THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS INVOLVED IN DIVORCE:

A CRITICAL INCIDENT STUDY


by

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# ABSTRACT

The present research explores the process of coming to terms with the decision to divorce. The research was conducted with 20 women of North-American culture, divorced or separated a minimum of six months with no thought of reconciliation.

The methodology employed retrospective accounts. A semi-structured interview using the critical incident technique pioneered by Flanagan (1954) was used to gather data. The subjects were asked to describe specific incidents which prompted them to reassess their marriage and eventually decide to separate or divorce. They were also asked to describe incidents which made it more difficult to come to that decision.

A total of 175 incidents were collected illustrating a range of experiences which either precipitated or hindered the decision to separate or divorce. Using an inductive method of analysis, the data was organized in a classification schema consisting of three superordinate categories - feelings, cognitions, behaviours - and 33 subcategories. In addition, a summary of the marital problems highlighted in the critical incidents is provided, with examples of the marital dynamics involved.

Finally, a four-stage model outlining the process of coming to terms with the decision to divorce was derived from the category system. The model focuses on the intrapsychic dynamics of the subjects in the decision-making process. The labels given to these stages are disillusionment, ambivalence, cognitive restructuring, and resolution.

The findings of the present research are compared and contrasted to those of social exchange theorists (Albrecht & Kunz, 1980; Levinger, 1965), stage theorists (Duck, 1982; Kaslow, 1981; Ponzetti & Cate, 1988; Vaughan, 1979), and grief theorists (Crosby, Gage & Raymond, 1983, 1986; Wiseman, 1975). The issues raised in the present research are discussed from a gender role perspective, in light of the theories of Attanucci (1988), Eichenbaum and Orbach (1983), Gilligan (1982), Goodrich, Rampage, Ellman and Halstead (1988), Herman (1977), Lerner (1977), Miller (1976; 1983; 1984; 1986) and Rubin (1983).

In conclusion, the category system and model delineated in the present research offer a comprehensive set of experiences of what facilitates and hinders the decision to divorce.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# LIST OF TABLES

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

The body of literature on the breakdown of relationships is extensive. Researchers have noted a multitude of factors associated with the phenomenon. There is much confusion, however, as to what is actually meant by marriage breakdown. Definitions vary widely from one researcher to another. Terms such as marital instability, disruption, dissatisfaction and failure have all been used to connote marital breakdown and yet these terms do not necessarily relate to the same concept. This creates problems in trying to understand and compare various studies and theories. Newcomb and Bentler (1981) use the term "marital breakdown" in a general way to refer to the existence of problems in a marriage. At this junction, what is important to note is that marital breakdown does not follow a simple cause and effect formula, but is a complex, interactive process involving the two marriage partners (Duck, 1982; Kressel, Jaffee, Tuchman, Watson, & Deutsch, 1980; Newcomb & Bentler, 1981; Rasmussen & Ferraro, 1979).

Researchers have been studying relationship problems for many decades. The earliest studies of marital breakdown were basically atheoretical. They related variables such as demographic factors, the spouses'

background, personality traits and social antecedents to marital dissolution. A more recent example of this line of inquiry is Tiit (1981). The 1960's saw an attempt to formulate theories and operationalize variables in order to provide a conceptual framework within which to make sense of the various empirical findings. Research in the seventies and up to the present has expanded the areas considered relevant to a complete theory of marital dissolution to include post-divorce adjustment (Bloom & Caldwell, 1981; Davis and Aron, 1988; Gerstel, Riessman & Rosenfield, 1985; Kitson & Sussman, 1982; Spanier & Casto, 1979). For a detailed review of these studies and the methodological issues that have arisen from them, the reader is refered to Kitson, Babri and Roach (1985), Laws (1971), Newcomb and Bentler (1981), White and Mika (1983).

Divorce is both the end result and an indicator of severe marital breakdown. One explanation for the high incidence of divorce in our era is the rapid cultural transformation which followed the Second World War (Norton & Glick, 1979). Among the changes that resulted, industrialization and increased affluence have contributed to changing people's definition of satisfaction in marriage (Hunt & Hunt, 1977; Nye & Berardo, 1973). With women acquiring greater economic independence, the traditional

patriarchal value system has been challenged and a gradual shift in the balance of power between the sexes has taken place (Scanzoni, 1979). The women's movement, in particular, has contributed to the higher incidence of divorce by changing women's expectations of themselves and of their way of life. The trend towards egalitarianism and the difficulty of partners in adjusting to changing roles has caused severe strain on marriages, often resulting in divorce (Newcomb & Bentler, 1981). Another alleged factor for the soaring rate of divorce is increasing life expectancy which means that marriage partners have to go through many more life transitions with each other nowadays than in the past, when the natural lifespan of a marriage was shorter due to bereavement (Divorce: Law and the Family in Canada, 1983). Other influences on divorce patterns are outlined in Bohmer and Lebow (1978). Beside modernization, they include the kind of kinship system prevalent in the society in question, the status of women, values concerning ownership of property, religion and its influence on the socio-political system, the role of the state in governing personal relationships and the prevailing meaning of marriage. This clarifies how outside factors impinge upon the marital relationship and have a determining influence on its duration and/or termination. Attitudinal changes along with lower economic, social and legal barriers have

influenced the way we think of divorce in Western societies. Divorce is now considered an acceptable alternative to an unhappy marriage.

It is clear that social mores and customs have changed significantly. Many couples have discarded legal formalities and live in common-law unions. Newcomb and Bentler (1981) report an eight-fold increase in cohabitation in the seventies. Considering that the social climate in general is more tolerant and accepting of this type of arrangement, it can be inferred that couples who decide to marry are highly committed to the concepts traditionally associated with marriage such as permanence and the desire to have a family.

Unlike marriage, divorce has been called a culturally unscheduled event (Hagestad & Smyer, 1982). It is a time of transition which is totally unstructured. There are no vows, no celebrations or similar rites of passage to make it easier for the marriage partners who are disengaging from one another (Hancock, 1980). There is wide agreement that the divorce process is a very stressful psychological experience (Chiriboga & Cutler, 1977; Charlton, 1980; Dasteel, 1982; Gerstel, Riessman & Rosenfield, 1985; Herman, 1977; Kitson & Sussman, 1982; Kraus, 1979). The losses to the spouses and children in terms of personal meaning and social definition have been outlined (Hancock,

1980). Research on the grief that accompanies divorce has also been done (Crosby, Gage & Raymond, 1983; Crosby, Lybarger & Mason, 1986; Herman, 1974; 1977). Gender differences in adjustment to separation or divorce have been investigated (Bloom & Caldwell, 1981; Gerstel et al., 1985). It has also been suggested that divorce, albeit a painful experience, is a crisis that provides unique opportunities for personal growth (Kraus, 1979; Wiseman, 1975).

The need to conceptualize divorce as a process in the lifecycle of the family rather than a single event has been noted (Ahrons, 1980; Duck, 1982; Kaslow, 1984). However, despite the vast amount of literature on the topic, there is still a paucity of research focusing on the divorce process as such and even less focusing on the divorce decision from the perspective of the individuals involved (Kitson et al., 1985; Turner, 1985).

**Research Question**

The present study explores the psychological experience of divorce and its concomitant feelings, cognitions and behaviours from the perspective of women who decided to dissolve their marriage. The phrase "emotional divorce", coined by Bohannan (1973), is used throughout this paper to distinguish this aspect of the total experience from its counterparts, for example the legal and economic aspects of

divorce.

More specifically, the research question is three-fold:

1.  What critical events, if any, played a significant role in the women's decision to dissolve their marriage?

2.  What were the feelings, cognitions and behaviours of the subjects in connection with these events?

3.  Are there identifiable common themes that illustrate the process that the subjects went through in coming to terms with the decision to dissolve their marriage?

A fundamental assumption underlying the present research is that the process of emotional divorce, characterized by the withholding of emotional energy from the marriage, begins well before the actual decision to separate or to divorce. For years, an individual might stay in an unsatisfying marriage until he or she decides to take some action. This study will explore what triggered the decision to leave the marriage.

## CHAPTER 2

## Literature review

## Overview

Marriage is the intimate union of a man and a woman. It is also a legal, social, and economic institution. Hence, the dissolution of a marriage has wide ramifications for those involved and for society at large. The investment that the spouses have with each other in terms of emotional energy and time, combined with other factors such as joint assets, children, and the sheer habit of living together for a number of years create a powerful bond. In fact, the marital bond has been found to be strong even in unhappy marriages where disrespect, mistrust and disdain are prevalent. This is attributed to the emotional experiences that a couple have shared over time (Weiss, 1979). As noted earlier, the period preceding the actual decision to divorce has been found to be a very stressful time for the spouses, especially for the person considering divorce. It is generally characterized by a lot of ambivalence (Bohannon, 1973; Duck, 1982; Ponzetti & Cate, 1988; Vaughan, 1979). Kressel and Deutsch (1977) have refered to it as a time of "marital flip-flop" where each spouse alternates in pushing for and opposing the idea of divorce. This is noteworthy because it avoids the

concepts of victim and victimizer often associated with divorce and reinforced by the legal system and its adversarial process in the settlement of divorce. The realities of emotional divorce, as conceptualized by Bohannan (1973) and Vaughan (1979), are often obscured when the legal machinery is set in motion.

The dissolution process of romantic relationships, in general, has been the focus of several studies (eg., Baxter, 1984; Lee, 1984; Lloyd & Cate, 1985; Lynch & Blinder, 1983). Regarding the marital relationship and its demise, the major focus in the literature has been on determinants/and or predictors of divorce. An example is Laner (1978) who used an inductive method of theory building to develop a model that predicts marital dissolution by integrating cultural, societal, dyadic and individual level factors. The relationship between marital quality and marital stability has also received a lot of attention (Lewis & Spanier, 1979; 1981; Thomas & Kleber, 1981; Schumm & Bugaighis, 1985; Utne, Hatfield, Traupmann & Greenberger, 1984). Factors that either facilitate or act as restraints against marriage dissolution have been investigated (Levinger, 1965; 1979) as well as the impact of alternatives attractions and external pressures on marital stability (Green & Sporakowski, 1983; Thompson & Spanier, 1983; Udry, 1981; 1983).

The divorce process has been conceptualized in many ways. However, two major approaches are discernible, social exchange theory and stage theory. The following literature review is primarily organized around these two theoretical frameworks.

## Social Exchange Theories

An element common to many of the theories of marital dissolution is that the reader is presented with a rational choice model in which the individual assesses the desirability of maintaining the marriage by comparing costs and benefits.

For example, Levinger's (1965) work on marital cohesiveness and dissolution provides a basic framework from which to consider the factors underlying marriage durability and divorce. Marital cohesiveness is viewed as the net sum of barriers against dissolution of the relationship and positive bonds or attractions for the spouse. Restraining forces operating to keep the relationship intact include feelings of obligation towards the spouse and/or dependent children; moral prescriptions stemming from religious convictions; external pressures such as those exerted through primary group affiliations, community stigma and legal and economic restraints. In a more positive sense, attractions tending to maintain the union are affectional rewards such as esteem for the

spouse, companionship and sexual enjoyment; socio-economic rewards related to the husband's income, education and occupation as well as home ownership; similarity in social status on the basis of religion, education and age.

Levinger's model (1965; 1979) attempts to predict the likelihood of marital dissolution by assessing simultaneously the attractions in the marriage, the barriers to dissolving the union and alternative attractions outside the marriage.

A major shortcoming of this type of approach to the decision to divorce is that it assumes that human beings are always rational, weighing the advantages and disadvantages of the marital relationship in a cool and logical manner. Affect is totally ignored. Another limitation pointed out by Newcomb and Bentler (1981) is that the model overlooks the role of conflict and negotiation to redress perceived inequities in the marital relationship.

Nevertheless, Levinger's work (1965) was the starting point for several other theorists. For example, Albrecht and Kunz (1980) draw from his framework to explain the decision to divorce.

As mentioned earlier, social exchange theory provides a rational choice perspective which views all social relationships including marriage in terms of costs and

rewards. A postulate is that marital satisfaction does not automatically result in marital stability, nor does dissatisfaction necessarily result in marital dissolution.

The concepts of comparison level (CL) and comparison level for alternatives (CL ALT), originally developed by Thibaut and Kelley (1959), are used to explain why unhappy marriages may be stable for lack of a better alternative and happy marriages unstable because the person has other alternatives which are more attractive than the present situation.

A key assumption is that an individual's happiness or satisfaction in marriage is not based on some fixed standard. Rather, it depends upon the individual's ongoing assessment of what the relationship has to offer compared to the costs entailed in maintaining it. CL is what the person believes he or she deserves in terms of outcomes or rewards from the relationship. When rewards from a given relationship exceed the comparison level, the likelihood of dissolution is nil. On the other hand, CL ALT represents the outcome level that a person thinks he or she can obtain from various alternatives. There is a reciprocal relation between CL and CL ALT. When the person's CL ALT increases, his attraction to his marriage may decrease accordingly and vice versa. Hence, marital satisfaction is relative. It can change over time and can be influenced by many external

factors. Levinger (1979) and Albrecht and Kunz (1980) agree that the decision to leave a marriage will take place "only after drastic shifts have occurred in reward-cost outcomes" (Albrecht & Kunz, 1980, p. 322).

The findings of Albrecht and Kunz (1980), based on self-report data, indicate that the most frequent reason or cost cited for marital breakdown is infidelity. Other reasons are loss of love for each other, financial difficulties, emotional problems and physical abuse.

Albrecht and Kunz (1980) focused on reasons for divorce and used a questionnaire to collect data. In contrast, the current study explores the subject's experience in making the decision to divorce. In-depth interviews are used to generate comprehensive data about the subject's emotions, thinking and behaviours in that process.

Exchange theorists borrowed two other major concepts from sociology to predict marital stability: The "concept of the alternative" and "role competence". The former was introduced by Levinger (1965) when he refered to the potentially disruptive effect on marital cohesiveness of alternate sources of affectional and economic rewards. Others (Edwards & Saunders, 1981; Kalb, 1983) also consider it important in their theoretical formulations of the decision to divorce.

Kalb (1983) elaborates on the concept of the

alternative and postulates that it is the chief factor influencing the decision to divorce. He refers to the decision-making process involved as one of mental weighing of "what the marriage has to offer as compared to the perceived alternative" (p. 348). The evaluation that a person makes of his or her marriage is based on factors inherent in the relationship such as feelings towards the spouse, personality characteristics, interactional and intrapsychic needs met and unmet within the marriage. However, it is also based on factors that are largely independent of the relationship, which he claims form a person's conception of the alternative. These include the occupational identity and financial security of the spouse contemplating divorce, his/her educational background, the presence of children and their ages, the age of the spouses when married and the number of years married, their current age, the perception of one's own physical attractiveness, feelings and attitudes about divorce in general, divorce history, nature and type of pre-marital relationships and the presence or absence of a third party. Kalb's (1983) model seems valid. However, it has not been tested empirically.

Role competence (Nye & Berardo, 1973; Nye & McLaughlin, 1976) is considered to be another important predictor of marital satisfaction and stability. Conversely, one can

assume that role incompetence would be a strong determinant of marital dissolution. Nye and McLaughlin (1976) propose a model derived from group theory which outlines six basic propositions. Propositions five and six are quoted because they are directly relevant to the current study:

5. Individuals (and couples) who receive good reward-cost outcomes from each other are likely to be satisfied with their marriages.

6. Individuals (and couples) satisfied with their marriages are less likely to dissolve them through divorce or separation (p. 193).

Their findings provide support for the research hypothesis, that the competence of the partner in various family roles is directly to the marital satisfaction of the spouse. This was especially the case for wives, whose husband's competence "in all the family roles contributes to the prediction of the satisfaction of the wife" (Nye & McLaughlin, p. 200). Of the six roles tested to predict marital satisfaction for wives - provider, child care, child socialization, recreational, therapeutic and sexual - competence in the therapeutic and recreational roles ranked as the most important. Thus, it was inferred that the roles which involve companionship are the most valued by the wife. Next in importance were the roles which are traditionally left to the wife, such as child care and

child socialization. The husband's competence in these roles was also a good indice of marital satisfaction for the wife. It is suggested that wives may take for granted the provider and sexual roles of men, since they were less important in predicting marital satisfaction for wives.

