification of Project

This project is being undertaken in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Human Development. There exists currently a large body of research devoted to divorce and to remarriage, but there is a dearth of research pertaining to the processes involved when adults reestablish intimate relationships following a divorce. The purpose of this study is to examine divorced adults' perceptions, expectations, and feelings about post-divorce intimate relationships. The study focuses on the meanings adults attach to their divorce, and how they believe that the divorce has affected their current feelings and views about close relationships. A related area of inquiry is how the divorce is connected with current or anticipated relationships.

By contributing a thematic description of this process, this study enriches the current research base by contributing a missing link between divorce and remarriage studies. This study also has implications for therapeutic intervention, as it can contribute more specific understandings about post-divorce relationship processes. Finally, there are educational implications for this study. Because it addresses the issue of how divorced adults rebuild significant relationships, this study can offer new information to individuals about their own personal situation. Furthermore, because this study will include discussion about the strengths of individuals, and the potential for growth and renewal following a divorce, it offers a more hopeful perspective than many previous studies. It can also offer a new viewpoint to the lay public, thus potentially reducing the stigma attached to divorce.

Procedures

This research project will be conducted through 20-40 semi-structured interviews with individuals who have divorced, and who have not yet remarried. The interviews will be taped, and later transcribed for content analysis. The participants will be located through advertisements, notices, and personal contacts. They will be selected because they have been divorced and have a contribution to make to the research question. They will be men and women who have been separated at least one year, and have had at least one exclusive relationship subsequent to their divorce.

This study is designed to be completed within one year. Interviews will be conducted in a spot that is convenient for the participant, and that ensures confidentiality. Location possibilities include the participants' homes or a professional office. I expect each interview to require between 60 to 90 minutes. No preparation for the interviews by participants is needed; however, interview questions will be made available to them, in order to enable them to reflect on the issues to be discussed.

Risks and Benefits

While risks from this research are minimal, there could be some unforeseen results. The interviews cover personal material, including a discussion of their divorce experience, which might cause distress to some individuals. Interviewees may feel uncomfortable about being recorded. To address some of the anxiety, I am providing the interviewees a copy of the interview questions, so they can anticipate the interview. Furthermore, participants will be informed that they do not have to reveal any information they feel is compromising or embarrassing to them. I will be using many open-ended questions, thereby providing a flexible structure that will allow participants to decide to what extent they wish to respond to any given question. Participants are also free to withdraw from the interview or the study at any time. Finally, as a psychotherapist with more than twenty years of experience, I have the training to cope with people's reactions to talking about personal experiences.

The benefits include having the opportunity to discuss their situation with an interested and knowledgeable interviewer. Upon request, participants will have the opportunity to get additional feedback from me after I analyze the transcript data. This may benefit them, as it hopefully will provide new insights regarding their personal situation. They will also be contributing to the general knowledge base about divorce, and to specific knowledge that therapists and educators can utilize to help divorcing individuals.

Confidentiality/Anonymity

The participants in this study will be guaranteed anonymity. Interviewees will be identified only through pseudonyms that they choose for the interview and all data analysis. The interviews will be tape recorded for transcription and data analysis. The investigator and the transcriber, should one be used, will be the only persons who have access to the tapes. Tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet until after the completion of a dissertation, at which time they will be destroyed, or returned to the participants.

Informed Consent

A copy of the informed consent form for individuals is attached to this request.

Researcher Information

The faculty member guiding the research process is:

Dr. Joyce Arditti
Associate Professor of Family Studies
Department of Human Development

The graduate student conducting the interviews:

Debora Schneller, M.A., MSW

Ph.D. Candidate

Family Studies

Department of Human Development

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent

Project Title: After the Breakup: Adult Perceptions and Expectations of Post-Divorce Intimate Relationships

Investigators: Debora Schneller, M.A., MSW; Dr. Joyce Arditti, Department of Human Development

I. Purpose of this Research/Project

The purpose of this research is to investigate divorced adults' perceptions, expectations, and beliefs about intimate relationships following a divorce. This study focuses on the meanings adults attach to their divorce, and on how they believe the divorce has affected not only their current feelings and views about relationships, but also their experiences in intimate relationships. A minimum of twenty divorced men and women will be interviewed for this study.

II. Procedures

Participants will be interviewed at least one time in connection with the qualitative research project titled *After the Breakup: Adult Perceptions and Expectations of Post-Divorce Intimate Relationships*. The interview will take between 30 to 60 minutes, and there may be occasion for a follow-up interview. Interviews will take place in a quiet locale that is convenient for the participant. Questions will be asked about participants' experiences, feelings and thoughts regarding close personal relationships after a divorce.

