

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

“... and the marriage was celebrated the very next day with the utmost splendour, and Beauty and the Prince lived happily ever after.” (Madame de Villeneuve, Beauty and the Beast, The Andrew Lang Collection)

*“A civilized divorce is a contradiction in terms.”
(Gavin D’Amato, the lawyer portrayed by Danny de Vito in the 1989 movie ‘The War of the Roses’)*

1.1 BACKGROUND

1.1.1 A personal note

I was married at the age of 22, at a military wedding with stars in my eyes and swords overhead. I came from a family where divorce was unheard of; nobody in our family had ever been divorced. In fact, I encountered the first divorced people in my life at the age of 13. The myth of ‘happily-ever-after’ was a strong one. Equally strong was the internalised instruction, ‘You made your bed – you lie on it’. Eighteen years later, I was separated from my husband, with an 11-year old daughter and a 9-year old son. Two years after that, we were legally divorced. Looking back, I suppose the stars dimmed in the harsh light of day, and the swords which were held so high began to fall fairly early on in the marriage. After years of lack of communication, resentment and hostility, and some very, very good times, my husband left me for a younger woman. I was 40 years old. Of course it was painful. Of course my life was a mess. Of course it felt as if the world as I knew it had imploded. So I sought to understand what was happening, needing desperately to make sense out of a very confusing, stressful experience. I wrote my masters dissertation on ‘*Women coping with divorce through social support*’. I spoke in great depth to other mid-life divorced women, sharing their pain and their triumphs.

Through this process, I started to realise how resilient these women were. They had not only *survived* divorce but were, in many aspects of their lives, *flourishing*. They had, and I had, bounced back from divorce and seemed to be bouncing higher than before. This was at odds with the research I had read, which portrayed women after divorce as socially, financially, and psychologically diminished. Then I met Dr Merle Friedman, who had developed a model of personal resilience out of her extensive work with trauma patients. This seemed to be an important key for recovery from divorce. I became interested in what mid-life women, in particular, had or did to overcome the stress and pain of divorce; social support (the topic of my earlier dissertation) was just one aspect. What was most exciting about Dr Friedman's model was that resilience appeared to be more than just a personality trait, or a set of personality characteristics. Resilience was something that one could *learn*, a set of skills that enabled an individual to be more resilient. The topic of this thesis, then, aims to explore in depth the concept of resilience, applied specifically to divorced women, with a view to assisting women through the recovery process with the use of resilience-building skills.

1.1.2 An overview of divorce

Most people do not enter into marriage with the intention of getting divorced. But divorce in a rapidly changing, industrialising world is fast becoming a common phenomenon, something that many of us will experience, or have already experienced. In South Africa, the divorce rate in 2002 was 526 per 100 000 married couples. (Statistics South Africa, 2005).

From a societal viewpoint, divorce is eroding the very basis of our society: the family unit. More and more children are being raised by single parents, most often by the mother. Divorce also affects the extended family with, for example, the loss of the in-law network. Despite disapproval from certain sub-sectors of society, however, divorce is increasingly seen as regrettable, but necessary. It provides one solution for individuals to escape an unhappy marriage. Divorce is also becoming an *easy* solution, with no-fault divorce laws providing a quick, relatively inexpensive and seemingly simple end to marital dissatisfaction. From an individual perspective, the happiness of the marital

partners is viewed as more important than the needs of the family unit. Nevertheless, there is still a lingering notion of divorce as social deviance (defined as abnormal, infrequent or unacceptable behaviour), resulting in the continued stigmatization of divorced individuals. With the growing numbers of divorces, this is somewhat ironical as divorce is rapidly becoming the norm rather than the exception.

Many reasons for the increasing divorce rate have been proposed, including historical antecedents such as the shift from a multigenerational, extended family to a nuclear organisation, and industrialisation (Goode, 1963). Kitson and Holmes (1992) explain that, with the loss of the extended family, marital partners are forced to rely on one another to a much greater degree for emotional support. These needs are not easy to meet and, when un-met, may result in strong feelings of resentment, anger and disappointment. In addition, says Kitson, increased longevity means that ‘till death us do part’ becomes “an endurance contest” (p. 16): “In one sense, with such high hopes riding on having a good marriage for 40, 50, or 60 years, the wonder is that so many husbands and wives are able to grow, change, accommodate, and nurture each other well enough to choose to stay married, rather than that so many fail to do so” (p. 16). Other factors have also been found to contribute to the increased divorce rate, such as greater gender equality and economic independence (Anderson & Troost, 1976), and more liberal divorce laws (Stetson & Wright, 1975). Weitzman (1985) proposes that no-fault, gender-neutral divorce laws have actually changed the way in which marriage is viewed by individuals and by society: “When we change the rules for divorce – that is, when we change the rules about what is expected of husbands and wives upon divorce – we also change the rules for legal marriage: we implicitly create and ‘institutionalize’ new norms for marriage.” (p. xv).

Although the divorce laws may have become more ‘simple’, the concept of divorce is still very complex. Bohannan (1970), for example, points out how divorce affects many aspects of a person’s life: emotional, legal, economic, coparental, community, and psychic. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) observed several types of divorce in their study, including divorce as a rational solution after a long period of marital dissatisfaction; as a stress-related response triggered by an external event; impulsive divorce undertaken to

punish the spouse; and divorce following the unexpected revelation of infidelity in an ostensibly satisfactory marriage. None of these divorces are single events, but rather an accumulation of stressful incidents, which build up to marital dissolution. The stress of divorce also does not end with the legal divorce decree, but is chronic and ongoing as individuals struggle to adapt to a new life.

Increasingly, divorce is viewed as a process rather than as a single life-event (Riessman & Gerstel, 1985; Caldwell & Bloom, 1982). Kitson (1992) summarises the types of loss that may be associated with divorce: “Although divorce is thought of as *an* event, it actually entails a pileup of events, each of which may contribute to a wrenching series of losses: loss of friends and family, loss of status, possibly loss of one’s children, and sometimes loss of financial security” (p. 18).

Following this concept of divorce as loss, Parkes (1975) and Wiseman (1975) equate adjusting to divorce with the mourning or dying process. Gullo (1992) describes the concept of ‘love shock’ as a state of emotional emptiness and disorientation following the dissolution of a significant love relationship. This author proposes an emotional course that occurs in a typical order:

- Shock – the individual experiences numbness and loss of self
- Grief – obsessional thinking, despair, yearning for reconciliation
- Blame – the individual blames self or others for the loss
- Magnification – magnifies the partner’s post-separation positive situation and her negative situation
- Resignation – resigns herself to the failure of the relationship
- Renewal – the individual begins to lead a life of her own.

An important source of grief in divorce is that the other person is still physically within reach, although metaphysically removed; there is the tantalising promise of reconciliation that is not part of loss through death.

Midlife women, in particular, appear to be negatively affected by divorce. Despite the influence of the feminist movement, the ‘marriage and motherhood mandate’ (Anderson,

Stewart & Dimidjian, 1994) remains very powerful, and divorce may represent a significant failure in the important roles of wife and mother. Linked to this is the loss of social identity, status and self-image for divorced women whose social standing and identity is still likely to be strongly connected to that of their husband. The loss of self-image is embedded in the perception that one has been found to be inadequate or unacceptable, and thus rejected in marriage, the most intimate of relationships (Kitson & Holmes, 1992). An important task for divorced women is the redefinition of self.

The loss of social support following a divorce is often considerable. Not only does the divorced woman lose her spouse, but she may also experience diminished support from her in-law network. Added to this is the possible loss of mutual friends of the couple. The loss of a spouse through divorce may be especially disruptive for women who do not have other people in whom they confide (Gubrium, 1974). This lack of support may tend to continue as Menaghan and Lieberman (1986) found that individuals who remain divorced tend to have “significantly fewer available confidants than the newly divorced.” (p. 326).

Many, or even most, divorced women find themselves in difficult financial circumstances: “... when income is compared to needs, divorced men experience an average 42 percent rise in their standard of living in the first year after the divorce, while divorced women (and their children) experience a 73 percent decline.” (Weitzman, 1985, p. 323). Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) found this to be particularly true for women who had been in the most prosperous socioeconomic group, whose identity and self-esteem had been strongly seated in a certain social class. Women who devoted themselves to raising a family and making a home are also likely to suffer more financially following divorce. Reduced financial means lead to many women, who may not have worked outside the home previously, having to seek employment. This is a challenge for those who do not have marketable skills or little experience or education, and may result in feelings of lowered self-esteem and demoralisation following unsuccessful job-hunting (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). It would appear that financial limitations also have a direct effect on one’s sense of satisfaction with life. Thabes (1997) found that income

influenced depression in divorced women: the lower the income, the more depressed the mood, while higher income was related to greater life satisfaction.

In addition to the practical stresses associated with divorce, there are psychological issues that must be addressed by those adjusting to marital separation. A great tumult of feelings is experienced by these people: anger, resentment, bitterness, jealousy, loneliness and betrayal; as well as ambivalence about being parted from a partner to whom they still feel attached and yet from whom they are relieved to be separated (Riessman, 1990; Kitson, 1992; Garvin, Kalter, & Hansell, 1993). Emotional issues, such as anger towards their former spouses are problematic for divorced women. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) found that women were considerably more hostile towards their ex-husbands, and that this continued in a ten-year follow-up, particularly in women 34 years and older. Anxiety was also observed to be greater amongst women over 40 at the time of divorce, often “accompanied by the fear of the departure of the last child from the home” (Wallerstein, 1986, p. 73). All of the older women in Wallerstein’s study were found to be moderately or severely lonely. In a comparison between a continuously married group and a disrupted marriages group, Doherty et al. found that psychological well-being was significantly lower in the disrupted group, and that substance use increased amongst the disrupted women (Doherty, Su & Needle, 1989).

Within the paradigm of General Systems Theory (Buckley, 1968) “divorce is seen as a crisis in the life cycle of a family which results in reorganization of the original family system, but not necessarily in its dissolution.” (Goldsmith, 1981, p. 2). One of the difficulties in this reorganisation is the absence of norms surrounding the development of such relationships. The presence of children can complicate the divorce process in many ways, one of which is the disruption of the detachment process. In divorced couples with children, the former spouses continually find themselves in situations which reactivate old attachment feelings (Reibstein, 1998), with no guidelines for dealing with such interactions. This may result in ongoing pain, anger and confusion about intimacy. It is unrealistic to expect that divorced couples with children can ever completely detach from one another, but the reorganisation of the parenting relationship is a key task for divorced women.

Women are also less likely than men to remarry. In Wallerstein's ten-year follow-up study of divorced women, none of the women who were 40 years or older at the time of divorce had remarried, whereas 75% of their husbands had remarried.

Divorce at midlife can be an especially wrenching experience, as middle-aged couples are more likely to be deeply entrenched in social networks, lifestyles, parenting, and economic linkages, making the dissolution of such a marriage a turbulent time. In addition, many midlife individuals have not been single for a long time; they may have last dated at school or during their years of tertiary study. Societal changes in the dating scene are likely to be confusing and intimidating (Chiriboga, 1989). The precipitous rise of the HIV/AIDS epidemic also adds to the stress of dating.

In terms of the consequences of divorce, research findings consistently demonstrate the distress experienced following divorce. Divorced people are more likely to experience physical symptoms and psychological disturbance, (Gove, 1972a, 1972b; Briscoe & Smith, 1974; Chiriboga, 1982; Menaghan & Lieberman, 1986). Women, in particular, suffer physical, emotional and financial stress (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Weitzman, 1985; Wallerstein, 1986; Thabes 1997).

However, some studies have revealed that, although disruptive, divorce can be a time of personal growth which may, in fact, lead to improved psychological functioning (Weiss, 1975; Wiseman, 1975; Chiriboga & Dean, 1978; Wallerstein, 1986; Anderson, Stewart & Dimidjian, 1994). Gettleman and Markowitz (1974) maintain that the negative aspects of divorce for women have been overemphasised. They see divorce as an act of courage that may be liberating and the start of an important stage of emotional growth.

Why is it, then, that some individuals work through the transition of divorce with ongoing distress, and poor adjustment, others return to pre-divorce functioning, and still others experience improved functioning following divorce? There are many factors which influence post-divorce adjustment including, but not limited to, age (Chiriboga, 1982); gender (Wallerstein, 1986; Thabes, 1997); social support (Weiss, 1975; Garvin, Kalter, & Hansell, 1993); coping style (Chiriboga, 1989); degree of attachment (Weiss, 1975;

Reibstein, 1998); the presence of children (Goode, 1956); length of separation (Chiriboga & Cutler, 1977), and independence and self-esteem (Colletta, 1979). Many of these factors contain within them elements of *resilience*. Resilience theory prompts us to search for and develop those individual strengths and resources that enable people to grow following stressful life events such as divorce.

It would appear that much of the research surrounding divorce and its consequences has fallen prey to ‘pathologizing’; becoming overly sensitive to the negative, pathological effects of divorce and possibly neglecting to acknowledge the strengths, resources and growth of individuals experiencing divorce. More recently, however, “[t]he paradigm shift from a reductionistic, problem-oriented approach to nurturing strengths is a prevalent theme across academic disciplines and the helping professions.” (Richardson, 2002). Instead of focusing on those individuals who fail to cope with divorce, perhaps we should be looking at those people who *are* able to adjust and grow through the experience, with a view to teaching these skills to enable more people to grow.

1.1.3 A brief overview of resilience

Resilience will be dealt with in depth in Chapter 3, but a very brief overview of the concept seems to be necessary here. Flach (1988) defines resilience as “the psychological and biological strengths required to successfully master change.” (p. xi). Friedman (2002) states, “Resilience is thriving with significant resourcefulness in a world characterised by competitive individualism, and in the face of extreme and daily challenge.” Other researchers have also variously defined resilience, but the core of all these definitions appears to be the ability to ‘bounce back’ from adverse circumstances with new skills that enable an individual to function with a sense of well-being. In a world where we are continuously faced with often rapid and difficult changes, the capacity to be resilient is extremely important.

The concept of resilience appears to have originated, phenomenologically, in the field of child psychology. Richardson (2002), describes three waves of inquiry in the development of the concept: In the first wave, research focused on the identification of

resilient qualities of survivors (e.g. Werner & Smith, 1992; Rutter, 1985); Garmezy, 1991). The second wave of research defined resiliency as the process involved in the development of resilient qualities (e.g. Flach, 1988, 1997; Richardson et al, 1990). The third wave, according to Richardson, resulted in the concept of resilience as motivational energy used to reintegrate after disruptions in life. "... there is a force within everyone that drives them to seek self-actualization, altruism, wisdom, and harmony with a spiritual source of strength. This force is resilience, and it has a variety of names depending upon the discipline." (Richardson, 2002, p. 313).

Recently, resilient qualities have been explored within the field of positive psychology, and include such characteristics as optimism (Peterson, 2000); faith (Myers, 2000); wisdom (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000); creativity (Simonton, 2000); dreams (Snyder & McCullough, 2000); hope (Snyder, 2000) and morality and self-control (Baumeister & Exline, 2000), amongst others.

An important aspect of the concept of resilience, as described by Richardson, is that "[t]he resiliency movement has augmented the meaning of the term resilience and resilient reintegration to mean growth or adaptation through disruption rather than to just recover or bounce back." (Richardson, 2002, p. 313). Or, as Friedman (2002) puts it, to thrive rather than to simply survive. Carver (1998), in fact, suggests that resilience is a return to pre-event homeostasis, whereas thriving is improved functioning. For the purposes of this dissertation, resilience will be defined as *reintegration with significantly improved functioning*.

Resilience is not only an outcome of extreme stress or trauma, but may operate in our daily lives in response to the smallest changes, each time our view of the world is challenged. So whether we are confronted with major life changes, such as divorce, or whether our homeostasis is challenged by a minor event, such as extending a child's bedtime, we need resilience to reintegrate and grow (Flach, 1988).

Furthermore, resilience is not static. People may be more or less resilient at different stages in their lives and in response to different types of stressors.

The process of developing resilience is essentially a process of disruption and reintegration. Disruption occurs when we are confronted with change which challenges our worldview, our view of ourselves, or our view of others. When the change is significant, as in severely stressful events, disruption is inevitably accompanied by pain. Out of the pain and chaos come various outcomes: we can succumb to adversity, survive with impairment, recover, or thrive (Carver, 1998). Or, put another way, we can reintegrate dysfunctionally, reintegrate with loss, reintegrate back to homeostasis, or reintegrate resiliently (Richardson et al., 1990). One of the debates surrounding resilience theory is the subjective nature of these outcomes; ‘resilient reintegration’ or ‘thriving’, ‘succumbing’ or ‘dysfunctional’ are subjective notions, and may be differentially defined by individuals, societies or cultures.

Resilience is clearly not a straightforward construct. There are variations in definitions, in assessment, in models, and in outcomes. Some of these issues will be further explored in Chapter 3.

But resilience is, nevertheless, a seductive concept. The elements of resilience include the more noble human attributes such as faith, morality, and creativity. Resilience enables us to focus on the positive, searching for strengths, finding stories that inspire and motivate us. It gives us hope. It talks to us of skills that we can *learn*, not of immutable human weakness but of unlimited human potential.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

This research paper will use the case-study method. Five case studies of divorced women will be presented to explore the subjective experience of divorce, focusing on the recovery and resilient reintegration of these women.

The process of developing resilient capacity will be explored, and elements of resilience will be identified and analysed regarding the impact they have had on the outcomes of the divorce process. Differences and similarities between the participants regarding the process, various elements and outcomes will be highlighted.

By assessing the strengths, resources and skills of divorced women who have recovered from divorce with varying degrees of success, it should be possible to identify those processes and resources which not only aid recovery from divorce, but enable women to successfully grow and reintegrate with improved functioning following the major transition of divorce. Furthermore, if such processes and resources are not simply personality traits but are skills to be learnt, then the development of an intervention to assist divorced women in their reintegration will be possible. “If characteristics of resilience could be taught or somehow made available to others, then prevention and treatment would have a second major dimension – that of building on the positive and strengthening the individual” (Glantz & Johnson, 1999, p. ix).

1.3 PRESENTATION

In order to address these objectives, chapter 2 will provide an overview of the literature surrounding resilience. Chapter 3 discusses the challenge of divorce and resilience, with particular reference to the role of resilience in recovery from the stressful transition of divorce. Chapter 4 provides a brief exploration of interventions aimed at assisting in divorce adjustment or recovery. The methodology is discussed in chapter 5, which includes a description of the participants, measures, method of data analysis, and ethical considerations pertinent to the study. In chapters 6 to 10 the analysed data is presented, with each chapter focusing on the experience of a single participant. Conclusions and recommendations are addressed in chapter 11.

CHAPTER 2

THE RESILIENT SELF

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Greene, Galambos and Lee (2003) examined the theoretical assumptions of resiliency theory and divided resilience factors into internal (such as attitude, intelligence, a sense of mastery, and so on) and external factors (such as family support, role models, community). This chapter focuses on the internal aspects of resilience and explores such diverse areas as Frankl's (1962) 'will to meaning', Kobasa's (1979) 'hardy personality', Goleman's (1995) 'emotional intelligence', as well as contributions from cognitive psychology and, finally, Block and Block's (1980) concept of 'ego-resiliency'.

2.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF MEANING

Perhaps some of the most striking examples of the resilience of the human spirit in more recent history are to be found amongst the survivors of the Holocaust, the incarceration and extermination of millions of people by the Nazis during World War 2. Viktor Frankl, himself a concentration camp survivor, developed his theory of man's 'will to meaning' and applied it in this context.

Frankl (1962) observed that those who coped best in the concentration camps were the people who had meaning in their lives, who had a sense of a future still to be actualized, who made choices and took responsibility for their lives; "this striving to find a meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man" (p. 99). This is possibly another way of describing what Richardson calls "a force within everyone that drives them to seek self-actualization, altruism, wisdom, and harmony with a spiritual source of strength. This force is resilience, and it has a variety of names depending upon the discipline." (Richardson, 2002, p. 313).

Logotherapy postulates that individuals discover meaning in their lives in three ways: “(1) by doing a deed, (2) by experiencing a value [for example, love], (3) by suffering” (p. 113). Frankl quotes Nietzsche extensively: “He who has a *why* to live for can bear almost any *how*” (p. 106). Existential meaning and purpose life motivate individuals to endure adversity because they believe they must survive in order to complete their ‘mission’. For some divorced women, this might be the raising of their children.

For many people, spirituality or religious belief provides this meaning or purpose in life (Richardson, 1990; Masten, 1994). Greene, Galambos and Lee (2003) in their study of practitioners’ conceptions of resilience, found that over half of the participants reported that spirituality or religion was of particular importance to people during adversity.

In terms of resilience, by viewing suffering or traumatic experiences as meaningful, individuals are able to escape the ‘victim’ mentality and strive to overcome. Shantall (2003) indicates that suffering evokes resilience in the following ways: suffering is intended to challenge us; it calls us to account; suffering leads to repentance; it inspires us and leads us to spiritual victory; and it is a watershed experience. These are all either contexts, outcomes or elements of resilience. The context of resilience is epitomized by challenge and “watershed experience”; accountability and repentance may be important elements of a resilient attitude; inspiration and “spiritual victory” could be anticipated outcomes of dealing resiliently with adversity.

More recent work on meaning in life has explored this concept in the context of personal goals and purpose in life (Emmons, 2003). “Goals are the concretized expression of future orientation and life purpose, and provide a convenient and powerful metric for examining these vital elements of a positive life” (Emmons, 2003, p. 106). Emmons examines the broad categories of goals which engender subjective well-being: intimacy, spirituality and generativity, as well as the importance of intrinsic versus extrinsic goal orientations. Of particular relevance is the exploration of the virtues underlying goal striving. “Virtues are essential person characteristics that can differentiate successful from unsuccessful goal strivers. Virtues are acquired excellences in character traits, the possession of which contributes to a person’s completeness or wholeness” (Emmons,

2003, pp. 120-121). The three virtues that Emmons discusses as influencing goal striving are prudence, patience and perseverance. Each of these traits might possibly affect an individual's ability to be resilient in the face of setbacks. Prudence, for example, involves "foresight, future-mindedness, and the reasoned pursuit of long-term goals" (Emmons, 2003, p. 121), while patience focuses on being in the present moment and includes "(a) suffering with calmness or composure, (b) forbearance and tolerance of others, (c) willingness to wait without resentment, and (d) constancy and consistency in effort" (p 122). Perseverance would appear to be closely associated with resilience in that it requires commitment and determination to continue despite obstacles or setbacks.

2.3 THE 'HARDY' PERSONALITY

An important contribution to resilience research is the concept of a 'hardy personality', particularly resistant to stress, which suggests that resilience may be an inherent aspect of an individual. Kobasa (1979) defined the characteristics of the 'stress hardy personality' in the context of health psychology. The three characteristics are *control*, *commitment*, and *challenge*. Individuals with these characteristics appear to respond to stressful events in a more adaptive, effective way than those who do not demonstrate these characteristics and, specifically, do not show illness as a result of stress.

Kobasa (1979) found that stress hardy individuals have an internal locus of control as opposed to an external locus of control i.e. they believe that control of their lives comes from their own efforts rather than that they are the victims of external circumstance. Such individuals take responsibility for their own actions, and are less likely to spend time and effort attempting to deal with issues beyond their control. The second characteristic, commitment, is closely allied to meaning (discussed above). Stress hardy individuals are committed to the various aspects of their lives (work, family, and so on) but commitment to self is particularly important. Kobasa describes commitment to self as, "An ability to recognize one's distinctive values, goals, and priorities and an appreciation of one's capacity to have purpose and to make decisions" (p. 4). Thirdly, Kobasa states that individuals who view change as a challenge and an opportunity to learn are more stress hardy than those who see change as an obstacle.

In a study of HIV and AIDS sufferers, Farber, Schwartz, Schaper, DeElla, Moonen and McDaniel (2000) explored hardiness in relation to three adaptation domains: psychological distress levels, perceived quality of life and core personal beliefs. Of particular relevance to divorce is the area of core personal beliefs, which have the potential of being altered or even shattered by divorce. The core belief domains focused on in Farber et al's study were: "1) benevolence of the world, including assumptions about the inherent goodness of the impersonal world and the world of people; 2) meaningfulness of the world, including assumptions about justice in relation to the distribution of positive and negative outcomes/life events, controllability of outcomes, and randomness of outcomes; and 3) worthiness of the self, including assumptions about the goodness and moral decency of self..." (p. 141). The authors found that higher hardiness was related to lower psychological distress levels, higher perceived quality of life and more positive core beliefs. Certain hardiness factors had differential influences on core personal beliefs: "an experience of meaning and purpose in life (i.e., commitment) contributed uniquely to predicting more positive views of self and the world, while a sense of autonomy and ability to influence life event (i.e., control) contributed uniquely to predicting more positive beliefs about the goodness of other people. Relative comfort with change as life unfolds (i.e., challenge) contributed uniquely to predicting lower levels of beliefs regarding the controllability of outcomes" (p. 145). It thus appears possible that a hardy personality could predispose an individual to better cope with a stressful life event such as divorce by reducing distress levels, increasing the perception of quality of life, and fostering more positive core personal beliefs.

2.4 SELF-COMPLEXITY

Self-complexity is an aspect of personality which may also influence resilience (Linville, 1987; Morgan & Janoff-Bulman, 1994). The construct of self-complexity focuses on the multiple aspects of the self (sub-selves) and includes both social roles and specific traits. For example, a woman with high self-complexity may see herself in terms of many subselves: nurturing as a wife, lover, daughter and friend, adventurous as a sky-diver and rock-climber, efficient as a teacher and competent as a manager. "People who are high in

self-complexity have a highly differentiated view of self: they think about themselves in terms of many subselves that differ considerably from one another in terms of their defining attributes” (Morgan & Janoff-Bulman, 1994, p. 64).

Linville (1987) found that those who deal more effectively with adversity are able to limit the effect of stressors to specific self-aspects. High self-complexity may result in resilience as positive views of the self can be derived from remaining, unaffected subselves following trauma. In terms of divorce, for instance, a woman may experience the divorce as damaging to her subselves of nurturing wife and lover, but her subselves of teacher, rock-climber and so on, with their associated traits of efficiency and adventurousness remain unaffected, thus increasing her resilience through the process of divorce.

Morgan and Janoff-Bulman (1994) take this a step further by postulating that “it is the maintenance of differentiated *positive* self-perceptions that should be associated with better adjustment” (p. 66). In their study they found that “there is something uniquely adaptive about positive self-complexity in the aftermath of adversity.....Many positive non-overlapping self-aspects provide considerable protection against long-term difficulties in the aftermath of misfortune” (p. 83).

2.5 ADAPTIVE CHANGES IN SELF-CONCEPT

Kling, Ryff and Essex (1997) suggest that adaptive changes in yet another aspect of personality: self-concept, are associated with well-being during life transitions. This presupposes that the self-concept is not static but dynamic. The authors focus on the dynamics of psychological centrality, that is, how different aspects of the self (life domains) are organized according to importance; for example, health, economics, daily activities, family or friends.

Our self-esteem is, in part, maintained by dealing effectively with negative information about the self. One of the ways in which we do this is to place special importance on domains in which we are competent, at the same time devaluing domains in which we are

less capable. Changes in a specific life domain influence well-being more when that domain is seen as central to the self-concept. Kling et al's (1997) study explored this through a longitudinal analysis of older women experiencing community relocation. They found in the domains of health and friendships that "negative self-evaluation changes that were accompanied by lowered ratings of domain importance predicted higher levels of purpose in life, environmental mastery, and autonomy. Thus, among women who felt that their health and friendships compared less favorably with others around them after the move...., those who lowered the importance of these life domains felt better about multiple aspects of their well-being than those who increased the importance of the domain" (p. 988). In terms of divorce, a woman who feels that her intimate relationships compare unfavourably to other women around her, may decrease the importance of this domain in order to feel better about herself.

They also found, however, that in other domains (daily activities, family and economics) "when self-evaluations...were less positive after the move, increasing domain importance was associated with greater well-being". The authors explain these results by proposing that centrality changes in the domains of health and friendship are a form of emotion-focused coping, whereas the centrality changes in the three other domains reflect problem-focused coping. In the case of the latter domains, "increasing psychological centrality may be the first step in becoming a 'psychological activist' in the face of life challenges" (p. 988) i.e. actively attempting to 'fix' the domain. This would appear to be a resilient approach to dealing with changes in one's life. For example, a divorced woman who feels that she is not dealing well with her financial situation, is likely to experience greater well-being if she takes control of her finances by getting advice, for instance.

2.6 SOCIAL IDENTITY

Bonanno, Papa and O'Neill (2002), in their work with bereaved people, have suggested that resilience following loss may be determined by an individual's ability to maintain continuity in social identity pre- and post-loss. Traditional models of the self as static and uniform over time, which may dysfunctionally fragment following loss, have been

largely replaced by a model of the self which is dynamic, multifaceted and flexible. "...the more well developed and elaborate a person's self-structure is, the more likely that person will be able to withstand the emotional impact of the death of a loved one" (p. 196). In addition, McAdams (1993) proposes that individuals maintain identity continuity through narrative conceptions of self which evolve throughout the life span; that is, people's sense of self changes across time and situations as a result of normal developmental processes. When faced with a major life-change, the same processes assist in maintaining identity continuity.

Bonanno et al (2002) propose four possible mechanisms which enable resilient people to maintain identity continuity following loss: worldview; self-enhancement; concrete aspects of the self; and emotion regulation. The extent to which an individual's worldview is undermined or even shattered following the loss of an important relationship depends in part on two things: firstly, how extensively the loss of the relationship influences different aspects of the individual's self; the more aspects affected by the loss, the more severe the grief. Secondly, a priori worldviews or beliefs can influence the acceptance of loss; for example, a belief that divorce is not abnormal or deviant could lessen the emotional pain of divorce.