The major limitation of the research reviewed so far is that it does not investigate the process involved in making the decision to divorce. As pointed out by Edwards and Saunders (1981), not enough attention has been given to the dissolution process as such.

Edwards' and Saunders' (1981) model is comprehensive and integrates many of the major constructs already discussed. Essentially, the model outlines a sequential process leading to marriage dissolution. Its components are presented in the form of seven bivariate propositions which are linked causally. The spouses' social backgrounds, their adjustment in the premarital period, the congruity of the marital relationship, the permeability of barriers and saliency of alternatives, the comparison level of alternatives and goodness of outcome deriving from the marital relationship, and the degree of commitment to the marriage are all elements which are interrelated and predict the likelihood of marital dissolution.

In terms of the research question posed earlier, namely, what process did the subjects go through in coming

to terms with the decision to end their marriage, Edwards'
and Saunders' (1981) model is not very useful. The
sequential process outlined above is not one of
decision-making. Moreover, the findings are presented in
the form of bivariate propositions although few if any
psychological phenomena can be so described. The authors
are the first to acknowledge the shortcomings of their
model. They point out that the various components of the
model are given as though they had equal validity despite
the fact that some are better substantiated by evidence
than others. They also recognize that a multivariate
analysis of the data would most likely cause revisions in
their findings. While the researchers claim to investigate
the "underlying processual nature of dissolution" (p. 380),
the model examines correlates of marital breakdown.

An important work which incorporates exchange theory
and attribution theory is presented by Kelley (1979).
Although Kelley's model was developed with respect to
intimate interpersonal relationships in general, Newcomb
and Bentler (1981) adapted it to marital relationships.
The three basic components of this model are the following:
(1) "Outcome interdependence" relates to the capacity of
each partner to influence the behaviour of the other.
(2) "Transformation of motivation" relates to the ability
and quality of responding to the other which, in turn,

transforms the interactional pattern and structure of the relationship. (3) Finally, "dispositional attributions" are made by the partners on the basis of the interactional shifts that have resulted "from mutual responding to interdependency patterns" (Newcomb & Bentler, 1981, p. 90).

Conflict negotiation and resolution is an essential part of any intimate relationship. As such it must be part of the equation when considering marital dissolution. Kelley's model (1979) describes how negative attributions can result in escalating conflict and eventual marital dissolution. For example, when the needs of one of the spouses are not met in the relationship herein refered to as the "interdependency structure" and the other partner is either unable or unwilling to respond in a way to relieve the dissatisfaction, a negative disposition might be attributed to the partner, for example "He does not care for me...love me...care about this marriage". Repeated disappointments will result in an accumulation of negative dispositions attributed to the partner. This, in turn, will lead to an escalation of conflict and eventual marital breakdown. The content issues may vary from general relationship concerns to specific behaviours, role performance, discordant values or marital expectations. Nevertheless, what is key, at the process level, is that

the issues are not resolved satisfactorily between the couple, resulting in a series of unfulfilling transformations and negative attributions eventually leading to marriage dissolution. Newcomb and Bentler (1981) have demonstrated how general concepts of conflict negotiation can be applied to the marital dyad and further our understanding of marital breakdown.

A criticism of social exchange models is that they fail to explore the relationship dynamics of the couple as it moves towards divorce. Another shortcoming of exchange models, pointed out by Wright (1988), is that they focus mainly on structural and demographic variables and their influence on marital outcomes. Also, tangible resources such as education, income, home ownership are given a disproportionate weight in the balance, while intangible resources such as self-esteem, autonomy and prestige that partners either gain or lose in their interactions with one another are entirely overlooked.

Wright (1988) proposes a model which borrows from social exchange theory and cognitive consistency theory. He questions the assumption made by social exchange theorists, that individuals in a relationship always perceive accurately their outcomes and alternatives. He emphasizes that perceptions change with new information acquired through experience and argues that a model of the

divorce process should take into account "the reciprocal effects between perceptions of outcomes, comparison levels, and alternatives" (Wright, 1988, p. 6). A premise of cognitive consistency theory, that individuals strive for internal consistency, is the cornerstone of his model. The decision-making involved in divorce is discussed as it relates to three decisions points in the process: 1. The decision to separate or not; 2. to file for divorce vs. to reconcile; 3. to obtain a final decree vs. to reconcile. The action taken at each of these junctures is based on (a) the effects of former decisions, (b) the assessment of current outcomes and comparison levels, (c) the "degree of power in the relationship, and (d) resources possessed" (Wright, 1988, p. 7).

This model is more comprehensive than the previous ones reviewed. It highlights some of the intrapsychic and interpersonal aspects of making the decision to divorce and, therefore, is a valuable addition to the literature.

## Stage Theories

Several stage models of the divorce process exist. (Bohannan, 1973; Crosby et al., 1983; 1986; Duck, 1982; Ponzetti & Cate, 1988; Kaslow, 1981; Kessler, 1975; Shapiro, 1984; Vaughan, 1979; Wiseman, 1975). Stage theories postulate a predictable sequence of stages that an individual or a couple undergoes in the process of

divorce. Only those models which attempt to describe in some depth the experience of divorce - from the psychological standpoint - will be reviewed.

Bohannan's (1973) model reflects the complexity of the divorce experience and takes into account the personal and dyadic as well as the filial and social dimensions. There are six overlapping "stations" to this model: Emotional divorce, legal divorce, economic divorce, co-parental divorce, community divorce and psychic divorce. The model does not assume that the experience of divorce is linear. As a matter of fact, the author stresses that the complexity of divorce is due to the fact that a person may experience all of the above at once. Bohannan (1973) distinguishes between emotional and psychic divorce. The first refers to the deteriorating relationship, while the latter refers to the individual's search for autonomy and wholeness in the recovery phase. Only the first stage of his model is presented since it deals with the process taking place before physical separation and, as such, has direct relevance to this study.

The root of emotional divorce, according to Bohannan (1973), is the inability to tolerate change in the partner. Emotional divorce is characterized by a withholding of one's emotional energy from the relationship. The initial hopes and expectations have been

replaced by disappointment (Kessler's disillusionment stage, 1975). It is a time when ambivalence towards the spouse and the marriage prevails. The spouse are growing apart, often investing most of their emotional energy elsewhere, be it in their careers, in community involvement, or in their parenting roles. Displacement of conflict is another hallmark of this stage. Instead of dealing with the underlying issues at the core of their marital difficulties, couples will often argue over sex and money, areas which are alleged to be commonly accepted ones to disagree about in our culture. This results in an increasing blurring of the real problem areas and subsequent inability to resolve them satisfactorily.

Bohannan (1973) provides a broad overview of the entire process of marriage dissolution, including the legal, social and economic dimensions. His formulation of the individual's inner experience in dealing with divorce, although not very detailed, is nevertheless relevant to the present research. The present research intends to focus on "emotional divorce" as Bohannan calls it. More specifically, it will explore the experience of women as they are struggling with the decision to dissolve their marriage.

Kessler's (1975) seven-stage model describes the emotional experience of divorce, primarily from a dyadic

perspective. The "disillusionment stage" marks the onset of the divorce process. It is characterized by a greater awareness of major differences, more time spent dwelling on the negative, and disappointment. If the differences are not discussed and resolved, the couple moves on to the "erosion stage".

Vague feelings of discontent are common in the erosion stage. The spouses may not know exactly what the source(s) of their dissatisfaction are. Nevertheless, the problems are surfacing in the form of negative communication, sexual difficulties and a desire to look outside the relationship to fulfill unmet needs. At this stage, the couple is still open to working things out and many who seek counselling may find that it provides them with the opportunity, support, and communication skills needed to explore problem areas and air grievances. This may lead to a renegotiation of the implicit marital contract. Failing that, deterioration of the marriage continues and eventually detachment sets in.

Typical of the "detachment stage" is not caring enough to fight any longer. Since the important underlying issues have not been dealt with successfully, communication becomes superficial lest conflicts be fuelled anew. Intimacy and shared experiences decrease markedly. Thoughts of separation and/or divorce become more frequent,

at least for the spouse who feels caught in an unsatisfactory arrangement. The model takes into account the fact that the process described above may not be mutual. Consequently, for the spouse who is still committed to the marriage, anger and bargaining are common. As a couple moves towards separation, events and decisions concerning the viability of the marriage gain momentum. At this stage, reversing the process is very difficult because one or both spouses are usually too emotionally disengaged to invest time and effort in the marriage.

"Physical separation", the most clearly delineated stage, is fraught with confusion, uncertainty, and disorganization. Many lifestyle adjustments have to be made as legal, financial, and custody matters are resolved. It is a highly stressful time, one when a multitude of feelings are experienced and must be worked through. To name a few, there is sadness, anger, loneliness, anxiety, a sense of failure, feelings of guilt and sometimes relief. Low self-esteem is common because the individual has to cope with so many new demands that his/her usual coping mechanisms and skills are strained beyond capacity.

The fifth stage is "mourning". The major task involved is twofold: Grieving for the loss of the marriage

and all that it entailed and moving closer to accepting the new reality. In other words, coming to terms with the loss. It should be noted that this task will be especially difficult for the spouse who did not initiate the separation or divorce, since feelings of abandonment are accentuated by the rejection (Kelly, 1982). It is generally acknowledged that it is easier for the significant other to deal with the loss as a result of bereavement rather than if the loss is due to a divorce. The finality of death hastens acceptance (Crosby et al., 1983; Vaughan, 1979). In divorce, however, ambivalence toward the spouse combined with on-going contact concerning joint assets or parenting issues serve to trigger the pain of the loss anew. This often results in fantasies about the past which prevent the individual from directing all his/her energies to dealing with the present.

"Second Adolescence" and "Hard Work" are the last stages of the process of emotional divorce. They correspond to Bohannan's (1973) psychic divorce. In second adolescence, the major task is to become autonomous in all areas of life. It is a time of exploration, value clarification, and especially for individuals who married young, it is a time where identity issues are very prominent. Sexual experimentation is often part of this process. If the individual progresses through this stage

satisfactorily, then self-esteem will increase and the person will generally feel more positive about life.

Hard work refers to the process of integration which must take place. The individual assesses the events that led up to the divorce, recognizes his/her part in bringing this about and assumes responsibility for redirecting his/her life.

Kessler's model (1975) is more detailed than Bohannan's (1973) in describing the emotional aspects of divorce. It also outlines several tasks that the couple must face at each of the stages. The model is limited, however, in that it assumes a linear progression from one stage to another. Vaughan (1979) notes that indeed, the uncoupling process is not straightforward. Rather it is characterized by mutual uncertainty with the relationship moving "back and forth between active trying (at disengagement) and passive acceptance of the status quo..." (Vaughan, 1979, p. 427).

Unlike the foregoing, the present research specifically addresses the experience of one of the spouses, namely the woman who was making the decision to dissolve the marriage. In addition, it will focus only on the time preceding the physical separation in an attempt to delineate and capture more fully the various aspects of the experience at the feeling, cognitive and behavioural levels.

Kaslow's (1981) "diaclectical" model is a synthesis of the theoretical formulations reviewed above. Her model consists of three stages and for each of the stages, she has outlined the corresponding emotions and tasks to be accomplished. For example, the feelings and tasks which accompany the first stage, refered to as the "pre-divorce-deliberation period" are:

| <u>Feelings</u> | <u>Requisite Actions and Tasks</u> |
|---|---|
| Disillusionment | Confronting Partner |
| Dissatisfaction | Quarreling |
| Alienation | Seeking Therapy |
| | Denial |
| | |
| Dread | Withdrawal |
| Anguish | (physical & emotional) |
| Ambivalence | |
| Shock | Pretending all is okay |
| Emptiness | Attempting to win back affection |
| Chaos | |
| Inadequacy | |
| Low self-esteem | (Kaslow, 1981, p. 676). |

The second and third stages are titled "During divorce: litigation period" and "Post-divorce: Re-equilibration". They will not be reviewed as it is not directly relevant to the present research. The major limitation of her work is

that it is not grounded in empirical research.

Another synthesis of research concerning relationship dissolution is presented by Duck (1982) who conceptualizes marital breakdown as evolving through four phases: Intrapsychic; dyadic; social and grave dressing.

The crux of the intrapsychic phase is the evaluation of one's partner. The spouse contemplating divorce must clarify specific reasons for deciding that a withdrawal is warranted. He or she must be able to come up with a personal justification in order to use it later to confront the partner. This phase is characterized by private deliberations and consists of individual thoughts, feelings and concerns. In essence, there is a marked vigilance towards the partner's behaviour and an attempt to assess the internal dynamics of the relationship. Energy is expanded both in coping with the partner and in attempting to modify the partner's behaviour. At this point, the partner may become alerted to his spouse's disaffection through non-verbal cues. One might expect hostility to surface and that the spouse contemplating divorce will be confiding in others. There might also be noticeable changes in attitudes to self and life in general. These are observable behaviours to the spouse and measurable ones to the researcher.

In the first stage, the person is not necessarily

convinced that the relationship is over. Ambivalence is often a hallmark of this period, along with hopes for improvement. It is not until the spouse concludes that the relationship is irredeemably dissatisfactory that the person moves into the dyadic phase.

In the dyadic phase, the two partners become involved in the task of reassessing the relationship and deciding whether it can be repaired or should be dissolved. This changes the dynamic of the situation from private deliberations to having to consider the partner's point of view. For example, the person may be presented with alternative explanations of events which he or she had, hitherto, regarded as crucial in the decision to confront the partner or not. Open discussion may bring an awareness of the actual costs and implications of a disengagement. At this juncture, resolve may be shaken. Frequently, this period is one of oscillation between reconciliation and withdrawal. The partners need to answer questions such as whether or not it is realistic to expect the relationship to work. If the answer is negative, the final steps of this stage involve preparations for the post-dissolution stage. In essence, this requires them to create a "public story" to explain the breakdown of the relationship.

In the social phase, the social network becomes the background for the dissolving marriage. The partners must

account for the disengagement to themselves and to others. A major issue of that stage is the change of status from being a couple to being single. In a society where couplehood is valued, an individual must not only face personal feelings of bereavement and failure but must also deal with awkward position of being single. The social network itself must also adjust to the loss of a previously acknowledged couple.

The last stage, labelled grave dressing, relates to recovery. It is essentially a tidying up of accounts. The former spouses undergo a retrospective analysis of the relationship and of its breakdown. The process is crucial to coming to terms with relationship dissolution.

Duck's (1982) model highlights both the psychological and social aspects of marital dissolution. However, it is yet another theoretical formulation which is not grounded in empirical research. Duck (1982) calls for a systems approach to understanding relationship dissolution. He stresses that disengagement is not a single event but rather a process composed of constituent elements, all of which must be understood and clearly related to other elements.

Building on the work of other grief theorists (e.g., Froiland & Hozman, 1977; Wiseman, 1975), Crosby et al. (1983) generated considerable information on the divorce

process using a qualitative approach.

Their study examined the process of divorce from retrospective accounts of individuals. The objective was to determine if, in the grief work which accompanies divorce, there is a sequence of stages similar to that postulated in Kubler-Ross's (1969) model of bereavement. They examined grief resolution in terms of the sequencing of affect, cognition and behaviour.

They asked their subjects to write an essay describing their feelings, behaviours and cognitions as they related to their divorce. The subjects were given questions as guidelines to facilitate their task. The accounts were analyzed by two independent raters using a simple frequency count. Clusters were made of the various feelings, cognitive and/or awareness statements, and behavioural factors. These were subsequently divided on the basis of who was the more active or the more passive agent in the divorce.

Crosby et al. (1983) present a model based on three chronological stages: First serious thought to separation and/or filing, separation and/or filing to final decree, final decree to penultimate closure.