III. Risks

There are no known risks to participating in this project, although it may be difficult at times to discuss unpleasant memories. Participants are free to refrain from answering any question that may cause them distress. The interviewer is an experienced psychotherapist who has experience discussing personal subjects. Additionally, a reference list of community and mental health services and providers may be provided for any participant who may request further help with the issues discussed.

IV. Benefits

This study will provide useful information to professional counselors and educators and to the general public about how people who are divorced are thinking and experiencing close relationships. For counselors, it can contribute more specific understandings about how adults interpret their divorce in terms of post-divorce relationships. There are educational implications for this study as well. Because it addresses the issue of how divorced adults rebuild significant relationships, this study can offer new information both to researchers of divorce and to individuals about their personal situations. It can also offer a new viewpoint to the lay public, thus hopefully reducing the stigma attached to divorce. The results from this study will be presented in national conferences on families. A summary of results will also be sent as press releases to local and national newspapers. All people participating in this study will also be offered a summary of the research results.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

The identity of all participants will be kept confidential at all times. A pseudonym will be chosen before the interview begins, in order to assure confidentiality in any transcript, tape, and reference to any information contained in the interview. The primary researcher may keep a list of actual names for contact purposes, but will not share those names with anyone during any part of the research process.

There will be audio taping of the interviews. All tapes will be kept in a locked file drawer, and will be destroyed or returned to participants at the conclusion of this study. Transcription of tapes will be done either by the researcher or by a professional transcriber. There are a few situations in which confidentiality must be broken. If child or elder abuse is revealed, or if a participant is dangerous to himself or others, it will be necessary to notify the appropriate authorities.

VI. Compensation

A \$25.00 gift certificate is offered as an optional compensation. The compensation will be given at the time of the interview, or mailed to the participant shortly thereafter.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

Participation in this research is voluntary. Participants are free to refrain from answering any question without any penalty of any kind. Participants may also withdraw from the interview or the project at any time without any penalty. In the event that a participant withdraws from the interview or project, any tape made of the interview will be either returned or destroyed, and no transcript will be made of the interview.

VIII. Approval of Research

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and by the Department of Human Development.

July 1, 2001
IRB Approval Date

July 1, 2002
Approval Expiration Date

IX. Participant's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. My responsibility is to come to the interview at the agreed upon time, and to speak honestly about my thoughts and experiences.

X. Participant's Permission

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

Subject Signature

Date

Should I have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research participants' rights, I may contact

Debora Schneller, M.A., MSW
Principal Investigator

540-953-9212 / dschnell@vt.edu

Dr. Joyce Arditti
Faculty Advisor &
Departmental Reviewer

540-231-5758/ Arditti@vt.edu

Dr. David Moore
Chair, IRB
Office of Research Compliance
Research & Graduate Studies

540-231/4991/ moored@vt.edu

PARTICIPANTS WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OR DUPLICATE ORIGINAL OF THIS CONSENT

APPENDIX E

Coding Schema
Content Areas and Major Themes

Content Area (in italics)

Intimacy

Coding categories

1. Components of Intimacy [cat.1]
 - A. Themes:
 - Honest, expressive interaction
 - Common interests
 - Incorporating Differences

2. Evolving Understandings [cat.11]
 - B. Themes:
 - Personal and cultural influences
 - parents
 - religion
 - relationship experiences

Marriage

Coding categories:

1. Personal Meanings [cat.2]
 - A. Themes:
 - Security and comfort,
 - Companionship,
 - Sexual intimacy,
 - Love
 - Equality
2. Societal meanings [cat.2]
 - B. Themes:
 - Familial and religious attitudes
 - Permanent commitment
 - Family unit

Divorce

Coding Categories:

1. Context of Divorce, [Cat.3] – (how context influences meaning)
 - A. Negative Meanings[cat.3]
 - Themes
 - Parental influences,
 - Religious influences
 - Social stigma

Personal experiences of divorce

- B. Positive meanings – [cat.3]
 - Themes:
 - Supportive parents
 - Reading current literature
 - Independent thinking
- 2. Interpreting the divorce [Cat.4, 5]
 - A. Causes [cat.4]
 - Themes:
 - Emotional distance,
 - Inequality,
 - Communication problems
 - Poor conflict resolution skills
- 3. Aftermath of the divorce [Cat. 6,7,8]
 - A. Difficulties [cat.6, cat. 8. cat.5]
 - Themes:
 - Financial problems, [6]
 - Parenting dilemmas [6]
 - Loss and loneliness [5,6, 9]
 - Damaged trust [5]
 - B. Benefits [cat. 5,7,]
 - Themes:
 - Personal growth –
 - spiritual [5&7]
 - emotional [5&7]
 - autonomy [5]
 - new goals [7]