Self-enhancement (see also Taylor, 1983, cited above) is a further mechanism which might enable an individual to maintain identity continuity. Downward social comparison not only minimizes "the negative impact of a loss on the self but would also tend to minimize the spread of the pain of the loss to other aspects of the self and thereby promote identity continuity" (Bonanno et al, 2002, p. 198). To apply this to the situation of loss through divorce, a divorced woman without children may grieve over the loss of her relationship, but compare herself to divorced women with young children and find her situation somewhat less traumatic. She is then more likely to invest energy in other aspects of life, such as her career, and to perceive continuity in her identity in these other areas.

Focus on concrete aspects of the self, such as "roles, behaviors, goals, and plans" (Bonanno et al, 2002, p. 198) rather than on abstract characteristics of the self, is

suggested by Bonanno et al (2002) as another mechanism by which individuals might maintain identity continuity. Concrete aspects of the self, 'doing', are likely to be more controllable than abstract characteristics, 'being', and thus not as likely to be perceived as permanently altered by a traumatic event. A hypothetical example of this might be the divorced woman who focuses on her plan to obtain a particular qualification (which has been delayed but not destroyed by her divorce) rather than focusing on her self-confidence (which has been considerably diminished). Bauer and Bonanno (2001) found that individuals with self-evaluations which combined both actions and traits displayed healthier adjustment during bereavement. "This latter finding suggests the compelling possibility that by focusing on their actual behaviors and roles as they repeat over time, bereaved individuals might also be more likely to realize the continuity in their most enduring personal characteristics" (Bonanno, Papa, & O'Neill, 2002, p. 199).

Emotion regulation (see also Goleman, 1995, cited below) is the fourth mechanism suggested by Bonanno et al (2002) which might maintain identity continuity during bereavement. Individuals who are less able to regulate the expression of grief-related emotion are likely to evoke aversive responses in others, negatively affecting their social interactions and social identity as they "internalize negative self-attributions about self-worth and social desirability" (Bonanno et al, 2002, p. 199). Effective regulation of negative emotions assists in maintaining identity continuity by enabling the person to continue functioning in other important areas, such as their job or in relationships with friends.

Further insight into personality traits predisposing to resilient recovery from traumatic events comes from Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996). In the development of their Posttraumatic Growth Inventory, which measures outcomes following trauma (relating to others; new possibilities; personal strength; spiritual change; and appreciation of life), they suggest that certain personality traits enable individuals to perceive beneficial outcomes after experiencing a traumatic event. For example, "people who are open to experience are used to examining their experiences and seeing them as less threatening and potentially beneficial" (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, p. 467). Other personality traits which seem associated with posttraumatic growth include agreeableness, extroversion,

discipline and orderliness, and religiosity. People who are agreeable are more likely to evoke supportive responses in others following trauma. Extroverts are more able to use social support. Discipline and orderliness are related to personal strength: “people who are already disciplined and orderly rely on, develop, and appreciate this ability after trauma” (p. 467). Religious individuals are likely to use a spiritual form of coping to recover from trauma, and thus to strengthen themselves in their religiosity. An interesting finding is that men and women differ in their responses to trauma generally. Specifically, there are differences in their ability to perceive spiritual and relationship changes following trauma. It is possible that women rely more heavily on these areas in order to cope, and thus perceive greater change in these areas. Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) suggest that “these events have a greater effect on women in that women may be more capable than men of learning or benefiting from difficult life experiences” (p. 468), and recommend further research in this area.

Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996), however, make the point that their study does not indicate whether the personality traits mentioned above existed before the trauma, or whether they were evoked or influenced by the trauma. McCrae and Costa (1993), in a longitudinal study of bereavement, suggest that such personality traits do, in fact, exist before bereavement and remain following a loss.

2.7 EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Goleman (1995) believes that *self-awareness* is at the core of emotional intelligence. Self-awareness is being aware of one’s emotions and one’s thoughts about the emotion, and is a first step to taking control of emotions. *Emotion regulation* is how we manage our emotions. “The art of soothing ourselves is a fundamental life skill....we very often have little or not control over *when* we are swept by emotion, nor over *what* emotion it will be. But we have some say in *how long* an emotion will last”. (Goleman, 1995, p. 57). Individuals who are able to soothe their more turbulent, distressing emotions will be more resilient, as they are more likely to avoid falling prey to destructive incidents created by rage, anxiety or depression.

Impulse control is an important aspect of emotional self-control, “since all emotions, by their very nature, lead to one or another impulse to act” (Goleman, 1995, p. 81). Goleman quotes Shoda, Mischel and Peake’s (1990) longitudinal study of children’s ability to delay gratification at pre-school age and a follow-up at adolescence: “Those who had resisted temptation at four were now, as adolescents, more socially competent: personally effective, self-assertive, and better able to cope with the frustrations of life. They were less likely to go to pieces, freeze, or regress under stress, or become rattled and disorganized when pressured; they embraced challenges and pursued them instead of giving up even in the face of difficulties; they were self-reliant and confident, trustworthy and dependable; and they took initiative and plunged into projects. And, more than a decade later, they were still able to delay gratification in pursuit of their goals” (Goleman, 1995, p. 81-82). As we shall see in Chapter 3, many of these characteristics are elements of resilience.

Baumeister and Exline (2000) view emotion regulation and impulse control as key aspects of *self-control*. Self-control appears to be a factor in resilience in that it enables individuals to be more adaptive to many various situations.

Hope and *optimism* are aspects of emotional intelligence which foster resilience. Hope in the future results in the individual striving to overcome present challenges or obstacles. “Optimism, like hope, means having a strong expectation that, in general, things will turn out all right in life, despite setbacks and frustrations. From the standpoint of emotional intelligence, optimism is an attitude that buffers people against falling into apathy, hopelessness, or depression in the face of tough going” (Goleman, 1995, p. 88).

Snyder (2000) proposes a more cognitive theory of hope which appears to contain several aspects of resilience. These are goals, agency, and pathways. As noted above, it is often goals that provide meaning in our lives. Pathways are the imagined routes we think of to reach our goals, and agency “reflects the belief that one can initiate *and* sustain movement along the imagined pathways to goals” (Snyder, 2000, p. 13). Agentic thinking is particularly important when initial routes to our goals are blocked, as it

provides motivation to find alternatives. This could well be a factor in resilience and is perhaps related to the virtue of perseverance.

The underlying characteristic of both hope and optimism is *self-efficacy*, “the belief that one has mastery over the events of one’s life and can meet challenges as they come up” (Goleman, 1995, p. 89). Self-efficacy can be strengthened by developing competence in a particular area, encouraging the individual to take on more challenges. Each time the person overcomes a challenge, self-efficacy is further enhanced, deepening the belief in one’s abilities to deal with life’s difficulties.

Empathy and *social skills* are aspects of emotional intelligence which improve our interpersonal relationships, enabling individuals to create a social network of supportive people to assist in times of crisis, for instance. They are skills which enable individuals to deal with conflict, negotiate solutions and make personal connections. Hoffman (1984) postulates that empathy, the ability to put oneself in another’s position, results in moral action: “it is empathizing with the potential victims – someone in pain, danger, or deprivation, say – and so sharing their distress that moves people to act to help them (Goleman, 1995, p. 105). McCullough (2000) proposes that empathy and perspective-taking also facilitate forgiveness, which could be an important aspect of resilience following divorce.

2.8 COGNITIVE RESILIENCE SKILLS

Reivich and Shatté (2002) in their self-help book, *The Resilience Factor*, believe that our level of resilience depends on our thinking style. This is, of course, closely related to emotional intelligence as our ability to adapt our thinking processes enables us to better regulate our emotional lives. They describe seven skills to increase resilience through cognition:

- Learning your ABC’s
- Avoiding thinking traps
- Detecting icebergs
- Challenging beliefs

- Putting it in perspective
- Calming and focusing
- Real-time resilience (pp 13-14)

Learning your ABC's is essentially Ellis's (1991) rational-emotive therapy, where A is an activating event, B is one's belief about the event, and C is the emotional consequence. Our self-defeating beliefs about adverse events can result in, for instance, low self-esteem, pessimism, guilt and anxiety. 'Therapy' (which individuals can perform themselves) is setting up D, a dispute belief system which challenges maladaptive cognitions or beliefs. According to Reivich and Shatté (2002) "The better you are at identifying what you say to yourself the moment adversity strikes, the easier it will be for you to change your nonresilient beliefs so they don't throw you off course" (p. 94).

Avoiding thinking traps encompasses Beck and Weishaar's (1989) work on illogical thinking or cognitive errors in depression. Beck believes that maladaptive thinking patterns deepen depression and lower a person's motivation to take constructive action, which must surely undermine resilience. He identifies six types of faulty thinking processes: arbitrary inference, selective abstraction, overgeneralization, magnification and exaggeration, personalization, and polarized thinking. Reivich and Shatté (2002) describe Beck's seven 'thinking traps' in their own words: jumping to conclusions, tunnel vision, magnifying and minimizing, personalizing, overgeneralizing, mind reading, emotional reasoning, and they add one of their own, externalizing, which is essentially an external locus of control. 'Thinking traps', like illogical beliefs, undermine an individual's positive perception of themselves, the world and others, making them less likely to deal effectively with setbacks or challenges.

Detecting icebergs refers to our ability to detect the underlying, deeply held beliefs which drive us and often determine how we react to difficult situations. Reivich and Shatté (2002) propose that "[m]astering the skill of Detecting Icebergs is an important step in creasing your emotion regulation, empathy, and reaching out scores" (p. 123) on a resilience profile, and improve interpersonal relationships. Examples they give of unhelpful underlying beliefs are: "I should succeed at everything I put my mind to' or

‘Getting emotional is a sign of weakness’” (p. 123). ‘Iceberg beliefs’ may undermine resilience in the following ways: by resulting in extreme emotions and reactions; emotions and behaviours that are inappropriate to the situation; confuse decision-making; and they become rigid, “causing you to fall into the same emotional patterns over and over again” (p. 131), all of which may be obstacles to dealing effectively with adversity.

The above skills are described as ‘know thyself skills’ and involve acquiring insight and self-knowledge. The following skills are labeled ‘change skills’, and involve changing the beliefs that determine how you feel and behave in response to adversity. Reivich and Shatté (2002) describe the contribution of these skills to resilience thus: “With *Challenging Beliefs*, you can analyze beliefs about the causes of the adversity. In *Putting It in Perspective*, you can better determine the future outcomes of adversity. *Calming and Focusing* works to impact the negative emotions directly or to push nonresilient beliefs out of your mind. *Real-time Resilience* enables you to do Challenging Beliefs and Putting It in Perspective at the moment when an adversity strikes” (p. 146).

Certainly our thinking styles and patterns appear to influence the way in which we respond to events, especially adverse ones.

2.9 COGNITIVE ADAPTATION THEORY

Taylor (1983) proposes a theory of cognitive adaptation to threatening events, which was explored through work with cancer patients. Taylor argues that “the readjustment process focuses around three themes: a search for meaning in the experience, an attempt to regain master over the event in particular and over one’s life more generally, and an effort to enhance one’s self-esteem – to feel good about oneself again despite the personal setback” (p. 1161). Taylor suggests that these three themes are addressed by the individual’s ability to create and sustain “a set of illusions” (p. 1161) around the crisis. ‘Illusions’ in Taylor’s theory are not contradictory to the facts of the situation, but rather a way of looking at the situation or event.

Taylor states that the “search for meaning involves the need to understand why a crisis occurred and what its impact has been” (p. 1162). When people are faced with a crisis, they typically attempt to attribute causes for the event. This assists individuals in understanding the significance of the event. The impact of a life crisis may be viewed positively; for example, gaining a new attitude towards life, growth of self-knowledge, or reorganizing priorities to focus more on relationships or personal projects than on mundane issues. Taylor makes the point that “when positive meaning can be construed from the cancer experience, it produces significantly better psychological adjustment” (p. 1163).

A sense of mastery is closely linked to belief in control over one’s life. In Taylor’s study of cancer patients, efforts to take control included direct physical efforts (for example, diet change or eliminating medications) as well as mental control (for example, meditation, self-hypnosis or visualization). Other ways of gaining control included gathering knowledge and controlling the side-effects of treatment.

Self-esteem is considerably diminished by a traumatic life event or stressor such as divorce. Taylor suggests that self-enhancing cognitions are important resource in recovering from such an event, particularly downward social comparisons which enable an individual to view themselves as coping better or as better off than others in their situation or in worse situations. Such social comparisons may be both self-enhancing as well as “instructive and motivating” (p. 1166).

One of the key points of Taylor’s theory is that of the ‘illusionary’ nature of, for example, our causal attributions of a distressing life event, or the self-enhancing cognitions we employ to bolster our self-esteem following such an event, or even our attempts to control our lives in the face of stressful occurrences. As illusions, our beliefs could well be disconfirmed by factual evidence. Taylor proposes that, contrary to other cognitive models, the cognitive adaptation model views disconfirmation of illusions “not as the violation of a single expectation, but as a temporary frustration” (p. 1169). Thus, when our efforts to attribute causality, or to control or self-enhance are thwarted, we are likely to substitute an alternative that achieves the same end. In conclusion, Taylor states that

the cognitive adaptation theory “views people as adaptable, self-protective, and functional in the face of setbacks” (p. 1170).

2.10 COPING STRATEGIES

Dealing with stressful events is a very individualistic process; even in terms of the evaluation of what is or is not stressful. Once we have appraised an event as stressful, we search for coping responses that will reduce or remove the threat. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) distinguish two types of coping, problem-focused and emotion-focused. These two types overlap with Cohen and Lazarus’ (1979) five general categories of coping strategies in the face of stress: (1) direct action response; (2) information seeking; (3) inhibition of action; (4) intrapsychic or palliative coping; and (5) turning to others for help and emotional support. Problem-focused coping would include taking direct action and obtaining information in order to reach a solution, and perhaps in seeking social support. Emotion-focused coping involves attempting to reduce negative emotions associated with the stressor and could include palliative coping, which might mean dealing with stress through the use of relaxation techniques or by reappraising the situation through rationalization or denial, for instance. Effective coping depends on matching the appropriate coping strategy to the situation.

Coping mechanisms are positive adaptations to stressful circumstances which enable individuals to adapt to stressful situations in a constructive way. It should be noted that Lazarus and Folkman (1984) separate coping styles from personality, stating that personality traits are enduring dispositions whereas coping strategies are specific behaviours. McCrae and Costa (1986) examined the influence of the personality domains of neuroticism, extraversion and openness to experience on coping mechanisms. They identified 27 coping mechanisms including, for example, fatalism, positive feelings, escapist fantasy, social comparison, avoidance, humour, assessing blame, faith, and so on. Their results suggested that “neurotic coping” (p. 394) is associated with neuroticism and includes mechanisms such as “hostile reaction, escapist fantasy, self-blame, sedation, withdrawal, passivity, and indecisiveness” (p. 394). “Mature coping” (p. 394), on the other hand, is associated with extraversion, and includes mechanisms such as “rational

action, perseverance, positive thinking, restraint, and self-adaptation” (p. 394). Thus, it would appear that certain personality traits are likely to be associated with specific coping mechanisms which, in turn, are likely to be related to resilient behaviours or attitudes.

2.11 EGO-RESILIENCY

Klohn (1996) investigated the construct of ego-resiliency (ER), formulated by Block and Block (1980), and its effect on adjustment in adulthood. Block and Block (1980) defined ego-resiliency as “resourceful adaptation to changing circumstances and environmental contingencies, analysis of the ‘goodness of fit’ between situational demands and behavioral possibility, and flexible invocation of the available repertoire of problem-solving strategies (problem-solving being defined to include the social and personal domains as well as the cognitive). The opposite end of the ego-resiliency continuum (ego-brittleness) implies little adaptive flexibility, an inability to respond to the dynamic requirements of the situation, a tendency to perseverate or to become disorganized when encountering changed circumstances or when under stress, and a difficulty in recouping after traumatic experiences” (p. 48).

Some of the behavioural implications that the Blocks associated with ego-resiliency are resourcefulness under stress, flexibility, active engagement with the world, and a comprehensive repertoire of problem-solving strategies to deal with the environment.

Klohn makes the point that although resilience has mainly been explored in the context of dealing with extreme adversity, ego-resiliency probably also plays a role in everyday life in coping with daily stresses and challenges. Klohn found that four distinct aspects of personality underlie ego-resiliency: (1) *confident optimism* – “an optimistic, positive, and energetic outlook and approach to life” (p. 1071); (2) *productive and autonomous activity* – “involves productivity, persistence in the face of adversity, initiative, and independence” (p. 1071); (3) *interpersonal warmth and insight* – “the capacity for close relationships and for being insightful and socially perceptive” (p. 1071); and (4) *skilled expressiveness* – “an expressive interpersonal orientation, being at ease in social settings,

and being skilled in interacting with others” (p. 1071). These are somewhat similar to certain aspects emotional intelligence.

In a further study reported in the same article, Klohnen (1996) explored the effect of ego-resiliency on adjustment in adult women in the life domains of work, relationship and family, and physical and psychological health. It was found that ego-resiliency predicted effective functioning and adjustment not only in one life domain, but across the work and social domain, and the physical and psychological health domain. This suggests that the personality construct of developed ego-resiliency predisposes individuals to better cope with and adjust to everyday stresses, as well as life transitions or crises.

2.12 CONCLUSION

The above exploration of some of the possible internal or psychological aspects of resilience is far from exhaustive. What is clear, though, is that there is no single facet of personality which can explain why some individuals respond resiliently to challenge in their lives, while others do not. As Glantz and Sloboda (1999) put it, “... there does not appear to be any credible evidence that there is a single quality or circumstance, and certainly not a single universal factor of resilience that is beneficial in most if not all circumstances. In fact, at least in some cases, it seems that the qualities and circumstances which contribute to a positive outcome in one situation may be irrelevant or even counterproductive in another” (Glantz & Sloboda, 1999, p. 115).

Perhaps the closest we come to describing a ‘resilient self’ is the concept of ego-resiliency (ER). Yet even this is not a single personality trait, but rather, as Klohnen (1996) concludes, “ER is best conceived of as a superordinate yet unitary personality resource that combines a number of important and more specific facets of personality” (p. 1073). Thus, it is possible that certain individuals possess personality traits that predispose them to resilience. But it is, perhaps, not this simple. Waller (2001) describes risk and protective factors as pervasive, durable and cumulative. A person with the protective factor of, for example, hope, is likely to be hopeful across several contexts. Similarly, someone who has used the resource of emotion regulation from an early age

when dealing with adversity, will continue to use this throughout their life. The cumulative nature of protective factors suggests that “the right combination of protective influences can outweigh the negative impact of exposure to multiple risks” (Waller, 2001, p. 293). In addition, Waller proposes a “ripple effect” (p. 293) of risk and protective factors, whereby possession of a protective trait, such as confident optimism, for instance, can lead to further protection in times of adversity by engendering better interpersonal relationships which, in turn, might result in an enhanced sense of self-worth.

However, as Waller (2001) points out: “...focusing exclusively on within-person factors obscures the ecosystemic context of resilience” (p. 291). In exploring resilience, we cannot ignore the importance of the person-environment interaction. Inasmuch as people are affected by adverse events in their lives, they also have an effect on such events. “It seems most reasonable to assume that resilience varies, sometimes being more intra-personal and sometimes being more environmental, but most often being an interaction of both....sometimes being more an issue of competence and sometimes more an issue of motivation, but most often being an interaction of both” (Glantz & Sloboda, 1999, p. 120).

The cognitive approach to resilience is of interest as common-sense tells us that it is not what happens to us, but how we think about it that is important. Our ability to make cognitive adaptations and to sustain ‘illusions’ might well assist us in responding resiliently. Certainly our deep beliefs about ourselves, others and the world will influence the way in which we deal with stressful events.

Perhaps it should be noted here that certain aspects of the concept of resilience are somewhat contentious, as is true of many other psychological constructs. The first of these is the subjective nature of the concept of resilience: from whose perspective is an outcome judged as ‘resilient’? When studying resilience, researchers must take care to listen to the subjective narrative of the individual, rather than judging from the researcher’s own personal perspective. Secondly, ‘resilience’ is embedded in a cultural and historical context; in different cultures, or at different times, resilient behaviour may be differentially defined. An example of this is the “contemporary European-American

reification of independence, dominance, and mastery” (Waller, 2001, p. 291) which invalidates cultural perspectives favouring interdependence, obligation to the community, and kinship. Thirdly, resilience is neither static nor consistent across situations; that is, an individual may be resilient at a particular developmental stage in life, but not resilient at another stage. For example, an adult who has resiliently reintegrated following an adolescent trauma of rape may be unable to deal resiliently with the life crisis of the death of a spouse. Similarly, a person may exhibit resilience when confronted with a specific situation, but not resilient in the face of a different stressor or life event.

In summary, it would appear that the most useful way to view resilience is not as an innate single trait, but rather as adaptive behaviours and factors employed by an individual, which interact with the environment in various contexts to produce resilient outcomes for that individual.

CHAPTER 3

THE CHALLENGE OF DIVORCE AND RESILIENCE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

As we have seen in Chapter 1, the transition of divorce is a complex and often painful process, requiring great adjustment in many aspects of one's life. It is a long, arduous, and sometimes circuitous journey toward a new and very different life. This chapter will discuss the tasks involved in restructuring following divorce and how resilience might facilitate such restructuring.

3.2 SHATTERING

Divorce is perhaps, at its most basic, the shattering of dreams. We go into a marriage relationship with expectations and with illusions. Despite the evidence of statistics, society and, in particular, the media still perpetuates the romantic myth that “only a man, marriage and motherhood together could make a woman happy” (Anderson, Stewart & Dimijian, 1994, p. 38) or, as Anderson et al call it, “the marriage and motherhood mandate”. (p. 50)

Out of this myth emerge expectations of marriage; the primary expectation being that marriage *will* make you happy. Secondary expectations may include the belief that, as a woman, you will be protected and cared for; that your life will gain purpose through providing for the needs of your husband and children; that by being married and part of a couple you will escape social censure; that decisions and choices will not be yours alone, but conjoint; that someone else will take care of mundane maintenance tasks; that intimacy and emotional support are exclusively available within marriage; and, possibly one of the most important expectations, that marriage is forever.

These are powerful illusions. And illusions they are, as many divorced women will testify. With these dreams shattered, the primary task for divorced women is to create a new life which is based on new and different beliefs.

3.3 RESTRUCTURING

In any transition there are different tasks required at different stages. In the divorce process, the separation stage demands the severing of ties with a former way of life. In the liminal stage “comes the task of discovering where you are heading and acquiring the skills you will need once you get there.” (Chiriboga, 1989, p. 194). The final, re-entry stage involves establishing oneself in a new lifestyle.

Wallerstein (1986) suggests four tasks which individuals must confront following divorce: “(a) gradual disengagement from the failed marriage relationship, from the internal images and social roles that were associated with or maintained by that relationship, and from the structure and social network in which the marriage was embedded; (b) the resolution or control of the passions and anxieties stirred by the marital rupture and its specific precipitants; (c) optimal distancing and stabilizing of a post-divorce relationship with the former spouse that is conducive to emotional and financial co-operation in support of minor children and the maintenance of individual commitment to the rearing of those children in the absence of the intact two-parent family; and (d) construction of a new and sustained adult relationship or otherwise gratifying life pattern and the establishment of social and economic stability within the post-divorce or remarried family. This final task may be the most difficult.” (p. 66)

Although Chiriboga (1989) points out ‘stages’ of divorce, other authors (e.g. Rossiter, 1991) have pointed out that a lineal, stage-by-stage progression might not be the experience of those actually in the process of separation and divorce. Clinical practice shows that recovery from divorce is an ‘up and down’ journey, alternating good and bad days, with progress manifesting in more good than bad days. Wallerstein’s (1986) tasks support this view in that they are not discrete goals to be achieved before moving on to

the next task, but rather must be addressed simultaneously and continuously throughout the restructuring process.

Bohannon (1970) suggested that divorce creates six different areas which need to be resolved, each of which may be addressed in varying degrees by the individual: “(1) the emotional divorce, which centres around the problem of the deteriorating marriage; (2) the legal divorce, based on grounds; (3) the economic divorce, which deals with money and property; (4) the co-parental divorce, which deals with custody, single parent homes, and visitation; (5) the community divorce, surrounding the changes of friends and community that every divorcee experiences; and (6) the psychic divorce, with the problem of regaining individual autonomy” (p. 34).

“Adjustment to the end of marriage is characterized by a stable and resilient pattern of life, separate from the previous marriage and partner and based on anticipation rather than memory” (Spanier & Thompson, 1984, p. 103).

Perhaps one of the most difficult tasks in this process, and one which overlays all others, is the redefinition of self. As mentioned previously, loss of social identity and self-image almost inevitably occurs during the process of divorce (Kitson, 1992; Faust, 1987; Spanier & Thompson, 1984). This is often a result of societal norms and expectations, such as ‘marriage is forever’ and the assumption that being married is indicative of maturity or fulfilment. Divorce, then, may be perceived as a failure in an important role (Albrecht, 1980). This is particularly true for women who, despite the modern trend encouraging careers for women, are largely defined by their role as mother and wife. A woman takes her husband’s name upon marriage; their place of residence is often determined by where her husband works; and her career is usually deemed secondary to that of her husband. These are the threads of self-identity which are unravelled by divorce. Haber (1992) explains that, from a family systems perspective, loss of self through divorce is more likely to occur in individuals who have a lower level of differentiation of self. When the self in marriage is defined as a ‘common self’ shared with a spouse, the boundaries between individual identities become blurred. Termination of the marriage relationship is likely to result in a significant sense of loss and

dysfunction for one or both spouses. Following divorce, many women experience the feeling that they no longer know who they are.

3.3.1 Identity change and role-exiting

Unlike marriage, there are no social rituals surrounding divorce, no ceremonies which signal a change in role or identity. The marriage ceremony in most cultures is traditionally laden with symbols that indicate the individual's *entry* into new role-identities: the rings, the father 'giving away' the bride, the marriage vows, the exchange of gifts between families. The most one can hope for in exiting the role-identity of marriage is a lonely appearance in a divorce court, and the divorce decree received from a lawyer or through the post. So the task of role exiting becomes a considerable challenge for divorced women.

Some of the factors influencing the process of role-exiting and self-identity change include initiator status (whether the individual initiated the divorce process or had it thrust upon them) (Duran-Aydintug, 1995); the degree of voluntariness, awareness and control surrounding role exit (Duran-Aydintug, 1995) ; the centrality or relevance of the spousal role in one's identity structure (De Garmo & Kitson, 1996); socio-demographic variables such as economic status, number and age of children, education; therapy; time (Rahav & Baum, 2002); and employment (Bisagni & Eckenrode, 1995; Rahav & Baum, 2002).

Ebough (1988) defines the role exiting process in the following way: "... the process of disengagement from a role that is central to one's self-identity and the establishment of an identity in a new role that takes account of one's ex-role" (p. 1). The new role becomes internalized and forms part of the identity structure. This is a far from simple process, though, as the roles of 'ex-spouse' or 'ex-in-law' are not clearly defined in our society. Ebough (1988) proposes that role exiting involves disengagement (no longer accepting prescribed rights and obligations of a particular role e.g. 'wife'), as well as disidentification (no longer thinking of oneself in the former role). In addition, there is role residual from the previous role which is incorporated into one's current self-concept.

Duran-Aydintug (1995) also suggests that role distancing is involved in role exiting; that is, one's behaviour "sends the message to others and to one's self that such roles are not a part of one's self-conception" (p. 26). In Duran-Aydintug's (1995) study, it was found that the process of exiting the spousal role was different for initiators of divorce and for non-initiators, and that almost all initiators had more control and awareness over the role exit process, as well as voluntarily starting the process of separation.

Rahav and Baum's (2002) study of divorced Israeli women and factors contributing to self-identity change is particularly illuminating. The instrument that they designed included scales for each of six identity domains: control, challenge, independence, responsibility, competence, and self-esteem. Factors investigated for their influence on the above domains were "(1) the socio-demographic variables of age, education, number and age of children, economic status, and employment; (2) the marital variables of duration of the marriage and time since the divorce, and (3) the divorcee's socio-emotional relationships, that is: having a steady partner, the quality of her relationship with her ex-spouse, and the experience of therapy" (p. 44). They found that the variables most strongly correlated with positive identity change were education, age of youngest child, subjective economic situation, and time since divorce. Employment and therapy also contributed to positive identity change. Interestingly, in this study relationship variables were not significantly correlated with identity change. "The findings suggest that, unlike adjustment, identity change depends less on social relations and social support than on the women's own self-construction through their experience and handling of the challenges of their lives alone" (p. 55).

Work identity is closely associated with divorce adjustment in women (Bisagni & Eckenrode, 1995), and employment may provide a focus for individual identity. Bisagni and Eckenrode (1995) explored four aspects of employment that were found to increase levels of self-esteem and decrease stress levels in divorced women: meaningfulness, social interaction and support, productivity, and positive distraction. Work can assist women in forming a new post-divorce identity by providing an area in which they feel competent, purposeful and well-regarded.

A point to be noted, raised by Rossiter (1991), is that 'recovery' is perhaps an inappropriate term for the experience following separation and divorce. 'Recovery' has implications of regaining one's previous identity, a return to homeostasis. In fact, "[a]s the experience of separation radically alters identity, clients never recover the previous self. Rather, they slowly develop a new identity which, for a long time, doesn't feel like 'their self'" (p. 148). But it is by forging new roles and a new identity that a woman is given the opportunity to grow and individuate. Navigating the many roles required for single-hood and single parenting can result in a journey which ultimately increases a woman's self-esteem and self-efficacy, as she steps out of the traditional female role of emotional care-taker, nurturer and homemaker and into more non-traditional sex role attitudes.