Of particular significance to the current study are the conclusions reached by the researchers about the process of divorce. First, they discovered a wide variance amongst

their subjects about the manner in which the latter reached the decision to divorce and resolved it for themselves. Secondly, the process itself is generally not a linear one. Rather, it is marked by circularity with "the affective, cognitive, and behavioral realities occur, change, convert, and reoccur in a cyclical manner" (p. 17). Finally, they found a discernible time lag between the active and the passive agent in the resolution of the divorce process, "with the passive agent lagging behind the active agent" (Crosby et al. 1983, p. 17). However, the difference between the active and passive agent was not confirmed in their follow-up study (Crosby et al., 1986).

As mentioned earlier, their major interest was to find out in what ways the grief resolution process, as a result of divorce, differed from that resulting from the loss of the spouse through death. They concluded that, in divorce, there is a general sequence of stages which progresses from denial to bargaining to acceptance.

However, the distinguishing characteristic between loss of a spouse through death or divorce is the element of responsibility. In divorce, there is decision-making whereas in death there is not. It is the decision-making involved that the present study explores.

A valuable typology of the process of marital dissolution is offered by Ponzetti and Cate (1988). They

conducted two-hour interviews with 107 divorced men and women. Using a graph, they identified three distinct periods in the divorce process: (1) Initial recognition of significant marital dissatisfaction; (2) discussion of the possibility that the marriage might end with others; and (3) when action was taken by either party to obtain a legal divorce. Following that, the participants were asked to complete various questionnaires designed to assess several aspects of their marital relationship as it progressed toward dissolution. Levels of conflict, ambivalence, maintenance behaviours, love, trust, and perception of alternatives to their current situation were measured and correlated to each time period identified previously.

Following that, Ponzetti and Cate (1988) classified the marital dissolution processes according to their trajectory. This was done on the basis of six broad characteristics: "The total length of the dissolution process, the number of critical events, the number of downturns, the index of critical events, the index of turbulence, and the index of reconciliation" (p. 7).

Of particular relevance to the present research is their definition of critical events, namely "the number of times in the dissolution process that the participants perceived a change in the probability of divorce" (pp. 7-8). Also, a categorization of the reasons given for the

critical events was done using an adaptation of Lloyd and Cate's work (1985) on attribution. Five descriptors were used: Individual attributions; dyadic attributions; circumstantial attributions; network-nonromantic attributions and network-romantic attributions.

Finally, statistical analyses were performed in four steps. First, a cluster analysis was used to construct a typology of marital dissolution. Next, the characteristics of each were compared with those of the other types. Third, the relationship dimensions were studied with a view to discerning differences among dissolution types. Last, the attributions associated with the critical events were analyzed.

Three types of dissolution were found, based on the duration of the process, from initial recognition of problems to securing a divorce decree. They were labelled rapid, gradual and extended. Characteristics of these types are discussed and compared with reference to the indices mentioned earlier, namely the index of critical events, the index of turbulence and the index of reconciliation.

Their findings concerning relationship dimensions are interesting. No significant differences were found between dissolution types on the relationship dimensions of conflict, love, maintenance, trust, ambivalence, and

marital satisfaction. However, a significant gender effect was noted in that "women reported less trust for their former partners" (Ponzetti & Cate, 1988, p. 13). Also to be expected is that those who initiated the marital dissolution reported significantly less satisfaction and love than noninitiators and those whose decision was mutual.

The measures of love, maintenance, trust, and comparison level for alternatives varied significantly over the three time periods. For instance, both love and trust decreased significantly over each phase. On the other hand, maintenance behaviours such as the amount of time spent discussing the relationship and trying to solve problems were significantly higher during the recognition and discussion phases and lessened during the action phase. Regarding perceived alternatives to the marital relationship, there was a marked increase in reported alternatives in the action phase. Although this tends to confirm a precept of social exchange theory, namely that marital stability is jeopardized as alternative attractions increase, Ponzetti and Cate (1988) indicate that it was not possible to determine what came first, the perception of alternatives which led into the action phase or the action phase which opened up a range of alternatives.

## Other Studies

The following research does not fit neatly into either of the two theoretical frameworks presented so far. Nevertheless, these studies are noteworthy for the following reasons: Federico (1979) introduces new concepts such as the "psychological point of no return" and marital termination strategies. Rasmussen and Ferraro (1979) is one of the few research studies of divorce based on the retrospective accounts of both spouses. Kressel et al. (1980) offer a typology of divorcing couples which underscores the fact that divorce is a complex and differentiated process, oversimplified by the unidimensional perspective of stage theories. Finally, Turner (1985) uses social-psychological theory and seminal research on decision-making to explicate the dynamics of that process as it relates to separation and/or divorce.

Federico (1979) discusses the marital dynamics typical of the period immediately preceding the decision to divorce based on his clinical experience with couples. Intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics are reviewed in detail.

The pre-separation period is considered a very stressful time. The author points out that, often, when a couple seeks marital counselling, one of the spouses has already made a unilateral decision regarding the

non-viability of the marriage. Many of the concepts discussed earlier are addressed in his work. For example, Federico uses the term "click off" to refer to the withdrawal of one's emotional energy from the marriage.

He compares the mental processes involved in coming to the decision of ending the marriage to other types of problem-solving. The decision, he writes, "may be reached silently and after a period of 'back burner' mental activity" (Federico, 1979, p. 94). This is similar to the concept of private deliberations characteristic of the intrapsychic phase outlined in Duck (1982). In the literature on creativity, this is generally called the incubation period, a time where deliberation is taking place below the person's level of awareness. When, occasionally, the decision surfaces in conscious thought, it is quickly suppressed since its implications may be far too threatening to entertain. Denial is at work to preserve the marriage intact, at least outwardly. This may be so even after one of the spouses has passed the "psychological point of no return" hereafter called N/R (Federico, 1979, p. 95).

N/R is an hypothetical construct the author derived from accounts of divorced persons. It means that one of the marital partners has reached a point where he or she cannot return to a previous emotional investment in the

marriage. Often, the individual who has passed N/R behaves as though he or she does not care much about the relationship, acting out his or her decreased investment while, perhaps, verbally professing the desire to see the marriage continue. This results in much confusion and marital conflict.

Federico (1979) also discusses the limitations of social exchange theory in explaining marital dissolution. The major one is that it does not address the issue of how the psychological dynamics of one spouse, for example dissatisfaction with self or life in general, can influence the person's entire outlook on the marriage. While he recognizes that the marriage may be unhealthy and dysfunctional in many ways and that both partners may be dissatisfied, the movement past N/R he argues "may reflect factors that are more primary than the basic interactional dynamics between the spouses" (Federico, 1979, p. 97).

Federico (1979) describes two marital termination strategies often used by a spouse who wants out of a marriage but may be reluctant to admit it. The first, provocation, involves a succession of relationship damaging acts, each a little more serious than the preceding one, aimed at gradually bringing about greater distance. In this scenario, the provoker's objective, which may be more or less conscious, is to get the spouse to request a

divorce, thereby avoiding responsibility for the decision.

The other strategy is sabotage. It differs from the above in that the partner being provoked does not adopt an accommodating stance. Instead, he or she responds in kind which then provides a justification for the other to request a divorce. An example of this is someone who has an affair. When the spouse learns of it, he or she is angry and retaliates by having an affair also. This becomes ground for the provoker to demand a divorce.

In conclusion, Federico (1979) stresses that the dissolution of a marriage is the result of a long process of interactions in the relationship of a couple.

Rasmussen and Ferraro (1979) conducted a study based on retrospective accounts of 32 divorced men and women of middle-class background. Except for five of the couples, they interviewed both husband and wife.

Their findings suggest that although respondents often cited adultery, excessive drinking and financial problems as reasons for divorcing their partner, a causal approach to divorce is much too limited. The researchers reached this conclusion on the basis of the fact that the majority of the respondents reported that these problem behaviours were present from the beginning of the relationship.

The question which this raises is how or why did the behaviour in question become defined as a problem in the

marital dyad? Rasmussen and Ferraro (1979) believe that the problem behaviours are used in the process of marital dissolution to create and escalate a crisis. Once this is done, the situation becomes unlivable for the couple. This, in turn, facilitates the severing of the deep emotional bonds uniting the couple.

The notion that the partner who wants to dissolve the marriage needs to find justification is echoed in Duck (1982). More specifically, it corresponds to the tendency in the intrapsychic phase to focus on the negative aspects of the partner's personality or behaviour. What was previously either overlooked or accepted must now be redefined as problematic.

Based on their research with couples in instance of divorce, Kressel et al. (1980) were able to identify four different patterns of decision-making. The couples were labelled autistic, enmeshed, disengaged or direct on the basis of their style of relating to one another throughout the mediation process.

The characteristics of each type are discussed in detail with regards to several key dimensions, namely degree of ambivalence, level of conflict and openness of communication. The enmeshed and autistic types were found most difficult to work with and their post-divorce adjustment the poorest of all. In contrast, mediation with

the direct and disengaged types was more successful and post-divorce adjustment relatively easier.

Regarding the reasons why these marriages ended, for the most part the answers were typical like lack of love, communication problems, or growing apart. Sexual and financial difficulties were also mentioned by a few participants. However, one clear pattern which emerged from the study is that in half of the cases there was some evidence that the wives were dissatisfied with the level of intimacy in their marriage.

Kressel et al.'s (1980) work is important. It challenges the notion that individuals or couples dissolve their marriage in a predictable and uniform manner. Instead, the divorce process is considered to be multidimensional and highly differentiated. Their typology of divorcing couples suggests that the manner in which a divorce decision is reached is, to some extent, an extension of the way partners related to one another while married. However, due to the small size of the sample and its special characteristics, namely couples who chose mediation to deal with issues relating to their divorce, it is impossible to draw definitive conclusions regarding the reliability of the descriptions outlined in this research. Furthermore, since at least one of the spouses had already decided to initiate divorce proceedings, these categories

may not be totally applicable to the unfolding of the divorce decision from the onset.

Turner's (1985) contribution is that he applies research and theory on decision-making to the divorce decision. Five stages of divorce decision therapy are outlined to help the client make a sound decision. These stages are summarized as follows: In stage one, the individual must come to terms with the decision to seriously consider the possibility of separation or divorce. Stage two involves surveying alternatives in light of one's personal values and objectives. In stage three, a conscious effort is made to weigh the pros and the cons of the decision. In stage four, the individual starts considering how to implement the decision made in the previous stage and how to go about informing others of the decision. In stage five, the decision is announced and the individual may experience relief, even euphoria. However, this may be shortlived if countered with unexpected resistance by the spouse or significant others. Depending on his or her ability to deal with negative feedback, the decision-maker may revert to an earlier stage of the process, remain stuck indefinitely in stage five, or proceed with implementing the decision.

The psychological process involved in making a major life decision such as divorce is generally not as

straightforward as the above implies. A decision of this magnitude usually generates powerful conflict within the individual. Turner (1985, p. 32) outlines five coping patterns in dealing with decisional conflict: "Unconflicted adherence"; "unconflicted change to a new course of action"; "defensive avoidance"; "hypervigilance" and "vigilance". It is noteworthy that only the last one, namely vigilance, is constructive and can lead to a balanced decision. Various problems are associated with the other coping patterns such as excessive delay, arriving at a decision prematurely in order to get a sense of closure, information overload resulting in distorted thinking and oversimplification, emotional overload and high levels of stress, misinformation, stereotyping, "fear of the unknown leading to excessive worry and preoccupation" (p. 34).

Turner (1985) proposes and describes three types of clinical intervention to facilitate the client's process in addressing the question to separate or divorce: Stress inoculation; role playing; and balance sheet. Finally, Turner (1985) also acknowledges the need for more research in this key area of decision-making as it pertains to major life decisions, namely to marry, separate or divorce.

## Concluding Remarks

In an attempt to make sense of the literature on

marital dissolution, the foregoing review was organized primarily around social exchange theories and stage theories. Some of the theories presented isolate and explain small parts of the disturbed marital relationship while others provide a more global perspective. Newcomb and Bentler (1981) discuss the limitations of the existing studies because most focus only on isolated components of marital breakdown and not on how the elements relate to all other factors. A case in point is Spanier and Margolis (1983) study of extramarital sex and its relationship to marital separation.

Newcomb and Bentler (1981) propose that the next step in theory development would be to combine a broad overview of the process of marital breakdown and also account for the various factors involved and their interaction. The theories of Jaffe and Kanter (1979) and Laner (1978) provide a broad perspective of the multi-facetted process of marital breakdown. Hence, Newcomb and Bentler (1981) suggest that they might serve as a "super-structure theory" which could incorporate other theories that are mostly concerned with the micro-level dimensions of marital dissolution. Whatever approach is taken, the need for theory development in this area is widely recognized.

One area that appears to have been overlooked in terms of research activity are studies focusing on the

experiential aspects of the divorce process. The need for research focusing on the decision itself and how it was arrived at has been noted (Kelly, 1982; Turner, 1985). Research on stress related to the divorce experience, for instance, has failed to take into account the role of each spouse in the decision to end the marriage. Moreover, as pointed out by Graziano and Musser (1982), the emphasis in most of the literature on relationship dissolution has been on "cold cognitions" at the expense of the role of affect. The work of Zajonc (1980) challenges the importance given to cognitions, compared to feelings, as determinants of behaviour.

In view of the aforementioned lack of theory development in the area of divorce decision-making, the present research does not attempt to test any hypotheses but is exploratory. It is a critical incident study of the marital dissolution process, from the perspective of women who made the decision to end their marriage. Using retrospective accounts, the study investigates what the subjects were experiencing at the feeling, cognitive and behavioural levels as they were struggling with the decision to dissolve their marriage.

# CHAPTER 3

## Methodology

### Rationale for the Choice of Methodology

It is clear from the preceding literature review that very little research has been conducted to understand marital dissolution from the perspective of those who lived through that experience. Consequently, the present research on the process of marital dissolution is exploratory and, at this stage, aims at generating data which can later be used in theory building.

The critical incident technique pioneered by Flanagan (1954) in the fifties was selected as the most appropriate method for conducting this research. The major reason for this choice is that the critical incident technique is designed to generate descriptive and qualitative data of a domain that is still mostly uncharted, namely the decision-making process leading to marriage dissolution. One of the underlying assumptions of this research is that there are major turning points or markers in the process resulting in the decision to divorce. The critical incident technique is ideal for exploring these turning points because this method requires the subjects to identify and describe them.

Another important reason for selecting this methodology is that it is phenomenological. Unlike experimental methodologies, the phenomenological approach seeks to understand a given phenomenon as people experience it. Thus, the subjective experience of individuals is seen as an area worth investigating (Colaizzi, 1978). Since decision-making is a psychological phenomenon, a methodology which endeavours to descriptively identify that phenomenon is clearly needed at this early stage of research.

## The Critical Incident Technique

The critical incident technique consists of collecting a number of specific incidents in the form of observed behaviours or events that either facilitated or hindered the attainment of the objective under study. The definition of a critical incident given by Flanagan (1954) is that it is:

> ...any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act. To be critical, an incident must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects (p. 327).

A primary objective in using the critical incident technique is to access specific events and to elicit full descriptions of the incidents as opposed to the person's opinions and generalizations about them. Basically, the researcher must be able to assert with some degree of confidence that all incidents recorded had a definite impact on the situation. Therefore, in the process of data analysis, vague reports are discarded because they might contain some inaccuracy.

Another important guideline in using this methodology is that the incidents should be collected from "those in the best position to make the necessary observations and evaluations" (Flanagan, 1954, p. 355). In this study, the woman who made the decision to dissolve her marriage becomes the observer since she is the most competent to report on what was critical for her in arriving at that decision.

## Reliability and Validity of the Technique

A study of the reliability and validity of the critical incident technique was conducted by Andersson and Nilsson (1964). Their research aimed at determining the critical requirements for the training of store managers. Over 1800 critical incidents relating to the behaviour of store managers were reported from four different groups of people considered in a good position to make such observations,

namely, supervisors, store managers, assistants and customers. Classification of the incidents yielded 17 categories and 86 subcategories which were grouped under three superordinate headings.