Current Relationships:

Coding Categories

- 1. Stable expectations/values [cats.13, 15, 17]
 - Themes:
 - Friendship
 - Commitment/loyalty
- 2. Changed expectations/values [cats. 13,16]
 - Themes:
 - A more equal relationship
 - women's perspectives
 - men's perspectives
 - New priorities

Honest, expressive communication
Conflict resolution

4. Problems in current relationships [cat.17]

Themes:

Ambivalence regarding commitment

5. Strengths in current relationships [cat.17]

Themes:

Having fun

Open, honest communication

APPENDIX F

DEBORA P. SCHNELLER

1002 Emil Circle
Blacksburg, VA 24060
Phone:(540) 552-9848
E-mail: dschnell@vt.edu

EDUCATION:

Ph.D., Human Development, expected 1/02

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech), Blacksburg, VA

Dissertation Title: *After the Breakup: Adult Perceptions and Expectations of Post-Divorce Intimate Relationships*. J. Arditti, Ph.D., Adviser

Awarded: James D. Moran Memorial Thesis/Dissertation Award

M.S.W., Masters of Social Work

Smith College School for Social Work, Northampton, MA. 1980

Thesis Title: *The Immigrant's Challenge: Mourning the Homeland and Adapting to the New World*

M.A., Humanities – French Literature

State University of New York (S.U.N.Y), Buffalo, N.Y.1976

B.A., Comparative Literature

University of California, Berkeley, 1972

TEACHING INTERESTS

- Children and Families
- Mental Health
- Family, Individual, and Group Practice
- Human Behavior in the Social Environment
- Research Methods

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Adjunct Instructor

Radford University, Radford, VA. 2001-present.

- Taught graduate level social work students
- Subject: Assessment, evaluation, and intervention with diverse family systems

Instructor, Founding Committee Member, Children of Divorce Seminar

Blacksburg, VA 1995-present

- Collaborated with multidisciplinary committee in creating a community based educational forum for divorcing parents
 - Cooperated in writing teaching guide and 50-page class manual.
 - Attended monthly committee meetings to revise teaching guide, improve teaching process and expand the program to surrounding communities
- Taught classes for divorcing parents in local communities, 1996-present
- Presented the class format to the local Family Bar Association
- Met with local judges to elicit cooperation
- Sponsored by the New River Valley Mental Health Association, which lobbied successfully for legislation mandating this course for divorcing parents with custody disputes.

Instructor and Facilitator of Community-Based Mental Health Seminars

Blacksburg, VA. 1992-1999

- Presentations on childhood depression, childhood bereavement, and effective parenting strategies, Montgomery County and Pulaski County School Systems
- Conducted workshops for factory workers and business executives: "Downtime: Clinical Depression in the Workplace," sponsored by Mental Health Association of the New River Valley
- Presented "Stress Management for Parents", Head Start Association, New River Valley

Adjunct Instructor

Radford University, Radford, VA. 1996 – 1997

- Taught undergraduate social work students
- Subject: Interventive Methods II: Working with Individuals and Families

Instructor and Supervisor, Field Placement Program

Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel, 1984-1986

- Co-taught field placement seminar to Arab and Israeli social work students
- Developed and supervised field placements in well baby clinics in Israeli cities and Arab villages
- Supervised students in these placements
- Trained pediatric nurses in preventative evaluation of infant-parent interaction.

Teacher, English Matriculation Studies

Jerusalem, Israel, 1977-1978

- Taught Israeli high school senior students English literature required for their matriculation examinations.