3.3.2 *Family reorganisation and single parenting*

Another task which must be confronted in the post-separation period is that of reorganising the family structure. Inasmuch as there are no guidelines for the role of ex-spouse, there are also no rules for the post-separation family. Hierarchies, alignments, decision-making, and general life patterns of the family must all change. A confounding issue is that divorce does not necessarily, or even usually, result in the *dissolution* of the original family system, but rather the family is reorganised around custodial and non-custodial parental involvement. In most of the studies reviewed women generally were the custodial parents (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Spanier & Thompson, 1984; Goldsmith, 1981; Kitson & Holmes, 1992).

The presence of children in the post-divorce family can have many repercussions, notably the role overload experienced by single parents who have to find the time and energy to perform as workers and as parents. In addition, children may be an inhibiting factor in dating and enjoying a social life outside of the home. Children may also be a focus point for ongoing conflict between former spouses, and their response to the separation of their parents is often an ongoing source of concern for mothers in particular.

Largely as a result of the 'marriage and motherhood mandate', a salient role in the life of many women is their role of mother. Depending on their role-orientation (mother versus work identity), the reorganisation of the family following divorce may be a more or less stressful experience. Wijnberg and Holmes (1992) described three orientations in their sample of divorced women: traditionalist, modifier, and career-directed. The traditionalists had typically not worked outside of the home during marriage; were satisfied with their role of wife/mother, and unwillingly accepted the need to work following divorce. Modifiers also valued the wife/mother role but had worked either full-time or part-time during their marriage. Career-directed women had a strong orientation towards work, had worked during marriage, and had established an identity separate from husband and family. They found that the process of family reorganisation and subsequently navigating the family life cycle was much more stressful for traditionalists than for modifiers or career-directed women.

Non-custodial parents have to adjust to being less of a part of their children's lives, and see this as "a serious deprivation" (Spanier & Thompson, 1984, p 80). Custodial parents commonly complain that the non-custodial parent, who sees the children less often, is not involved in discipline or the daily conflicts of the family, and is seen as more attractive by the children, or as a visitor in the children's lives (Spanier & Thompson, 1984; Goldsmith, 1981).

Goldsmith (1981) found that the most frequent area of involvement of the non-custodial parent is in celebrating holidays and special events. 55% of divorced couples report spending time together as a family at these times. Everyday decisions involving the children are less likely to be shared, although the majority of divorced couples still communicate relatively frequently about school and medical issues.

A further issue following divorce is the changed relationships with in-laws. Spanier and Thompson found that a third of the women in their study received emotional support from in-laws.

3.3.3 Relationship with the former spouse

In the post-divorce period, a primary task is that of establishing a new and different relationship with the ex-spouse. If there are no children involved in the divorce, individuals may choose the nature of their post-separation interaction. Some will choose to have no interaction whatsoever, while others may retain contact to a greater or lesser degree. However, when children are present, former spouses are often forced to maintain contact with one another as part of their parenting roles. Detachment from the former spouse will always be limited by the presence of children in the post-divorce family (Reibstein, 1998). Actual legal custody of the children will define the frequency and duration of contact between the children and each parent, but there are few guidelines for the establishment of a relationship between the separated parents. Goldsmith (1981) found that 84% of divorced couples maintain telephonic or face-to-face contact about child-rearing issues. However, the amount of contact varied greatly: from 19% of couples who communicated twice a week or more, to 16% of couples who had no contact at all. Continued contact with the former spouse through children reactivates attachment behaviour; deep feelings of concern, joy or anxiety about children engender intimacy when shared with the other parent, and access to children requires access to details of an ex-spouse's life, such as new partners, financial information, and so on (Reibstein, 1998).

Spanier and Thompson (1984) found that about half of their sample of divorced couples preferred some contact with their former spouse. The majority of their participants reported that this relationship was less tense following the separation. However, few said that they relied on their former partner for emotional support. Goldsmith (1981) found that "friendly or 'kin' type contacts (e.g. talking about family other than children) are maintained by the majority of divorced couples" (p. 13).

Goldsmith (1981) and Weiss (1975) also found that positive feelings, specifically caring and compassion, towards former spouses were the most frequently acknowledged, as opposed to hostility. Despite this, Goldsmith's (1981) study concluded that "former spouses are generally not satisfied with the way they have worked out their relationships with one another in areas other than parenting" (p. 17). Indeed, the absence of norms

regarding post-divorce relationships with former spouses can result in positive feelings towards the ex-spouse being confusing to those who experience such feelings.

Much of the literature surrounding divorce adjustment emphasises the necessity of breaking the former emotional bonds with an ex-spouse (Berman, 1985; Kitson, 1982; Reibstein, 1998), suggesting that any continued attachment is somehow pathological. In reality, however, the work required to resolve the crisis of loss that is divorce, including detachment and mourning, is inhibited by continued ties to children and by co-parenting with the ex-spouse (Wiseman, 1975). In fact, continued contact can either enhance attachment by bringing out memories of the good times, or can ease attachment by supporting the belief that one is better off without the former partner (Spanier & Thompson, 1984). Goode (1956) and Spanier and Thompson (1984) both found that liking or indifference towards the former spouse was less distressing than any strong feelings, either positive (love) or negative (hate).

Reibstein (1998) proposes that, in order to establish an appropriate relationship with a former spouse when children are involved, contact between ex-partners “must be limited and rule-bound” (p. 355). Civility must replace intimacy. Suggested rules of engagement are:

- (1) “avoiding, whenever possible, subjects which in the marriage aroused painful behaviours between partners (eg. fidelity; promptness; financial management);
- (2) if unable to avoid subjects completely, then avoiding behaviours which provoked behaviours in return which bring pain (eg. shouting, using critical tones of voice, criticizing, pointing out flaws);
- (3) if unable to trust that they will avoid these behaviours or subjects, then further limiting their engagement to civilities, common courtesy and normal behaviour, confining it to information-giving which is necessary (eg. school reports, children’s appointments and health information)” (Reibstein, 1998, p. 356).

3.3.4 *Emotional adjustment*

The emotional consequences of divorce are many and varied, and uniquely individual. Emotional responses may range from devastation, through mild distress, to relief. Wallerstein and Kelly's (1980) longitudinal study and Spanier and Thompson (1984) both found that emotional distress diminished with time. Anger was found to be a common response to divorce. Women, in particular, showed greater intensity of anger, and more women than men were hostile. Wallerstein (1986) found that older women were more likely to experience unrelenting anger, which appeared to be rooted in feelings of hurt, humiliation and rejection. For over half of these women, anger had not abated at the ten-year follow-up. Indeed, Wallerstein (1986) concluded that "It may be that the most realistic expectation in outcome following divorce, especially for women who have been married for a significant portion of their adult lives, is the persistence of powerful, angry feelings and that the most attainable goal is in the encapsulation of these feelings rather than their resolution." (p. 71). In the same study, Wallerstein found that 50% of the older female participants were clinically depressed and that all were moderately or severely lonely. Thabes (1997) reported that 26% of her sample of women were clinically depressed, and that the younger groups of respondents were more depressed. Spanier and Thompson (1984) also found that women were more likely than men to consider suicide following divorce.

Loneliness is a common experience amongst divorced individuals. Weiss (1975) suggests that there are two types of loneliness: emotional and social. Emotional loneliness stems from lack of intimacy, while social loneliness results from lack of social contact and activity. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) note that "[m]ost of the parents who had not remarried spoke openly of their loneliness" (p. 193). Wallerstein (1986) found that persisting anger was linked to loneliness, while Thabes (1997) found that persistent negative feelings towards the former spouse contributed to depression. Some of the factors contributing to loneliness include the disapproval of friends of the marital breakup; the more committed the individual was to the marriage, the more lonely they were likely to be following separation; being the partner who was left as opposed to the

leaver was related to loneliness; and more educated women experienced less loneliness (Spanier & Thompson, 1984).

Thabes (1997) found that depression in women following divorce could be attributed to abuse during the marriage, poor legal representation, persistent strong negative feelings about former spouse, lack of friends and family support, low level of social activity during and after marriage, lower income, and the lack of an intimate partner.

Despite these findings, a further theme in the above studies was that of feelings of relief. “The other side of the rage, the severe depression, and the regressive pull of the divorce is the feeling that the divorce presents a new chance to begin anew” (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980, p. 31). Spanier and Thompson (1984) reported that over half the men and women in their sample (separated 26 months or less) felt relieved following the divorce.

3.3.5 Establishment of a new life pattern (social support and economic stability)

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of post-divorce research is that several studies report improved functioning following separation and divorce (Anderson, Stewart & Dimidjian, 1994, Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Weitzman, 1985; Wallerstein, 1986). “[E]ven the longer-married older housewives who suffer the greatest financial hardships after divorce (and who feel most economically deprived, most angry, and most ‘cheated’ by the divorce settlement) say they are ‘personally’ better off than they were during marriage. They are proud of the skills they used to deal with the crisis, to marshal a support network, to manage their finances, and to take control of their lives. They also report improved self-esteem, more pride in their appearance, and greater competence in all aspects of their lives” (Weitzman, 1985, p. 346). However, this is neither a quick nor an easy process. Research shows that most women seem to take two to three years following separation to stabilise their lives (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Thabes, 1997; Booth & Amato, 1991)

Establishing a new life pattern following separation and divorce involves dealing with the tasks already discussed: identity change and role exiting; family reorganisation and single

parenting; establishing a working relationship with the former spouse; and emotional adjustment. In addition to these, one of the most important aspects of a new life pattern for divorced women is the establishment of a social support network. This is often not a simple task, but it is extremely important in adjusting to the aftermath of divorce. Many studies have found strong social support to be associated with post-divorce adjustment (Spanier & Thompson, 1984; Goode, 1956; Thabes; Garvin, Kalter & Hansell, 1993; Kitson, 1992; Miller, Smerglia, Gaudet & Kitson, 1998; Riessman, 1990).

One of the obstacles divorced women face in a social context is that of stigmatization. This may result in women being excluded from social situations because of their divorced status, particularly in situations where couples are the norm e.g. dinner parties (Anderson, Stewart, & Dimidjian, 1994). A further obstacle is that of available time and income to engage in social activities. Single mothers may find that the combined responsibilities of child-raising, housekeeping and employment leave little time for engaging in social interaction. Divorced women often begin their single lives with a limited social network if their friendships were closely linked to their 'couple' status or if much of their time and energy had been invested in family relationships during their marriage rather than in their own personal friendships. Both Anderson, Stewart and Dimidjian (1994) and Spanier and Thompson (1984) observed that divorced individuals may complicate their efforts to develop a social network due to the belief that they should 'go it alone', approaching the marital separation with self-sufficiency rather than relying on their social networks for support.

Social support networks vary in the size and type of support provided. Some women may establish large, diverse networks, while others seek fewer social supports. Indeed, it has been noted that some women have a strong need for solitude (Anderson, Stewart & Dimidjian, 1994; Spanier & Thompson, 1984). Thabes (1997) states: "The physical conditions under which divorced women live alone appears in need of additional exploration; that is, what may appear to be reclusivity may in fact be sanctuary" (pp. 171-172). This is supported by Spanier and Thompson (1984), who suggest that "[t]he need for autonomy may be as strong as the need for the comfort of others" (p. 185). However, most divorcees form a social network which may include family, friends, in-laws, and

even their children. Anderson, Stewart and Dimidjian (1994) note that other divorced women may be an important source of support for some women.

The presence of an alternative partner may ease the transition into single-hood and dating can boost the divorcee's sense of self-worth. However, older women date less frequently than younger women. Dating for any age group following divorce is fraught with awkwardness, fear of being hurt again, and may be constrained by the presence of children, or by ongoing attachment to the former spouse. Older women are also less likely than younger women to remarry (Spanier & Thompson, 1984; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

As previously mentioned, employment can be a pivotal aspect of a new life pattern, especially if it provides a source of social support. Employment can also be an arena in which mastery, independence and competence develop, contributing to enhanced self-esteem and self-efficacy (Anderson, Stewart & Dimidjian, 1994; Bisagni & Eckenrode, 1995). A possible reason for women reporting that divorce has served a useful purpose in their lives (e.g, Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Weitzman, 1985) is that prior to divorce, many of these women were not employed outside of the home and so did not have the challenge of achievement that employment might offer. Once divorced and forced to seek employment, many women experienced a significant increase in their sense of self-worth. The negative aspect of having to seek employment is that, for those with no previous working experience or marketable skills, job-hunting with little success may further erode their already battered self-esteem.

Economic stability is another key aspect in establishing a new life pattern. This is an area in which the 'marriage and motherhood mandate' has a lot to answer for. Even women who are relatively well-off financially worry about supporting themselves simply because they do not have a man in their life to lean on (Anderson, Stewart & Dimidjian, 1994). Weitzman's (1985) statistic (quoted in Chapter 1) of the 73 percent decline in standard of living experienced by divorced women demonstrates the stark reality of economic hardship endured by many women. Older, longer-married and higher socioeconomic status fall the furthest economically following divorce. Apart from direct loss of

financial support, another problem that divorced women face is discrimination in, for example, housing or obtaining credit (Spanier & Thompson, 1984). Many women experience difficulty in managing financial matters after divorce because they were not involved in money management during their marriages. It would appear that financial security, rather than income, contributes to well-being following divorce (Spanier & Thompson, 1984). This includes such aspects as medical insurance and retirement or pension funds. A loss experienced by many women is their exclusion from their husbands medical and retirement plans.

Perhaps the most demoralising part of economic instability following separation and divorce is that it is often beyond the individual's control to change the situation; level of education, previous employment experience, lack of available financial advice, and even geographical location may limit a woman's potential earnings. Despite this, certain women may relish the autonomy of controlling their own money, giving themselves the opportunity to develop competence in a previously unknown area.

The task of achieving economic stability appears to be key in establishing a new life pattern. An individual's economic situation leaks into many other areas of life, and so the more satisfactory the financial situation, the easier adjustment will be in other areas. For example, ongoing conflict in a relationship with an ex-spouse may be constantly fired by resentment about money, or lack of child-maintenance payments. Leisure time and social pursuits may be limited by financial resources, thus inhibiting the development of a sound, supportive social network. Indeed, moving out of the family home and relocating to adapt to lesser income can completely disrupt an individual's social circle. Even mundane maintenance tasks, such as servicing or repairing a motor car or attending to minor house repairs can become the stuff of nightmares if financial resources are limited. Finally, a perceived inability to cope with financial pressures can further erode self-esteem. However, one's financial status is a very subjective thing, and must be understood from the individual's own perspective; some women may be worse off economically following divorce, but may perceive themselves as more economically stable because they have control over their own finances and more choice about how and where money is earned and spent. Other women may experience no decrease in income

but feel more anxious and uncertain about their current and future financial status because they are inexperienced regarding money management.

In summary, the establishment of a satisfying new life pattern following separation and divorce should ideally enable a woman to feel empowered and competent in her new identity. This often stems from feelings of liberation strongly linked to independence and self-determination. Divorced women, despite the difficulties they face in working through the tasks mentioned above, frequently report a new sense of freedom, the joy of being responsible for their own lives, a healthy selfishness where they determine their own direction without constraint from a partner. As Anderson, Stewart and Dimidjian (1994) put it: “.... Women discussed the benefits of their years on their own, not in terms of major priorities such as work or parenting, but in terms of seemingly minor aspects of their lives such as being able to play tennis or go fishing on a whim, eat potato chips in bed, or have nothing but cookies for dinner. These small liberties may seem trivial when compared to the warmth and security of the Norman Rockwell portrait of family life we all carry within us; however, they reveal the universal qualities of single life that some women find extraordinarily valuable: freedom, independence, and most of all, *self-determination*” (p. 35).

3.4 RESILIENCE

How does resilience influence an individual’s capacity to perform these tasks? Following Richardson’s (2002) three waves of inquiry, the qualities and characteristics of resilience will be discussed, followed by models of resilience which attempt to describe the process of developing resilience and, lastly, resilience as motivational energy.

3.4.1 Elements of resilience

A distillation of the literature surrounding resilience reveals certain common elements which facilitate resilient growth in an individual. These include dispositional factors (which were addressed in Chapter 2), skills, and environmental factors. The focus here is

on elements which are relevant to adult resilience; protective factors and skills which have been identified as relating *specifically* to children have been omitted.

The authors reviewed for the elements of resilience are Flach (1988), Friedman (2002), Kumpfer (1999), Richardson, Neiger, Jensen and Kumpfer (1990), Turner (2001), and Wolin and Wolin (1993). Each of these authors refers to studies which correlate qualities and characteristics of the individual to resilient coping. The common elements described by these authors (although not necessarily in these exact terms) are as follows:

- Strong self-esteem/ability to restore self-esteem
- Independence of thought, action and spirit
- Social support/ability to give and take in social interactions
- Internal locus of control/self-mastery/initiative
- Possession of talents or skills
- Creativity/capacity for learning
- Ability to dream/positive futuristic vision
- Sense of humour
- Insight
- Flexibility
- Purpose in life/meaning
- Problem-solving
- Morality
- Competence and environmental mastery
- Physical well-being and competencies

Possibly the most important aspect of all these elements is that they can be learnt or developed by an individual. These are not inherent personality traits that one is either born with or born without. All individuals have within them the capacity to develop, for instance, their sense of self-esteem, their ability to problem-solve, or their ability to dream.

However, resilience is not merely a collection of characteristics or qualities. According to our definition, *resilience is reintegration with significantly improved functioning following a stressful life event or challenge*. This defines resilience as an outcome, an observable result. In addition to resilience as a cluster of elements and an outcome, resilience is also an interactional process, as is highlighted in the models below.

3.4.2 Models of resilience

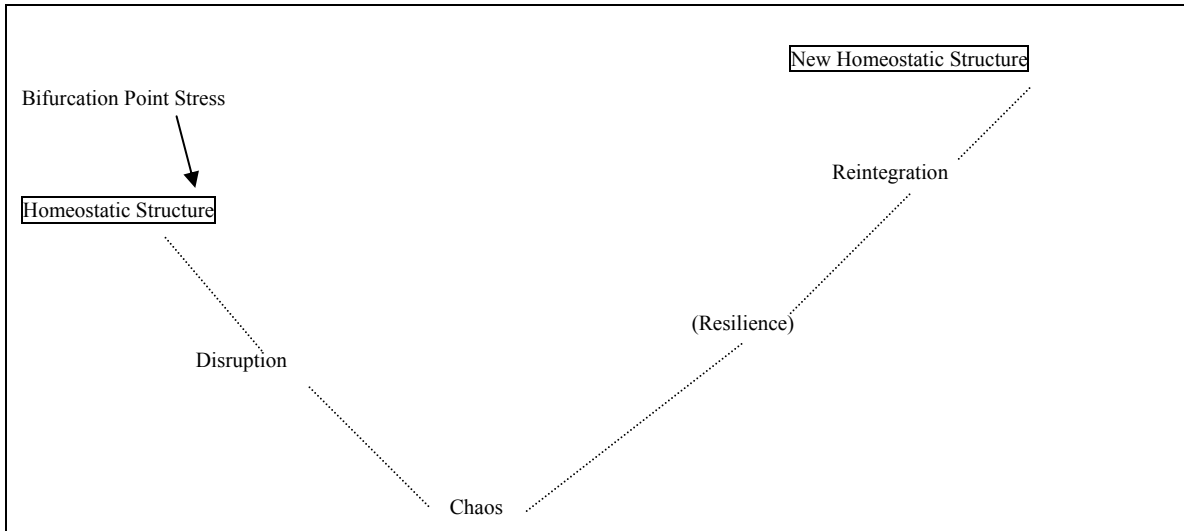
The various models of resilience described in the literature tend to focus on the interaction between stressors/life challenges and protective processes/factors (Richardson, Neiger, Jensen & Kumpfer, 1990; Flach, 1997; Kumpfer, 1999). These models describe a process of disruption leading to disorganisation, and then to reintegration. Resilience is found in the effectiveness, for the individual, of the reintegration stage; that is, whether the reintegration is resilient, homeostatic, maladaptive, or dysfunctional, as described by Richardson et al (1990). The role of the elements of resilience described above is that of protective factors interacting with and balancing life stressors to determine how the disruption is ultimately resolved.

3.4.2.1 Flach's (1988, 1997) model of disruption and reintegration

Flach's (1988, 1997) model of disruption and reintegration, as illustrated in Figure 3.1, describes most simplistically the process of disruption and reintegration in systemic terms of homeostasis (returning to the status quo). Borrowing a term from modern physics, Flach postulates that 'bifurcation points' representing times of extreme change, occur in our lives, resulting in destabilisation in our normal structures and even chaos. At the point of chaos, we are extremely vulnerable and may, at this point form a new homeostasis based on "disability, anguish, and inadequate coping behaviour" (Flach, 1997, p. 14). Or we may, out of the chaos, reintegrate to a more effective level of functioning than previously. This is resilience. Reintegration may be defined as "the process of reforming a world view" (Richardson, Neiger, Jensen & Kumpfer, 1990, p. 37). It is important to note that Flach describes bifurcation points as not only the big, traumatic events that we encounter in our lives, but also the small, everyday occurrences

that cause our homeostatic state to become disrupted. The process of disruption and reintegration is also seen as cyclical, with each period of disruption and reintegration potentially providing us with the resources to weather the next. Such resources include, amongst others, strong self-esteem, sense of humour, personal discipline and a sense of responsibility - aspects of what Flach (1997) calls the ‘resilient personality’.

Figure 3.1 Flach’s (1988, 1997) model of disruption and reintegration



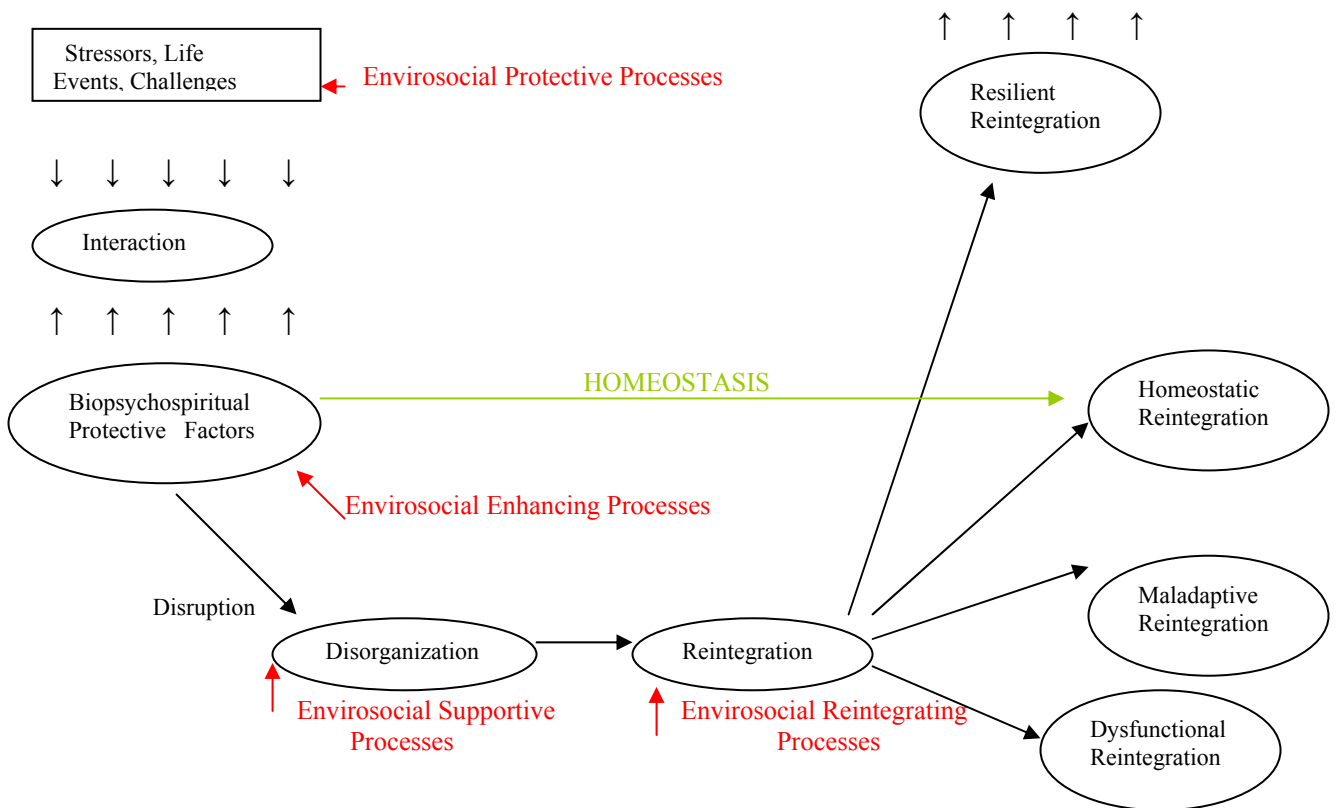
Source: Flach, F. (1997). Resilience: The power to bounce back when the going gets tough! New York: Hatherleigh Press. (p. 13)

3.4.2.2 The resiliency model : Richardson, Neiger, Jensen and Kumpfer (1990)

Richardson, Neiger, Jensen and Kumpfer (1990) propose a model of resiliency (the term commonly used for ‘resilience’ at that time) similar to that of Flach (1997). Figure 3.2 depicts this model. The process of disruption and reintegration in this model is, however, more specifically determined by the interaction of life challenges or stressors and what Richardson et al (1990) call “biopsychospiritual protective factors” (p. 35). Biopsychospiritual homeostasis is “a point in time when one has adapted physically, mentally, and spiritually to a set of circumstances whether good or bad” (Richardson, 2002, p. 311). Homeostasis is routinely disrupted by life events, threats, challenges and opportunities. The degree or type of disruption experienced by an individual when faced with a stressful event is determined by how the individual negotiates with the event, using the biopsychospiritual protective factors and skills. These include, amongst others,

purpose in life, good self-esteem, self-mastery, ability to be a friend, and so on. Richardson (2002) describes the resiliency process in response to disruption as two main stages: the first stage includes primary emotions such as fear, hurt, confusion and guilt. As time passes and the individual begins to adapt, “the question, What am I doing to do? consciously or subconsciously emerges, which begins the reintegration process” (p. 312). Richardson et al (1990) specify four types of reintegration which might result from the process of disruption and reintegration: resilient reintegration (resulting in more effective functioning than before the stressful event); homeostatic reintegration (return to the same level of functioning as before); maladaptive reintegration (returning to a lower level of functioning, with fewer protective skills than before); and dysfunctional reintegration (using dysfunctional coping mechanisms such as psychoactive substances or withdrawing, for example).

Figure 3.2 *The resiliency model : Richardson, Neiger, Jensen and Kumpfer (1990)*



Source: Richardson, G.E., Neiger, B.L., Jensen, S., & Kumpfer, K.L. (1990). *The resiliency model*. *Health Education, 21*(6), p. 38.

Emerging from the two models above, is the premise that the development of resilient skills, characteristics and attitudes can be both preventative *and* therapeutic. At the point of disruption, when an individual's homeostasis is disturbed, the resilient characteristics are protective, and can potentially lessen the impact of such a disruption. In the context of divorce, women who are educated, or who have a meaningful career, or who see the divorce as a release from an abusive marriage may be protected to an extent from the trauma of many aspects of divorce.

During the process of reintegration (Richardson et al's 'What am I going to do?' stage), problem-solving skills, creativity, self-mastery and independence can do much to ease the distress of having to re-form a world view based on being a single person.

Indeed, as part of the resiliency model, Richardson et al (1990) propose that there are four major points of intervention where family, friends or professional health-care workers can assist in the development of resilient characteristics. I would like to expand this to include the individual who is experiencing the stressful event. These interventions are "envirosocial influences" or processes (p. 37). "Family, friends, prevention specialists, health educators, other support persons as well as positive environments act as envirosocial resiliency enhancing facilitators" (p. 37). Richardson et al (1990) focus on children in terms of these interventions, but I believe that they are equally valid for adults. Although Richardson et al (1990) describe these as 'processes', in the following description, it should be noted that I have included **elements** of resilience (internal and external) that might play a role in the process; and that *all* or any of the elements of resilience listed above may be relevant at each point in the process of disruption and reintegration. The elements I specifically mention are simply examples.

Interpreting Richardson et al's (1990) model in terms of divorce, the first point of intervention would be developing protective factors to buffer the potential impact of life events, in this case, the stresses of separation and divorce: these are '*envirosocial protective processes*'. This might include a strong, supportive network of family or friends. Or it might be financial independence, or having a strong sense of identity that is not entirely defined by marriage. The greatest problem here is that, as mentioned

previously, no-one goes into marriage planning to get divorced, so these protective factors are very often under-developed in married women. Consequently, they are unprepared for the trauma of separation.

'Envirosocial enhancing processes' are processes which develop the biopsychospiritual protective factors to ensure that in the event of a stressor or challenge, the individual is better able to cope effectively. Self-esteem and an internal locus of control (or sense of responsibility for one's life) are important elements of resilience when dealing with stressors, as is maintaining physical resilience.

Once the separation or divorce has occurred, the individual's whole world and perspective on life is disrupted and becomes disorganised. Intense emotion is experienced; often relocation must occur; a woman might have to find employment; or she might find herself in dire financial difficulties. "When the individual negotiates a life event unsuccessfully, the world view is disrupted. The process of falling apart is healthy if the fall is not too far or too dangerous. Envirosocial support processes are the efforts of support people to make sure the fall is not too extreme ... The attempt is to allow the fall to occur but to keep it from being life threatening or permanently damaging. It is envirosocial support that helps to catch and hold the person long enough for him/her to enter the reintegration stage" (Richardson et al, 1990, p. 38). *'Envirosocial supportive processes'* may include a divorced woman's interdependence with her social support network, or her ability to hold a positive vision of the future, sense of humour, or a purpose in life.