The data was subjected to several checks to insure its reliability and validity. The question of saturation and comprehensiveness was the first to be addressed. The researchers found that the majority of the categories were formed in the early phase of classification. More specifically, 95% of the subcategories had emerged before two-thirds of the incidents had been classified. Thus, they concluded that a sufficient number of incidents had been collected and that the data was comprehensive enough "to include all types of behavioral units that the method may be expected to cover" (Andersson & Nilsson, 1964, p. 399).

Next, the reliability of the collecting procedure was investigated. Because data were collected through interviews and questionnaires and several interviewers were involved in the study, there was some concern about the different number of incidents reported with each method and from one interviewer to another as well as to the structure of the materials obtained by the different interviewers. The data was subjected to several tests and the researchers were satisfied that the factors outlined above did not

account for any significant difference in the number and structure of the incidents reported.

The researchers tested the reliability of their categorization system by asking several independent raters to classify random samples of incidents into the existing categories and subcategories. The results confirmed that the category system already established was sound and objective because independent raters reclassified the incidents with good levels of agreement among themselves and also in relation to the original sort.

The next important question to be addressed pertained to the validity of the critical incident technique. To this end, the researchers conducted a content analysis of the literature used in the training of store managers. The object was to verify that all important aspects of the task had been covered in the category system. For the most part, the contents of the literature corresponded to the aspects of the job already identified in the category system. Therefore, they concluded that the method is valid.

Still pertaining to the validity of the study, another question was raised: Whether or not the incidents collected were representative of behaviours that would be considered important or critical to the work of a store manager by a large number of evaluators?

In the past, the critical incident technique was criticized on the grounds that the evidence it generated was of no practical value because the incidents represented extreme cases rather than what was typical of the activity under study.

In addressing this key issue, the researchers designed a six-point scale and asked 44 supervisors, 122 store managers, 45 assistants, and 89 psychology students to rate the 86 subcategories derived from the incidents collected in their study. They found that only five subcategories were rated as unimportant by the four groups of raters.

Another interesting finding was that subcategories with few recorded incidents were nevertheless rated as important by all four groups. Hence, we can conclude that frequency does not constitute, in and of itself, an adequate measure of the significance of a particular behaviour unit.

In summary, Andersson and Nilsson (1964) applied a variety of methodological checks in order to test the critical incident technique. Their findings indicate that the method is both reliable and valid.

## Description of Research Design

**Sample**. The present research was conducted with a group of individuals who were separated from their spouse and had made the decision to dissolve their marriage. The following selection criteria were used in order to maximize

the homogeneity of the sample:

1. Women only were selected since there is ample reason to believe that there are gender differences associated with marriage and, by extension, with the divorce process (Bernard, 1972; Bloom & Caldwell, 1981; Chiriboga & Cutler, 1977; Gerstel et al., 1985; Herman, 1977; Kitson & Sussman, 1982).

2. It had to be the first divorce experience for all subjects. More than one divorce experience could have resulted in a different set of emotional responses for the person.

3. All subjects had to be separated from their spouse a minimum of six months. This was to ensure that sufficient time had elapsed for them to have gained some perspective on the process they had undergone.

4. The separation had to be permanent. Potential participants were asked if they considered their separation final. An affirmative response to this question and the length of time already separated were primary factors in selecting the participants for the study. The majority of the subjects were separated between 24 and 36 months at the time of interviewing. It did not seem feasible to use either the criteria of legal separation or divorce since either event may have been so temporally distant from the physical separation as to significantly impede or bias

recall.

5. The subjects were to have been married and cohabitating with their spouse for a minimum of three years prior to the separation. The rationale was that it implied a greater commitment to the relationship and a willingness to working things out. This criterion was not strictly adhered to in a few cases where the subject had cohabitated with their spouse for three years prior to separation, although they had not been legally married for the entire period. Thus, in reporting demographic data on the duration of the marriage prior to separation, the date of the legal marriage was used as the basis for the calculation. While this is far from ideal because it does not give an accurate reading of the actual time invested in the relationship, it is an arbitrary decision which simplifies a complex issue, namely, when does commitment to a partner and/or a relationship begin? For example, in this study, seven marriages were preceded by a period of living together or common-law relationship lasting from 10 months to 8 years.

6. The subjects had to be Caucasians, from the mainstream North American culture.

**Demographic information.**

1. The age of subjects ranged from 29 to 45 years old. The majority were in their thirties at the time of interviewing.

2. The subjects were residents of a large urban center in Western Canada, were born and raised in Canada, with the exception of three who had emigrated to Canada in the past 10 years - two from the United States and one from England.

3. Eight subjects were divorced, one had a legal separation agreement, one had started divorce proceedings and one was widowed shortly after the separation.

4. The table below shows the distribution of subjects and the duration of marriage up to the time of separation.

**Table 3.1**

**Years of marriage prior to separation**

| Years married | # Subjects | % |
|---|---|---|
| 1-5 yrs: | 9 | 45 |
| 6-10 yrs: | 7 | 35 |
| 11-15 yrs: | 1 | 5 |
| 16-20 yrs: | 1 | 5 |
| 21-25 yrs: | 2 | 10 |
| Total: | 20 | 100% |

5. 15 of the 20 subjects had some post-secondary education. At the time of separation, four subjects had secondary education, four had some vocational training, seven had a bachelor degree, three held a masters degree and one, a doctorate. At the time of interviewing, five

subjects were pursuing advanced studies.

6. 10 of the 20 subjects had full-time employment throughout their married life. Only four subjects were full-time homemakers and the rest either worked part-time, intermittently or pursued studies on a full-time or part-time basis.

7. Eight subjects had children from their marrriage. Two of the women were single mothers with one child at the time of their marriage. Another subject was expecting a child. Their spouse was not the child's natural father. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, the presence of children was very significant in keeping the women from making the decision to divorce earlier. Similarly, for the three women who had a child from a former relationship or were expecting one, the wish to have a father figure for the child and the need to be taken care of were factors which had an important bearing on their decision to marry. However, it is not within the scope of this study to investigate the reasons which led the subjects to marry and whether or not they made a suitable choice of partner.

**Procedure.** Volunteers for the study were recruited in several ways. First, notices (Appendix B) were posted at a number of key locations throughout the university campus, for example at the Women's Students Office, at the School of Social Work, at the Department of Counselling

Psychology and in the lobby of a student family housing complex. Secondly, an attempt was made to broaden the spectrum of the sample and notices were posted on the bulletin boards of several community centres, the Women's Resources Centre located downtown and some colleges in the outlying areas of the city. Furthermore, several family service agencies and counsellors in private practice were informed of the research and asked to refer potential volunteers. Thirdly, the researcher made a couple of presentations to groups in an effort to recruit more volunteers. One was to a class of fellow students in Counselling Psychology; the other was to a group for separated individuals offered through a local family service agency.

Those who contacted the researcher were screened in a short telephone interview. The object of the screening was to determine whether or not the interested party met the six main criteria outlined above. At that time, volunteers were also given a general statement about the nature of the research. When the person met the sampling criteria, a mutually convenient time and place were determined to hold the interview.

Finally, a letter briefly outlining the study and setting out the interview questions was sent to the prospective participant, approximately one week prior to

the interview (Appendix C). This was done to allow the
person time to reflect on the questions in preparation for
the interview, as a way of encouraging the co-researchers
to be more active in the research process. Moreover, given
the complex nature of the topic, the expectation was that
it would make the interview more focused and data gathering
easier. A consent form (Appendix D) was also included in
the package.

**The interview.** An interview lasting from one hour
and a half to two hours was conducted with all 20
subjects. The interviews were done at the subject's home
or at an office made available at the university. Each
interview was audio-recorded.

The interview was standardized. It consisted of
open-ended questions prepared beforehand and asked in the
same order of all the subjects. This format allowed the
counsellor to respond with empathy to the subject's sharing
and to elicit further material as needed, through the
judicious use of probes and active listening. Used in this
way, the "standardized open-ended interview" (Patton, 1980)
is by far superior to questionnaires or survey methods in
that it brings out the uniqueness and richness of each
person's experience, while also allowing for similarities
to emerge.

All interviews were prefaced by restating the general

aim of the study as follows:

I am studying divorce from the perspective of women who made the decision to dissolve their marriage. More specifically, I would like to know how you came to that decision and what were the critical events which played an important role in your decision to leave the marriage. I also want to know what significant factors, if any, made it more difficult to come to that decision.

Once the main objective of the study was stated, the interviewer inquired if there were any questions and clarified anything that was confusing to the subject. Furthermore, a definition of a critical incident was provided to the subjects in the following terms: "Something that happened that had a major impact in bringing you closer to making the decision to end the marriage or, alternatively, an event which stands out because it kept you in the marriage longer".

Following this introduction, the subject was asked to respond to the following questions:

1. I would like you to focus on a time in your marriage when you began to have serious reservations or doubts about your relationship with your husband. When was that?

2. Can you remember a specific incident or several small incidents when something significant happened, either

between you and your spouse or outside the relationship, which made you question your marriage and consider separation or divorce? Please take a few minutes to recall the incident in detail and when you are ready to describe it, let me know.

3. Can you describe exactly what happened?

4. What led up to it?

5. How was that particular incident important and meaningful to you?

6. What changed for you through this incident?

7. Did that make a permanent and lasting change in your attitude towards your marriage?

8. How did you feel about the incident at the time?

9. How did you respond? What actions did you take, if any?

This format was followed to elicit as many clear descriptions of incidents as possible from the subjects. Sometimes, a subject made general statements about her marriage or her spouse in response to the questions. When this happened, the interviewer responded with empathy to the underlying feelings expressed but also reiterated the purpose of the study and asked the subject to describe as concretely as possible the events and experiences which made her decide to end her marriage.

Questions 6 and 7 were designed as extra measures to

check the validity of the incident considered critical in the subject's decision-making process.

A similar set of questions was asked to bring forth descriptions of critical incidents which checked the person's movement towards separation or divorce. The assumption underlying the terminology used is not that the person necessarily had a definite and conscious goal to leave her spouse, was set on an irreversible course to achieve this and ran into some obstacles in that process. Nevertheless in several cases, once the women had come to that decision, the task of finding ways of implementing the decision still lay ahead.

Data was collected until redundancy seemed obvious: 20 subjects provided a sufficient number of incidents for that criterion to be met. Although it is far from ideal, the difficulty in finding more volunteers and time constraints were also factors which influenced the present researcher's decision to discontinue data collection.

## Data Analysis

**Initial category construction.** The audio-taped interviews were listened to with the intent of identifying the critical incidents reported by the respondents. Each incident was coded and transcribed verbatim onto index cards. After having transcribed the incidents, a reading of all the incidents from the same interview was undertaken

and the incidents were placed in chronological order, if they had not already been given in that sequence. Notes taken during the interview with regard to the time frame involved were called upon to fill the gap and in several cases where this was feasible, the researcher contacted the subject to ascertain the accuracy of the sequence. Although subjects were asked to describe incidents from when they first began to experience severe doubts about their marriage and so on until they made the actual decision to end the marriage, some respondents were too caught up in the telling and found it difficult to recall incidents in chronological order.

Incidents which were not full and precise were discarded because, using the critical incident technique, vague reports might indicate that the data was incorrect (Flanagan, 1954).

Once critical incidents were transcribed, another major task lay ahead. Since the majority of incidents were described at great length, they were summarized into one paragraph. Great caution was exercised to extract with accuracy the essential features of the incident. Each summary was written to convey an understanding of the context, feelings, thoughts and behaviours of the subject whenever these were explicit. To ensure that the meaning of the incident was not altered in the process of

summarizing, verbatim extracts were used as often as possible.

Once this task was completed, the categorizing process began. Several readings of the incidents and complete interview protocols were required for the researcher to become familiar with the data. Using the theoretical framework of Crosby et al. (1983) as a guide, the incidents were sorted into five major categories as follows: (1) Topic of the incident (2) Feelings (3) Cognitive Processes (4) Behaviours (5) Turning point.

This categorization scheme also flowed automatically from the research questions initially posed: namely, what were the feelings, thoughts and behaviours of the subjects in coming to terms with the decision to end their marriage.

Each superordinate category with the exception of the "turning point" comprised several subordinate categories. There were 21 subcategories under topic, 23 under feelings, 17 under cognitive processes and 15 under behaviours. Each incident was rated on all the above dimensions and a frequency count was done for each subordinate category. However, with an average of 8.8 incidents per subject and 20 interviews, it soon became apparent that this approach was too cumbersome. While it yielded very detailed and rich information about each particular incident, there was much overlap between the subcategories. They lacked

distinctiveness and it was difficult to grasp patterns because of the sheer volume of data involved.

**Refinement of the category system**. The next attempt at categorizing the data followed the approach outlined by Flanagan (1954). The incidents collected were subjected to an inductive categorization process. As well as being "more subjective than objective", this process has been described as "requiring insight, experience, and judgement" on the part of the researcher (Flanagan, 1954, p. 344). It is a laborious task which requires the researcher to struggle with the data until common themes emerge. While keeping with the actual data at hand, without adding or taking away from it, the researcher must go beyond the specific content of each incident and discover what links this particular incident to the others. In other words, the researcher is looking for the underlying pattern(s) which give(s) meaning to the particular incident in relation to the frame of reference selected. In the present study, the frame of reference was what facilitated or hindered the woman's decision to leave her marriage.

Basically, the procedure consists of the following steps: First, a small sample of incidents is sorted on the basis of their similarity. These groupings become the framework for the evolving category system. Next, the

tentative categories are given short titles which convey meaning without detailed explanation. As recommended by Flanagan (1954), caution was taken that the headings reflect the same level of specificity-generality. At this stage, brief definitions of the categories are usually written out. As new incidents are classified, categories are added or reformulated as needed. This process continues until all incidents have been sorted. Throughout the whole process, the researcher was careful not to impose her own theoretical assumptions on the data but to let the categories emerge from the incidents themselves. This is what is meant by an inductive approach to categorization. Patton's (1980) description of this type of research design is particularly enlightening because it clearly shows the contrast with deductive approaches used in experimental designs:

> A qualitative research strategy is inductive in
> that the researcher attempts to make sense of the
> situation without imposing preexisting expectations
> on the research setting. Qualitative designs
> begin with specific observations and build toward
> general patterns. Categories or dimensions of
> analysis emerge from open-ended observations as
> the researcher comes to understand organizing
> patterns that exist in the empirical world under

study. This contrasts with the hypothetico-deductive approach of experimental designs which require the specification of main variables and the statement of specific research hypotheses before data collection... The strategy in qualitative designs is to allow the important dimensions to emerge from analysis of cases under study without pre-supposing in advance what those important dimensions will be. The qualitative methodologist attempts to understand the multiple interrelationships among dimensions which emerge from the data without making prior assumptions about the linear or correlative relationships among narrowly defined, operationalized variables (Patton, 1980, pp. 40-41).

**Reliability**. With the critical incident technique, the accepted method to test the reliability of the category system is to ask one or more independent raters to sort the incidents in the categories provided. Andersson and Nilsson (1964) recommend that an acceptable level of agreement between raters is 75 to 85% for categories and 60 to 70% for subcategories.

A fellow student in Counselling Psychology was asked to sort the incidents. Good agreement was found between her sort and the original sort. More specifically, the percentages were 96% for categories and 87% for sub-categories.

Subsequently, the incidents were submitted to another independent rater. The results of the second sort did not indicate good agreement with the original sort or the first rater's sort.

Several reasons can account for this. First, the second rater who was not a Counselling Psychology student was not familiar with the type of content analysis used in analyzing transcripts of counselling sessions, a task which is similar to that required of the raters. Secondly, the two raters worked under different conditions. Although this was of their own choosing, the first rater sorted the incidents of a couple of interviews at a time and the average time spent at this task was generally one and a half hour per sitting. In contrast, the second rater sorted incidents from a random sample of 14 interviews in one sitting of some five to six hours duration. Fatigue and time pressure may be factors that interfered with doing an optimal job. Moreover, the first raters were only given verbal instructions and the category labels without the benefit of having operational definitions which would assist them in making some of the difficult decisions required in classifying the incidents. Nevertheless, the fact that the two independent raters obtained differing results was interpreted to mean that there were some problems either with the category system itself or with the

manner in which the sorting task was introduced and carried out. Consequently, operational definitions were written out for all the subcategories. In addition, an instruction sheet outlining the various steps involved in the sorting task was prepared for future raters.