Graduate Teaching Assistant

SUNY Buffalo, Buffalo, New York, 1974-1976

- Instructed undergraduate students in French language and literature

SOCIAL WORK EXPERIENCE

Private Counseling Practice

Independent practice providing counseling to children, families, and adults, Blacksburg, VA, 1993-present

Psychiatric Social Worker

Los Angeles Unified School District, Mental Health Clinic, Los Angeles, CA, 1991-1992

- Performed assessments and consultations
- Coordinated treatment with public agencies
- Organized workshops on crisis intervention
- Participated in interdisciplinary case consultation series on children and families
- Languages used: English, Spanish and Hebrew

Clinical Social Work Director

Family Counseling Services, Volunteers of America, Los Angeles, CA, 1989-1990

- Interviewed and selected student interns
- Responsible for liaison activities with several local universities
- Prepared interdisciplinary clinical training programs
- Wrote agency's policy and evaluation manual

Social Work Supervisor and Family Therapist

Arazim School, (Therapeutic school for children ages 6-13 with emotional problems and learning disabilities) Jerusalem, Israel, 1986-1988

- Supervised teachers, psychology students, and volunteers
- Participated in multidisciplinary task force to establish new therapeutic policies for school
- Interfaced with multiple public agencies to provided concrete services to children and families
- Counseled students and parents
- Coordinated school activities for students
- Led bi-weekly group sessions for teachers

Child and Family Therapist

Northeast Community Center for Mental Health/Mental Retardation, Philadelphia, PA 1982-1984

- Counseled children, adolescents, and parents
- Developed group activity program for adolescents
- Assumed responsibilities in emergency services
- Participated in multidisciplinary staff meetings and clinical consultations

Counselor

Hebrew University Counseling Services, Jerusalem, Israel, 1980-1982

- Counseled Israeli and American students
- Participated in multidisciplinary on-site training programs

Social Worker

Eilan Child Therapy Clinic, Jerusalem, Israel, 1980-1982

- Performed play therapy with children
- Counseled parents, provided parent guidance services
- Participated in interdisciplinary case conferences
- Participated in ongoing theoretical seminars

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Publications and Manuscripts in Process

Schneller, D., & Arditti, J. (2001). Conceptualizing adult post-divorce intimate relationships. (in preparation).

Uttech, M., Schneller, D., Fournillier, J., Soukup, K., & Newman, B. (2001). Student views of diversity at Virginia Tech. (in preparation).

Schneller, D., & Arditti, J. (2001). Methodological issues in qualitative data analysis. (in preparation).

Schneller, D. (1981). The immigrant's challenge: Mourning the homeland and adapting to the new world," *Smith Studies in Social Work*, 51, 2, 95-125.

RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Marriage and Divorce
- Diversity and Resilience in Families
- Self-Authorship in Women
- Transitional Life Situations and Personal Growth

PRESENTATIONS

Schneller, D. P. (2001). *Phenomenology: An Approach to Qualitative Data Analysis*. Annual Conference of the National Council of Family Relations, Rochester, NY, November.

Schneller, D. P. (2001). *Putting the Puzzle Together: Formulating Results in Qualitative Research*. Guest instructor, HD 6514 - Advanced Research Methods, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA, October.

Schneller, D. P. (2001). *Perceptions and Expectations of Intimate Relationships Following a Divorce*. Southeastern Symposium of Child and Family Development. University of North Carolina, Greensboro, April.

Schneller, D. P. (2001). Theoretical Perspectives: Feminism, Postmodernism and Constructionism. *Guest Instructor, EDRE 6794 -Advanced Topics in Educational Research*. Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA, March.

Schneller, D. P., & Benson, M. (2000). *Parent Perspectives on Teaching and Learning*. Invited guest panelist, HD 2984 - Special Study in Early Childhood Education. Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA, October.

Schneller, D. P. (1997). *The Mourning Process in Children*. Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of Juvenile Justice. March.

Schneller, D. P. (1996). *Play Therapy Techniques*. Department of Counselor Education, Virginia Tech University. March.

Schneller, D. P., Shea, L., Jones-Freeman, D., Hamilton, J., & Garrison, J. E. (1994). *Difficult Issues in Child Custody and Visitation Cases*. First annual family law seminar of the Montgomery-Floyd-Radford Bar Association. February.

Schneller, D. P. (1991). *Challenges and Rewards for Russian-Jewish Immigrants in the United States* Jewish Family Services of Los Angeles. November.

PROFESSIONAL VOLUNTEER WORK

- Committee member, Children of Divorce Seminar, Blacksburg, VA, 1995 – present
- Board of Directors, Mental Health Association of the New River Valley, 1994-1996 – Recipient of MHANRV award for volunteer work, 1996, 2001
- Free Clinic volunteer therapist, Los Angeles, CA, 1989-1991
- Social Work Volunteer Network, Los Angeles, CA 1990-1992

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

National Association of Social Workers

National Council of Family Relations

Kappa Omicron Nu, Family and Consumer Sciences Honor Society

LANGUAGES

Spanish, Hebrew, French