Finally, when the divorced individual is ready to begin rebuilding a life as a single person, *'envirosocial reintegrating processes'* come into play. As mentioned earlier, problem-solving capabilities, independence of thought, action and spirit, flexibility, and so on, are skills that will assist the individual in resilient reintegration.

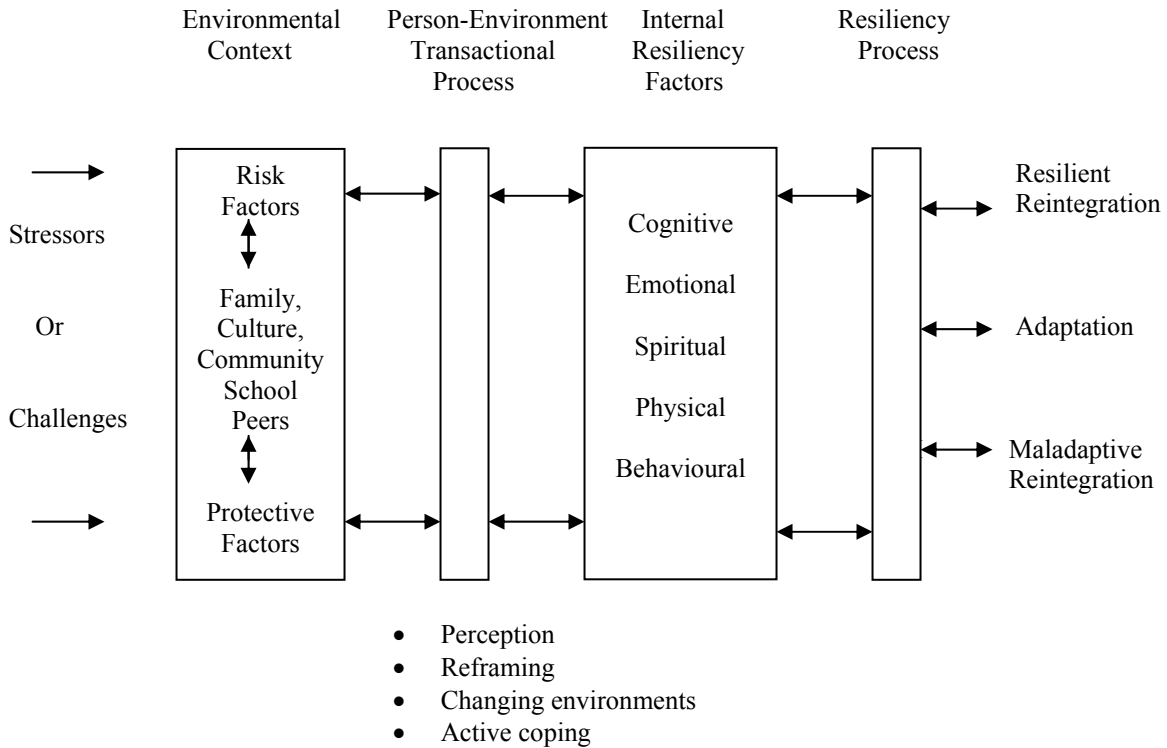
The models of Flach (1988, 1997) and Richardson et al (1990) both postulate that disruption is necessary for reintegration and resilient growth to occur. When we are in homeostasis, growth does not occur. Thus, many individuals seek challenges that they

know will disrupt their homeostasis; they move out of their ‘comfort zone’ in order to experience personal growth. Although not commonly given as a reason for divorce, many divorced women experience this resilient growth following separation because the disruption of their world view necessitates putting the pieces of their lives back together in an entirely new way.

3.4.2.3 The Resilience Framework : Kumpfer (1999)

Karol Kumpfer’s (1999) resilience framework is a transactional model of resilience, and includes “both process and outcome constructs” (in Glanz & Johnson, 1999, p. 183). This model, as illustrated in Figure 3.3, is similar to Richardson et al (1990), but focuses less on the cycle of disruption and reintegration, and expands somewhat on the interactional nature of environmental context and internal resiliency factors (person-environment transactional processes), and of internal resiliency factors and reintegration outcomes (resiliency processes). Resilience processes include unique coping processes learnt by the individual through previous exposure to challenges and stressors. Friedman (2002) calls this the ‘wellspring’ of resilience. It should be noted here that both Richardson et al (1990) and Kumpfer (1999) have developed their models in research with children. However, I believe that the models apply equally to adults.

Figure 3.3 *Kumpfer's (1999) resilience framework*



Source: Kumpfer, K.L. (1999). *Factors and process contributing to resilience: The resilience framework*. In "Resilience and development: Positive life adaptations. Glanz, M.D. & Johnson, J.L. (eds.) (1999). New York: Plenum. (pp. 179-224).

To apply this model to the context of divorce, the primary challenge or stressor would be separation from an intimate relationship. Other stressors would include those mentioned previously, such as single parenting, financial difficulties, seeking employment and so on. The environmental risk factors for a divorced woman might include lack of social support, limited financial resources or employment opportunities, conflict with the ex-spouse, or the presence of children who inhibit the development of a social life. Environmental protective factors could include a strong social support network, economic security, educational or employment opportunities, access to professional help, or perhaps having a steady partner.

Person-environment transactional processes such as the individual's perception of the divorce, reframing the divorce as an opportunity rather than as a disaster, changing the

environment (e.g. relocating), and actively coping with the challenge of divorce will all contribute to the degree of resiliency experienced in reintegration.

Contributing to the person-environmental transactional processes are the divorced woman's internal resiliency factors. Cognitive factors include problem-solving capability, insight, self-esteem, and capacity for learning, and may assist with the individual's ability to reframe their experience of divorce. Emotional factors such as empathy, a sense of humour, and the ability to restore self-esteem, and spiritual factors such as a sense of purpose, the ability to dream, and an internal locus of control contribute to the way in which an individual views divorce and the impact on their life. Behavioural skills such as effective communication, social skills and flexibility, and physical well-being may assist in actively coping with the stressor of separation and divorce. Also interacting with internal resiliency factors are resiliency processes: coping skills and mechanisms learnt through previous experiences. For example, looking back on earlier stressful experiences, an individual may identify effective use of a strong social support network as an important resource in successfully coping with those experiences. The systematic use of this 'wellspring' of resilience (Friedman, 2000) can be a valuable tool in resiliently reintegrating.

3.5 RESILIENCE AS MOTIVATIONAL ENERGY

Although the focus of this dissertation will be on the disruption and reintegration model of resilience represented by the models described above, and the elements and processes contained therein, the idea of resilience as motivational energy requires some attention here. Richardson (2002) states that "[t]he questions that led to the third wave of resiliency inquiry were, What and where is the energy source or motivation to reintegrate resiliently?" (p. 313). In essence, the answer to this question is that human beings have within them a force which drives them towards self-actualisation. Richardson (2002) describes how many diverse disciplines explain this force, including quantum physics, Eastern medicine, theological beliefs in God or a creative force, and transpersonal psychology, and concludes: "It is clear that society, as well as the academic revolution of

the spirit or soul, supports the postulate that there is a healing, driving, and motivating force within every soul” (p. 315).

This offers us the reassurance that resilience is a *human* force, something that lies within all of us. Resilience, then, is more than characteristics, skills, processes, or outcomes; it is a primary force that motivates us to overcome, to bounce back, and to flourish.

3.6 CONCLUSION

Recovery from the shattering effects of divorce is clearly a journey, not something that is achieved quickly nor in a linear fashion. In coping with the tasks associated with restructuring life following divorce, the elements and processes of resilience must play a part. In later chapters, we look at how women experience divorce and how they use the various elements of resilience to rebuild their lives.

CHAPTER 4

INTERVENTIONS AIMED AT ENHANCING DIVORCE ADJUSTMENT

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Women experiencing divorce often find themselves in a situation that is not shared by friends and family. The problems they experience are different to those experienced by other members of their community, and consequently they may feel isolated from the community. It appears that having a temporary community which shares similar experiences may be useful in the aftermath of divorce. However, when considering the effectiveness of support groups or other such interventions, it is important to examine the format of the group, the role of the facilitator, and the type of support or assistance offered.

4.2 THE FORMAT OF THE GROUP

The varied needs of divorced individuals makes providing services a complicated matter. Issues such as whether or not there are children involved, religious beliefs, length and number of marriages, emotional/mental health before the divorce and other unique individual circumstances all influence the benefits that an individual may experience in different types of divorce groups.

Charping, Bell and Strecker (1992) compared sixteen programmes designed for divorce adjustment with their own *Divorce Adjustment Group*. Most of the groups reviewed aim “to create an environment which will enable members to move from a point of pain, isolation, and disequilibrium to a point of connectedness, greater stability, and hope” (p. 27). The majority of groups have a combination of objectives, including therapeutic educational and supportive components; while some offer practical assistance, such as legal or financial information, skills for single-parenting, or social skills training.

The groups vary along a continuum in degree of structure. Some are highly structured (Fisher, 1976, 1978), clearly allocating each session to specific content areas. Others are much less structured (Morris & Prescott (1975), leaving the members to determine what is discussed and at what length. The majority of the support groups reviewed used a combination of structured and unstructured interventions. An example of this is a group described by Vera (1993); this programme was based on Fisher's (1981) book *Rebuilding*. Members were asked to do structured 'homework' assignments, such as writing a good-bye letter to the ex-partner; the assignments were reviewed at the next session, and individual issues and concerns would be raised in an unstructured manner. Participants would offer feedback and emotional support.

Graff, Whitehead and Lecompte (1986) compared structured and unstructured group formats and found both useful, but the structured format appeared to be more beneficial for members in the long-term. However, these results are inconclusive, as the counsellors appeared to favour the structured approach and seemed "more encouraging and enthusiastic in the cognitive-behavioral group than in the supportive-insight group" (p. 280). In addition, the sample was limited to women who had been divorced between 8 and 18 months.

A further aspect of the format of divorce adjustment groups is the number and length of sessions in the programme. Charping et al's (1992) comparison shows that most programmes offer six to eight sessions (their own programme runs ten sessions, as does Vera's (1993)), with the length of session being two to three hours. This is justified by the proposition that ten sessions provide adequate time for most members to "regain a sense of stability, experience some success in relationships, and begin the process of establishing a new identity" (p. 33). If the group continues for longer, the focus becomes diffused, and the group starts to deal with issues less related to divorce adjustment.

Related to the length of the session is the size of the group. The optimal group size appears to be between eight and ten members. This allows for rich interaction in each session, and is small enough to become a 'community' for its members.

4.3 THE ROLE OF THE FACILITATOR

Charping et al's (1992) comparison shows that nine of the programmes use co-leaders, with five recommending male/female co-leadership. The remainder of the programmes were not specific about the gender of the facilitator. Charping et al (1992) strongly advocate the use of male/female co-leaders in divorce adjustment programmes: "Having both a man and a woman leader in the group provides an opportunity for members to deal more honestly with issues related to the opposite gender that may have been triggered by the divorcing process" (p. 30).

What is perhaps more important is that the facilitator of a divorce adjustment group is a skilled, professional group leader, who understands group dynamics, and is capable of facilitating the expression of strong and often painful emotions.

4.4 TYPES OF SUPPORT/ASSISTANCE OFFERED

The benefits of a divorce support group are obviously very subjective and will depend a great deal on factors such as the circumstances, personality and history of the individual member. However, the effectiveness of support groups in general, and the effectiveness of certain specific programmes, has been documented. Charping Bell and Strecker (1992) designed a questionnaire to measure helpful/unhelpful aspects of group treatment following divorce. Most helpful aspects included the opportunity to be with others who were in the same situation, social support, and the instilling of hope.

This is confirmed by Oygard, Thuen and Solvang (2000) who, in a qualitative evaluation of divorce support groups, found that group participants valued meeting people who had experienced the same thing as themselves, and felt relieved that they were not 'crazy' or alone in their situation. They also experienced increased insight into themselves and their own behaviour through others' stories and feedback. There was a feeling of belonging and being accepted by the group, which facilitated open expression of emotions, all of which contributed to increased well-being among participants.

Divorce support groups may facilitate post-divorce adjustment, both in practical matters and emotional issues. Bloom, Hodges, Kern and McFaddin (1985) found that individuals participating in divorce groups scored significantly higher than controls on adjustment variables, had fewer separation-related problems, greater separation-related benefits, and reported less guilt and self-blame.

Lee and Hett (1990) examined the effects of a specific group intervention designed to teach coping skills to recently divorced adults. Results indicated that, when compared with a control group, the programme reduced depression and anxiety, and increased the ability to live in the present as well as independence.

In an article describing a support group specifically for divorced women over the age of fifty, Norberry (1986) states that such a group provides both emotional and informational support, and that the participants rebuilt their self-esteem and competency through involvement in the group. A general aspect of support groups is that “when women begin to move away from their own deep concerns and become sensitive to one another, they find it therapeutic to be helpful to someone else” (Norberry, 1986, p. 159). In this age-group (over fifty), the focus tends to be on financial management and the maintenance of relationships, rather than on parenting issues.

Addington, (1992) makes the point that, rather than simply providing general social support, “[m]any of the groups described in the literature focus on helping divorced parents in their new role as single parents” (Addington, 1992, p. 21). This is a natural focus, as single mothers represent some of the major users of mental health services (McLanahan, Wedemeyer, & Adelberg, 1981).

4.5 CONCLUSION

It appears that support groups may be a valuable means of enhancing resilience for divorced women. Such groups can provide emotional support, education, skills enhancement and practical advice in the post-divorce period. A major aspect of these groups appears to be the reassurance that the individual is not alone in her situation; nor

is she abnormal in the feelings she is experiencing. However, as mentioned, individual differences in experience make it difficult to provide a group that is 'all things to all people'.

CHAPTER 5

METHOD

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Divorce, and the stress associated with it, is clearly a subjective experience, as is the experience of resilience. Each person going through the process of marital breakdown, separation and divorce will have a unique set of events, cognitions, emotions, and outcomes that they will interpret in their own way. “Like death, divorce can be traumatic, because our lives are organized around particular relationships that are crucial to how we find meaning in our lives. When we lose an important relationship, whole structures of meaning disintegrate We search for a compass, a new structure to give us bearing Central in this process is the development of an account – what happened and why” (Riessman, 1990, p. 3). As human experience is interpreted by individuals in their own context, it would seem mandatory to use qualitative techniques to explore such an experience as divorce.

Qualitative research “is theory generating, inductive, aiming to gain valid knowledge and understanding by representing and illuminating the nature and quality of people’s experiences. Participants are encouraged to speak for themselves” (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor & Tindall, 1994, p. 142). The aim of the method of this study, then, is to extract an individual account from each participant, describing the aftermath of separation and divorce, and listening for their experiences of resilience. In order to explore the stress following divorce and the role of resilience, it is important to obtain ‘thick descriptions’ of individual experiences of these events and processes. Waller (2001) makes the point that “[w]hile the knowledge base of resilience research can be greatly enriched by empirical observational methods, narrative approaches that tap in to subjective experience may reveal protective factors not apparent even to participant-observer researchers” (p. 295). This methodology also allows the “honoring of human experience To incorporate, advocate, and verify the full and expansive measure of any human experience studied, however it presents itself to awareness” (Braud &

Anderson, 1998, p. xxvi). In this study, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used to explore the experience of divorce and resilience. The aim was to obtain individual subjective meanings, rather than eliciting responses to a standard format for comparison with other individuals or groups.

As this research was carried out with the possible end result of designing an intervention to assist divorced women in the process of reintegration following divorce, an action research orientation was appropriate. As Uzzell (1995) states “the researcher moves from the role of being solely a chronicler of social activity to that of an agent of social change. Doing the research is integral to taking action, because action is part of the research and research part of the action” (p. 310). Zuber-Skerrit (1992) describes five characteristics of action research which distinguish it from more traditional forms of methodology. These are that it has practical consequences; it is collaborative and participative; it is emancipatory; interpretative; and it is critical. This type of research attempts to overcome the positioning of the researcher as ‘expert’ and ‘dominant’, freeing the participants from the role of ‘subject’ and allowing them to collaborate and critically evaluate their situation, “which may as a consequence lead to a change in both their situation and themselves” (Uzzell, 1995, p. 311).

2.9.1 Cautionary notes

During my reading for this dissertation I came across certain articles which caused me to pause for thought, and I believe that it is pertinent to include these thoughts here. Firstly, as is clear from the personal note in Chapter 1, my own background and experience were important factors in the choice of topic. While this could well facilitate my understanding of the topic, and possibly increase my rapport with the women I was interviewing, Kitson, Clark, Rushforth, Brinich, Sudak and Zyzanski (1996) make the point that, “Overinvestment in a research topic can conceal how unwieldy it actually is, blind the researcher to certain dimensions of the topic, force too much attention on other aspects, or lead to downplaying dimensions that do not fit with preconceived notions or experiences” (p. 184).

A second caution regarding the potential understanding that I, as a woman, would share with other women, came from Riessman (1987) in an article entitled, “When gender is not enough: Women interviewing women”. In this, she points out that culture, class and race differences may still be obstacles when women interview women, and warns that the listener may not ‘hear’ what is important to the person telling the story if the listener fails to grasp the cultural, race or class themes being presented. This is particularly true if the narrative is recounted in a way that is unfamiliar to the interviewer. In addition, Riessman warns of the tension that may exist between “the interviewer’s allegiance to ‘scientific’ interviewing practice – with its norms of distance and objectivity – and her allegiance to women’s culture – with its norms of empathy and subjectivity”, which may result in a breakdown in conversation.

I would like to believe that I have incorporated these thoughts into the research performed for this dissertation.

5.2 PARTICIPANTS

This study used an idiographic case-study approach, with in-depth analysis of five divorced women. This was a convenience sample.

Five white women between the ages of 30 and 55 (with a mean age of 41,6 years) were approached to participate in the study. All but one of the women were legally divorced at the time, and had not remarried. The fifth woman was separated, but not yet divorced. One of the women had established a new heterosexual intimate relationship. The women are all of middle- to high-socioeconomic status, live in urban areas of South Africa, and are employed full-time or are self-employed. Four of the five women have children, ranging in age from 3 to 33. Educational qualifications range from matriculation to Bachelor degrees.

Three of the women were previously known to me, as personal friends or business associates. The other two women were referred to me by friends with whom I had discussed the research topic.

5.3 THE INTERVIEW

Conventional approaches to interviewing see subjects “as passive vessels of answers for experiential questions put to respondents by interviewers” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 8). However, if one perceives the interviewee as participant, an expert informant of her own experience, the interview becomes a dynamic, meaning-producing occasion.

This study required that women tell their own stories of their experience, including the resources that they had, how they coped, and where they found themselves in the process of adjustment to their life crisis. Thus, the interview was based on a minimal number of open-ended questions and invitations, which enabled the women to choose their own direction in the story-telling. In this way, the interview became a constantly developing conversation between participant and researcher.

Each interview commenced with the invitation: “Tell me how you coped with the process of separation and divorce”. Other questions that were asked at different points during the interview process included: “What or who was of assistance to you during the process of separation and divorce?”; “What are the sources of stress for you?”; “How do you see yourself in the future?”; “If you were to advise other women about dealing with divorce, what would you tell them?”

5.4 PROCEDURE

Interviews with each of the women were scheduled at their convenience. The interviews were conducted by the researcher, lasted between one and half hours and three hours, and were audio-taped with the consent of the participants

Once the participant had accepted the invitation to share her story, I encouraged conversation by using clarifying and confirming questions and statements, such as “How did you feel then?”; “So money is like his last way of controlling you....”; or “You felt you weren’t ready”.

It was extremely important to establish rapport with the participants, to create an atmosphere conducive to the sharing of sensitive, often emotional, material. The ease of rapport was facilitated by the fact that I, as the researcher, had experienced the crisis of separation and divorce. The participants knew this, and would often include statements in their stories referring to it; e.g. “You know what it’s like”. Riessman (1990) comments that being divorced herself “placed me in more egalitarian relationship with those I was studying and created a greater reciprocity than is customary in interviews” (p. 226).

Several of the women commented on the cathartic, almost therapeutic nature of the interview; e.g. “Thank you. I’m sure I’m going to probably feel good I’ve said things that I didn’t even know were there” and “I feel so relieved to have said all this”.

The audio-tapes were transcribed in full immediately after the interview. In the event that the material was unclear or ambiguous, I either met with the participant or contacted her telephonically to clarify the data.

The original transcripts of the interviews are available on request.

5.5 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE DATA

‘Reliability’ refers to the extent to which questioning yields the same answers whenever and wherever it is done. When the interview is conceived of as an opportunity for the construction of meaning, one “cannot expect replication of answers because they emerge from different circumstances of production” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 9). Thus, the trustworthiness of the data could only be evaluated by the participants themselves. Each transcript and final story was given to the participant to read and to verify. Any changes made by the participant were included in the final story.

5.6 ANALYSIS

The stories produced by each of the women were scripted from the original transcripts of the interviews. The transcripts were paraphrased, using the women’s own words,

indicated by quotation marks. It was essential that each woman should produce her own story, to speak on her own behalf, with as little interference as possible.

Each story was divided into sections, commencing with a short background to the participant's circumstances. The story of the journey travelled in the process of separation and divorce through to single-hood included a brief description of their marriage and their experience of separation, resources and support during this period, and recovery. Major themes in the stories were identified and included at the end of each individual's story.

Combining the information provided by the five stories, a clear picture emerged of what constituted resilient reintegration for these women and how they each gauged their post-divorce resilience.

5.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In dealing with a highly sensitive matter such as divorce, it is important that the participants are assured that their information will be handled in an ethical manner. Thus, each participant gave informed consent to the inclusion of their material into the study, having been told the nature and purpose of the research. They were also told that all information would remain confidential, and that their anonymity would be protected by changing their names in the final product. In addition, each participant gave permission to have their interviews audio-taped. They also received a copy of their own original transcript and their story.

CHAPTER 6

JANE

Each of the participants will be presented in the following way: a very brief background of the individual; the woman's story of her journey in her own words, organised around the headings of 'marriage and separation', 'the post-separation experience' and 'resilience'; then an analysis which looks at the tasks encountered by the individual and how they were dealt with.

6.1 BACKGROUND

Jane is a 30 year-old mother of a 2 year-old daughter, Charlotte. At the time of the interview, she had been divorced for two years after three years of marriage, and ten years of co-habitation. She shares a house with a friend, Sue, who is also divorced, but has no children. Jane has a challenging career as a project manager for a company doing transformation work in large organizations. Her ex-husband, Nick, provides maintenance for Charlotte, who attends a crèche in the mornings and is cared for by Jane's mother in the afternoons. I interviewed Jane in my office.

My first impression of Jane was that of a Madonna: her long straight hair framed her serene face, and she appeared composed and calm, sitting upright in the chair, attentive and focused. During the interview, she seemed very clear on the issues surrounding her divorce, and presented her thoughts in a clear, analytical manner. However, she was able to express a range of emotions in a most articulate and often entertaining way. Jane's narrative was told in roughly chronological terms, but with detailed descriptions of episodes she had experienced on her journey.

6.2 THE JOURNEY

6.2.1 Marriage and separation

Jane was the new mother of a 6-week old baby when Nick left the marital home. As far as she knew, there was nothing amiss in their marriage. Nick had been “*the* model husband and father ... He’d carried a picture of Charlotte around with him and shown it to anybody who he could get to stand for long enough. He was *so* proud of her ... He was home on time every night to bath her.” She mentions that “he had been a little bit distant. Looking back I can see that now, but at the time, to be honest, I don’t think I’d really noticed. I was so caught up with the baby...” Then Nick came home one Saturday and Jane recounts: “... he looked unhappy, just angry I was sitting on the couch feeding Charlotte, and I said to him, ‘Well, what’s wrong?’ And he literally turned around, looked me straight in the eyes, and quite coldly said, ‘I don’t love you any more.’ And he turned around and he left.” Jane describes her response as “complete disbelief. I *could not* believe what he was saying!” Nick then disappeared for two months, during which time Jane had no idea where he was. Eventually, he reinstated contact by phoning to enquire after Charlotte. Jane’s support immediately following the separation was her mother: “... I ran to my mother’s house”. Ongoing support was provided by the family when Jane and Charlotte moved into a flat next to her parents’ house, while Nick returned alone to the marital home.

Jane’s greatest source of stress during this period was the lack of meaning or sense in the situation: “So I was kind of thinking, ‘This is clearly something that I’ve done, that’s kind of escalated’. But I still didn’t know what it was ... And I had nothing to fight with. There was nothing that I could argue, nothing that I could counteract. I didn’t what I was dealing with.” The sense of powerless that Jane experienced was a dominant theme in this part of her narrative. Further stress was generated by financial concerns. “So money was now a huge issue to me, because I had two bonds, two cars, and everything else coming off my account, and I was on maternity leave.”

Nick, who had agreed to consult a psychologist, “then decided that he might be prepared to put things back together again”, and together they took the baby to visit Nick’s family on the coast. Jane had toyed with the thought that Nick might be having an affair “... but it seemed so far out of any realm that I could think of that a man with a six-week old would have an affair I was making every possible excuse.” Eventually “he did admit that he was having an affair with someone in the industry ... I still didn’t know who.” However, they moved back into the marital home together. “It was very strained, very difficult. That lasted a week.” The tension culminated in an episode where Jane lost her temper and Nick tried to strangle her, after which he was admitted to a psychiatric hospital, “and I didn’t see him for a long time after that.” This traumatic incident spurred Jane to obtain a divorce, using a mediator, in which she was awarded maintenance, and Nick was given visitation rights with Charlotte

6.2.2 The post-separation experience

The shattering of expectations and dreams was a key experience for Jane in the post-divorce period. “I’d been brought up in a family that I anticipated my life would mirror. A very secure, very sheltered little place that was safe and wonderful, and my parents had been married for 50 years. My dad had been the epitome of the provider, and my mom was the epitome of a mother. And I just assumed that life would be like that ... I’d *always* wanted to be a family, and I’d looked forward to it so much. And I was a family for six weeks. And probably not even a real family because he was sleeping with her by that stage in any case. So that was quite hard ... And I’m resentful about the fact that the one opportunity I *did* have to have a tiny baby, which is what I’ve always wanted, I was *so* caught up in going to mediator’s meetings, going to psychologist’s meetings. She spent the majority of my time on maternity leave with my mother. And I resent that. And it’s gone forever.” In addition to Jane’s expectations of how marriage and family would be, she also had to come to terms with the dissolution of her dreams for the future. “... also the loss of the dreams ... all the hopes and dreams. And the planning for the future. It was already there, it was in place. And now it’s gone.” I was struck by the deep sense of loss that I heard here.

Jane's concern for her child is an enduring theme in her story. One of the greatest difficulties she has had to face is the development of a co-parenting relationship with her ex-husband. "I took the stance that the relationship wasn't about me and Nick any more, it was about Charlotte and Nick, and because she was so little, I *had* to facilitate it. And I wanted her to have a good relationship with him, because although I really hate what he did, I don't hate the person." However, there is still ambivalence in this relationship for Jane: "I tried to make his visits as exciting for her as possible ... She gets really excited when Daddy's coming, which is lovely, although it burns me a little bit, it really does". Jane elaborates on this: "It's really lovely that she has a relationship with him, and there are many good things that he can actually provide for her. But at the same time there's a part of me that goes, [in an angry tone], 'Who the hell are you to walk in here and pretend to be the big dad. You've had absolutely nothing to do with her since the day she was born.' But he's good about his visits to her."

Social institutions such as social workers and the legal system have further impacted on the triangle of Nick, Jane and Charlotte, causing Jane to feel that her concerns and needs in the relationship are not adequately addressed: "The legal system and the social worker system in this country, or in every country ... they favour the man ... the father in the relationship ... But now it's brought to the point where it's almost ridiculous. I've been through social workers' offices, going through processes where Nick can now visit Charlotte without necessarily having me there all the time ... And they will say things to you like, 'No, he doesn't have to tell you where he's taking her when he takes her out.' And you go, 'But this man has got my two year old child, he's on unbelievable medication still, he's been in and out of psychiatric hospitals, he has delusions that he sees dead people in his lounge!'" Nick's unrestricted visits with Charlotte, instead of relieving Jane's parenting burden, become a source of stress as she is concerned for Charlotte's safety.

Besides Charlotte's relationship with her father, Jane feels the responsibility of single parenting very strongly. "I also think that the responsibility of Charlotte is HUGE ... because it's me who will have to shape her future, direct her, help her, support her. She's not going to get that from Nick." Sometimes, the lack of confidence in her ability to

mother her child seems overwhelming: “There was a time when I really doubted myself. I looked at this tiny little thing, and I thought, ‘Who the hell are you to think that you’re a mother in the first place?!’” Monetary considerations come into the single parenting responsibility: “Money’s always a concern. There’s no backup now. If I stuff up, I stuff up for both of us. And that’s a big pressure.” In addition to the sense of responsibility, there are also the daily trials and tribulations of single parenting: “Mornings are *frantic* times! I’m up at five with her, and I *just* manage to get done what needs to be done. Little things, like putting on makeup in the morning become an absolute mission because she’s got the lipstick, and then she’s got the mascara, and she’s trying it on. And evenings are almost just as bad. You’ve got to get home, and then it’s dinner, bath, bed, lie down and read a book. And by the time I’ve finished, I’m exhausted.”