Subsequently, a third rater (a graduate from the Counselling Psychology program) was hired to sort all the incidents. She was asked to proceed one interview at a time as the previous raters had been asked. Given the complexity of the material, this was felt to be the best approach. As with the first rater, she worked at her own pace over several days. As was the case with the two previous raters, the researcher was on hand to answer questions that arose during the sorting process.

In reviewing her work, good agreement was found between her sort and that of the first rater. The exact percentages of agreement between the two raters were 96% for superordinate categories and 86% for subcategories. This indicates that the category system is both valid and reliable.

**Content validity.** With respect to content validity, the completed category system was submitted to a group of marital therapists for their impressions regarding its comprehensiveness and accuracy. One of them, responding in

writing, stated unequivocally that the category system had captured the essence of the process of coming to terms with the decision to divorce as he knew it, from his personal experience and 15 years of clinical work (Dr. Richard E. Campbell, personal communication, April, 1987).

This constitutes additional evidence regarding the validity of the categories and subcategories developed from the research data and indicates that the category system is a fair representation of the experience of coming to terms with the decision to divorce.

# CHAPTER 4

## Results

In the following sections, the results are presented next to the initial research questions.

1.  **What critical events, if any, played a significant role in the subjects' decision to dissolve their marriage?**

The subjects described a total of 154 facilitating and 21 hindering incidents which were critical in their decision to leave their marriage. This is an average of eight per person.

The facilitating incidents cover a broad range of topics and most of them reflect severe and on-going marital problems. Hence, it can be said with confidence that for the majority of the subjects, the events were critical precisely because of the repetitive and chronic nature of the marital dysfunction it illustrated. Some women were very explicit on that point, saying that their decision was not the result of any one single incident. Instead, they attributed it to the accumulation of unresolved problems in the marriage and to their reaching a point where they were no longer hopeful that constructive change would take place. This led to an unwillingness on their part to continue investing themselves in working on the marriage

and ultimately to their decision to divorce.

Table 4.1 will give the reader an overview of the type of marital problems which were directly related to the subjects' decision to end their marriage. They are organized in order of frequency reported.

Problems which are usually symptomatic of a dysfunctional marriage such as poor communication, deterioration of the sexual relationship, and so forth were not included unless the subject described it in terms of a specific incident which was significant in her decision to leave. Furthermore, subjects often reported more than one problem contributing to their decision to leave. While it is important to note that the marital problems listed in table 4.1 did not happen in isolation from one another, it is not within the scope of this study to analyze their interrelatedness.

**Table 4.1**

**Marital problems related to**

**the decision to dissolve the marriage**

| Marital problems | Frequency | %[a] |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Communication problems..................... | 10 | 22 |
| 2. Extra-marital relationships............... | 8 | 18 |
| 3. Physical and verbal abuse.................. | 5 | 11 |
| 4. Alcohol and/or drug abuse.................. | 4 | 9 |
| 5. Role incompetence.......................... | 4 | 9 |
| 6. Inflexibility of spouse re wife's desire for a more egalitarian marriage | 4 | 9 |
| 7. Lack of support for wife's career goals.... | 3 | 7 |
| 8. Workaholism ............................... | 3 | 7 |
| 9. Sexual incompatibility..................... | 3 | 7 |
| 10. Conflict with in-laws | 1 | 2 |
| Total: | 45 | 100% |

[a]= Percentage of the total number of incidents illustrating marital problems.


**1. Communication problems** were described by 10 subjects although such difficulties were implicit in all the accounts. This is especially so if one adopts the view that any behaviour between marital partners is a communicative act and an attempt to define the

relationship. The multiciplicity of communication levels present in any interaction is also an important consideration when looking at communication in a couple relationship. The following examples from this study illustrate the above principles:

After 15 years of marriage, husband abruptly leaves with a mistress. One year later, he implores his wife to let him come back and start afresh. She accepts since they have three children together and she still loves him. Six months after their reconciliation, she learns that he is having an affair with one of his patients. While he verbally professed wanting the marriage to work, his actions conveyed another message. She interprets this as "him not trying to make a go of it with [her]" and she loses the trust she had placed in him.

In another case, the question of starting a family has become the focus of a power struggle with the wife insisting that they attend marriage counselling and resolve their difficulties before she will consider having a child and the husband refusing to do so. When he makes a unilateral decision to stop using contraceptives, the wife decides to take a separate extended holiday abroad because she does not want to risk getting pregnant. However, she is not honest about her motivations, pretending instead that she is only using the same prerogatives he has on

previous occasions, namely taking a separate holiday. This angers husband who retaliates. An irreversible and total communication breakdown ensues.

Communication problems were also described as "not connecting" on an emotional level with the spouse, "not sharing what's important", "not sharing the same reality" and were construed as lack of empathy on the husband's part in a number of cases. In all cases, the women identified issues which they felt should be dealt with by discussing them with their spouse. However, after several attempts to communicate, they retreated because of their spouse's defensiveness or unwillingness to look at the issues.

In one example, subject has been telling her husband that they need to talk about a given situation. He agrees in principle but avoids dealing with it every time she brings it up. Subsequently, she hears that he is looking for a new family home. She believes it is her husband's way of making her happy but realizes that they "were really not communicating".

One woman felt that her husband's reply to her emotionally charged letter, namely "that it would be challenging" to work towards resolving their marital problems, was typically too detached. She interpreted this as indifference and unwillingness to "get down to the nitty gritty of emotional contact" and resolved to leave shortly thereafter.

2.  **Extra-marital relationships** were reported in 8 out of the 20 marriages.   In three cases, it was the husband who had extra-marital relationships.  Two of the subjects whose husbands had affairs knew about them and accepted this situation.

These women did not report their husband's infidelity as particularly significant in their decision to leave other than to use it as an opportunity to ask for a separation or a divorce.  The fact that their husbands were involved with other women made it easier for them to come out and express their desire to dissolve the marriage because they felt that he would be more receptive to the idea.

There were five women who reported having affairs themselves and this was significant in their decision to leave in the following ways: (a) For four of the subjects, the extra-marital relationships were a catalyst.  However, with the exception of one woman who has since married her lover, all the affairs were short-term, lasting from a couple of weeks to a couple of months. Nevertheless, it provided the impetus needed to get out of an unsatisfactory marriage;  (b) the affairs confirmed the subjects' feelings of attractiveness and, in two cases, there was anticipation of the relationship continuing once the women left her marriage.   These findings lend support to Kalb's (1983)

proposition that the decision-making process involved is, to some extent, one of mental weighing of "what the marriage has to offer as compared to the perceived alternative" (p. 348).

Of the five subjects who engaged in extra-marital relationships, only one did so for an extended period of time. In this case, the subject had lovers for years. She reports that this is how she coped with her unhappiness. In retrospect, she recognizes that this is when the marriage started falling apart. It resulted in unfavourable comparisons of her husband to her lovers and in withdrawal of emotional energy that might have otherwise been used to work on the marital problems.

3. **Physical and verbal abuse** was a major problem in five of the marriages. It happened in conjunction with alcohol abuse in three cases. In one case, there was verbal abuse only, with threats of physical violence. In half of the marriages where there was physical abuse, the subjects were motivated to leave when the abuse was no longer directed solely at them, but was extended to the children. All of these women stated that an important factor in their decision to leave was wanting a better family environment for the children.

In one case, family violence was extreme with husband threatening to kill his wife and on occasion pointing a

loaded gun to her head. When he called the crisis centre and made threaths of killing his whole family, subject started to believe that he was actually capable of it and this prompted her to leave.

4. **<u>Alcohol and/or drug abuse</u>** led to physical abuse, except in one case. Subjects were caught in the vicious cycle of drinking, physical abuse, repentance. One of the dynamics which was typical in these marriages was that the wife rescued the husband by taking care of everything, thereby allowing him to continue acting like an irresponsible child. In family therapy, this is known as the overfunctioning wife. It is when these women gained some awareness of how they contributed to the problem and stopped playing the role of rescuer that the marriages fell apart.

5. **<u>Role incompetence</u>** is a concept this researcher adapted from Nye and McLaughlin (1976). It is the opposite of role competence. It is a factor in the cost/reward equation which, according to social exchange theory, influences marital stability. Marriages where costs are low and rewards are high are deemed less likely to dissolve than those where the reverse is true. Role competence is posited as a predictor of marital satisfaction and stability. The traditional definition for male role competence in our society is that the man be a good

provider. On the basis of this definition, the findings of this study would support Nye's proposition. In three of five cases, the husband's inability to hold stable employment and be a good provider was a determining factor in the subject's decision to dissolve her marriage. In two of those marriages, role incompetence was related to alcohol and/or drug abuse.

Another definition of role competence emerges from the data. In two marriages, the husband's inability to be nurturing when subjects were ill was significant in their decision to dissolve the marriage.

6. **Inflexibility of the spouse regarding his**

**wife's desire for a more egalitarian marriage.** In all four cases, the subjects felt short-changed in the traditional marriage they had once consented to. They had come to see their marriage as an unfair arrangement by which they gave more than they received. Their dissatisfactions centered around issues of division of labour in the home, being considered an equal partner in decision-making, and generally wanting to be taken seriously. One woman, in particular, resented the condescending and unsupportive attitude of her spouse when it came to her interests. She felt cheated that, having been supportive of him for years, he did not reciprocate.

7. <u>__Lack of support for the wife's career goals__</u>. This issue was critical in the decision of three subjects. The main theme is the same but each case highlights a different aspect of the problem. In one case, the subject wanted to pursue career goals but her husband was pressuring her to start having children. In another, the subject wanted to make a career change which involved returning to university. Her husband was not supportive of the idea. In the last case, the subject wanted to move to a metropolitan area where her career opportunities would be enhanced but her spouse was totally opposed to it.

8. __Workaholism__. In all three cases, the subjects were disillusioned because their expectations of intimacy were not fulfilled in the marriage. Their husband devoted most of their energy to their work or hobbies.

In one case, the husband was a partner in a small business and he spent 60 to 70 hours a week at work. In his leisure time, he usually had renovating projects to occupy himself. The subject deplored the lack of shared activities. The situation became critical when she had to deal with a series of crises on her own because of his unavailability and lack of support.

Another subject recalled having to argue for one year for her husband to agree to come home for dinner. An academic, he usually stayed at the university until

midnight every day of the week. The incident which precipitated the break-up occurred when he did not inquire about the results of her pregnancy test. She interpreted this to mean that he was more concerned about his work than about her.

In the last case, the couple had shared outdoor and social activities before marrying. However, the husband gradually began to withdraw from these and occupied all of his leisure time fixing cars which was his hobby. The situation remained unchanged despite the subject's attempts to interest him in doing things together.

9. **Sexual incompatibility** manifested in lack of interest on the part of their spouses was a major concern for two of the subjects. They ended up initiating sexual contact most of the time and, in one case in particular, the woman was very upset that her husband called her a nymphomaniac when she did.

In another case, an extra-marital relationship which was physically satisfying meant to the subject that her "marriage was lacking in that and every other area as well" and that she could be sexually responsive although she was not with her husband.

10. **Conflict with in-laws** was significant in the break-up of one marriage, although the problem was compounded by communication difficulties and sexual incompatibility. The

subject never felt accepted by her in-laws who were of a different race and she resented the fact that her husband did not stand up to his family to support her when they were critical of her.

The subjects described only 21 hindering incidents which illustrate their reasons for remaining in an unsatisfactory marriage as long as they did. The reader will find them listed in Appendix A, along with the facilitating critical incidents. While they were not able to recall many specific incidents depicting what made it difficult for them to come to the decision to leave the marriage, the subjects nevertheless mentioned several reasons or factors which prevented them from leaving the marriage sooner. Table 4.2 outlines the reasons given by 16 of the 20 respondents. Four subjects did not report any reason.

**Table 4.2**

**Reasons for staying**

| | Reasons for staying | Frequency | %[a] |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Traditional values .........................7 | | 16 |
| 2. | Feelings of inadequacy.......................7 | | 16 |
| 3. | Hope that marriage will improve.............5 | | 12 |
| 4. | Importance of the house.....................4 | | 10 |
| 5. | Religious background and/or beliefs........4 | | 10 |
| 6. | Marriage counselling........................3 | | 7 |
| 7. | Fear of spouse..............................3 | | 7 |
| 8. | Feeling responsible for the spouse.........2 | | 5 |
| 9. | Economics...................................2 | | 5 |
| 10. | Lack of energy...............................1 | | 2 |
| 11. | Lack of information.........................1 | | 2 |
| 12. | Positive qualities of the spouse............1 | | 2 |
| 13. | Common interests............................1 | | 2 |
| 14. | Shared history..............................1 | | 2 |
| 15. | Respect for spouse's parenting abilities | 1 | 5 |
| | Total: | 43 | 100% |

[a]= Percentage of incidents illustrating reasons for staying.

In summary, the women's decision to leave their marriages was not triggered by one single incident. The majority of subjects attribute the marital break-up to several interrelated factors which made them think that the marriage was unworkable. One subject describes the process she went through prior to separation in the following way:

> The way I visualize the process is just like walking up a series of stairs; there's this progression and suddenly you realize well, okay, I'm on the landing now, I'd better start walking. It wasn't so much the one specific thing, it was the accumulation.

Apart from the marital problems discussed above, personal growth was a key factor for all the subjects in coming to terms with the decision to dissolve their marriage. (Personal growth resulted from the struggle to reconcile the conflict between what their marriage had to offer and their expectations.) Nine of the 20 subjects participated in groups, namely personal growth, consciousness-raising and self-help groups, or had some individual counselling. This gave them the support they needed to explore the problems and come to a decision. Through groups and personal counselling, the women learned to trust their feelings and perceptions. (As a result, they experienced a major change in self-concept.) As one woman put it, "I began to see myself as someone who had to take

responsibility". Personal transformation for her came about from reading feminist literature. She describes the process as a "conversion experience, a genuine revelation and an inner experience" which resulted in her adopting a different attitude towards the marriage and her husband. The process was described in similar terms by several other subjects.

2. **What were the feelings, cognitions and behaviours of the subjects in connection with the critical incidents?**

The category system developed from the descriptions of critical incidents collected from the subjects focuses primarily on the woman's inner experience and is organized specifically around what were her feelings, cognitions and behaviours in connection with these events. In this way, the reader will acquire an overall understanding of the process the women underwent in coming to terms with the decision to dissolve their marriages. Thus, the three superordinate categories which emerge naturally from the data are:

       I     Feelings

      II    Cognitions

     III   Behaviours

In the following pages, the subcategories in each major grouping will be presented.

In category I, "feelings", 12 subcategories were developed. The first six illustrate what facilitated the women's decision to leave their marriages. The last six relate to what made it more difficult to come to that decision.

**Table 4.3**

**Subcategories under category I - feelings**

|     |                                   | Frequency | % [a] |
| --- | --------------------------------- | --------- | ----- |
| 1.  | Disillusionment...................... | 13        | 18    |
| 2.  | Feeling abandoned.................... | 13        | 18    |
| 3.  | Resignation.......................... | 4         | 5     |
| 4.  | Losing trust......................... | 8         | 11    |
| 5.  | Gaining emotional distance........... | 6         | 8     |
| 6.  | Increased self-confidence............ | 9         | 12    |
| 7.  | Depression........................... | 7         | 10    |
| 8.  | Hope................................. | 6         | 8     |
| 9.  | Fear................................. | 4         | 5     |
| 10. | Feelings of inadequacy............... | 2         | 3     |
| 11. | Loyalty.............................. | 1         | 1     |
| 12. | Concern for welfare of children     | 1         | 1     |
|     | Total:                            | 74        | 100%  |

[a]= Percentage of total incidents reported in the feeling category.

In category II, "cognitions", 13 subcategories were developed to map the cognitive process of the subjects in

coming to the decision to dissolve their marriage. All of them illustrate what facilitated the process, as opposed to what hindered it.