The loss of support, both from a spouse and the social network of friends has been a painful experience. “You lose everybody all at the same time. You lose your husband, the father of your child, your best friend (because I considered Nick to be my best friend). And not only your best friend, but most of your friends at the same time, too. Because there are doors slamming everywhere. People are nervous of you ... And the timing was such that as my divorce came through, all of them were getting married. So they come over to the house as a group and bring their wedding albums with them. But everybody’s interested in looking at your wedding album. No-one’s interested in looking at your divorce decree, you know. It’s a very lonely thing.” Beyond this, though, is the feeling Jane expresses of receiving no support on a societal level: “Also, the fact that there’s no support. People are too scared to go in there and say, ‘This isn’t right, and I’m taking a stand against it.’ ... I think the women are blamed by society for the divorce.” Jane describes this in the context of meeting people socially: “You get talking with someone, and you’re getting along quite well, and of course the question comes up, ‘Are you married? Are you divorced?’ ‘Divorced.’ The *first* question is, ‘Oh, what did you do?’ ‘Nothing. I didn’t do anything.’ ‘Oh, no, you must have done something. You know, the marriage must have been really awful to make him walk out with a 6-week old child.’ And you go, ‘I didn’t even know he was having an affair!’ ‘Oh, well, you know, you should have paid a bit more attention then.’”

It has also been difficult for Jane to develop a new social network, constrained as she is by her single parent role. “When you’ve got a little one, there’s not much opportunity for going out.” She describes the type of interaction she has encountered on occasions when she has met new men, either through the Internet or through friends: “And they go, ‘Well, do you have children?’ ‘Yes, I’ve got one.’ ‘How old are they?’ ‘Well, she’s eighteen months, two, whatever.’ ‘Nice talking to you. Bye!’ Literally, as straight as that. People are not interested. So it makes meeting other people a little bit more difficult.” Jane also acknowledges that she’s “... never really been a big dating type of person. I struggle with making conversation for the sake of talking. I really don’t enjoy it.” She feels that her age is a constraining factor: “My age doesn’t help. The age of man that I’m looking at would either have to have never been married, in which case I’d want to know why; or they’re already married, quite happily. They haven’t yet reached the point in their marriage where issues have surfaced. So it’s difficult to meet single people.” Jane also believes that she is “quite comfortable with the fact now that if I never met another man as long as I live, it would be OK.”

The crisis of identity has shaken Jane’s worldview to the core. “I find that I struggle to belong. There isn’t really a place for divorced women to belong, and single mothers And suddenly you’re both in a matter of seconds. And you fit into the structures that are already there ... like the social structures: the couple structures and the single structures, and social kind of going-out-partying-friends-type structure. But you’re not any one of those things. Because you’re not single; you’ve got a family. And you’ve *been* married; you’re not married. So you don’t belong anywhere I don’t even feel like I belong in my family any more. You know, we get together for Christmas, and you’ve got all these happy little married couples with their children and you think, but I’m so *different* to everybody.”

Perhaps allied to this sense of alienation is Jane’s loss of self-esteem. “I don’t feel good about myself ... I’ve never liked failing with anything ... I just don’t like crossing things out and starting again. It’s just not me. It has to be done right, and it has to be done right the first time ... But I do feel like I’ve failed. And I feel like I’ve failed Charlotte, too.” Part of the loss of self-esteem comes from other people, particularly Jane’s family:

“There’s also the horrible pity. Oh! *That* I can’t stand! Family events have become the bane of my life If anything, it’s getting worse. Because, you know, she’s still alone, still single, how is she going to survive? It’s done very subtly.” Divorce is stigmatized in Jane’s family upbringing: “And also the stigma of divorce ... I can remember my gran, who lived with us for years, speaking of a lady who lived quite close by, and referring to her as ‘the divorcee’ [whispering]. Oh! It was entirely not done. It’s still not done. So it’s sad, and it’s accepted, but it’s not done.” The family attitudes contribute considerably to Jane’s perception of herself as having failed in an important role.

Cognitively, Jane explains that decision-making and problem-solving was difficult in this period: “Directly after the divorce I procrastinated about *everything*. I could not make a decision on anything. Even when it came to what Purity tub I was going to open for Charlotte that night.”

Jane’s emotional experiences in the period following separation and divorce are often intertwined with cognitive issues of confusion and her inability to make sense of the split. There is a sense of futility which Jane describes thus: “... perhaps the hardest part of that was that he negated the marriage and the relationship entirely ... you know, he’d never loved me, he’d never been happy. He married me because he thought he had to Like the whole thing, the last ten years had all been ... What *was* it? What had I been doing?” Added to this was frustration created by the fact that Nick did not communicate to Jane any substantial reasons for the separation: “He would never speak to me about anything. I really was stranded when it came to what Nick was thinking, feeling, doing, being. He wouldn’t talk at all.” Jane struggled to make sense of the situation: “The difficulty there is that, for a very long time, I couldn’t fathom what the possible reason could have been for something so revolting.” And later: “... there was no frame of reference at all ... There are no guidelines.”

Much of Jane’s emotional language is around regret. Firstly for broken dreams, but secondly, for the emotion she *did not* express during this period. Anger, for example, is certainly part of Jane’s narrative: “I was *fuming* with him”; “... which made me furious, absolutely furious”; and so on. However, during the period following her divorce, this

emotion was suppressed to a large extent. “Grace [the psychologist] suggested that I maintain my dignity and all of that type of stuff, which I did. To a degree I regret that. I *would* have liked to have gone and jumped up and down on his desk, and stuck stickers on his car, and her car, and just made a nuisance of myself in general. I don’t think it would have helped, but it would have made me feel better. My biggest regret is that I never made it look like it wasn’t OK. And it *wasn’t!*” Later in her story, Jane says: “I think that could be a regret as well, apart from anything else, is the fact that I’ve never actually really told him what happened. I kept way too quiet ... I wish that I’d had the opportunity to really put it to him about what he was doing.” When asked what advice she would give other women in a similar situation, Jane responded: “The emotional response would say that if he walked out like he walked on me, track him down, sit him down, tie him into a chair and force him to listen to you, one way or another. Don’t brush it over, don’t even maintain your dignity. Do whatever you need to do to make sure that he knows how hurtful it is Even if you don’t want him back.”

Another difficult aspect for Jane was the “principle” of the situation. She says: “... what he did was wrong. It was just *wrong*. Nobody cares ... The principle was a huge thing. I was always brought up to believe that when you take a decision and you make a commitment, it doesn’t matter how *bad* that decision or the commitment is, you stick with it and you make it work until it’s completed. You don’t bail on anything or anyone. And that was the *really* hard thing for me to accept ... You honour your commitments, because that’s what being a good person is.” The incongruence of divorce in terms of Jane’s value system made it even more difficult for her to find meaning in the situation. The simple ‘wrongness’ of divorce is emphasised later in her narrative: “Nick will have to deal with the fact that Charlotte will be raised to understand that what her Daddy did was *wrong* ... I will not raise her to think that it was right She’ll be brought up with *my* values and my integrity. And she will understand.”

6.2.3 Resilience

So how has Jane coped? Throughout her narrative, Jane refers to many aspects of resilience. Let’s first look at the social support she receives from her family. “... my

parents were fantastic. We moved into the flat next to my parents' house, so that was a good support"; "My mother's taken a huge interest in Charlotte, and that's a really good thing I admire her immensely. She's a wonderful woman"; "My dad ... is a pillar of support. He would help me with anything, but it would have to be practical help. Whereas my mom is practical and emotional support". Her sisters provide emotional and financial support. However, despite Jane's close ties to family, and the support she obtains from them, she makes this comment: "It's a double-edged sword, family I think it's a reminder of what I don't have, all the time." As we saw earlier, much of Jane's sense of failure seems to stem from family expectations and the pity she perceives that they feel for her.

Although Jane talks about the loss of friends, one friend provides a great deal of support, her house-mate, Sue. Sue is an antidote to loneliness, provides practical support with child-care and, more importantly, is someone who has experienced a similar life event, and who understands. "... it's someone who's at home, to begin with, just on a very low level. You're not going home to a dark, empty house. Because that's killing. That is *really* killing. She and Charlotte have *the* most amazing relationship So there's a little bit of backup ... just playing with Charlotte while I'm making supper ... And it's someone who actually *understands*, and I think that that is the biggest part Sue plays. I don't really have anybody else I know who understands. And who's pretty much at the same point that I am. Because she got divorced 6 months after I did."

Work is an important resource for Jane. "Work helps. The community at work helps. I work with wonderful people. John [her employer] has really been there to assist me ... He was very understanding when it came to mediator meetings, psychologists. For months and months I took an afternoon off a week to go and see a psychologist. That was of huge benefit I'd drop the ball on a couple of occasions ... and although they were pointed out ... it wasn't done in a threatening manner. It was kind of, 'Al, we know you're having a tough time, but...'. A lot of support, and almost no criticism. And no *judgement*. The people that I work with have never judged me in this at all. Work actually became almost like a sanctuary. A safe place that I could scuttle off to and feel safe and in control. That's the thing! I think out of everything, the loss of control of your

own life is killing. And I had to find little areas of my life where I was still in control. I am a little bit of a control freak. So work was a place where I was in control again.”

The issue of control, of gaining mastery over the environment is emphasised, and Jane describes how she rebuilt her confidence by consciously finding islands of competence: “Driving my car was another place where I was in control, and I was happiest when I was driving ... Anything that kind of stabilised me, any activity that I could do that kind of grounded me again, was helpful Even if it meant walking up to a bar and ordering my own drink, or taking Charlotte to the zoo on my own. Those were huge things to begin with. But they make you feel like, ‘Wow! I *can* actually do this. I don’t need Nick.’ I think ... I never really thought that I needed anybody anyway, but I was never really comfortable doing those things on my own.” Another thing that ‘grounds’ Jane is routine. “... just in little ways, routine helps. In fact, routine helps a *lot*. Charlotte and I do certain things on specific days. We go to the Spur, or to and it just keeps things rolling.” This mastery, linked to what Jane calls “hope for the future” and a sense of growing independence, has led to an increased feeling of freedom: “There are things I can do now, being divorced, that I would never be able to do as a married woman. Which is actually quite liberating. There’s a very liberating side to divorce. I’m my own master now I can get involved in things that I want to do ... work stuff. I can get more involved in work. I can study. I can travel, at half the cost [laughing]. I can raise Charlotte almost exactly as I please ... and the time that I spend with Charlotte is Charlotte-time. I don’t have to split my time with another person. And that’s all really lovely stuff.”

Charlotte, inasmuch as she represents responsibility for Jane, has also been a confidence-builder: “Watching her, and the fact that I can look her and go, ‘Wow! I can actually *do* this.’ She’s just excelling at everything ... and she’s just a lovely little girl ... And, I have to say, it’s kept me on the straight and narrow. Thinking about it, if I hadn’t had a baby, I probably would have gone out and gone off the rails entirely. I would have been out drinking every night, socialising, probably getting into a whole lot of stuff that I shouldn’t actually have been in. And she’s made sure that I’ve walked the good path.”

In terms of finding meaning both in her situation and for the future, Jane refers to her spiritual beliefs: “I do have a belief that there is a higher power that guides us all along. And I believe in life lessons ... and soul progression. I think that we do come back, and I think that everything has a reason and ... you learn from everything ... There are lots of different little things that I can see, and mostly they pertain to Charlotte. One of the reasons would be, like I said before, she’s had an opportunity to spend more time with my mother. She’s had an opportunity to live with Sue, who I believe is just the most wonderful role model for anybody to have. It strengthened me. That’s been terribly important. It’s the first bad thing that ever happened to me. I led a very sheltered life. I don’t think I’m fearful of any other bad things that could happen. I also think that Nick would have held me back quite a lot. In many ways. And I’m certainly a lot freer, just to fly now.”

Jane’s home has become a sanctuary and a place where she expresses her creativity: “Something that has become very important is my home, which was never important to me before this It wasn’t the little sanctuary that I’m creating for myself now. Especially the rituals and the little things that you do. I’ve got very into Wiccan ways ... they do wonderful stuff ... you make dreamcatchers for yourself and candles, and it’s all meaningful. So I make that stuff, candles, you know.”

Jane has, over time, discovered how to express her emotions, particularly anger: “I’ve changed my philosophy. To begin with I kept quiet. And now I let him [her ex-husband] know in no uncertain terms that I’m upset with him. That’s not great. It leaves me feeling pretty awful, it leaves Nick feeling angry with me. But at least it’s out there.” She talks more about anger: “The anger’s dissipating as time goes by, it really is Funnily enough, the one thing that would help me with the anger, that I know will never happen, is for Nick to just verbalise, in some way, that he does understand that what he did was terrible. But it’s not in his nature.”

Much of what Jane says implies that she is still on a journey: “I think in a way I’m still dealing with it”; “I’m very hopeful for the future”; “There’s not much of a solid plan for the future. It’s slowly coming together, but I’ve been kind of drifting since the divorce.

Not really knowing which direction to go in. It was almost enough that I could just make it through the day. That's slowly starting to change, which is nice'; "It's getting a little bit easier now"; "I think I will get there".

Finally, in answer to the question, "What other resources have you got?" Jane responded: "I've got me. Which I think is my biggest resource. I've achieved things I'd never have believed possible. Apart from the support structures I have, I'm the number one resource." A source of this view of herself as a powerful force is Jane's increased self-confidence. Beyond this, though, one could interpret this as evidence of resilience as motivational energy (Richardson, 2002).

6.3 ANALYSIS

What is notable about Jane's story is that she experienced two major stressful life events almost simultaneously: the birth of her baby and separation from her spouse. Thus, the tasks involved in adjusting resiliently to divorce were compounded by having to adjust to the role of motherhood, and all the practical, emotional, and physical aspects thereof. The expectations she had of marriage and motherhood (largely based on her own experience of family) were abruptly shattered, almost before she had time to begin fulfilling them.

6.3.1 Identity change and role-exiting

Jane describes considerable difficulty with this aspect of divorce. She describes it as a "struggle to belong". Part of this struggle with her new role of single woman and parent would appear to be the centrality of the roles of wife and mother in her worldview, as a result of her upbringing in a close, loving and 'traditional' family, making it more difficult for her to shift to a new identity (DeGarmo & Kitson, 1996). Although Jane was the partner who ultimately sued for divorce, she did not see herself as the initiator: "although I still don't really feel that it was my decision, but I instituted the papers being drawn up". Duran-Aydintug (1995) states that role-exiting is easier for the initiator, as they have more control and awareness over the process. Jane did not experience this

since she believed the decision was forced upon her. However, factors which may have contributed to Jane's gradually finding a new identity could be the fact that she was employed and that she had engaged in therapy (Rahav & Baum, 2002). Jane certainly experienced social interaction and support at work, and it was an area where she felt competent and well-regarded (Bisagni & Eckenrode, 1995). Her growth in confidence as a single person and mother would have enabled her to gradually develop a new identity, to see herself as successful in these roles, rather than as a failure in the 'wife' role.

6.3.2 Family reorganisation and single parenting

Jane herself poignantly describes the reorganisation of her family: "You've got a portrait of the family: Nick, Charlotte and Jane. You suddenly have to take that off the mantelpiece and put a picture of Jane and Charlotte, and a picture next to it of Nick. Because it's there forever, but they're just not in the same frame anymore." She has worked consciously at maintaining a relationship between father and child, despite the emotion this evokes in her. However, she does see her ex-husband as minimally involved in Charlotte's life and something of a visitor (Spanier & Thompson, 1984). As Jane is taking the brunt of child-rearing, we see her experiencing the typical role-overload confronted by single parents who also have to run a career. The fact that Jane has invested in her career, though, could have smoothed the process of family reorganisation for her, in that her focus was not entirely on home and children before the divorce (Wijnberg & Holmes, 1992). Single parenting is also mentioned by Jane as a constraining factor for dating, meeting new people and socialising. Jane's family reorganisation has certain positive aspects, which she points out, such as the time Charlotte spends with Jane's mother and with Sue.

6.3.3 Relationship with former spouse

As Reibstein (1998) points out, detachment from the former spouse is most unlikely when children are involved. Jane's relationship with Nick appears to revolve almost entirely around Nick's relationship with Charlotte. There is very little reference to a relationship between Nick and Jane apart from that. Although Jane has committed to

facilitate the relationship between father and child, a tension appears to exist due to the lack of restrictions placed on that relationship by the legal system. It is clear that Jane would be much more comfortable with a more rule-bound visitation system because of her fears for Charlotte's well-being.

6.3.4 Emotional adjustment

This appears to be an area fraught with tension for Jane, particularly with regard to the regret she feels in not expressing her feelings more strongly at the time of separation. A great deal of residual anger remains, despite the fact that she is now able to vent anger at Nick concerning current issues. The anger seems to be rooted in two aspects of the separation: the frustration that Jane has with not having completely understood the reasons for the separation, and resentment that she has been 'cheated' of a family life. Loneliness in Jane's case, is largely ameliorated by her house-mate, Sue. However, the loss of friends and the subtle disapproval of the separation by her family can contribute to a feeling of social loneliness (Weiss, 1975; Spanier & Thompson, 1984).

6.3.5 Establishment of a new life pattern (social support and economic stability)

As mentioned previously, establishing a social support network has been difficult for Jane, particularly in situations where couples are the norm (Gerstel, 1987; Luepnitz, 1982; Anderson, Stewart & Dimidjian, 1994). Jane refers to this as "doors slamming everywhere". Her discomfort with dating, and the constraint of a small child have all but closed down this avenue for developing new friendships. However, the support she obtains from her house-mate is very valuable, not only in terms of alleviating loneliness, but also the shared understanding she gets from another divorced woman (Anderson, Stewart & Dimidjian, 1994). In addition to this, Jane perceives social support emanating from colleagues in her workplace. Her work also provides an arena for developing meaning, independence and competence (Anderson, Stewart & Dimidjian, 1994; Bisagni & Eckenrode, 1995). Although Jane is financially stable, she is still concerned about this responsibility: "Money is always a concern." Anderson, Stewart and Dimidjian (1994)

make the point that even women who are relatively well-off financially may still worry about supporting themselves with no man in their lives.

Supportive of studies that find improved functioning following divorce (Anderson, Stewart & Dimidjian, 1994; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; etc), Jane reports a new freedom: “There are things I can do now, being divorced, that I would never be able to do as a married woman ... There’s a very liberating side to divorce.” With this seems to come increased energy to involve herself in various aspects of a new life pattern: “I can more involved in work. I can study. I can travel I can raise Charlotte almost exactly as I please.” The sense of self-determination spoken of by Anderson, Stewart and Dimidjian (1994) is very strong in Jane’s story: “I’m my own master now.”

CHAPTER 7

HELEN

7.1 BACKGROUND

Helen is a 36 year-old separated woman, who lives with her 7 year-old son, Brad. Brad has been diagnosed with ADHD. At the time of the interview she was separated from her husband, David, and awaiting finalisation of a divorce. She has a full-time career in the training division of a large, well-known corporation in Johannesburg. The interview was conducted at her home, which is a small townhouse with a private garden in an attractive complex next to a river. The house was filled with mosaic pieces on which Helen was working.

Helen came across initially as somewhat quiet and reserved. Once she began to talk, however, I became aware of her intense energy. She spoke very quickly and jumped quickly from topic to topic. On occasion, I had difficulty following her train of thought. There was little chronological order in her narrative, and she told her story primarily by way of episodes as well as descriptions of her inner feelings and thoughts. Throughout the interview I was aware of Helen's vulnerability and, simultaneously, a hardness that was apparent in her self-awareness and honesty.

7.2 THE JOURNEY

7.2.1 *Marriage and separation*

Helen experienced a great deal of stress during her marriage. She describes her husband, David, as “an alcoholic, but he doesn't admit that he is. He's also a drug addict.” Helen carried much of the responsibility in the marriage: “I earn more than him”; “my son was quite a handful”; “he [David] did nothing in the house”; “And just standing there in the kitchen watching him at eight o'clock with a beer in his hand just falling asleep or whatever, passing out”; “That TV was on just *all* the time. The noise.” Her husband, for

instance, was unable to drive because of what Helen calls “a phobia.” She also felt that “he wasn’t abusing me or anything like that, physically. But it was the mental and the psychological impact it was having on me stress. And little sarcastic remarks to me if I’d done something really good or was proud of it. Sarcastic remarks to make it seem like, ‘Ag, it’s not such a big deal anyway’.” Ultimately though, it seems that inequalities in the marriage resulted in the break-up: “... not that there’s anything wrong with being a clerk; but going to work, often he would say he’d just spread his work out to last the work day. And just existing: going to work, doing his job, coming back. I used to say to him, ‘I don’t want you to be a director, or whatever’... but I just wanted him to have some direction and ambition. So he’s got this thing that I wanted him to become a director. And *that’s* why we actually got divorced.” It appears that active steps were taken to rescue the marriage: “We’d been to about seven marriage counselling sessions, but we weren’t getting anywhere with it. Because he refused to acknowledge that it was That the alcohol ... he thought wasn’t a problem. For me it was. Obviously”. Helen’s growing discontent with the marriage culminated in two events which spurred her to consider divorce, one of which was a New Year’s party when David was extremely drunk and his friends were commenting negatively: “I remember just too many people starting to say, ‘You must tell him to cut down on his drinking’. The second event was that Helen conducted a career development course at work, which started with the question: ‘Do I want to be doing this for the rest of my life?’” “And I thought, sjoo, do I want to be here for the rest of my life?” “I suppose it’s a long thing but then one day you just wake up and think, ‘You know, I don’t need this.’”

The process of separation was not straightforward. Helen had to take steps towards obtaining a court interdict to remove David from her house before he would start divorce proceedings. “I had already seen my lawyer, but we hadn’t drawn up anything yet. We were just busy trying to negotiate ... and then he [David] went and started, but then subsequently couldn’t pay his lawyers. That’s why it’s taken so long.”

7.2.2 The post-separation experience

Once separated, however, Helen felt only relief. “Oh, that [the separation], regardless of what anyone says ... that I would never look back on. I’m glad I did it. It’s less stress. There’s no noise here. My place is the way I want it to be. I can arrange my finances the way I want them to be.” Later she states: “I don’t have anyone criticising me any more, you know, putting me down. And that’s the nicest thing. I don’t have to feel stupid at all ... I don’t have this TV on and beer bottles here, and friends in and out.” Although she admits that, “I reckon when the divorce goes through, I’m not too sure how I’m going to feel.”

There have been challenges for Helen. A constant theme in her narrative is the ambivalence she feels towards her child, Brad. On one hand, the daily difficulties of raising a child with ADHD seem to make her resentful of his presence: “Like the other night ... he came to sit on my lap, and I said, [in a despairing tone of voice] ‘Please, please, just sit *there*,’ I said. ‘You know, you’re by me all the time. Just give me some space.’” On several occasions, Helen refers to her son as “the kid”, and says, “I get very intolerant of my son sometimes.” On the other hand, she tries to see the best in him: “Although he’s very good”; “...it’s getting better”; “... he loves his mommy.”

The daily stresses experienced by Helen centre around Brad and single parenting: “... coping with my son, getting up ... I wake up, I’ve got to sort him out, and then it’s the rush to work, and then you’ve got other people and you come home ... It’s getting home, it’s having to cook his dinner. And you know, like, I get home, I have my cup of tea. I haven’t even finished my tea because I’ve sorted out all his millions of pets, and I just sit down and he says, ‘Mom, when’s dinner, I’m hungry.’” Besides the usual daily hassles, Brad’s ADHD necessitates extra attention from Helen: “But you’ve got to constantly remind him to put the clothes on ... you know, ‘Listen, I’ve told you twice now to put your shoes on, what’s happening?’ ‘OK, oh, ja, ja.’ And then I’ll go back to the bathroom, and say, ‘Just remember your shoes,’ and he’ll say ‘Ja.’ I’ll come back and now there’s the one shoe ... and ‘Oh, sorry, I forgot.’” Brad also loses things: “My son’s lost his third jersey in a year. I can’t buy a new jersey.” Helen describes Brad as

“obsessive-compulsive persistent, so he will not give up” and describes an episode of Brad nagging constantly for something that he wants. As David doesn’t drive, Helen has to fetch and carry Brad from his father’s house whenever he goes there. “Sometimes I feel like I’m just existing. Like last Saturday, it was all about the kids *all day*.” She says, “I’ve been tired.” Sometimes, this all gets too overwhelming: “... like the one time, you know, I broke a cupboard door with Brad ... I was just very upset.”

Economically, Helen feels that she, personally is “better off”. “But in terms of the child, I’m definitely paying, I would say, a lot more.” Although she receives maintenance from her ex-husband, she describes additional costs which she has to meet: “He’s not paying medical aid, he’s not paying school fees, he’s not paying anything over and above that. And, you know, it’s quite expensive now.” She goes on to say: “But it’s just little things... if there’s a concert ... or like, my son cut himself and had to have an operation to repair his ligaments. And that came to R2000. Medical aid weren’t paying. So I said [to David], ‘I need at least R2000 from you because it’s R4000 all in all and I have to pay. And he says, ‘Well, I don’t have the money.’ And it’s *so* easy to say, ‘Well, I don’t have the money.’” At the time of separation, David “took the nice furniture” and Helen acknowledges “I’ve got debts, from things like going to buy linen and stuff like that, but that will get paid off.”

Issues such as money have made Helen’s relationship with David somewhat tense. Helen compares her situation with David’s and is resentful that his life seems more prosperous and easier than hers: “Meantime he’s got DSTV. He’s always got people at his place. Someone will take him to do his grocery shopping, someone will take him to get his beers.” Another theme which appears throughout the early part of Helen’s narrative is the allocation of blame for the failed marriage. She talks a lot about how David accepts no blame for the break-up: “Oh, and needless to say, he tells everybody that I’d met somebody. I had a boyfriend, so it’s like, me [my fault]... So, ja, that’s what gets me. Totally no blame. He’s completely blameless, he’s the victim.” Later she states: “he still sees me as being the nasty one ... the fact that I earn more money And he’s got this impression that he supported me while I worked my way up. Which he didn’t.” And again: “He’s got his idea that he was blameless, you know.” “Sometimes I think, ‘Gosh,

if it weren't for Brad, I would have no need to see his person again.” She maintains a veneer of civility for Brad's sake: “So many times I just want to turn around and say [to Brad], ‘Listen, I'm going to tell you exactly what an asshole he is.’ But you can't. It's hard, hey.”

Helen has a circle of friends that she has maintained throughout her marriage and the break-up. To enhance her social network, she has also tried Internet dating, which she enjoyed, because “I'd met David and he was the only boyfriend I ever had ... and we never went on dates and stuff. So for me, the novelty of speaking to people my age group, and them paying for dinner and really good conversation was lovely.” This was not, however, a serious search for a new partner: “But just not the kind of person I would want to hang out with, and also they were looking for their true loves ... I just find that guys are just very keen to ... under the guise of being friends, they're looking for a partner ... It becomes a little bit of a thing; all you want to do is come home and link up to your Internet, see who's written. And you can't really get to know people like that.”

Regarding her emotions in this post-separation period, Helen expresses a great deal of relief: “It's less stress”; “When David left it was a huge amount of stress just lifted”. However, she also talks in terms of anger: “I just get really angry”; “I was just angry then”; “Sometimes I still get pissed off”.

7.2.3 *Resilience*

The bulk of Helen's narrative revolved around resilience. I had the feeling that she had worked hard and consciously at developing her own resilient skills and resources.

Social support emerges as a powerful resource for Helen, both emotionally for herself and as practical support for Brad. “... most of my friends have got kids ... And my brother is OK. I can just take him to my brother ...he stays two townhouses down with his fiancée. And it was wonderful, because they'd fetch him, you know, when I needed them to”; “There's a lady, about three townhouses down, whose son used to go the same school, I've got her number if I need it. She's just around the corner.” Other members of

Helen's family live in distant areas of the country. But she has a supportive group of friends: "I would say that's the biggest thing. I've always maintained my friends. We've always had a monthly thing ... a monthly get-together." "We've got a good social circle. Everybody's got their own lives, but we've always managed to stay in contact." She also receives support from colleagues at work: "And at work ... we keep in touch. I wouldn't say I have special friends. But, you know, I'll chat to anybody, and I find they're sympathetic. If I have a problem, I'll talk about it. And it's not talking about it so everyone can go, 'Oh, shame!', because I don't like that, but ...just getting it off, you know." Of her Internet dating experience she says: "I've made a friend that I keep in touch with ... like he'll invite me to a party, or I'll say do you want to go for dinner or meet for drinks. And I got out, and I was going on dates, which I think I needed. It was nice." She is going to continue expanding her social network: "I might try this Fast Dating thing, just for the experience. And I'm going to be joining a hiking club as well. I'm going on a mountain leadership course in July. Oh, it's just lovely getting out there. And I've got a few friends that are interested in going hiking as well. But I think to join the club, that's to meet people outside of work. I love meeting new people." Women, in particular, are important to Helen: "I'm very selective about who I become friends with ... I can chat about anything with anybody but ... you've got to have stuff in common with friends. You see, girls ... we all acknowledge and we get to know somebody over time."

Helen has also received support from health professionals, including Brad's psychologist: "I phone her when I need to"; "So if it's really bad, then I will phone her." Other support has come from what Helen calls "a nutritionist/counsellor, who I was seeing for Brad". Helen says that she received counselling, and vitamins, from this individual "... because I was very stressed."

Employment has also been a source of resilience for Helen, although it was quite stressful *during* her marriage: "I was taking a hell of a lot of work home, but that's because I felt I had to carry the burden of the finances, and he wasn't going to get anywhere, so I needed to work towards it." Describing her situation now, however, she says: "I've always loved my work. I am career orientated, but not in terms of climbing the ladder. I'm in the most

beautiful situation now ... where I have to ask for work to do during the day. And I'm loving it where I am ... everybody tells me on a daily basis how much value I add to the team. People are asking me to mentor them." Helen's work environment provides a great deal of affirmation, and contributes to a strong sense of self-esteem.

Meaning in Helen's life has a spiritual source: "I've always been spiritual ... I've always known that God's with me." She also has a sense of purpose: "I didn't have a good childhood, so I thought there's no ways I could have come out of that and still be OK today without it being for something, a reason." Helen attends a Christian church fairly regularly and describes the benefits thus: "... going for an hour to church, you learn things that make you feel so good afterwards." "I went away on a ... a friend and I ... about a month ago ... a retreat. A Christian retreat. And that was really nice because I put a lot of stuff into context there. And one of them was just going with the flow, you know."