**Table 4.4**

**Subcategories under category II - Cognitions**

| | Frequency | % [a] |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Heightened awareness of dysfunctional marital dynamics....................... | 13 | 12 |
| 2. Awareness of value differences......... | 6 | 5 |
| 3. Altered perception of spouse........... | 11 | 10 |
| 4. Acknowledging dissatisfaction to self... | 4 | 4 |
| 5. Comparing marriage to that of others.... | 6 | 5 |
| 6. Acquiring a new perspective to analyze the marital relationship....... | 5 | 5 |
| 7. Integrating the feedback of others...... | 5 | 5 |
| 8. Experiencing validation of self outside the marriage................... | 14 | 13 |
| 9. Acquiring concept of alternative........ | 6 | 5 |
| 10. Heightened awareness that dysfunctional marital dynamics have deleterious effects on the children................ | 8 | 7 |
| 11. Accepting that marriage is unworkable... | 11 | 10 |
| 12. Shifting focus from marriage to self.... | 5 | 4 |
| 13. Making the decision to separate | 18 | 16 |
| Total: | 112 | 100% |

[a]= Percentage of total incidents reported in the cognitive category.

In category III, "behaviours", eight subcategories were developed. The first six illustrate what facilitated the process; the last two illustrate what hindered it.

## Table 4.5

### Subcategories under category III - Behaviours

|  | | Frequency | %[a] |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Confiding in others | 6 | 14 |
| 2. | Testing new behaviours | 11 | 25 |
| 3. | Becoming self-sufficient | 2 | 5 |
| 4. | Engaging in extra-marital relationships | 5 | 12 |
| 5. | Receiving counselling | 3 | 7 |
| 6. | Implementing the decision | 10 | 23 |
| 7. | Advice of professionals | 2 | 5 |
| 8. | Physical abuse | 4 | 9 |
|  | Total: | 43 | 100% |

[a] = Percentage of total incidents reported in the behaviour category.

At this point, a brief overview of the subcategories most often reported will give the reader some understanding of the process as a whole.

In category I - feelings, the subcategories most frequently reported were disillusionment and feeling abandoned, with a count of 13 each. This was followed by

losing trust and depression, with a count of eight and seven respectively. Increased self-confidence, which is associated with the end of the process, reflects the subjects' feeling of having rediscovered their core selves. It was reported nine times.

In category II - cognitions, the subcategories most frequently reported were heightened awareness of dysfunctional marital dynamics and experiencing validation of self outside marriage, with a count of 13 and 14 respectively. Next came altered perception of spouse and accepting that the marriage is unworkable, with 11 each. Making the actual decision to separate was described by 18 of the 20 subjects.

In category III - behaviours, the subcategories most frequently reported were testing new behaviours and implementing the decision to separate, with 11 and 10 respectively.

A taxonomy of the three superordinate categories and 33 subcategories grouped under each of these can be found in Appendix A. Definitions of the subcategories as well as frequency reported and participation rate are provided along with examples of each subcategory. The participation rate is the number of participants who described the experience captured in the subcategory heading and the corresponding percentage out of 20.

An incident may be described in such a way as to illustrate all three dimensions of the category system. However, the majority of incidents were classified in one of the three major categories, namely, feelings, cognitions or behaviours, on the basis of what was predominant in the subject's description. It is interesting to note that the largest number of incidents are classified under cognitions. This may be due to the nature of decision-making, which is by and large a cognitive process even though it has concomitants feelings and behaviours.

3. **Are there identifiable common themes that illustrate the process that the subjects went through in coming to terms with the decision to divorce?**

In answering this final research question, a model was developed. Although each woman's story is unique, the model reflects the commonalities found in the accounts. The process of decision-making associated with divorce, although it is infinitely complex, can be summarized as follows:

The first stage, disillusionment, is characterized by intense discontent, whatever the specific reasons. The subjects report feeling hurt, unsupported, uncared for, and very much alone in the marriage. Their attempts to discuss their feelings with their spouses and get some resolution on the issues they identify as problematic are

unsuccessful. This leads to an increased awareness that there are major problems in the marriage. Whatever the incident that prompted the new awareness, this is the beginning of an irreversible process. This is especially true when the incident in question shatters the subject's perception of her husband and, at the same time, triggers the feeling that the spouse has severe personality problems.

In category I - feelings, the following subcategories illustrate that experience: Disillusionment and feeling abandoned. In category II - cognitions, the incidents which illustrate this are grouped in the following subcategories: Heightened awareness of dysfunctional marital dynamics; awareness of basic value differences; acknowledging dissatisfaction to oneself and altered perception of spouse.

The second stage, ambivalence, is characterized by approach/avoidance. On the one hand, unhappiness is pushing the woman to leave. But, on the other hand, there are other factors which make it difficult to leave. The subjects mentally acknowledge their dissatisfaction with the marriage but there is still high emotional investment in it. This results in a moral dilemma. The subjects are unhappy but the moral standards they have internalized preclude considerations of divorce as an option. For some

of the subjects, the discontent is accentuated when they compare their marriage generally to other relationships where they feel better understood, namely with friends or more specifically to other marriages which seem to portray what they are looking for.

Internalized moral prescriptions had a large impact on the decision-making of the subjects in the present research. These messages were consistent with the idea that marriage and the family are the center of a woman's life and that without it, she is nothing. Consequently, the majority of subjects invested themselves totally in trying to save their marriage.

Other factors keeping the subjects from coming to their decision earlier were depression, hope of changing the spouse, feelings of inadequacy, fear, force of habit and the logistics of the situation. The first four were described as hindering incidents and, therefore, are included in the category system.

For many years, these women struggled to find solutions to their marital difficulties, vascillating between their intense dissatisfaction and their hope that the marriage would improve. Some sought marital counselling which provided some symptomatic relief in the short-term but which was not successful in keeping the marriage intact. One couple, in particular, engaged in marriage counselling several months of the year for many successive years.

Feelings of powerlessness are typical of this stage. In category I - feelings, the subcategories of resignation and depression illustrate this. Indeed, 50% of the subjects reported incidents which were classified in these two subcategories. At the behavioural level, this was translated by accommodation and "going through the motions". An example of this is the woman who reported not having any emotional energy left to consider the question of divorce because she was too caught up in the daily problems and crises of her life.

Depression can be understood as the outward expression of the inner conflict the subjects lived with. The subjects had reached an impasse which was to last from one to several years, depending on the temperament and predicament of the individual woman.

The third stage, cognitive restructuring, is characterized by the subjects' distancing themselves emotionally and physically from their spouse. In category I - feelings, the subcategory which captures this is gaining emotional distance. For many, this came about as a result of an incident which caused them to lose trust in and respect for their spouse.

The movement from ambivalence to the restructuring stage was generally accomplished through events/factors external to the marital relationship. All the subjects

were trying in one way or another to resolve the moral dilemma they found themselves struggling with, namely that they were committed to their marriage and yet were deeply unhappy with it. The unhappiness and inner conflict they experienced led them to look for support outside the marital relationship. Some joined self-help groups like Alanon or other types of personal growth groups. Others began individual counselling. Others invested themselves in volunteer work or found employment outside the home. For others still, extra-marital relations were another important source of validation. Several subjects reported that reading feminist literature resulted in a change of perspective which was liberating. Through these positive relationships and experiences, the woman's self-worth was affirmed and the idea planted that she could find or create something better than what her marriage had to offer. In the short-term, the new perspective and emerging sense of self resulted in her adopting a different attitude towards the marriage. She became more detached and acted accordingly.

In category II - cognitions, the subcategories which illustrate this process are: Acquiring a new perspective to analyze the marital relationship, integrating the feedback of others, experiencing validation of self outside the marriage and acquiring a concept of the alternative.

In category III - behaviours, there are five subcategories which correspond to the above: Testing new behaviours; becoming self-sufficient; engaging in extra-marital relationships and receiving counselling to assist with decision-making.

The fourth and final stage, resolution, is characterized by increased self-confidence as well as relief. Once the subjects acknowledged and accepted that the marriage and/or their spouse was unlikely to change, they were able to take responsibility for what they wanted out of life. A shift of focus followed. Having previously being centered on the marriage as if it were the very core of their existence, they now redirected their emotional energies in the pursuit of establishing their autonomy in other areas of their lives.

In category I - feelings, the subcategory which captures this experience is increased self-confidence. In category II - cognitions, it is accepting that the marriage is unworkable, shifting focus from marriage to self and making the actual decision to divorce. In category III - behaviours, the above translates into implementing the decision to divorce.

CHAPTER 5

Discusssion

## Summary of Results

The present research has outlined the psychological process involved in making the decision to divorce. Unlike the majority of studies of divorce, this research was specifically designed to explore the subjects' feelings, cognitions and behaviours in coming to terms with that decision. It is a study of decision-making and a study of the divorce process, and as such it is unique in the field.

The critical incidents described by the subjects are the core of this research. Taken as a whole, they form the rationale for each woman's individual decision to leave her marriage. A total of 175 incidents were reported and described at length to the interviewer. Of these, 154 were descriptions of facilitating incidents and 21 were descriptions of hindering incidents. These data were subsequently organized in a classification which consists of three superordinate categories - feelings, cognitions, behaviours - and 33 subcategories. Each subcategory is defined and illustrated with a minimum of two examples. Frequency count and participation rate are also provided for each subcategory.

In addition, a summary of the marital problems

highlighted in the critical incidents is provided, along with examples of the marital dynamics involved.

Finally, a four-stage model outlining the process of coming to terms with the decision to divorce was derived from the category system. The stages are disillusionment, ambivalence, cognitive restructuring and resolution.

The model assumes an orderly progression from one stage to another. However, it is mostly for the sake of clarity since it is difficult to translate any psychological phenomenon as complex as this one into a neat linear model. It might be more accurate to think of it as a dialectical model in that the subjects experienced conflicting feelings and thoughts over and over again, with increasing intensity, until they were able to arrive at a resolution of these conflicting feelings and thoughts and reach a decision. Crosby et al. (1983) describe the process as one where the various affective, cognitive and behavioural dimensions all recur in a cyclical manner. Kaslow (1981) likens it to the highs and lows of a roller coaster ride, with the partners being drawn back periodically into the relationship to "give it one more try" (p. 675). The findings of the present research corroborate that.

## Significance of the Study

### Theoretical significance. Social exchange theory

views marriage in terms of a cost/reward equation. The present research supports the proposition of Albrecht and Kunz (1980) and Levinger (1965; 1979) that major shifts in reward-costs outcomes must take place before a decision is made to end the marriage. Albrecht and Kunz (1980) also report that the most frequent reasons associated with marital breakdown are infidelity, loss of love, financial difficulties, emotional problems and physical abuse. The present research did not specifically investigate the reasons for the marital breakdown. With the exception of "loss of love", all of the above were described by the subjects in the form of critical incidents which prompted them to make the decision to divorce.

The present research outlines several additional reasons related to the marital breakdown. They are communication problems, alcohol and/or drug abuse, role incompetence defined as the spouse's inability to be a good provider and to be nurturing, inflexibility of the spouse regarding the subjects' attempts to negotiate a more egalitarian marriage, lack of support for the subjects' career goals, workaholism, sexual incompatibility and conflicts with in-laws. With the exception of boredom and husband's desire for independence, the above correspond to the perceived causes of divorce outlined by other researchers, in particular, Granvold et al. (1979) and

Davis and Aron (1988).

In the present research, three distinct factors related to gender role conflict are identified, namely, role incompetence in terms of the husband's inability to be nurturing, inflexibility of the husband regarding his wife's desire for a more egalitarian marriage and lack of support for the subject's career goals. Conflict over gender roles, both joint and internal, have also been found to be significant for men and women in Kitson's and Sussman's (1982) study of marital complaints. Regarding the type of marital complaints associated with divorce, Kitson and Sussman (1982) conclude that, nowadays, couples are dealing with issues which were not predominant for the previous generation, namely the desire to pursue personal growth, having a life of one's own, and role allocation within the family.

Levinger (1965; 1979) applies a cost and benefit analysis to marital dissolution. Most of the factors he identifies as barriers to marital dissolution were validated. The present research discriminates with greater accuracy, however, the reasons which kept the subjects in the marriage. As outlined in Table 4.2, feelings of obligation towards the spouse ranked 7, while keeping the family intact for the sake of the children ranked first. Children are important in keeping a marriage together.

Also, fear of not getting custody of the children was invoked by two subjects as significant in remaining married longer. For some of the subjects who were in abusive relationships, their resolve to keep the family together changed when the abusive spouse started hitting the children as well. Moral prescriptions stemming from religious beliefs were mentioned in four cases. Economics were given as reasons for staying in two cases only. There is no clear evidence, however, regarding the importance of external pressures from primary group affiliations in keeping the subjects married, namely, the extended family and community stigma.

With regard to attractions operating to maintain the marriages intact, home ownership was mentioned by four subjects. Two other factors of attraction identified by Levinger (1979), such as esteem for the spouse on the one hand, and desire for companionship and sexual enjoyment on the other hand, were found to be important. Several incidents relating specifically to either lack of esteem for the spouse, desire for companionship or deterioration of the sexual relationship were described as significant in the subjects' decision to end their marriages. Additional evidence for these findings is provided by Kressel et al. (1980). In half of the couples they studied, Kressel et al. (1980) found that "the wives wanted a more intimate,

emotionally closer relationship than their husbands were willing or able to supply" (p. 107).

Levinger (1979) postulates that socio-economic rewards related to the husband's income, education and occupation also serve to maintain marriage cohesiveness. The findings of the present research suggest a positive correlation between the husband's inability to hold stable employment and be a good provider with the subjects' eventual decision to end the marriages. However, whether or not unemployment itself was the key factor in their decision cannot be ascertained because these marriages were also afflicted with other major problems such as substance and physical abuse.

The concept of the alternative is a construct that social exchange theorists (Albrecht & Kunz, 1980; Edwards & Saunders, 1981; Kalb, 1983; Thibaut & Kelly, 1959) use in predicting marital stability. It is proposed that unhappy marriages may endure because of the lack of perceived alternatives and that happy marriages may be unstable because other alternatives which are more attractive to the individual present themselves.

The present research was not designed to test the above hypothesis and therefore cannot be conclusive in this regard. Nevertheless, all the subjects were empowered to make the decision to leave their marriage once they

acquired a sense that they could have a satisfying and meaningful life outside the marriage. Stage 3 of the model clearly suggests that getting positive feedback and recognition from others as capable, worthy and attractive was significant in facilitating the decision to divorce. It had a positive impact on the subjects' self-esteem and enabled them to envisage the possibility of dissolving their unhappy marriages. Consequently, the present research broadens the definition of the concept of the alternative proposed by Kalb (1983) to include the concept of personal validation as equally significant in the decision to leave an unsatisfactory marriage. Personal validation and the concept of the alternative are incorporated in the category system under cognitions.

Another assumption of social exchange theory, that marital cohesiveness is jeopardized once a lover enters the picture, is only tangentially supported by the findings of the present research. Upon close examination of the incidents described in this subcategory, it is found that only five subjects engaged in extramarital relationships at some point during their married life. Of these, only two reported that the prospect of continuing the relationship with the third party after separating from their spouse influenced their decision to end the marriage. On the whole, extramarital relationships were a catalyst for

leaving an unsatisfactory marriage but not the cause of marital breakdown.

Nevertheless, the five subjects reported feeling encouraged at the thought of feeling attractive and being responsive with another partner. This is additional evidence for the validity of the construct of personal validation delineated in the present research.