Helen is able to set goals for herself, both practical and in terms of self-regulation. Many of these goals, though, became overly driving, and Helen had to make them more realistic: "I get so down with myself for not getting it done. And I'd knock myself about that. Then I'd get very upset with the way I behave with Brad, and I just think, 'Whoops! Before I know it, I think I'm going to get terribly old and not have enjoyed it.'" So now, she says: "If I just set a goal, just to get *that* done [one thing], that'll be fine." She also sets goals to better manage her relationship with her son: "Now he's built up some nice friends here and I make sure that just about every weekend I've got *a* friend staying over."

She employs self-discipline to attain her goals: "I didn't really feel like doing this [the mosaic work] last night, but I knew once I started that I would just feel better." This insight results in increased self-esteem: "I look at the stuff I've done and, oh! I feel so good about it." Helen is also studying psychology through a correspondence college and is, again, very disciplined in the way she approaches this: "I'm loving it. It's helping with Brad as well. I'm also good. I used to get up between four and six every day [to study]." Emotionally, Helen is also disciplined: "Yes, I do allow myself sometimes to

feel down, one or two days. Shame for me, I have had a lot on my plate, blah, blah, blah. But it drains, energy-wise. You don't really want to do this, and you don't want to do that." Regarding her relationship with her son, she says: "I have to really work hard at not freaking out"; and "... it's just about learning to say 'no'". The discipline enables her to keep busy, but she has started to question this: "Oh, I do so many other things, though. I knit and I sew. But not too busy, though. Because I was wondering how come I've got to keep doing these things all the time. I think it was because I don't know if I was trying to forget or not. Because the minute I sat down and didn't do anything, I started thinking about other stuff ... It's my relationship with my mom, and my relationship with my dad, and that's stuff I need to sort out. But I think it [being constantly busy] was a way of just blocking out all the stress and tension."

Helen describes herself as "optimistic". When asked what makes her optimistic, she replied: "I don't know. It's like if anyone asks, I say, 'Well, the point is, what's the alternative? To be down and miserable?'"

Throughout Helen's narrative, I was continually struck by her self-awareness. Here are some examples: "It's important, listening to your body"; "I think it's just listening to yourself"; "I analyse the way I think all the time, all the time. I read a lot. But I know I don't have everything under control all the time." She also says: "I've started to recognise it in my body ... when things are about to blow." Helen also has insight regarding what makes her feel 'better' or 'good'. "I know that if I just sit down to do some of my studies ... I've got to discipline myself to get into it ... I feel *so* much better afterwards." Later she says: "You know, when I'm feeling really down in the dumps, I think, 'You know how it goes; if you do something you'll feel good.'" She realises that physical well-being results in improved mental well-being: "I was doing an hour's worth of exercise every night, because that also helps, you know."

Perhaps the most remarkable thing I encountered in the interview with Helen was when I asked her whether she had a vision for the future. She stood up and asked me to join her to look at a collage that was hanging on the sitting room wall. "That represents my life in another two years". I assumed that she had made it at the Christian retreat, but she said,

“No, I did that in December, the December before David moved. He went out ... suddenly I wasn’t invited to a dinner party that we’d been invited to ... and I just got all my magazines and made a collage ... so I can see myself in my future.” The collage is abstract, and Helen described it to me in terms of a combination of concrete and abstract dreams for her future: a beautiful home, peace, harmony, good relationships, and so on. I was truly moved by the clarity of her vision, and also by the motivation that had urged her to do such a thing in the first place.

Part of Helen’s vision for the future is to become involved in community work. This is difficult at present because of the demands on her time and energy of her child: “... not right now, with Brad.” She has already taken steps to explore what her involvement might be, though: “I took a drive to this sanctuary ... to go and work with AIDS orphans ... I want to work with kids, you know, babies. I also want to get involved with teaching people that this doesn’t have to be like this. No matter where you are, it doesn’t have to be that bad. So it would be nice to change it, because if everybody’s happy and positive, it impacts on everybody else.” Helen believes that her work offers her opportunities to help others: “... that’s why the training area’s nice because I have a chance to influence people. And the courses I’m writing for the SETA are nice because you have to build in life skills.”

7.3 ANALYSIS

Although Helen had essentially instigated the separation, she still had to confront the tasks following separation to start to rebuild her life.

7.3.1 Identity change and role exiting

I had the strong feeling when interviewing Helen that she had perhaps never invested deeply in a ‘marriage identity’, and so the task of establishing a new identity was not relevant. During the marriage, Helen was practically raising Brad single-handed; she was career-orientated to the point where she was the major breadwinner (Wijnberg & Holmes, 1992); and she initiated the break-up (Duran-Aydintug, 1995). All of these factors would

have contributed to Helen building an identity that was not wholly based on “marriage and motherhood” (Anderson, Stewart & Dimidjian, 1994).

Self-esteem is an important aspect of identity. As Flach (1988) says: “People can more readily keep in mind who they are and respect themselves when those around them seem to know and respect them too” (p. 145). Helen receives this affirmation to a large degree in her work environment.

Helen’s dreams and vision for the future also help her to see herself clearly in new roles, new environments and with a ‘new’ identity. “Having a dream allows us to chart our future along a new course” (Anderson, Stewart & Dimidjian, 1994, p. 290). Her ability to set goals enables her to actively work towards these dreams. Emmons (2003) states that “Goal attainment is a major benchmark for the experience of well-being” (p. 106) and goes on to discuss goals in “four life meaning categories of achievements/work, relationships/intimacy, religion/spirituality, and self-transcendence/generativity appear to encompass most of the domains in which people strive for a sense of meaning” (p. 108). Meaning has developed for Helen, particularly in the spiritual arena. “... a strengthening of religious beliefs may lead to an increased sense of control, intimacy, and finding meaning” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, p. 457). However, her achievements at work also contribute to meaning in her life, as do her creative activities, and her desire to give of herself to others. Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi (2003) suggest that, “One important way people find meaning in their lives is by becoming deeply involved in activities that afford them scope” (p. 83). Throughout Helen’s narrative there is a sense of her constant search for these types of activities.

7.3.2 Family reorganisation and single parenting

Helen was, to all intents and purposes, a single parent even when she was married: “I still, when I was writing exams, had to look after a kid that was teething ... Not once did he say, ‘OK, well you stay here. *I’ll* go upstairs and sort him out.’” Nevertheless, Helen finds the burden of single parenting very trying. This is probably exacerbated by Brad’s diagnosed ADHD, which tends to cause him to be forgetful, disorganised, impulsive and,

as Helen puts it, “obsessive-compulsive persistent.” Although she has support to assist practically with Brad, Helen feels, like many single mothers, that she is carrying most of the load (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). The fact that her ex-husband does not drive and does not help financially beyond the required maintenance adds significantly to this burden. However, Helen is gradually taking steps to address the way in which she carries this load: “I make sure that just about every weekend I’ve got *a* friend staying over [as company for Brad]”; “... it’s just learning to say no”; and, following a change in Brad’s diet and supplementary vitamins: “... his speech therapist has noticed an increase in his concentration, and at school he’s doing great.” With the passage of time, mothering has become somewhat more rewarding: “But now it’s not so bad because I’ve got him at the weekends. Even like last Saturday him and his friend were upstairs, it still felt nice. It still felt like I was still with him.” Helen has not perceived Brad to be a constraining factor in dating and socialising with her friends, although this has been found to be a problem for many separated or divorced women (Spanier & Thompson, 1984). Her career-orientation during her marriage probably assisted in the reorganisation of family following separation as her focus had already been in the direction of career (perhaps of necessity) rather than completely orientated towards home and family (Wijnberg & Holmes, 1992).

7.3.3 *Relationship with former spouse*

Helen realises that the primary link she has with her ex-husband is their child and acknowledges that this limits detachment from her ex-spouse: “Sometimes I think, ‘Gosh, if it weren’t for Brad, I would have no need to see this person again’” (Reibstein, 1998). She tries to maintain a degree of civility with David for the child’s sake. It would appear that the relationship between Helen and David is not free of tension. This is evident in Helen’s comparison of their lifestyles; she perceives David’s life as much easier, more wealthy, and far less stressful than her own. Although Helen spoke a fair amount about her relationship while they were married, her narrative around the post-separation period almost completely excludes him and focuses to great degree on herself. This, and the relief she expresses following the separation, suggests that she is detaching

from the marital relationship (Spanier & Thompson, 1984). Further evidence of this is the pleasure she obtained from dating and meeting new people.

7.3.4 Emotional adjustment

Helen's ability to regulate her emotions enables her to cope with many of the disruptive emotions experienced following separation. She 'lets' herself "feel down" when she needs to, and strives to be optimistic. Helen is very aware of her own emotions, such as anger, and works hard to control it: "I have to really work hard at not freaking out." She is able to both rationally analyse and use her intuition to remain in touch with her emotions. Her ability to identify what makes her feel 'better' or 'good' gives her control over emotional swings and, with self-discipline to do those things, she can steady her emotions. Flach (1988) proposes three tactics to alleviate emotional pain: "Diversion ... Self-discipline and control ... and empathy" (p. 34-35). Helen has successfully employed these tactics. The relief that Helen feels regarding the end of her marriage has been documented by other researchers (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Spanier & Thompson, 1984).

7.3.5 Establishment of a new life pattern (social support and economic stability)

Dealing first with social support, Helen has a network of social support ranging from a family member, to friends and work colleagues. She is actively endeavouring to further expand this network by, for example, her dating efforts and plans to join a hiking club. Helen is building her own community, "by design" (Flach, 1988). Several of the activities she does to build resilience: gym and attending church, for example, are done in the company of friends. An interesting point to note, though, is that Helen has reached a point in the establishment of her new life pattern where she is feeling a greater need to be alone: "... when Brad was away every weekend, I used to see a lot of my friends. But now I'm going through a period when I just want to ... I love just being by myself." She also says of the dating game: "But now I'm bored of it, you know." Of time with friends and time alone, she says: "I need a balance." This is consistent with Thabes' (1997) statement: "... what may appear to be reclusivity may in fact be sanctuary" (p. 172) and

Spanier and Thompson's (1984) observation that "[t]he need for autonomy may be as strong as the need for the comfort of others" (p. 185).

For Helen, employment is central in her new life pattern, providing social support, and an area in which she is affirmed and feels competent (Anderson, Stewart & Dimidjian, 1994; Bisagni & Eckenrode, 1995).

In terms of economic stability, Helen feels confident that she will cope, possibly due to the fact that she was the bigger wage-earner during the marriage. She perceives herself as "better off" financially and is unafraid of financial issues such as debt: "... I've got debts But that will get paid off." Helen has, fortunately, not suffered the drop in income often reported by divorced women (Weitzman, 1985). Her employment in a large organisation also means that medical insurance and retirement funds are provided for.

Despite the trials and tribulations of single parenting combined with a career, studying and hobbies, Helen is already experiencing a new, satisfying life pattern following separation. She says of herself: "I would say 10 percent of the time I feel like I'm just existing Most of the time I think I'm thriving. You know, I feel like I'm growing mentally and spiritually every day."

CHAPTER 8

SOPHIA

8.1 BACKGROUND

Sophia is a divorced woman, who is 51 years old. She was married for almost 15 years before her separation 6 years ago. She lives in Johannesburg, having recently moved from the KwaZulu Natal North Coast, with her 17 year-old daughter, Kim, and her current partner, John. Her 20-year old son, Darren, is away at university in Cape Town. Sophia is in business with a friend; together they are aiming to establish a small enterprise using their combined skills of writing, project management, and their background in film. Sophia's ex-husband, Edward, provides maintenance for their daughter, and pays for Darren's education. I interviewed Sophia in my office.

Sophia presents herself with confidence. She is attractive and vivacious, and expresses herself generously and enthusiastically. Her anecdotal approach painted vividly detailed pictures of her experience of marriage and divorce. The descriptions she provides of her emotions during the interview were extremely moving.

8.2 THE JOURNEY

8.2.1 Marriage and separation

It would appear that, until about 3 years before the separation, Sophia and her husband, Edward, had been relatively happy, with little cause for concern about the state of the marriage. An example of the trusting relationship they had is that Edward and a female friend and colleague, Tracy, went on holiday ahead of Sophia, taking some of the smaller children. Sophia and Tracy's husband joined them a few days later, with the rest of a large group. However, an incident during the holiday aroused Sophia's suspicion that perhaps Edward was being unfaithful to her. Sophia explains that "for about three years before the separation, I must have known that something was up and something was

brewing, but.... I lied to myself about it.” She clearly describes the incident that provoked this intuitive feeling: “It was a Saturday afternoon and I took Kim onto the beach. I didn’t know where Edward was – we all did our own thing. And from far away along the beach, I saw two figures walking towards me, and I realised it was Edward and Tracy..... It is *impossible* to explain to you how it happened, but as they came closer I looked at them and I just *knew*... I saw it – the picture in my head... I just saw the two of them on this beautiful beach and they just looked like they were a couple, the energy between them. And my heart physically went *ker-dumpf!* They weren’t close together... and they had a couple of kids with them; they weren’t even completely on their own. But I just in that very moment knew, and that picture’s never left me..... It was unbelievable intuition”. Sophia, though, convinced herself that she was wrong: “Of course, I tried to suppress it... I was telling myself, ‘It’s you; you’re being silly. It’s not like that’”. When she confronted Edward with her suspicion, “he just laughed at me and said, ‘Don’t be ridiculous’”. After the holiday, Sophia explains “I couldn’t shake off the suspicion, and I kept telling myself, ‘No, no, no! It’s you, it’s you’. Edward used to get really fed up with me”. Further incidents occurred over the next few months, and Sophia continued to believe it was all her imagination, encouraged by Edward and even a therapist. Sophia describes this period: “We just carried on for the next three years, with little spurts of suspicion, and him squashing it. Slowly I started feeling other people drawing away from me...and the whole dynamic of our little group changed. And I was convinced that it was me, and that I was just a not very nice person – I was the problem, no-one else.”

Sophia talks of the time immediately preceding the separation as a time in which Edward displayed extreme confusion: “Edward always had these moments of utter despair and black depression... He was quite moody that way....” On one occasion “he was in such a state, and he was telling me how he doesn’t know where his life’s going...and this job he’s in...and he thinks he should go on a two months’ sabbatical, and he’s not coping...he was even crying at one stage.” Despite all the ups and downs of the past three years, Sophia supported Edward fully: “I just did everything in my power... I said to him, ‘Go away, it’s fine; you need to find yourself...you’re that kind of person, you know, if you need to do that...I’ll keep the home fires burning’”. Edward moved out to a beach cottage, ostensibly to write a book. “And even then, I knew he’d come back.” A

few days later, Sophia's sister-in-law phoned and hinted that Edward was, in fact, being unfaithful to Sophia. Sophia confronted Edward, who finally admitted that he was having an affair with Tracy. "You can't accept it...In retrospect I should have said, 'Right, well that's it. Piss off, I never want to see you again'.But your heart or your mind won't let that happen". The first person Sophia turned to was her friend, Karen. "When he had gone, I was still quite calm and I phoned Karen, and I said, 'Karen, I need you'. And she came round, and we spoke a lot."

8.2.2 The post-separation experience

There was a period of 18 months between the time that Edward moved out of the family home and the divorce was formalised. During this time, perhaps the most difficult thing for Sophia was hope. "It was the whole year...He still wasn't sure – he might come back, he might not...I was waiting. I think I would have taken him back, although every time people asked me, I'd say, 'No way!' But I think I would have." This feeling that the separation was not final was compounded by the fact that, on two occasions, Edward and Sophia slept together; the first occasion was the night that she confronted him about the affair. "I don't understand it! To this day I don't understand it. But it was desperation of some sort. I think in my mind it was, 'Now it's all out in the open...he knows I still love him and want to make love to him, and maybe he'll stay'. And then the next day, when he didn't come back and he was obviously *not* going to come back, I *hated* myself!"

Denying to herself that the separation was final, Sophia reports that during these 18 months, "I played games with Edward, in an effort to try and get him back. I would say to myself, 'OK, well let me pretend that I don't care, because once he knows he can't have me, then he'll want me....If there was another man around, I wanted him to know that there were other men interested. So you know, I played those games". Sophia took the initiative in getting advice from a lawyer regarding the separation and the prospective divorce, and met with Edward to explain to him how a divorce agreement would work in terms of custody and so on. "And I remember doing that, and sort of not believing that it was going to happen, but trying to jolt him. That whole year, I was doing this to try and

wake him up...So I didn't go to the divorce lawyer because I wanted to get divorced; I did it to try and jolt him".

Clearly, the most difficult task facing Sophia in the post-separation period was detachment from her former spouse. Apart from the game-playing, this resulted in great emotional upheavals, and confusion. She was still very dependent emotionally on Edward. On the occasion when she presented legal information to him, she recalls: "I remember him looking at me with incredible respect in his eyes, and I liked that". This was exacerbated by Edward who, Sophia explains, "...is so volatile. He would phone me up and talk to me about all his problems one month, and the next he'd be shitting on me for something...I never quite knew where I was". Even now, 4 years after the legal divorce and 6 years after separation, Sophia is still struggling with her feelings towards her ex-husband: "That's what I've been asking myself: do I still love Edward? Am I still in love with Edward? Is that why I weep a lot when I'm around him?" Sophia's emotional state was determined largely by what was happening in Edward's life: "My anger would come and go so much...I would experience anger more when Edward and Tracy were together than when they were apart, in terms of my anger towards Edward. So I was able to cope when he didn't have her, and he was living on his own and I was living on my own. I didn't experience that bitter kind of anger. Because his relationship with her was on/off the whole time. When it was on, my anger would flare. Her destiny is still intricately linked to his: "The fact that Edward has broken up with Tracy – it's been like a year now that they haven't been going out – that also made me feel good". Sophia describes her emotional response to the separation thus: "I keep saying 'emotionally', and I'm wondering if it isn't more *ego*, if you like. Because what I think I battle with more than anything else is the fact that I was *rejected*, and that this person doesn't want *me* any more...That is what I didn't cope with, but I coped with everything else".

Sophia was prescribed anti-depressant medication during her marriage when she was diagnosed with yuppie flu, which she continued to take in the post-separation period. When she met John she decided, "I don't need these stupid things any more, so I weaned myself off. And I didn't take them or need them or even think about them for about three

years”. When she was preparing to move to Johannesburg, a frightening incident occurred: “I was thinking of moving to Jo’burg, and my parents had just moved out and that had been stressful. And I had a moment which scared the living daylights out of me. I could *not stop* crying. My kids were in the house, and I had to hide myself from them – I didn’t want them to see. And there’s never a reason why I’m crying... and then I hate myself, because I think, ‘What have I got to cry about, because I’m so lucky compared to so many other people’. Then you hate yourself, and you cry more because you hate yourself, and it went on and on and on. It went on for hours and hours. I was absolutely exhausted! From just crying. I could not stop the crying”. Sophia went back to her GP who again prescribed anti-depressants. She believes that she needs them in order to cope: “So through the whole move and that, I coped because of the pills. I just think I must stay on them, because I can’t blame Edward and I can’t blame my marriage. It’s me – there’s a chemical imbalance...the serotonin....And yet, those three years I was off it, I was as happy as Larry. But now I’d be too scared to go off them”.

This time was filled with change for Sophia. She moved house: “The most important thing I did was move...I was very involved in selling a house, buying a house, moving. There was absolutely no doubt in my mind that I could not stay at that house, because Tracy lived around the corner. I had to start afresh, even though I didn’t believe I would never have him back”. Sophia also started working again, as a freelance writer for a local newspaper, even though there was no financial need for her to do so. “But I like to work, for my own self-esteem”. The motivation for obtaining a job was still closely linked to wanting Edward back: “Even then thinking, ‘You see, Edward, I’ve proved to you I can get it without you....’ So maybe he’ll respect me more, admire me more. Maybe now he’ll want to come back”.

A very painful experience for Sophia was discovering that some of her closest friends had been involved in covering up Edward’s affair. “I think what hurt me was the *friends* that were involved, particularly Heather and Rose. To this day, I still hurt. Heather knew about it, and Heather, in fact, played a part in it...playing the middle person to get them together. I think that that *now* hurts me even more than Edward”. In addition, many of Sophia’s friends were business colleagues of Edward’s or Tracy’s. “I kind of understood

that for all those kind of people, they were friends with both of us and, because of the business, they didn't want to take sides. But it kind of *happened*. And that was terribly hurtful, the whole friend issue.”

Another great loss for Sophia was the perceived loss of the traditional family unit. Just a week before I interviewed her, she and Edward had had a family breakfast with their children. Sophia describes the occasion as “a little family gathering that was the most beautiful thing for me...It was so wonderful – it was a *family*.” Sophia watched the children and her ex-husband walk across the parking lot afterwards: “And I looked at it and thought, ‘That’s my family. Aren’t they just too gorgeous!’ And then I started driving away, and that thought turned itself in a sense of great loss, and then I started weeping...I was driving and I was *sobbing!* I’m such a family-orientated person, and I think it’s so sad that I don’t have that....that family thing...That’s my loss. And I’ll never have that again”.

Sophia and her new partner, John, started dating about 6 months after the separation, but only began co-habiting 3 years after the legal divorce. They were old friends but, nevertheless, “It was a very slow process to get really involved with him, because... Kim didn’t like John at all.” Although John provided much support to Sophia during the legal divorce, his relationship with her children is still of concern to her: “But that’s the part I don’t like about him. He’s not prepared to try and be a part of the family. For him, it’s him and me”.

8.2.3 *Resilience*

Throughout her story, Sophia continually refers to how lucky she was in the period following separation, particularly with regard to social support. Sophia comes from a family of 6 children, and her parents are both still alive. “I had the most incredible family support. Unbelievable! Sisters all over the country, phoning; brothers; everybodyBrothers-in-law...They were all so *there* for me...Even Edward’s family, to a point; certainly the in-laws. They were so mad with him. I knew they were all saying to him, ‘You’re making a big mistake; Sophia’s the right person for you’”. When Sophia moved

to her new house on the coast, her parents moved into a flat on the same property: “My parents helped me practically by living on my property. Like if I wanted to go out on a date with John, my parents were there for my kids. I was so lucky”. Besides the practical support, Sophia says, “My parents...I spoke to them...undoubtedly they were absolutely the emotional strength for me from day one”. When she moved to Johannesburg, this support was further enhanced by the geographical proximity of siblings and their families, as well as old friends. Although her friendship network at the coast had diminished, one friend, Karen, provided constant support: “Karen was my rock, she really was. She was the one that I’d phone, and she’d come around, and I’d weep on her little shoulder. She was unbelievably strong for me”. “For that year, it was my family and Karen”.

Sophia’s Christian faith and membership of a congregation was very important to her in the year following separation: “I got very involved in the church, also in that first year of separation and up until I met John. I was very involved in the church. I did the Alpha course and I ran the youth group every Friday night for a whole year, Soul Kids. I actually started it and ran it for primary school kids. I got a huge amount out of it. And the people that I was mixing with....everyone knew what I was going through. What I got out of it was this....it helped me to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Without that, perhaps, I wouldn’t have seen the light, that there was a future for me. Because the people I was with, and just the message of God kept reassuring me that there is light at the end of the tunnel”.

In addition to church community support, Sophia obtained great personal inner strength from her belief in God. She describes the incident which finally cemented her separation from Edward when she confronted him about his affair, and how she prepared for that confrontation: “I went into my little nook in my bedroom and I actually remember physically dropping to my knees so that they actually hurt. I just dropped to my knees, and I put my hands together, and I prayed like I have never prayed before in my whole life. And I just said, ‘God, I know there’s something I’m going to have to face today. I can’t run away from it any more. I don’t know what it is, but just give me all the strength you can”. She then says: “By the time Edward arrived, I was not the Sophia that most

people know. I sat there with such calm, it was unbelievable. And I took my Bible with me”. Following this experience, whenever Sophia had to confront Edward or engage in a difficult meeting with him, she would use this technique: “Before all these meetings I’d do this strength-building thing: I’d pray, and I would take deep breaths, and I would just tell myself, ‘You’re in charge’”.

Talking about the separation in retrospect, Sophia is able to recognise many small steps that she took to empower herself. For instance, the third time Edward asked Sophia to sleep with her (about 9 months after the separation), Sophia refused. “I felt very empowered. I thought, ‘That’s *good*; that’s a step. That was like a first step”. A much greater step was taken a year after the separation, “when I realised, finally, that he wasn’t going to come back”. Sophia felt that Edward had “kept me on a string the whole year”. She now needed to have closure. “So I needed a ritual. I still had my rings on, wedding and engagement rings; I hadn’t taken them off that whole year. And I said to him, ‘Edward, I need this now...you have to make a decision. You don’t have to say it in words. I’m going to hold out my hand, and you’ve got to take my ring off. Because you were the one who put it on, and you’ve now got to take it off.’ And just that physical ritual was so important to me. So I held out my handand I was really strong and quite proud about it. And he did it. Put his hand there, got the ring, and took it off. It was so *horrible!*” Sophia believes that “All those months later, it was probably the first real step I took...the first realisation that I need to look after myself”. This was a major milestone for Sophia, as it appears to be the first time she took control of the separation process; prior to this, it seems that she was completely at the mercy of Edward’s indecision about the possibility of continuing the marriage. Sophia was “the first one to get a lawyer”, and this also appeared to empower her: “I’d say, ‘I’ve been to the lawyer and this is what will happen....It was quite a nice feeling, being the one in charge”. It was Sophia who, when asked by Edward if she knew of a house that his lover could rent, suggested that Edward and his lover move in together. Sophia says, “This was another moment of empowerment”.

A stabilizing influence that helped keep Sophia relatively focused, was concern for her children: “My focus was on making everything as smooth as possible for my kids”. In

addition, it was her *son's* need for therapy that resulted in Sophia herself participating in therapy. She describes the therapy as “unbelievably helpful. For two solid years I went to her. I loved it, I absolutely loved it. It helped so much because I did what I’m doing now, I just spoke and spoke. And that was good, to speak with someone completely distant from it”.

Once she started dating John, Sophia received a great deal of support from him. “There were two areas that come to mind. The first is just the knowledge that somebody else found me attractive. I was pushing 50 – I was 47 or something – and you sort of feel, that’s it, I’m too old. But he made it so obvious that he was so in love with me, and he just adored me. I actually felt tall, you know, and I could look Edward in the eye. The other thing was having this male point of view through the whole process...reading contracts carefully, making sure this, that and the other...his support in that way was fantastic! I was *very* lucky”.

Sophia’s strong value system helped her to maintain her integrity throughout the process. Talking about the financial arrangements made during the separation, Sophia says, “I could have played much more on his guilt and gone and spent a fortune. I could have. But it’s not really in my nature to do that”. Sophia also talks about her attraction towards John even while she was married: “I would probably have liked it go further even then. But I didn’t and that’s where my values came in and protected me. I’m so grateful for that”. This enabled Sophia to take the moral high ground with Edward: “So that helped, knowing that he was the one who bugged up, not me”. Another aspect of her value system that was helpful was her strong belief in family values: “I think my whole strong sense of family values, because that’s what I grew up with, made me so determined that my children were not going to be too disrupted”.

Sophia believes that she was well-prepared for living without Edward: “I was pretty independent anyway. I was dependent on him financially and emotionally, but not practically”. Even during the good years of their marriage, Edward worked long hours and was away from home a lot: “So living with him was like living on my own”. This meant that Sophia coped very well with many aspects of her life, apart from her

emotional life and her financial affairs. Such aspects included parenting: “Even bringing the kids up – I did it on my own. I mean, he’s a good father now, but he didn’t do anything for them. He had fun with them, he romped with them, that was it”. “Every school holiday I used to go away with my kids and Edward used to stay. We hardly ever had family holidays”. Sophia was also competent in home maintenance: “Edward was not a handyman, so if there were bulbs to change, plugs to put on...whatever in the home, I did it”. In addition, the nitty-gritty aspects of single life that can be very frustrating could be easily dealt with by “Edward’s money”. “Any time anything went wrong: come and fix it, and the bill goes to Edward”. John and Sophia’s father were also helpful in dealing with home maintenance matters.

Optimism has been an important source of resilience for Sophia: “I’ve always been a very, very positive person. I’ve always known that things were never going to be bad forever. And I’ve always felt that I’ve had luck on my side, if it can be called luck. I’m very optimistic”.

8.3 ANALYSIS

Sophia’s experience of separation and divorce can almost be divided into two parts: for 3 years following the legal divorce, Sophia remained within Edward’s ambit, living in the same area, sharing parenting of the two children, and supported financially by him. With her move to Johannesburg, she began co-habiting with her new partner, started her own business partnership, left her parents behind, and had to survive financially without the rehabilitative maintenance she had received until then. The discussion below attempts to bring both these stages into perspective.

8.3.1 Identity change and role exiting

Sophia describes her changed view of herself thus: “I see myself as an individual, and I don’t think I ever did when I was married”. Sophia’s identity, however, still seems determined to a large degree by her relationship with her former spouse. (This will be discussed in detail below). According to Rahav and Baum (2002) the process of self-

identity change would have been facilitated in Sophia's case by a number of factors, including economic status, having a steady partner, and the experience of therapy. In addition, Sophia's own view of herself as competent in the tasks of single life would have been helpful (Rahav & Baum, 2000).

Duran-Aydintug's (1995) contention that initiators and non-initiators experience role-exiting differently is highlighted by Sophia's non-initiator position. For an entire year Sophia was "waiting" for her ex-spouse to make a decision regarding the end of the marriage. She felt that she had no control over the process (Duran-Aydintug, 1995). Indeed, it was only when she insisted on the ritual of removing her wedding ring that the role-exiting process could really begin. Prior to that, she still tended to see herself as Edward's wife, with the hope that they would be reconciled.

The presence of a steady partner in Sophia's post-separation life has boosted her self-esteem considerably (Rahav & Baum, 2000), as she describes: "He made it so obvious that he was so in love with me, and he just adored me....What it did for my self-esteem was *huge!*"

While still living at the coast, Sophia's work provided her with positive distraction and a degree of satisfaction (Bisagni & Eckenrode, 1995), and it was "exciting, because I'd done this without Edward". However, the fact that, financially, Sophia did not need to work suggested that, as she recognised, the underlying motivation for finding employment was not entirely for her own benefit, but also to impress Edward. She also states: "So even when I was looking for a job, I didn't give my all because what did I need a job for?" Once Sophia moved to Johannesburg and the rehabilitative maintenance stopped, employment became a necessity. In her current business partnership she receives support from her colleague (Bisagni & Eckenrode, 1995): "With Gaynor, we keep building each other up all the time". Sophia also sought work through interviews in various organisations, and this has contributed to her increased self-confidence and sense of self-worth (Bisagni & Eckenrode, 1995): "When I got there, and the woman immediately assessed me, then I was filled with self-confidence, because then I knew she was looking at someone who was presentable and still had a brain on her, and a

personality. And at each one I get far more confident, because I realise that as soon as people meet me, then they see what I'm worth".

8.3.2 *Family reorganisation and single parenting*

As noted earlier, a major loss for Sophia was the loss of the traditional family unit. Sophia's view of her role as mother is strongly internalised, and although she worked part-time during her marriage, her major role was perceived to be 'wife and mother'. According to Wijnberg and Holmes (1992), this would have made the process of family reorganisation more stressful for Sophia.

Sophia believes that she has been a successful single parent, and notes that the adaptation to single parenting was not a difficult task because, during her marriage, she had been the primary parent: "Even bringing the kids up – I did it on my own". In talking about her role as a single parent she states: "...and the stress of having a female teenager in the house. One hopes she's not going to get involved in sex, drugs and rock and roll. That's stressful. But I actually have a sense of peace about that. I feel that I've done a good enough job. That's nice. You wouldn't have heard me saying that six years ago!"

Important in the reorganisation of the family is her ex-husband's role. Sophia has a strong sense of co-parenting with Edward, even though he is geographically removed. "I think Edward and I together have done a bloody good job of parenting, considering we haven't been together". She gives Edward a lot of credit for parenting: "I so appreciate the fact that he is so passionate about his children; first of all, their physical well-being and, secondly, very much their schooling and what direction they are taking". This has greatly assisted Sophia in her custodial parent role, as she is able to discuss the children and their issues with Edward.

During the interview, when Sophia was describing the incident where she and her ex-husband and the children had gone out together for breakfast, she spoke about crying as they walked away from her: "I was questioning myself the whole time: why am I crying? What does it mean? And I kept thinking, what is it? Is it Edward? But it's *not* Edward.

For me it's family!It was an incredibly important realisation to know that". Sophia realised that she and Edward, although divorced, both wanted to keep the family intact as far as possible: "He wants us to be a family. And he'd love John [Sophia's new partner] to be part of it". However, a problem in achieving this new view of a blended family is John, who is resistant to the idea of becoming more involved with Sophia's children, and is uncomfortable socialising with Edward. As Sophia puts it: "The difficulty is John... He is totally, totally not into that".

An additional fact to note is that nobody in Sophia's family, nor in Edward's family had been divorced, so neither of them had available models on which to build their own family reorganisation.

8.3.3 *Relationship with former spouse*

This is a very ambivalent area for Sophia. She acknowledges that life is less stressful without Edward: "The *best* thing of all is the loss of stress and that angst...wondering what mood he was going to be in; and was he going to bring me down because he was in one of his black, black moods. And being without that now is just wonderful!" However, co-parenting ensures Edward and Sophia's lives remain entwined (Reibstein, 1998; Wiseman, 1975). Sophia says: "I'm glad he's the father of my children, and that's why I want a relationship with him". These positive feelings towards Edward are confusing to Sophia (Goldsmith, 1981). As mentioned above, 6 years after separation, Sophia is still wrestling with the role Edward plays in her emotional life: "...do I still love Edward?"

Some of the ambivalence Sophia feels about her relationship with Edward is revealed in statements such as "Now I'd love him to ask me to come back to him. And I would say, 'No'. And I would feel so great"; "I would also, even today, love him to want me still, and love to be able to say, 'No'. Isn't that pathetic?"; "I'd love it if he said to me, 'You know, Sophia, is there any chance?' Just so I could say, 'No'." These statements suggest that there is something of an unacknowledged power struggle occurring between Sophia and Edward. She also talks about how Edward "became really nasty for months and

months” when she announced her decision to move to Johannesburg. She interpreted his behaviour as fear of his daughter moving away from him, “and probably me, to a degree. Not because he wants me as a wife, but in his clutches”. Sophia touches on the power issue when she describes finding out about another affair that Edward had while married to her: “Edward, to this day, does not know that I know about this.... I don’t know why, but it’s important that I know something he doesn’t know, just in case one day I might have to use it. And it’s another power thing”. And again when talking about their divorce agreement: “...he loves to be generous....but then he has the power”.

It appears that Sophia’s sense of self-worth is still strongly linked to Edward’s opinion of her: “I want him to respect me”, and possibly her fantasy of him wanting her back, and being able to say ‘no’ suggests that her self-esteem would be greatly boosted by Edward wanting her. She relates another incident: “I remember being careful about the way I looked....I just knew I felt that I looked good. And I could see the way he looked at me – he was admiring”.

The relationship between Sophia and her ex-husband is further complicated by the presence of John. Sophia says of John: “I love him to bits and I’m happy with John, I really am, and we’re going to be together definitely for the rest of lives (unless he runs off with a younger woman!)”. It is, however, distressing to Sophia that John is unwilling to acknowledge her need for a relationship with Edward. “And people like John, they get so mad at me because I still think good things about Edward”; “John can’t get his mind around the fact that I still want a relationship with Edward”.

There was a moment of revelation during the interview when Sophia realised that she was, perhaps, not weeping over the loss of Edward, but rather over the loss of family (see 7.3.2 above). Disentangling the two separate issues of Edward and family could assist Sophia in better understanding her changed relationship with Edward. This could result in less stress for Sophia by liking Edward as the father of her children and as a member of a new blended family, rather than the stronger positive feelings she now appears to have (Spanier & Thompson, 1984).

8.3.4 Emotional adjustment

Throughout her story, Sophia uses many emotional words: “desperation”; “fear”; “relief”; “anger”; “hurt”; “panicky”; “love”; “hate”, amongst others. One of the major changes Sophia reports is that since the divorce she is “definitely more in control emotionally. I do actually control my emotions better than I ever did when I was with Edward”. Her ‘strengthening’ ritual of prayer, breathing and telling herself “I’m in charge” has proved to be an effective technique in regulating emotions. It would appear that during her marriage, Sophia’s affective moods were strongly influenced by those of her husband, for example: “...was he going to bring me down with one of his black, black moods”. Following the divorce, Edward’s actions still influenced Sophia’s emotions, as seen in her description of her anger fluctuating depending on whether Edward was with his lover or separated from her.

Sophia believes herself to be clinically depressed, and dependent on anti-depressants. Although this was diagnosed as part of the ‘yuppie flu’ syndrome during her marriage, it is likely that her experience of separation and divorce, and the stress resulting from this, contributed to her going back on to anti-depressants. This is in accordance with findings from Wallerstein (1986) regarding older women’s response to divorce. However, Thabes (1997) found that depression in women following divorce could be attributed to a number of factors: poor legal representation, persistent strong negative feelings about the former spouse, lack of friends and family support, low level of social activity during and after marriage, lower income and the lack of an intimate partner. Sophia experienced *none* of these factors. Indeed, her story indicates that the very opposite of all these things was true in her case.

Sophia reports that she “didn’t ever experience loneliness as in – I’m on my own I’ve got no-one in the house with me. In fact, I actually enjoyed it”. Her well-developed family support network meant that she always had people to call on for companionship, thus alleviating what Weiss (1975) calls ‘social loneliness’. In addition, her relationship with her new partner prevented Sophia from experiencing emotional loneliness, which stems from a lack of intimacy (Weiss, 1975).

8.3.5 Establishment of a new life pattern (social support and economic stability)

Sophia's social support network has always been strong, primarily due to her close ties with her large family of origin, but also because she was used to socialising as a 'single' person even during her marriage. Moving to Johannesburg meant leaving her parents at the coast, but this was compensated for by being closer to brothers and sisters and to old friends. The move also meant that Sophia gained the support of a business partner. It is interesting to note that Sophia's primary support in terms of friends were divorced women: Karen at the coast, her business partner, and several of her old friends in Johannesburg. This confirms Anderson, Stewart and Dimidjian's (1994) observation that other divorced women are an important source of support. John has also been an important factor in easing the transition through the divorce, largely by boosting Sophia's sense of self-worth (Spanier & Thompson, 1984).

The move to Johannesburg was an important step in another way for Sophia and, in fact, pushed her to consciously develop a new life pattern. She states: "I left my comfort zone big time when I left Durban...because had I stayed back in Durban, although my maintenance would have ended, I would have still been in Edward's control". She acknowledges that she could have stayed, and benefited from Edward's proximity in terms of financial aid and "just having him there....and I would have accepted it, because it's easy". Once again, John was a support: "Let's face it, having John has helped. I don't know if I would have done it without him".

One of the things that has changed in Sophia's life is her disengagement from the church, and starting to explore other avenues of spirituality. This causes her a degree of distress: "I feel guilty because I don't do that any more, I don't go to church ...and I'm starting to look at all the things that Gaynor's into....she's all New Age-y. And then I sort of think, "Ooh! Is it *wrong*?"

Financially, Sophia was very well-off during her separation and for 3 years after the divorce she received rehabilitative maintenance for herself as well as maintenance for the children. The rehabilitative maintenance ended at about the same time she moved to

Johannesburg. “Money worries” are Sophia’s biggest stressor: “My biggest stress now is money. And it’s the first time in my life that I’ve had that”. Sophia’s situation 4 years after her divorce confirms Weitzman’s (1985) finding that older, longer-married and higher socioeconomic status women fall the furthest economically. Looking back, Sophia realises that she could have done things differently: “I knew I had that rehabilitative maintenance for 3 years....but like a fool, I sat on my backside...In retrospect, I should have used it the way it was supposed to be used. But instead, I had an absolute ball...So financially now things are different because I have not controlled it well....I’m not in control financially – I’ve really stuffed up”. Part of Sophia’s struggle to control her finances arises from a lack of experience in handling money matters; Edward controlled the finances during their marriage and Sophia confesses, “Before I got married, I only had to me to worry about. I didn’t ever save because I knew I was going to get married one day”. This emphasises the power of the ‘marriage and motherhood’ mandate (Anderson, Stewart & Dimidjian 1994).

Sophia’s own perception of herself following separation and divorce summarises in this way: “I wish I could say that after 4 years of divorce I’m flying. Because everyone used to say to me, ‘You just wait Sophia, you’ve lived under Edward’s shadow for so many years, and yet you yourself a quite a vibrant person. And you watch, as soon as that divorce happens, you’re going to fly, you’re going to be successful, you’re going to do this, that and the other’. And I was thinking, ‘Wow! Great!’ But I don’t think it’s happened.... It’s happened on a deeper level, I think, deep, deep down it’s happened. Not career-wise and all that. But I think definitely on a deeper level, that has happened. But it’s hard to put into words”.

CHAPTER 9

GERALDINE

9.1 BACKGROUND

Geraldine has been separated from her ex-husband, Jacques, for 3 years. She is 31 years old and does not have children. Geraldine has a busy career running her own information technology company. Jacques paid alimony to Geraldine for one year following their divorce. I interviewed her in her townhouse in Johannesburg, which she shares with a female friend and the friend's 3-year old daughter.

Geraldine projects an air of peace and restrained energy. She is well-built, with long dark hair, and an open face. Geraldine expressed herself articulately, in a somewhat understated manner, and tended to focus more on her life after divorce than on her marriage and separation. She told her story primarily through her own feelings and thought processes and related very few anecdotes or actual events. I got the impression of a person who lives in a rich internal world of deep thought and imagination.

9.2 THE JOURNEY

9.2.1 *Marriage and separation*

Geraldine was 25 years old when she married. She had never lived alone, moving directly from her parents' home to her marital home: "We didn't live together first, even though we went overseas for 9 months. So I'd never really been alone". Her husband, Jacques, and she built a strong marriage, based on intimate communication and a shared love of the environment. "I had a really *good* marriage. And I really thought it was a fairy tale. It was to a certain extent. He complemented me in many ways. He was really great to talk to and we used to spend hours talking".

Her fairy tale world collapsed one Friday night in September: “We’d gone out somewhere, and on the drive home he said, ‘I’ve got something very important to tell you’. So I said, ‘Well, what is it?’ And he said, ‘Let’s wait until we get home’. I said, ‘What could possibly be so important that you can’t tell me straight away? It’s not like you’re having an affair or anything silly!’ And he said, ‘Well, actually I am’.” This came as a terrible shock to Geraldine: “It was like being hit by a bombshell... You know, there was no breakdown or anything, which is why it came as such a huge shock, because it didn’t *seem* like anything was wrong. But clearly something must have been missing. For him”.

Geraldine does not describe any further discussion with her husband following his announcement, but says “It was quite a hectic evening. I basically spent that weekend thinking. I spent that weekend trying to come to terms with it; thinking, ‘Is there a way to save it after this, or is this it?’” One can only imagine the internal turmoil that Geraldine endured in those two days. “Eventually I said, ‘Well, what is it that you want?’ And he decided he wanted to be with this other woman. Geraldine had a strong belief system which included the belief that a marriage could not withstand an affair: “I’ve always said before, even before I got married that that would be the end of the marriage. You know, an affair for me is the end. There’s no going back to that. The trust is gone and there’s no point in trying to repair something if you don’t have the basics, which are trust and honesty.....So on that Monday, I moved out”.

She moved in with friends for a week, and then got together with her house-mate, “and we decided that we’d move in together”.

9.2.2 *The post-separation experience*

In the very first days following the separation, Geraldine attempted to focus on the positive aspects of the event: “I remember sitting there thinking, ‘You know, this is such a great experience’. And I’d numbed all the bad things about it and I was trying to see the positive.” This somewhat euphoric feeling soon abated and Geraldine entered a period of 3 or so months when, she believes, she was in complete denial: “I actually went

through a phase where I knew I'd made myself completely numb to everything. Especially those first three or four months. Like living in an empty shell, it was completely void of anything. I refused to feel anything... I didn't do anything really, just surviving, breathe in and out. It's almost like everything shut down. It was a terrible time. You know, waking up in the morning, you realise the sun still comes up and everyone else is still going about their lives like nothing's changed and your world just feels completely empty and completely disconnected from everything. You don't know how you're going to deal with people and things. You'd like to go and hide in a hole somewhere and disappear for a while. But you have to carry on".

A major issue for Geraldine following the separation was that of lack of control over her own life. "Being quite a control freak as it is, the initial thing was the worst, because I've got a big thing about choices and being able to make choices. And for me, what had happened had almost left me without choice....And trying to come to grips with the fact that something was completely out of my control was really a big struggle. Also, the numbness wasn't great; it's an out of control feeling because you don't know where you are and you don't know what you're doing and....it's almost like there's no *ability* to deal with it". This feeling of lack of control over the separation extended into other aspects of Geraldine's life: "We'd made great plans about what we were going to do during the festive season, and suddenly all of that was gone, and that was a huge part of why it all felt so disconnected. Suddenly everything has changed and I'm stuck in a different life, that I haven't planned and I didn't want".

Geraldine sought to understand what had happened: "I kept questioning, you know, now why would this happen to me? What have I done to deserve that to happen?" Her search for meaning was obstructed by her ex-husband's refusal to discuss what had gone wrong in the marriage: "I tried, and he never really had reasons. He couldn't actually give me an explanation. So that was really difficult for me. If there was just some of reason that I could either work on that, or find closure with that, it would have made it a lot easier. He never really told me...he wasn't willing to disclose". Geraldine was essentially left to find her own path to closure through exploring her own thoughts, feeling and attitudes.

Growing up in a traditional, close family, with parents who had been married for 36 years and who still had what Geraldine describes as “a loving relationship”, one of the difficulties for Geraldine was that “real life isn’t actually like it was in our house”. The shattering of her expectations about marriage was a “rude awakening”. “That [the separation] was really the *worst* thing that had happened in my life. I lived a very sheltered childhood; so sheltered that my parents wouldn’t *let* us get hurt. They really just safeguarded us from reality, really. So in that sense I really, really had to grow up to understand that life’s not a bed of roses”.

An associated difficulty for Geraldine was that her parents, with their view of marriage, found it difficult to understand Geraldine’s situation: “My mother was probably the worst, actually. I remember phoning her – I only phoned her two days later because I felt that dealing with them, initially, was just more than I could handle....And I phoned my mother and she was in absolute tears – she was beside herself....Because she’d also expected her children to have the same life as she’d had. And she still to this day can’t fathom how I can remain happy as a single person”. She also says: “What really surprised me, I always thought I would turn to my parents first if something really bad happened, you know. And when it happened, they were the last people I actually wanted to turn to. I see them feeling isolated in this, and wanting so desperately to help, but it just wasn’t possible”. Geraldine’s mother-in-law also struggled to come to terms with the situation: “Every time I’d see her, she’d burst into tears. It was a really uncomfortable thing to be there. She has still not gotten over it. She takes it very personally, like it’s her fault the whole thing happened”.

Having the responsibility of running her own business added to Geraldine’s burden at this time: “It was really difficult because I have to be there all the time, and it was very demanding. It was kind of just *too much* at the time. And I was struggling to put any effort into that, because I was putting all my effort into trying to bring myself back”. There was also little support from people with whom Geraldine worked: “I work with five guys, and they’re all married, so it was kind of very strange to have to deal with that, with all these married people. And I think they’re quite Christian, so in their mentality divorce is really a mortal sin. I was seeing a very different viewpoint there, and I can’t

quite relate to that, so it was really difficult. So I tried as much as possible to keep that [her separation] out of the picture at work”.

The legal divorce was finalised almost a year following separation. Geraldine left it to Jacques to arrange the legalities: “I said to him, ‘You started the whole situation, you deal with it, you organise the divorce. I want nothing to do with it. I won’t fight it”. They decided not to get lawyers involved, “I didn’t want it get ugly”, so they split their possessions and sold the marital home. In Geraldine’s mind, the actual divorce was merely a formality: “I was divorced when I walked out the door, really. It was just a piece of paper”. The only time Geraldine mentions Jacques’ lover in her story is in connection with the legal divorce: “She encouraged him not to tell me when the divorce had gone through. Like, wait a few days then tell me. I don’t know why she needed to make it worse than it was. It wasn’t like she had any vendetta against me, but there was clearly something....just a final little jab”.

9.2.3 Resilience

Although Geraldine felt her parents were unable to understand her situation, her brother and sister-in-law were a great source of support: “The first people I actually phoned were my brother and sister-in-law, and they were completely understanding about it. You know, compassionate, and like, ‘Come and stay with us if you have to’. They didn’t take it *badly*; it wasn’t like they had anything bad to say about him”. A further source of social support was Geraldine’s house-mate, Joan. Having someone living in the same house means, to Geraldine that there is constant company: “Almost like instant support”. “I never had to be alone and I think that that was a huge saving grace for me at that point. And more so that Joan was going through the same thing.....So we spent a lot of time discussing how we felt and what we thought about what had happened....I don’t think I could have done it without Joan to be really honest”. The importance of being able to talk to other divorced people is highlighted in Geraldine’s story: “I started meeting people everywhere, and I seemed to relate so much better with people who’d been through a divorce. And I also found a whole new group of friends who were all divorced people. We just seemed to have a similar mindset”. Geraldine acknowledges that these friends

cannot necessarily offer material support: “Most of them kind of feel that there’s nothing we can physically do for you”. However, the emotional support received from them has played a major role in Geraldine’s post-separation adjustment: “You know, there’s always a remnant of whatever it is you’ve been through. You’re tainted by certain things, and these people can help you through that. We talk a lot. I have three friends who I spend a lot of time with, and we just chat about life and how we feel about things that have happened to us and situations that pop up even now, knowing what your history is and how you see things. It makes it so much easier”. Old friends have also supported Geraldine: “People who were both of our friends, after the divorce tried really hard not to take sides. But they were really great; they really tried to stay in touch”. In addition to the support offered by her house-mate, Geraldine’s relationship with the house-mate’s daughter, Julia, has also been a source of satisfaction: “To be able to be separate from her but also so close....I have a lovely bond; it’s really special. To be able to be with her and give her love, it’s that simple...There’s a fulfilment in being able to do that”.

Geraldine’s search for meaning in her divorce led her on a spiritual journey: “There was also a huge spiritual angle to it. Feeling so lost, one tries to find something, some meaning somewhere, and the reason why it happened....There’s got to be more, there just has to be more to it. And I started reading all sorts of books: Buddhism, whatever. Just to try and find some meaning for myself in what had happened....I really believed there’s a lot more to life, you know, from an energy perspective. It’s all connected energies. And there’s lots of purpose and reason in lots of things...One has to learn a whole bunch of lessons in your life....I realise now that I had to go through that to learn a whole bunch of lessons in life”.

Geraldine summarises how her spiritual life comforts her: “I think, strange as it sounds, your attitude to love is a key resource. The moment you can love regardless, and I can still say I love Jacques....It’s helped me get around all the anger. And to know that I’m connected to everything. And you’re not really ever alone either”.

Geraldine recognises another aspect of spirituality, a close link with nature, as an important resource: “Being in touch with nature means quite a lot to me. A reconnection

to the things I need. I make time for that. I have a bunch of friends who all go hiking every second Sunday. It's the *best* thing! It's a hugely spiritual thing, able to be out there in the open, with your thoughts, which is lovely”.

Self-awareness is a large part of Geraldine's resilience. “One of the things that was so big about reading all those books was exactly that, you know, that constant awareness of exactly what thoughts are coming into your head”. Geraldine consciously developed this through meditation: “I'm doing meditations in the morning, and for me that's wonderful... It's a big thing in my life right now”.

It was this self-awareness that assisted Geraldine in moving out of emotional numbness: “I realised that I was empty, and I had to then start processing why I wasn't allowing myself to feel anything. And I realised that the minute I started feeling anything, it was only going to be sore. And there wasn't a choice – it had to be dealt with”. Self-awareness is an ongoing exploration for Geraldine, and drives her to make changes in her life: “One morning I woke up and I thought, ‘I always wake up feeling negative. And I hadn't any real reason to feel horrible this morning, but I've just woken up and I feel terrible. So I'm going to change that, and I'm going to try and find all the nice things in life. So on my way to work, I'm going to find just one really nice thing’”.

Geraldine is able to express her creativity through painting, drawing and guitar-playing. “It's an essential part of who I am, being creative. Being able to make things is hugely satisfying. It's just nice to spend some time with oneself. And that's why painting is so lovely because one gets so lost in your self and your thoughts. To be able to make something is just such a wonderful gift”.

An important aspect of resilience is the ability to develop goals and define one's purpose in life. Geraldine feels strongly that she has a purpose in life, which is to work with children. Although this is still rather vague, she has taken steps towards fulfilling this purpose: “I've only just started exploring that, so it's very grey at this stage....I was on the Internet the other day trying to find places ...to see if I could do some volunteer work, as a beginning. I know there is more to it, but I'm not sure exactly where it is at

this stage”. In terms of more general goals, Geraldine states: “I try not to look too far ahead in life. That’s one of the things I learnt in my whole spiritual process, was to try and put less on the future and more on the now....Trying to live every day....Being a better person”.

The ability to forgive has been important in enabling Geraldine to move on with her life and deal with her anger towards her former spouse: “I came across this one Buddhism book which great for me at the time; it just said so much about forgiveness. I made a decision, probably about six months later, that I was going to forgive him for everything that he’d done; that it was OK. I think there wasn’t any point in carrying on feeling all the anger, because anger breeds more anger....I had to forgive for *me*, not for him. Because I had to move on. I knew I had to move on, and that was the best way I saw to do it. And after that there was no resentment for anything that had happened, or wanting it back”.

9.3 ANALYSIS

9.3.1 Identity change and role exiting

A major theme in Geraldine’s story is her journey towards finding herself, primarily through exploring her spirituality and her creativity. It was not an easy road to travel: “Probably the most difficult part....After that whole denial thing there was just afeeling *lost*. Not having any firm plans or goals. One kind of plans your life; well *I* did, when I got married. And suddenly that whole carpet was pulled out from under me, and I didn’t know where I was any more. And that took a while to actually realise where I was and where I wanted to go again”. The fact that the separation was sprung on her by Jacques, and that she perceived she had no control over the event or process exacerbated this (Duran-Aydintug, 1995).

Haber (1992) states that loss of self through divorce is more likely to occur in those who have a lower level of differentiation of self. Geraldine says of herself: “I’d almost given too much of myself in the marriage so I’d almost given up my own

individuality....Looking back now, there were huge restrictions on who I was and what I could do....That was a big thing for me to have to deal with after the fact. You know, *who am I* really, and how much of who I'd become was really me and how much was part of him". The spousal role and marital relationship were very central to Geraldine; intimate discussions were primarily between her husband and herself: "I definitely was more isolated from my friends". This, too, would have influenced her role-exiting process (De Garmo & Kitson, 1996).

Self-esteem as part of her identity has changed since the separation: "I actually think I feel a lot better about myself now than I did in my marriage....there was no separation...a lot of the choices weren't essentially mine, and I did compromise, probably more than I should have."

It would appear that little of Geraldine's self-identity is related to work. Her sense of meaning is derived from her spirituality and creativity, which offer her more scope than her work (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003).

Geraldine seems comfortable with her new identity as a single person: "I definitely wouldn't be the person I am now if I hadn't gone through all of that. It's almost like one gets into a comfort zone. And I would have remained that person. The amount of things that have changed and the amount of things I've managed to do that I never would have done".

9.3.2 *Family reorganisation and single parenting*

Having no children in her marriage, this was a relatively easy task for Geraldine. She says: "It must be really difficult for people with children... because there's almost never that closure". I wondered if she was regretful that there were no children from the marriage: "No! Life's just too unsteady. I don't know that I would want to have kids by myself".

The primary difficulty in family reorganisation has been within Geraldine's family of origin, and her parents' concern for her as a single person.

9.3.3 Relationship with former spouse

Geraldine's relationship with her former spouse has been through three major stages since the separation. At first, there was anger about the separation: "But I never managed to aim the anger at him, which probably not good for me either. You know, it was so much easier to aim the anger at the other woman". This was followed by Geraldine's decision to forgive her ex-husband, which freed her to deal with her emotions. They developed a friendship, where Jacques would come to Geraldine for advice: "It left me feeling bad every time I'd seen him....you know, troubles with his girlfriend....Even on a Saturday morning he used to come over and ask for advice. You know, it was really hard on me". They would also attend parties together with mutual friends: "And they [the friends] were uncomfortable in the situation...because nobody quite knew how to deal with...I mean, why am I here? Then, about nine months before the time of the interview, Geraldine "made another decision": "I said, 'Well, I don't think I can do this any more'. And I came to the conclusion that there can be no finality to it unless he goes. You know, you're holding on to something even if it was a friendship. I'd forgiven him and that was great, but I couldn't carry on with the friendship". This ultimately gave Geraldine closure on her divorce: "It's been lovely. It's just been the best thing I've ever done. And it was such a freeing thing. I can't believe, that night, how great it felt, to put all that behind me. I should have done it a long time ago. I wasn't ready. I think it's also part of the healing process". Geraldine now has no contact whatsoever with her ex-husband.

Confirming Goldsmith's (1981) and Weiss' (1975) findings, Geraldine did experience caring and compassion towards her former spouse during the 'friendship' stage of their post-separation relationship: "I decided I'd really like to strike up a friendship....in a way, to make him feel better for the things that he'd done"; "There was that support system from me for *him* because he was going through such a harsh time".

9.3.4 *Emotional adjustment*

As mentioned above, Geraldine was able to deal with her feelings of anger by forgiving her ex-husband. It would appear that her anger was rooted in feelings of rejection: “I definitely experienced feelings of rejection, like ‘Why am I not good enough?’” (Wallerstein, 1986). Geraldine also reports that she experienced depression following her time of denial: “There was a stage where depression and the whole thing got serious” (Thabes, 1997), although this was largely alleviated by the social support which surrounded Geraldine. She applied cognitive techniques to overcome negative emotions: “There comes a time when you can start remembering and it doesn’t hurt any more – you can see it for the good that it was at the time....I think it’s my own mindset really. The mind is such a powerful thing, I mean, I can say today that those memories still hurt, and they would hurt, you know”. “I had to reassess how I feel about *everything*”. “It’s such an empowering thing to think.....I can create my world exactly the way I want it to be, situation by situation...I make a choice every minute of every day”.

Geraldine has had little experience of loneliness, largely because she relies on her house-mate for company. Shortly before the interview, the house-mate had gone away, and Geraldine states: “There’s good lonely and there’s bad lonely. Joan was away for these two weeks, and it was the first time that I’d been alone, totally alone, for that period of time. And the first days were great....There was complete freedom....It was lovely. And then there was a sense of ‘I’d rather actually have somebody around, somebody to talk to’. It’s really a struggle not to have somebody to talk to”. Thus, her house-mate provides an important buffer to social loneliness (Weiss, 1975). However, Geraldine admits that there was emotional loneliness (Weiss, 1975) in the early days following the separation: “I remember waking up in the morning, like two or three o’clock, with that horrible feeling in the pit of my stomach, ‘Oh, my goodness, I’m alone. What has happened?’”