Generally, the findings of the present research corroborate those of stage theorists (e.g., Bohannan, 1973; Crosby et al., 1983; 1986; Duck, 1982; Kaslow, 1981; Kessler, 1975; Vaughan, 1979) in that there seems to be a sequence involved in the process of divorce. Although each theorist uses slightly different terminology, the first two stages of the model outlined in the Results chapter correspond to the general sequence suggested. For example, most theorists agree that the divorce process begins with one spouse's disaffection with the other partner (Bohannan, 1973; Kaslow, 1981; Kessler, 1975). This disenchantment, named disillusionment in the present model, is followed by a period where ambivalence towards the spouse is manifested in the form of negative communication and conflict over superficial issues (Bohannan, 1973; Duck, 1982; Kaslow, 1981; Kressel & Deutsch, 1977; Vaughan, 1979). If the underlying problems are not aired and resolved, the couple moves on to the erosion and detachment stages which are

characterized by an avoidance of toxic issues which have not been successfully resolved in the past (Bradford, 1980; Kaslow, 1981; Kessler, 1975; Vaughan, 1979).

The majority of subjects described a clear turning point in coming to terms with the decision to divorce. Federico (1979) also identified this construct from a study of accounts of divorced persons involved in divorce adjustment groups. He labelled it the "Point of No Return (N/R)" (Federico, 1979, p. 95) and stated that a person having passed that point could not return to his/her former emotional investment in the marriage. The findings of this research corroborate Federico's (1979) in this regard. Federico (1979) also surmised that passing N/R was not something that the person was necessarily aware of. The findings of the present research suggest otherwise. There are several incidents which can be found in the taxonomy which clearly indicate that the subjects recalled this experience very vividly. It was definitely an "Aha!" experience for them, and although not all of them acted on this insight immediately, it resulted in a significant decrease of their emotional energy in the marriage. This corresponds to Lloyd's and Cate's (1985) findings. Their subjects also had clear recollection of significant turning points in the dissolution of their relationships.

It is difficult to make extensive comparisons between the present research and the aforementioned theories because each investigates the process of marital dissolution from a different perspective and with varying depth and scope. Since Kaslow (1981) and Duck (1982) offer the most comprehensive models of the pre-divorce period, they will be reviewed in light of the findings of the present research.

In referring to the pre-divorce period, Kaslow (1981) identified several of the feelings and corresponding tasks characteristic of this stage. Although the classifications differ on some of the key descriptors used, the feeling subcategories developed from the present research correspond closely to Kaslow's (1981). For example, her model sets out disillusionment and dissatisfaction as separate entities. In the present research, these two are combined under the first heading, disillusionment. Another descriptor used by Kaslow (1981) is alienation which is shorter but conveys the same experience as feeling abandoned. Kaslow's reference to dread is replaced by fear in the present research. The other feelings identified by Kaslow (1981), namely, anguish, ambivalence, shock, emptiness, chaos, inadequacy, low self-esteem also correspond to the experiences described by the subjects in the present research. Unlike the present research, Kaslow

(1981) did not provide any definitions or examples for her descriptors, which makes further comparisons impossible.

A survey of Kaslow's (1981) categorization and that of the present research reveals two other important differences: On the one hand, Kaslow's model completely overlooks the cognitive aspects of the experience. Her model is general compared to the present research which specifically investigated how the subjects reached the decision to divorce. Hence, in addition to the 12 feeling subcategories, the present research has identified and described 13 cognitive subcategories.

Kaslow (1981) is more explicit, however, with regard to actions which accompany the feelings in the beginning of the pre-divorce period. Her model sets out the following tasks: "Confronting partner; quarrelling; seeking therapy; denial; withdrawal (physical & emotional); pretending all is okay; attempting to win back affection" (p. 676). Although all of these were described by the interviewees in the present research, the category system does not reflect this. The six behavioural subcategories developed from the critical incidents correspond to the later stages of the decision-making process, not the beginning. This can be explained by the fact that raters were instructed to categorize incidents on the basis of what was predominant in the subjects' descriptions. Although an incident may

have contained elements of each major categories - feelings, cognitions, behaviours - it would have been classified under the one which best captured the whole experience.

Duck's theory (1982) is relevant to the present research because he emphasizes "the expression and conduct of dissolution rather than its inherent causes" (p. 12). His model addresses the private concerns that a person must resolve in dealing with the decision to dissolve a marriage and the implementation of this decision.

Duck (1982) focuses on the cognitive aspects of the process. The first stage is a theoretical formulation of the intrapsychic dynamics that come into play as the individual becomes increasingly dissatisfied with the marriage. A major assumption is that the person must come up with a justification for deciding to withdraw from the relationship. What happens outside the interactional field of the marital dyad, that is, at the individual's level of consciousness, is attributed a significant role in explaining the initial stages of relationship dissolution. For instance, disappointment with the partner will trigger mental activity such as fantasizing, recapitulating, planning, evaluating the partner and the relationship. All this is not immediately conveyed to the partner, except perhaps through non-verbal cues. Duck (1982) claims that

brooding is a powerful cause of estrangement within a relationship.

Several dimensions of the experience of coming to terms with the decision to divorce proposed in the present research correspond to the private thoughts and concerns characteristic of the intrapsychic stage proposed by Duck (1982). For example, the first five subcategories under cognitions expand on Duck's intrapsychic stage. These five subcategories are: Heightened awareness of dysfunctional marital dynamics, awareness of basic value differences, altered perception of spouse, acknowledgement to oneself of dissatisfaction, and comparison of the marital relationship to other relationships. All of these relate to the goals of the intrapsychic stage outlined by Duck (1982), namely that the individual is preoccupied with identifying the problems in the relationship and assessing the partner's behaviour in relation to these problems.

In summary, the category system and the model derived from the present research outline the intrapsychic process leading to marriage dissolution from the perspective of the person contemplating divorce. It builds on the work of Kaslow (1981) and Duck (1982) by integrating the feeling, thinking and behavioural dimensions of the experience into a coherent model of the decision to divorce. Furthermore, unlike much of the literature in this area which is based

on clinical work, the present research is grounded in empirical data. As such, it adds a significant contribution to the literature.

**A gender role perspective.** The findings of the present research bring into focus the issue of decision-making from a woman's perspective. It also highlights several other questions such as the nature of relationships between men and women, anger and depression in women, identity formation, to name a few. Since these topics are conspicuously absent from the divorce literature, it is necessary to consider the present findings from the theoretical framework provided by Gilligan (1982) and that of others in woman's studies (Attanucci, 1988; Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1983; Goodrich, Rampage, Elman, Halstead, 1988; Lerner, 1977; Miller, 1976, 1982, 1984, 1986; Rubin, 1983). The model delineated in the present research constitutes the basic framework of analysis.

The first stage of the model, disillusionment, marked the onset of the process of emotional divorce for all the subjects in the present study. Somehow, marriage did not fulfill their expectations. They did not find the intimacy or emotional connectedness with their spouse that they had been led to anticipate.

As Miller (1976) expounds, this is not just a private

concern. The socio-cultural context which impinges on marriage is a key factor in determining the nature of relationships between men and women. Gender role differentiation is identified as crucial because of its emphasis for women on attending to the needs of men and children at the expense of their own. As a result, women look to men, to fulfill their innermost aspirations and needs, when they often are not clear themselves on what those are. This can often lead to bitter disappointment.

Emotional relatedness and nurturing have traditionally been relegated to women in our society (Goodrich, Rampage, Ellman, & Halstead, 1988; Herman, 1977; Miller, 1976). Women have become "carriers" of these aspects of the total human experience because feelings are not highly valued by men. It is argued that, historically, men had to control their emotions to master the environment and as a result have become less adept than women at identifying their feelings. Men are often afraid of feelings, their own and those of the women in their lives. It is typical for them to deny their own feelings and to discount, if not totally disparage, those of women (Miller, 1976).

From this perspective, it is not surprising that the majority of subjects in the present research reported having difficulty connecting with their spouse on an

emotional level. Miller's (1976) analysis explains the intense dissatisfaction the subjects experienced when they realized that their spouse was incapable of the kind of intimacy they longed for. Other research has identified women's desire for greater intimacy and companionship as a major factor in marital dissolution (Burns, 1984; Kressel et al., 1980).

Drawing from object relation theory, Rubin (1983) claims that the "deep-seated internal differences" (p. 12) between men and women with regard to intimacy stem from gender-specific psychic structures which evolve in relation to the first love object, the mother. She proposes that each gender responds differently to two major developmental tasks involved in the process of individuation, the one being gender identity formation, the other, the building and maintenance of ego boundaries. For example, establishing one's gender identity is more complex and difficult for boys than for girls because:

> ...in order to identify with his maleness, [the boy] must renounce this connection with the first person outside self to be internalized into his inner psychic world - the one who has been so deeply embedded in his psychic life as to seem a part of himself - and seek instead a deeper attachment and identification with father. But this father with whom he is expected to

identify has, until this time, been a secondary character in his internal life, often little more than a sometimes pleasurable, sometimes troublesome shadow on the consciousness of the developing child (Rubin, 1983, pp. 55-56).

Thus, the boy's personality development will be profoundly influenced because, although attachment and identification are two separate psychological processes, they are so closely related "that the child can't give up one without assault on the other. With the repression of the identification with mother, therefore, the attachment to her becomes ambivalent" (Rubin, 1983, p. 56). In order to guard himself against the pain involved in this major shift in his inner life, the boy develops ego boundaries which are more rigid than those of the girl. Rubin (1983) proposes that the rigid boundaries of the boy "circumscribe not only his relationships with others but his connection to his inner emotional life as well" (p. 54). She also ascribes the distrust, contempt and aggressiveness that men often exhibit towards women to this early deprivation and to the feelings of betrayal, abandonment and rage that were engendered by the experience. Hence, the defenses erected at this early stage of development would later become a handicap to the man in his intimate relations with women.

The next stage of the model, ambivalence, can also be

understood more clearly from a socio-cultural perspective. Why would women who were so disillusioned with their marriage vascillate for years before making the decision to leave? Several issues have bearing on this question. First, the prohibitions against female anger in our culture must be addressed. Lerner (1977) has examined the taboos that women face in expressing anger and concluded "that women frequently turn their anger into self-destructive symptoms" (p. 331). This was the case for at least 30% of the subjects in this study. They reported feeling depressed, anxious, powerless, numb, hopeless, trapped and confused. Miller (1983) has also addressed the issue of anger in women. She spells out three beliefs that women usually have about themselves which generally influence their way of being in the world, and specifically their relation to anger. These are: "1) I am weak...2) I am unworthy...[and] 3) I have no right and no cause to be angry" (Miller, 1983, p. 3). Hence, she concludes, women have come to think of themselves as people "who should be almost totally without anger and without the need for anger...anger feels like a threat to women's central sense of identity...called feminity" (Miller, 1983, p. 3).

The tendency for women to blame themselves for the marital difficulties and the belief that marriage is their prime "raison d'être" resulted in plummeting self-esteem

for the majority of subjects. While the costs of staying married were high, namely, anxiety, depression, feeling unsupported, discounted, taken for granted and even being mentally or physically abused, the costs of leaving seemed greater. As Table 4.2 indicates, traditional values regarding the woman's primary responsibility for keeping the family unit intact ranked highly in the subjects' reasons for staying in an unsatisfactory marriage as long as they did. Also noteworthy is that personal feelings of inadequacy ranked just as highly. Wright (1988) points out that a lowered self-esteem is likely when "one is experiencing disparity between expectations and outcomes" (p. 10). Self-esteem is one of those intangible resources which must be addressed when considering the balance of power in the marital relationship. For instance, there is evidence that it is usually the partner with the most power in the relationship who initiates separation (Hagestad & Smyer, 1982).

It is proposed (J. A. Newman, personal communication, February 6, 1990) that battered women or spouses of alcoholics hesitate to leave their dysfunctional marriages because this would be an admission of failure on their part. Other theorists have incorporated feelings of personal failure and bereavement in their theoretical formulations of the divorce process (Crosby et. al, 1983;

1986; Duck, 1982; Froiland & Hozman, 1977; Wiseman, 1975).
The premise informed by Chodorow's work (1974), that the
"feminine personality seems to define itself in relation
and connection to other people more than the masculine
personality does" (cited in Attanucci, 1988, p. 204), could
perhaps explain the keen sense of failure experienced by
the subjects and, consequently, their compulsion to keep
working at the marriage against all odds.

With regard to ambivalence, Goodrich et al. (1988)
challenge the notion that personal happiness in marriage is
of primary importance to women. In attempting to explain
why some women will stay in abusive relationships, they
suggest that the values of loyalty, patience and
perseverance that women are taught in the socialization
process operate to keep the individual woman working at her
marriage. The present research has identified several
reasons which made it more difficult for the subjects to
leave their marriage. Among those are the dimensions
identified by Goodrick et al. (1988), more specifically,
those of perseverance and loyalty, which are also included
in the taxonomy in the feeling category, although
perseverance is labelled "hope".

Regarding depression, Attanucci (1988) found that the
women who described themselves solely in terms of their
relationship to their husband and children appeared most

depressed. The self-descriptions of the depressed women were characteristic of the "traditional feminine role of self subordinated to other..." (p. 205). The inherent risk in defining oneself in the significant others' terms rather than one's own terms is that of "losing sight of the self" (p. 215).

Gilligan's (1982) theory of moral development offers yet another perspective on the subjects' ambivalence. According to Gilligan (1982), "the essence of [a] moral decision is the exercise of choice and the willingness to accept responsibility for that choice" (p. 67). Gilligan (1982) proposes that the central moral problem that women face lies in the conflict between self and other. She claims that its resolution "requires a reconciliation between feminity and adulthood" (p. 71), in that women must transcend the dichotomous view of self manifest in the split of the good and the bad woman. Gilligan (1982) frames a woman's moral dilemma in terms of the struggle "between compassion and autonomy, between virtue and power" (p. 71). At an early stage of moral development, the woman feels highly conflicted over the issue of hurting, especially when there is no alternative "that can be construed in the best interest of everybody" (p. 80). Furthermore, Gilligan (1982) claims that when a woman is uncertain about her own worth, she is prevented from

claiming equality in the relationship. Thus, "self-assertion falls prey to the old criticism of selfishness. Then the morality that condones self-destruction in the name of responsible care is not repudiated as inadequate..." (p. 87).

Decision-making theory provides another explanation of the subjects' ambivalence. Turner (1985) has outlined four coping patterns and seven problems inherent to deficient decision-making. One pattern which seems to correspond to the decision-making style of the subjects in the present study is that of defensive avoidance. This is characterized by procrastination and rationalization as a way of protecting the individual from painful intrapsychic conflict. Excessive delay and fear of the unknown resulting in an inordinate amount of worrying were also common.

Finally, Herman (1977) argues that women have difficulty relinquishing traditional roles because of inadequate role development in other areas, making it difficult for them to integrate themselves fully in the economic, political, legal and social structures of society. Herman's (1977) research was conducted with an older group of women. Nevertheless, depending on the individual woman's circumstances, this may partially account for her reluctance to leave her marriage, despite its obvious shortcomings.

The third stage of the model, cognitive restructuring, focuses on the thought processes and behaviours which facilitate the person's movement from ambivalence to resolution of her dilemma. Once a dissatisfaction threshold is crossed, labelled the turning point in the present research, the person looks outside the marital relationship for self-validation. The woman begins confiding in outsiders with regards to her marital difficulties. There is a break in the social facade. Duck (1982) refers to this process as that of creating the public story for the eventual demise of the relationship. This sounds too calculating and does not correspond to the findings of the present research. What is evident is that the woman is finally dealing openly with the pain stemming from her marriage not living up to her expectations and that she is enlisting moral support in doing so. Vaughan (1979) discusses the initiator's need to find other sources of self-realization than what the marriage offers. A major task of the uncoupling process is to redefine oneself as separate from the marital relationship. Consequently, the individual contemplating divorce will often undertake various endeavors which validate his/her singularity rather than the coupled identity. In so doing, the initiator is seeking ideological support "for a belief in the self as the first priority" (Vaughan, 1979, p. 425). The

supporting ideology may be provided by a peer group, the women's movement, a new significant other. It may develop through interaction with others or indirectly, through literature. Vaughan's (1979) description of this stage of the uncoupling process corroborates the findings of the present research.