Much of Geraldine’s narrative emphasises the positive emotions she experiences now, three years after the divorce: “Being single is lovely...Freedom, absolute freedom...” In her marriage, Geraldine says, “If there was a problem, I would try and deal with it

myself. Now I've come to the realisation that it's just so much nicer to load your problems off...And it's such a relief to have somebody there".

9.3.5 Establishment of a new life pattern (social support and economic stability)

Social support is clearly very important in Geraldine's life. She has her house-mate for "instant support" and a new circle of friends who provide support mostly in allowing Geraldine to talk through issues. Many of these friends are also divorced, giving them a shared experience (Anderson, Stewart & Dimidjian, 1994). Friends also facilitate Geraldine's need to be connected to nature through her hiking group. She states: "Friends like that add more value to my life than my marriage did. And they're not going anywhere, either!" "Developing my own circle of friends was an enriching exercise". Geraldine has also engaged in dating activities and finds it easy to do so; this, however, is not a priority in her life: "I have been meeting people...a few people who I've seen a few times and then decided it isn't right. I've kind of decided what I want in life, in terms of a man. And they fall short, I'm afraid!" Her focus is much more on herself at present: "It's very selfish, but it's very much *me*".

Financially, Geraldine has few concerns. There was no need for her to seek or change her employment following the divorce, and, in addition, she received alimony from her ex-husband for a year. Geraldine also feels competent to manage her money, and finds this empowering: "I've always been quite anal retentive about money, so it's never been a big issue to me....I can spend my money as I wish, do as I wish".

Geraldine's new life pattern is remarkably liberating for her (Anderson, Stewart & Dimidjian, 1994; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980): "Tomorrow I could pack my bags and leave, and go for a month, and it doesn't matter. And everything's mine, you know....I can go on holiday where I want, see what I want, when I want. There's less compromise". And, "I tend to go out a lot more than I ever did...seeing people and going to suppers and that sort of thing. Like going to music festivals...I've done so many interesting courses...self-enrichment courses and all sorts of things that have just been so

helpful. And I wouldn't have done that.....There's so much more to share and there's so much more to learn".

CHAPTER 10

MARY

10.1 BACKGROUND

Mary is a 55 year-old school counsellor and mother of three adult daughters, all of whom live in their own homes. She had been married for twenty three years before her divorce ten years ago. Self-sufficient financially, her ex-husband, Charles, was still contributing to the youngest daughter's education and still owed Mary money according to the divorce agreement. I interviewed Mary in her office at the school where she worked.

My most vivid impression of Mary was one of positive serenity; a very enthusiastic, warm human being, with a strong sense of her own identity. This was a woman who knew, and was at ease with, herself. Mary was self-possessed and spoke confidently and with little prompting for much of the interview. Once or twice she became a little tearful and, on occasion, quite vehement when describing her experiences. Towards the end of our conversation, Mary, in some surprise, stated, "I've said things that I didn't even know were there".

10.2 THE JOURNEY

10.2.1 Marriage and separation

Mary and her husband, Charles, had been at school together and had dated since Mary was 16 years old. They got married and moved around the country a lot, producing three children by the time Mary was 28. Due to the constant moves for her husband's career, Mary did not pursue a career of her own, "other than just social work for odd periods I used the time for studying, adding educational subjects and doing my HED". She also notes that, like many women of her generation, "I had the perception that to be a good mother, you had to be around". However, once Mary obtained her teaching qualification she "got back into teaching part-time at a convent; and I could sort of feel the excitement

of where education was at I was then asked by a girls' school to set up the computer centre there". Shortly after this, Mary became the school counsellor at the school. Her life was beginning to gain momentum in a meaningful area; I could hear the buzz of enthusiasm in her voice as she described this period to me.

It was at this time, as Mary was getting seriously involved in a new career, "when my youngest, Anne, was in Grade 9, that the carpet was pulled from under me He (Charles) suddenly announced that he wanted his space". Mary was "totally and utterly numb". What she did not know at that time was that Charles was "having an affair with a great friend", but "it was only eight months after that that the whole story came out". In fact, "I was made to feel that I was the reason that the marriage couldn't go on".

10.2.2 The post-separation experience

Mary and Charles were separated for two years before they finally divorced. Mary describes much of this period as a time of "denial", thinking "this isn't going to last; he'll come back I really believed he would come back". She calls it "that bubble period, that vacuum". Numbness, shock and loss characterised her life. This was exacerbated by physical problems: "a breast lump I'd just had a hysterectomy before Charles left. I lost weight; I think I weighed about 45 kilograms". A doctor put her onto "something (I can't even remember what it was), and it was awful".

But even Prozac could not buffer Mary through the experience of finding out about Charles's affair. "I remember being devastated by what everyone was talking about, and I being the last to find out. I felt more devastated than angry". Her sense of betrayal and humiliation was in her voice. "I had always, perhaps naively, believed that people were basically good. I never, ever believed that this sort of deception took place amongst friends". What *did* make Mary angry was when the other woman's husband "started to pop up at every opportunity". She eventually "got a close friend to go and say, 'Please, just back off'". Being sought out by this man was, in Mary's view, a situation which added insult to injury.

One of the areas in which Charles had been particularly dominant was their financial situation. “The one regret I have is that I wasn’t better equipped for the world of finance I didn’t have an understanding or control of my own destiny financially It was the first time I’d had to budget”. This was a challenging time for Mary.

She dwelt obsessively on her circumstances, and often thought “I wonder if there’s ever going to be a time when for one day I won’t think about it. Do I have to go through life obsessed with this thought of what had happened? What used to go through my mind every day was ‘when will I get to a place?’” Mary states that controlling her thoughts was one of the biggest challenges she faced: “I think what was difficult to master, or what I found debilitating, was my thoughts, because I am an inside person”. I had a picture of Mary going through the motions of daily life: raising her daughter, cooking meals, running her home; but her head was bursting with questions, recriminations, blame and hope. There was a feeling of uncontrollable mental activity, while physical activity continued, almost on a different level of consciousness.

One of the less supportive aspects of her friends’ behaviour that Mary experienced, was that “they introduced odd people (men), and it just made me cringe. I thought, ‘No, I don’t think I’ll ever get to that point again’. Clearly, she was not ready to risk a new relationship at this early stage in her journey. In fact, Mary stated, “I think I’m only *now* beginning to feel that if I meet someone, that a relationship would be OK It’s a long time I believe I have evolved as a person I needed that time”. The timing of support is a very important element. “There were often things said that I found irritating people who insisted how they felt I should be, or where they felt I should be; especially to start with, when I really believed that he’d come to his senses. I used to resent that. I hated people to counsel me in that ‘this was it, this was finished’, because I didn’t think it would be. I can see in hindsight that you get there, but you don’t tell a person that”.

Ten years after her divorce, Mary still feels she has “a gnarled stump” in the area of intimate, heterosexual relationships: “I get that ghastly feeling of total rejection – and it’s relationships.....I still feel I was discarded as a woman”.

10.2.3 *Resilience*

Mary has a good social support network following her separation and divorce. Firstly, Mary's family are very supportive: "My family, extended family, are very, very close They just wanted to pack the two of us up (Mary and Anne) and wanted us down in Port Elizabeth. I've got an incredible extended family, they're not possessive I think supportive is the word. My brothers flew up, and even my great friend from Port Elizabeth flew up. I look back and that's what I remember".

Friends "rallied around". Charles and Mary had been members of Round Table, "and our Round Table support unit came right behind me and the girls The reaction was unbelievable support". Mary believed that one of the reasons for this was that "the truth (about Charles's affair) had been withheld And I was amazed at how strongly people in our social group react to deceptions, infidelity The reaction was based on values totally against that". This type of support, assuring Mary of her own blamelessness, was very valuable at that time.

Mary has a great appreciation for the support she received during her separation: "I just couldn't get over the support. It was really overwhelming. I really felt carried. I had one friend who would phone every morning at seven, and for me that support was incredible I think that that helped me a lot". Mary and her daughters were invited to join other families on holiday, for example; "So in terms of holidays, friends, and socially, I was busy". Colleagues at school also offered support: "At school the support I had from colleagues there was tangible".

In terms of professional help, a psychologist with whom Mary worked offered formal counselling and Mary "went to her about three times". She had no recollection of whether or not this had been helpful, but Mary felt that she had had "very good (informal) counselling support" from her many friends. Another source of more formal support came from Mary's GP, "who was a friend and a woman She was, I think, a counsellor for me, as well as (helpful) on the physical side".

Mary's work is clearly a great resource for her: "I was totally focused on that. I flourished in my job. It was unbelievable. I got two TED merits, I think, in one year." "I was busy working with other people, helping them identify their strength areas, so it made me acknowledge my own....I've been very lucky in that my work has enabled me to use my strengths, and I get affirmed for who I am and what I offer". "My work is all-consuming....I think my whole role here is not just during the school day. I'm so busy and tired, in a nice sense, from what I'm doing".

Another aspect of Mary's work which assists in her resilience is that it gives her a sense of meaning and purpose: "I have a clear purpose and that is to involve myself in para-education: I think there's a huge need". Besides this major long-term goal, work helped Mary simply get up in the morning: "But for me it was very definitely that I had....you need a purpose for your day. Because it is activity that enables you to keep going".

Mary also recognises her own internal resilience: "I have got huge inner courage and strength....reserves that I didn't know. So actually, just putting one foot in front of the other in the darkest of times is what it's about". "I think it's about not giving up, and knowing there are going to be dark days". She was also able to positively reframe: "I believe now that reframing is a conscious thing. The six second thing....and I have practiced it. The thought is there, and again it's the whole choice thing...Actually, you count to six and you change that thought to a visual that is pleasing to you, something recent". Finally, Mary says "another resource is a sense of humour – you have to be able to laugh at yourself!"

10.3 ANALYSIS

10.3.1 Identity change and role-exiting

This has not been an easy journey for Mary. The centrality of the spousal role was deeply entrenched by her marriage (De Garmo & Kitson, 1995). Charles had been the "dominant person" in their relationship. "He liked to control things and I adored him, and I was happy with that ... In our relationship I so looked up to him in terms of his

intellect and what he'd achieved that I didn't acknowledge my role in the relationship....". Mary had been left without a clear sense of her own identity, of who she was (Haber, 1992). "I had never been given the opportunity to control my own life". The difficulty of role-exiting was exacerbated by the fact that Mary had not initiated the separation and divorce (Duran-Aydintug, 1995).

However, her career greatly assisted in Mary developing a new self-identity (Bisagni & Eckenrode, 1995). This had started even before the separation, and Mary cites it as one of the explanations for the break-up of her marriage: "I did my social work; it was no problem if I was quietly going off to Weskoppies and talking to Napoleon's wife... getting R300 a month ... that's not even a cash flow". But when Mary's career became a major aspect of her life, she suspected that Charles felt his dominant position in the relationship was threatened: "I don't think that fitted into his reckoning". Bisagni and Eckenrode's (1995) four aspects of employment that were found to increase levels of self-esteem and decrease stress in divorced women, are all strongly represented in Mary's story: meaningfulness, social interaction and support, productivity, and positive distraction.

Confirming Rahav and Baum's (2002) statement that "identity change depends less on social relations and social support than on the women's own self-construction through their experience and handling of the challenges of their lives alone" (p. 55), Mary states: "I'm sometimes amazed at how well I cope with day-to-day crises. I find I don't get into a state, and I'm able to be flexible. Change doesn't scare me".

Mary's sense of herself as a real person in her own right was enhanced by friends: "I think, for the first time, in spite of this terrible feeling of rejection, I realised what people were saying to me I realised that actually *I* was perhaps the person in the relationship that friends enjoyed being with People said it to me".

10.3.2 Family reorganisation and single parenting

Mary measured her progress by her own personal growth and, perhaps even more important to her, the functionality of her family unit. “With my daughters, I would say we’re an incredibly functional family....We get on like houses on fire, have wonderful fun I think that really hit home last year when my daughter got married. The three girls sat me down and said they all wanted to thank me for what I’d been through, because they didn’t believe that any of the four of us would be the people that we are, had we not gone through that”. Mary is immensely proud of her daughters: “what they’ve achieved as young women. They’ve achieved incredibly, you know, at university and in their lives now It does make you, as a mum, feel you’ve done it okay I’m incredibly proud of them”.

The stress of reorganising the family into that of a single-parent family was possibly lessened as Mary had been involved in her career before the separation; or, as Wijnberg and Holmes (1992) would label it, she was a modifier. So the wife/mother role was important to Mary, but she also had a career orientation.

As Goldsmith (1981) found, the non-custodial parent is still involved in special family events, and this can potentially reactivate attachment behaviour between the ex-spouses (Reibstein, 1998). This aspect of Mary’s journey was highlighted at the time her daughter got married. “I wondered how I was going to cope emotionally, what sort of buttons that was going to press”. Ultimately, though, the daughters persuaded their father not to bring his second wife. Mary was “delighted I think it would have placed such a strain”.

An additional aspect of family reorganisation for Mary is that of her daughters leaving home. As a single parent, this can be a difficult transition. “My family were concerned when it got to the point that the girls were starting to move off and, actually, it happened at a good time. I feel you can have your children with you for so long, and then they need to move off. So that hasn’t affected me. In fact, I’ve heard of more friends who are still married going into severe depression for empty-nest syndrome. And I don’t. I have not once. Which is an interesting thing, I haven’t ever thought about it until I’ve said it

now. I've got my own purpose. I'm not doing it through them. And I wonder, if the separation had never come about, how I would feel".

10.3.3 Relationship with former spouse

Reibstein (1998) makes the point that detachment from the former spouse will always be limited by the presence of children in the post-divorce family (see 9.3.2 above). However, in terms of continued attachment to Charles, Mary felt that the last hold, or control, he had over her is financial: "To this day, the maintenance, which is really very little, has never been increased. He insists on depositing it himself and will put it in from the beginning of the month to the 7th of the month; when he feels like it. And I have now, in that area, a sense of anger. I find it totally unacceptable and irritating....I will *never*, ever stop saying he has a responsibility. He's done all sorts of things....I won't go into all the things he's done to control, to hold back, to do as little as he can financially, and to hide moneys I think the unfinished business that irritates the hell out of me is the finances". Mary felt very strongly about this, repeating this theme several times throughout the interview. However, "I recently went to the lawyer, because he still owes me money for the house we sold, which he now doesn't want to pay. And I said 'I want you (the lawyer) to make sure that everything that is owed to me, I get' This has also been quite a milestone So I've actually got to that point". Of Charles, Mary said "I just find it unbelievable that he isn't able to just work that out amicably. It's the last hold, I think".

Mary realised that, in terms of her relationship with her former spouse, "there are still going to be *issues*, because there is the pain there that doesn't go away". She describes this as "rawness". For example, "When my father was so ill and died, Charles didn't even pick up the phone or contact me or my mum Then I thought, 'Am I really over him?', but I suppose I am", she laughed quietly. Another 'raw' spot is Charles's second wife (whose name Mary never mentioned): "I've often thought about this whole forgiveness thing, but I also feel that I would be a hypocrite To have a relationship with her would be totally hypocritical".

10.3.4 Emotional adjustment

In retrospect, Mary saw the process of separation and divorce as a series of 'stages'. She describes the initial feelings of numbness and shock; followed by denial, the "bubble period, that vacuum", acceptance, and, finally, autonomy and renewal. Although there was great pain during the process, Mary clearly saw herself ultimately at "a point where I know I wouldn't change what I have now and go back I can say that I've got to a really good place". This loosely corresponds with Gullo's (1992) description of the emotional course of the divorce process. Mary's "denial" was based on hope that her marriage would be rebuilt. This tantalising promise of reconciliation is a major source of the grief experienced by divorced people.

Mary's anger towards her former spouse was not entirely on her own behalf: "One of my feelings along the way was anger, well resentment, that my family had really opened their home to him in *so* many ways, and that it was almost a betrayal of them as well".

Besides the anger Mary felt towards her ex-husband, there is still the lingering experience of rejection: "I get that ghastly feeling of rejection"; "I felt I was discarded as a woman". This has inhibited Mary in establishing a new intimate relationship, and will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

In terms of loneliness, Mary states: I value my own life, I value my home on my own. I value my time there. I'm not lonely, because I'm someone who needs my own time". An important factor in Mary's experience of separation was that she was "not someone who *needs* lots of people. I can honestly say I don't think I've experienced loneliness I've never felt alone. I *love* my own company and books and music". Although Mary attributes this to an internal, personality trait, it could also be explained by the extensive support that she received during this period: "a support network came into place that I don't think I was even aware of". Spanier and Thompson (1984) found that more educated women experience less loneliness, and this might well be a factor in Mary's case.

10.3.5 Establishment of a new life pattern (social support and economic stability)

Mary has established a rich life in terms of her career, her family of daughters, sons-in-law and grandchildren, and her friends. All of whom form a dense social support network for Mary. She says of her life: “Now I’ve got to a point where I know I wouldn’t change what I have now and go back” and “Where I’m at is a fantastic place!...I can say that I’ve got to a really good place”. “As a person, I have grown into a fulfilled, directed, excited human being”. Specifically, Mary believes she has grown enormously “professionally, in self-esteem, and independence”. This confirms studies which report improved functioning following divorce (Anderson, Stewart & Dimidjian, 1994; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Weitzman, 1985; Wallerstein, 1986).

One aspect that Mary is still exploring is that of intimate relationships. She displays ambivalence about developing a new, intimate relationship with a man, giving many reasons as to why this has not yet happened, and yet uncertain about whether or not she really wants this: “I’m so focused on where I’m going and on my own children, that I haven’t allowed myself to even wonder.... Maybe, yes, I am thinking about it. But I’m so busy....I’m not lonely. So it’s not a loneliness, it’s not a longing. It’s something that I think I have to acknowledge. I still feel I was discarded as a woman”. Mary also notes that, should she wish to meet a man, “My environment [in a girls’ school] is not conducive. Nor is my personality. I’m certainly not likely to go to Alleenlopers and date! So it’s got to be absolutely synchronistic. That’s the only way”. Later in her narrative, she says: “I mean that part of my life is stunted because I’ve chosen to opt out....I’ve sort of put this at the back of my mind. Well, if I stumble across someone, it was meant to be. ‘Meant to be’ is also pie-in-the-sky stuff. I think that sometimes it’s a case of if you feel that something is lacking in your life, then you do something about it”. The lack of an intimate relationship in her life at present is what Mary describes as “the gnarled stump”, and attempts to describe it’s root in these terms: “Interpersonal relationships are a two way thing, a mutual thing, that enriches both of you. I’m fine when it’s giving, but I’m perhaps blocking in terms of receiving”.

Economic stability is still a major concern for Mary. She states that: “Another area for me that I’m stunted in, is that I was never involved in the finances. I wasn’t interested; it wasn’t where I wanted to be...Financial stuff is more of a worry for me than the lack of relationship”. In fact, Mary is not badly off; she lives on the school property but owns a flat which she currently rents out; she earns a good salary, and has a pension fund and medical insurance. It would appear that Mary’s anxiety could well stem from the ‘marriage and motherhood mandate’ (Anderson, Stewart & Dimidjian, 1994), in that she believes she cannot support herself because there isn’t a man in her life on whom to lean.

CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 CONCLUSIONS

The five women who participated in this study each had their own very subjective experience of separation and divorce. Each of their situations was entirely unique. However, certain similarities and differences do exist in their narratives, and it is necessary to look at these as a prelude to exploring aspects of resilience employed by the women on their journeys. For example, Jane, Mary, Geraldine and Sophia were all left by their husbands, and were all surprised and shocked by their husbands' departures; all of them experienced infidelity. Helen was the only woman who initiated divorce proceedings. This could perhaps explain why, in the immediate post-separation period, Helen was the only woman who expressed relief at the end of her marital relationship, although all five women eventually experienced relief at some point in their journey. Mary and Sophia both strongly hoped that their husbands would come back to them, and that their marriages would resume. Some of the women felt totally unprepared for the trauma of divorce, as they had been raised in original families which were loving and close, and protected throughout their childhood from the crises of life. Consequently, they felt that their dreams and expectations of family life were completely shattered by divorce.

11.1.1 The effects of divorce

Several of the women reported stages in the adjustment process similar to those described by Gullo (1992), including numbness and shock, grief, magnification, and renewal. It appears, though, that these 'stages' do not occur in a fixed order or singly, but are likely to recur, and even to occur simultaneously. Thus, it would be a mistake to assume that the journey towards recovery following divorce is a uniform one, applicable to all.

The effect of divorce on women's social support networks can be considerable. Among the women, Sophia and Jane experienced a loss of support from friends following divorce, while Mary, although her friends were very supportive, found it irritating when friends would try to pair her off with new men. Some of the women felt deeply the loss of their spouse as a confidant and friend, someone on whom they could depend emotionally.

From a financial point of view, the participants in this study were all relatively well-off after their divorce although some of them were very concerned about their economic situation. This had more to do with their perceived level of financial competence rather than lack of financial support from their ex-spouses. However, for those women, their anxiety about their finances and their ability to manage money was pervasive and coloured their perception of how well they were coping with life as single women.

Emotionally, divorce took its toll on all five women. The initial stage of denial, numbness and shock was described by Mary and Geraldine in some detail. Residual, lingering anger was reported by Mary and by Jane, whereas Geraldine felt that forgiveness of her ex-spouse helped in dealing with her anger. Feelings of rejection were experienced by all five women, but the two older women reported that these feelings endured. Emotional loneliness was experienced early on in the divorce process by Geraldine, and Jane perhaps felt a degree of social loneliness due to the loss of her friendship network and the subtle disapproval of her family. But in general and contrary to Wallerstein's (1986) findings, the women reported that they were not lonely, either cherishing time alone and/or having an extensive social network.

The two women with small children (Jane and Helen) experienced the daily stresses of single parenting, running a career and maintaining a home. They also felt the burden of responsibility that single parenting entails. Jane felt that having a small child was an obstacle to dating and to establishing a new social network, but Helen did not find this.

In terms of their relationships with their former spouses, the women with children all expressed difficulty in this area due to the continued attachment they must have with their

ex-spouses in order to co-parent. Jane, in particular, experienced negative interference from social workers and legal system in attempting to establish a co-parenting relationship with her ex-spouse. Sophia's relationship with her former spouse appeared to be especially ambivalent as her self-worth seemed to be persistently linked to his opinion of her, although she felt that her life was far less stressful without him. Sophia and Mary (the two older women) had been financially dependent on their husbands, and this financial dependence created lingering links to their ex-spouses as well as areas where the ex-husbands could continue to exercise control over their ex-wives.

The issue of control is an important one. Following separation and divorce, several of the women reported a sense of loss of control over their lives. This loss of control extended to include control over events, processes, thoughts and emotions occurring at the time.

11.1.2 Resilience

Social support was an enduring theme in all five of the stories, especially support from friends and family. Sophia, who was the only woman in the study with a new partner also experienced support from this person. The types of support provided to the woman appeared to be primarily practical and emotional. Women friends were especially important for Helen, as were other divorced women for Geraldine. Although Jane experienced a loss of friends immediately following her separation, the presence of a house-mate provided great support. Geraldine and Helen grew their network in the post-divorce period, actively seeking out and making new friends.

Spirituality was strongly emphasized by all the women, albeit in different forms. In each case there was an emphasis on spirituality providing a purpose in life, as well as lessons to be learnt from traumatic experience of divorce. For the women in this study, spirituality provided strength in times of crisis. Geraldine, in her story, mentions the importance of love and forgiveness as aspects of spirituality that enhanced her ability to cope resiliently.

Perhaps allied to spirituality are the strong value systems mentioned by Sophia and Jane. Sophia felt that her strong value system was very helpful in that it ensured she kept her integrity and thus felt good about herself. However, in Jane's case her clear sense of right and wrong resulted in her struggling to come to terms with the principle of divorce, especially that it appeared to be acceptable in the circles in which she moved.

Work as a key source of resilience is mentioned by four of the five women. They received extensive support from work colleagues, and work also formed a vital 'island of competence' for these women. They felt affirmed, competent and worthy in their work environments. Work also provided meaning and purpose in life to some women, and was an area where one could regain control of one's life. The routine and challenge of work was important for the women as a distraction from the upheaval in their personal lives.

All of the women except Sophia talk of the importance of their homes as sanctuaries, as places where their creativity can thrive, and where they can enjoy time alone. Time alone, in fact, appears to be a significant element in the journey of recovery as experienced by these five women.

Four of the five women obtained professional help, and it appears that most found this moderately useful. Sophia experienced therapy with a psychologist as *very* helpful and continued therapy on a long-term basis.

Internal aspects of resilience were clearly described by four of the five women. Sophia, however, tended to ascribe internal strength to her religious belief. The other women talked about their sense of their own inner strength, courage and resourcefulness as inherent traits. *All* of them spoke of having hope for the future and an optimistic approach to life in general. Helen and Geraldine, in particular, were extremely self-aware and were consciously setting goals and applying self-discipline to achieve them. Dreams and vision for the future were important, but were only spoken of in a very concrete way by Helen, who could see herself clearly in new roles, environs and a new identity. The other women felt that there was a strong purpose in their lives, but expressed this in much vaguer terms than did Helen. Goals and meaning in life were mentioned particularly by

Geraldine and Helen in terms of reaching out to others, and by Mary, who felt that her work gave meaning to her life and enabled her to touch others' lives in a constructive way.

Sophia, Jane and Helen all mentioned the role of their children in keeping the mothers strong and focused during the process of divorce, and in maintaining a relatively civil relationship with their ex-spouse. The parenting role can also be a source of great pride and may generate a sense of competence for single mothers.

An important aspect of resilience for some of the women was empowerment and the development of competence following separation. Both Jane and Sophia described how they achieved this by taking small steps, each of which enhanced their sense of empowerment and/or competence.

The ability to reframe was alluded to by all of the participants, primarily by focusing on the positive aspects of being separated. This included being grateful for being able to raise children in one's own way, being less tied to another's moods or needs, and being able to spend time alone in one's own home.

Emotional regulation and control were important to the women in the study. All of them, in some way or another, practiced emotional control, which was often a first step towards mastery in other areas, such as parenting or maintaining a civil relationship with the ex-spouse. This must be distinguished from the *suppression* of emotions, which several of the women reported as having a negative effect on their well-being.

In summary, it would appear that *social support, spirituality, personality traits such as optimism, courage and resourcefulness, a future orientation and competence/mastery (including mastery of thoughts and emotions)* are aspects of resilience which enabled these women to navigate the journey of reintegration after separation and divorce. Indeed, four of the five women reported significantly improved functioning following the severe disruption of divorce:

“Most of the time I think I’m thriving..... I feel like I’m growing mentally and spiritually every day” (Helen).

“There are things I can do now, being divorced, that I would never be able to do as a married woman. Which is actually quite liberating... I’m my own master now” (Jane).

“Being single is lovely....Freedom, absolute freedom” (Geraldine).

“As a person, I have grown into a fulfilled, directed, excited human being” (Mary).

Sophia describes her personal growth in a more tentative way: “I wish I could say that after four years of divorce I’m flying... But I don’t think it’s happened.... Not career-wise and all that. But I think definitely on a deeper level, that has happened”

11.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The most difficult aspect of an intervention to enhance resilience through a formal group is that of the uniqueness of each individual’s needs. However, it is recommended that a group designed to assist women, in particular, in dealing with divorce should take into account the following aspects.

Such a group should, primarily, provide *social support* by allowing women to tell their stories and to be heard without being judged. Discovering that one’s own experience is similar to that of others’ can be a very reassuring thing. The group should be able to provide a temporary community, particularly for women whose social network is limited. Thus, the group should allow for the building of relationships within the group, through discussion and social activities.

The post-separation period is often a very chaotic time emotionally. Thus, structured exercises to deal with emotions such as anger, sadness and guilt are helpful in reducing the chaos.

The changed life-styles of divorced women necessitate information and skills-training in certain areas. Lectures and workshops addressing issues such as finance, employment and single-parenting are of great value and enhance the development of competence and mastery in these areas.

Cognitive issues, for example, redefining concepts such as family, could be addressed in either a structured or unstructured manner, using the composition of the group to broaden perspectives. Other cognitive work should include reframing to enable divorced women to alter their view of aspects of their situation.

In order for divorce to be a positive, liberating experience, women need to embark on a journey of self-discovery. In many cases, their self-esteem and identity have been damaged in the process of divorce. Structured exercises to develop insight, self-esteem and a sense of identity should be an integral part of a divorce support group. The development of dreams and goals for the future should be incorporated here.

Considering that most divorced women report other women as their major source of support, it might well be useful to provide groups specifically for divorced women; such groups would not include men. In addition, as the women in this study reported an important spiritual factor in their journey to recovery, it could be valuable to combine spiritual and secular aspects of support in certain groups.

11.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The case study method allows for in-depth exploration of unique individual experiences. One of the limitations of this method, though, is the lack of generalisability of the data. Further limitations of this study include a cultural bias: all of the participants were white, English-speaking South African women. It is also limited in the socio-economic status, in that the participants were all in the upper income group. Various factors contribute to an individual's experience of divorce, such as the reason for the divorce, who initiated the divorce, age and number of children, economic factors, and relationship with the former

partner. This study focused primarily on women who had been left by their husbands for another woman.

11.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As this study focuses entirely on the female perspective of resilience in coping with divorce, it is suggested that the male perspective be investigated. It is possible that men experience resilience in different ways to women, and that the interaction of elements comprising resilience would vary.

Cross-cultural studies of the role of resilience in coping with divorce would shed further light on this field of study. Although the white race group has the highest incidence of divorce (Statistics South Africa, 2005) it would be of interest to investigate this topic in other race groups in South Africa, particularly as there appears to be increasing urbanisation and Westernisation of these population groups. Religious factors, societal influences, family structures, and gender roles are among many factors which may determine the role of resilience during a life crisis such as divorce.

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