Cognitive restructuring focuses on the process of change which the subjects underwent. It was described as "conversion experience" and equated with "growing up" as well as "learning to take responsibility". This suggests that the subjects experienced a major shift in self-concept similar to that reported by Gilligan (1982). The divorce decision, like the abortion decision, was crucial to the women's sense of identity. It would appear that the subjects moved from a conventional morality defined by others, whereby they felt wrong and selfish for wanting their needs recognized in their marriage, to a "reflective mode which entails taking responsibility for self" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 123). When they began to question the idea that virtue means self-sacrifice, they were enabled to consider the issues of choice and responsibility. The following excerpt from the present research illustrates the transition from goodness to truth proposed by Gilligan (1982):

I was really attached because I had to make myself love him...I had to prove that I was a good wife. Whereas, in the last couple of years, I knew I had given him as much as I could give him...I still loved him but I wasn't going to allow him to ruin my life, because that's what he was doing, that's what I was allowing...I felt free in myself to leave. I had gotten to the point where I knew I could not change him, but I could change my life and I was enthusiastic about the change...I had dropped the sense of guilt, the feeling that I had not provided enough...(16.9)

Initially for this subject, good was equated with taking care of others, in particular her husband, at the expense of self. However, as pointed out by Gilligan (1982), "when only others are legitimized as the recipients of the woman's care, the exclusion of herself gives rise to problems in relationships, creating a disequilibrium that initiates the second transition" (p. 74). According to Gilligan (1982), this transition is a time when the woman must make a deliberate effort to discover her needs. In that process, the woman experiences changes in self-concept which are also related to a transformed moral understanding. This sets the stage for a reorientation which "centers on a new awareness of responsibility" (p. 94), a responsibility that includes both self and others.

The exercise of such responsibility requires a new kind of judgement, whose first demand is for honesty. To be responsible for oneself, it is first necessary to acknowledge what one is doing. The criterion for judgement thus shifts from goodness to truth when the morality of action is assessed not on the basis of its appearance in the eyes of others, but in terms of the realities of its intention and consequence (Gilligan, 1982, p. 83).

Another excerpt from the subjects' protocols illustrates this point, in particular the shift in judgment that occurred as a result of the subject taking an honest look at her life. It also underscores the change regarding responsibility mentioned earlier.

Something happened inside me. It was definitely a moment of reckoning when I was told that my own daughters could not see me as a person who could stand on her own two feet. Because, up until that point, I really was outwardly in many ways a person who stood on her own two feet: I kept on with my job, I kept on going to school [university], I was gaining more responsibilities in my job. Outwardly, I was a pretty together person. Inwardly, I was so tied in to this relationship whereupon I had expectations which were one thing and the reality was another thing and

I wasn't growing as an individual. I began to see myself in a different light, as somebody who had to take responsibility. (14.5)

In comparing Gilligan's (1982) study of the abortion decision with the present research on the divorce decision, another parallel can be drawn. Gilligan (1982) writes that the decision heralded "a time of disorganization, mourning, crisis and grief - and yet also...a time of change (p. 121)". This also corresponds to the experience of the subjects in the present research. Further evidence of the relationship between leaving a relationship that is detrimental to the individual and personal growth is offered by Harris (1984). In her study of self-actualizing women, Harris (1984) concludes that "self-actualizing women seem able to recognize and leave hindering relationships, so that they did not persist in impeding their self-actualization" (p. 116). Although her study focused on women's career development, it is noteworthy that the type of same-sex relationships classified by Harris (1984) as hindering have several characteristics in common with the unsatisfactory marital relationships described by the subjects in the present research. In particular, the subjects described their experience of hindering relationships in the following terms: They felt disillusionned, rejected, unsupported, criticized,

controlled or powerless and unsure of themselves. The similarity of these descriptors to the feeling subcategories developed in the present research provides additional evidence of the validity of the dimensions identified herein.

With respect to the last stage of the model, resolution, it is important to emphasize that, in contrast with other models (Crosby et al., 1983; 1986), this term refers to physical separation. It does not imply that everything is resolved at the psychological level. The main characteristics of this stage, as outlined in Chapter 4, are hope, relief, increased self-confidence and power at the feeling level, acceptance and shifting focus from the marriage to issues of personal identity at the cognitive level and, implementation of the decision to separate or divorce at the behavioural level. These correspond to the findings of other researchers. For example, Crosby et al., (1983; 1986) propose clusters of affect, cognition and behaviour experienced by the active agent and passive agent in the divorce process which are very detailed and include the subcategories noted above.

This stage has also been called one of "reorientation of life-style and identity" (Wiseman, 1975, p. 209), with prevailing tasks being concerned with redefinition, reorientation and reconstruction (Crosby et al., 1983).

The present research has been conducted to investigate the process of decision-making in divorce from the first serious doubts about the viability of the marriage to the implementation of the decision to separate or divorce. Crosby et al. (1983; 1986) focused on the grief resolution process. Hence, in addressing the issue of recovery, their model encompasses the nature of events after separation and obtaining the final decree.

The transition experienced by the subjects, from disillusionment and ambivalence to resolution of their dilemma, was mediated through cognitive restructuring. As long as the women accepted the conventional view of the feminine and masculine, namely the woman being weak and dependent, the man being the strong one on which she could rely, they were bound by this view of self and other. When the subjects questioned this and began to see themselves as capable and worthwhile in their own right instead of largely in terms of their instrumental value to others, they were empowered to leave their dysfunctional marriage. Gilligan, cited in Attanucci (1988), claims that the

> ...critical transition for adult women is the tran-
> sition from a conventional feminine role in which
> 'goodness' is self-sacrifice, toward a truthful acknow-
> ledgement of oneself as deserving of the consideration
> one grants others. This transition emerges from a

growing awareness of the deception inherent in the

feminine role of selflessness and the destruction to

self and other which that deception breeds. Women,

having achieved this transition from goodness to truth,

in fact, do not become indifferent individuals...

rather, they acknowledge their interdependence as

caring individuals, including themselves in the circle

of those for whom they care (Attanucci, 1988, p. 207).

The subjects of the present research seem to have made

a similar transition.

**Practical significance**. The category system and the

model derived from the present research could assist

counsellors who are working with individual women or with

couples. Knowledge of the specific feelings, cognitions

and behaviours that are involved in arriving at the

decision to divorce would be useful in assessing the degree

of commitment of the spouses to the marital relationship.

It can also be used to normalize the experience of the

couple in marriage or divorce therapy.

The present research was by nature exploratory. It

aimed at providing an overview of the decision-making

process involved in divorce, from the perspective of the

individual woman struggling with that decision. It was

successful in mapping this domain of inquiry and resulted

in a large quantity of valuable data which could be used to

build on in future research.

**Limitations of the study.** It is difficult to generalize from the findings of the present research because of several factors related to the composition of the sample: (1) The sample was made up entirely of women. Considering the differences in socialization for each gender, it is highly unlikely that the process that the subjects underwent in coming to terms with the decision to divorce would be similar to that of men. Therefore, the category system and model derived from it may not be generalizable to the male population. (2) The selection criteria for the study were fairly restrictive, thus limiting further the generalizability of the findings. For example, the subjects had to be 30 years or older, Caucasians, legally married and cohabitating with their spouse for a minimum of three years, and separated for at least six months. (3) The research was conducted with 20 subjects, which is a relatively small number of participants. It was difficult to find respondents who met all the criteria outlined above. Although the data collected is extensive and very detailed, it may not be representative of the general population. (4) Every effort was made to recruit a wide range of participants. Nevertheless, the demographic information reveals that, overall, the subjects were better educated that average. 75% of the sample had some post-secondary education, with a

high proportion having at least one university degree.

Finally, there is the issue of self-selection versus that of random selection. The subjects volunteered for the study. Self-report data is necessarily subjective and has been criticized as lacking statistical validity and reliability, on the grounds that "those who seek the researcher may have more concerns and issues or more of a story to tell than those selected in other ways" (Kitson et al., 1985, p. 284).

Moreover, as pointed out by Young and Friesen (1986), the task of identifying critical incidents and of developing the category system implies some subjectivity on the part of the researcher. Although the category system was validated by two independent raters and a clinical expert, further testing would be required to ensure its reliability and validity.

Another limitation of the present research is that the interviewer was not able to elicit a significant number of hindering incidents from the subjects. It seems to have been easier for the subjects to describe incidents which prompted them to reassess their commitment to the marriage rather than the opposite. Consequently, the results are somewhat unbalanced.

**Recommendations for future research.** The study of relationship dissolution from retrospective accounts is

becoming more accepted as a way of gaining access to psychological processes otherwise unavailable to the researcher (Harvey, Weber, Galvin, Huszti & Garnick, 1978). Attributions in the termination of intimate relationships have been investigated in several studies (Harvey et al., 1978; Kelley, 1979; Kitson & Sussman, 1982; Lloyd & Cate, 1985; Newcomb & Bentler, 1981; Ponzetti & Cate, 1988). The present research did not specifically explore attributions. Nevertheless, the use of retrospective accounts has brought into focus the process of attribution. The critical incidents described and classified in the taxonomy are significant precisely because they underscore the kinds of attributions, usually negative, that the subjects made about their spouse and how that influenced the decision-making process. This is an area which would deserve further study. The work of Kelley (1979), adapted to the marital dissolution process by Newcomb and Bentler (1981), and that of Ponzetti and Cate (1988) could provide the theoretical framework for such a study.

The scarcity of research exploring the divorce decision from the joint perspective of husband and wife has been noted (Kitson et al., 1985). It is not possible, however, to duplicate the present research with couples because it investigated the process of the person making the decision

to divorce. Nevertheless, a similar study could be undertaken with a male sample to determine whether or not there are important differences in how men and women make important life decisions. It has been suggested that the role of the individual in the divorce decision, namely initiator or non-initiator, may have considerably more importance than gender differences in determining how the process of emotional divorce is experienced (Crosby et al., 1983; Kelly, 1982).

Attanucci (1988) found that "the women who expressed the greatest personal satisfaction and contentment in their relationships described a perspective on themselves and their relationships beyond role expectations...These women seem to be informed by role expectations but not dominated by them" (p. 207). She also found that the women who were successful in moving beyond traditional feminine roles did not accomplish this totally on their own. She points out that this is not an individual developmental achievement on the part of the woman, but rather "the product of the actual relationship between the woman and her husband" (p. 214). Attanucci (1988) acknowledges the contribution of the spouse to the transition achieved by his partner in the following terms: "It is unlikely that a woman could maintain this perspective without a similar shift in her husband's understanding of their relationship" (p. 214).

This raises another interesting question for future research. Several subjects in the present study felt restricted by role expectations. They felt unable to be their own person within the marriage. They perceived their spouse as unsupportive of their goals and aspirations, when these went beyond the traditional spheres assigned to women. Considering the theoretical framework provided by Attanucci (1988), the question arises as to whose terms had the subjects initially accepted when marrying? Several reported that they had tried to renegotiate the implicit contract which governed their marriage to accommodate changing needs and expectations. They wanted to have their own terms recognized, to no avail. Thus, breaking up their marriage may have been the only way to remain true to self. Whatever else, the question of personal integrity was very much at the center of the subjects' struggle with making the decision to divorce. This theme is also reported in the decision-making of the subjects in the abortion study (Gilligan, 1982).

Finally, the divorce decision was a major moral dilemma for the subjects. It precipitated a crisis which was instrumental to the process of personal growth. Gilligan's (1982) subjects reported that their decision marked a new beginning, a chance "to take control of [their] life" (p. 95). This was also the case for the majority of subjects

in the present study. However, the relationship between personal growth and moral development is unclear. A study which would aim at answering this question would seem worthwhile.

**Concluding remarks**. It is to be hoped that the present research has made a contribution to the existing literature by elaborating on the decision-making process involved in divorce. As outlined in the present chapter, several of the findings of the present research overlap with those of other theorists. Nevertheless, these findings are presented from a unique perspective, namely that of the individual woman making the decision to divorce.

The qualitative methodology used in the present research yielded very detailed and rich data. For example, the taxonomy of incidents which precipitated or hindered the decision to divorce charts a domain which had hitherto been overlooked. These incidents encapsulate what was happening at the intraspychic level for the subject. They also highlight some of the dysfunctional marital dynamics underlying the marital breakdown and, consequently, address the causes of marital disruption, albeit indirectly and from a unidimensional perspective.

The model, in particular stage 3, makes a special contribution to the existing literature. It challenges the

notion that the individual's search for autonomy and wholeness is confined to the recovery phase. The majority of subjects wanted greater independence and autonomy in their lives. They were breaking away from traditional roles and wanted a different quality of relationship with their spouses. This resulted in conflict and dissension as their spouses resisted the change. In this respect, Bohannan's (1973) contention that the root of marital breakdown is one partner's inability to tolerate change in the other seems valid. It has also been proposed that "breaking up her marriage may be the only way for a woman to succeed fully in feeling and being a complete person" (Newcomb and Bentler, 1981, p. 2). This was certainly the case for several subjects in the present research whose spouses were domineering, abusive, or generally unsupportive of their personal ambitions or career goals. For all subjects in the present research, a process of personal change and transformation took place. They regained a sense of their own worth and were enabled to transcend socio-cultural expectations and leave their dysfunctional marriage.

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APPENDIX A:  TAXONOMY OF CRITICAL INCIDENTS

## I - FEELINGS

### Facilitating Incidents

I.1        **Disillusionment.**        Subject experiences a major disappointment regarding how her spouse relates to her or to a situation which is central to their marriage. The incident makes her question the assumptions she has made about the marriage. (Frequency [freq] = 13. Participation rate [PR] = 11/20 or 55%)

Examples:

Subject is very disappointed and hurt on her wedding night because her husband stays up late to drink with a friend.    This does not live up to the romantic notion she has about being newly wed.    To her, this means that he prefers his friend's company to hers. However, she does not discuss her feelings about this incident with her husband though she nags him at the time and makes allusion to it afterwards.    From the beginning, she has doubts that getting married with this person was the right thing to do.  (8.1)

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

One year after they married, husband quits his job "and decides to find himself". Subject is working full-time as a secretary, a job she does not enjoy. Husband is home, sitting around all day. For the next three years, he is in

and out of work. Subject is disappointed and resentful that she has to support him. This means that she cannot start having children or buy a home like all her other friends. In her words: "He kept quitting jobs. It drove me crazy." (10.1)

I.2 **Feeling abandoned**. Subject looks to her spouse for emotional support in difficult times. However, she is left feeling very much alone and uncared for because of his unwillingness and/or inability to respond with empathy and to nurture her. (Freq = 13; PR = 11/20 or 55%)

Examples:

Subject is extremely depressed following an abortion because she sees no way out. She remembers not washing her long thick hair for as long as six weeks at the time and going out for long walks in the middle of the night. She is at home with three young children. Husband is planning an extended business trip overseas. She pleads with him to postpone the trip, telling him that she needs him to be there. But he decides to go anyway. Subject feels "betrayed, cheated, angry, unsupported and uncared for". Once more, she realizes that he is not there for her when she needs him. She interprets his action to mean that he does not care and that she cannot count on him. (1.3)

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

Subject has a home birth for her second child. This is something both, she and her husband, wanted very much. Unlike the delivery of her first child, this one is extremely long and difficult. Labour lasted 30 hours. Afterwards, she is totally exhausted, unable to think, speak or even raise her arms.

When planning this home birth, she assumed that her husband understood that she would require some care initially and that she could count on him to look after the newborn and the older child. He read all the appropriate books and talked with many people ahead of time. However, he is oblivious to her needs. The day after the birth, he does not give her any food nor does he even make a cup of tea. The second day, he leaves to do some grocery shopping but does not return home as expected. He subsequently explains that he met friends on the way and decided to accompany them to the beach instead. Subject recalls several other examples of how her husband does not provide any support at that time:

He didn't wash the sheets that were stained with blood. A few days later, I was hanging them up to dry on the line. He didn't feed me, he didn't take care of the house, he didn't take care of our other child, my house plants were all wilting as well as the vegetable and flower gardens. With me out of commission, he didn't

step in and do anything...He had a son like he wanted, and I had it at home, a beautiful child and then it's like nothing happened. He wasn't there for me, for the baby or the other child (15.1).

Because of physical exhaustion, subject is not able to be assertive and demand his help. Her husband accepts a job in the evening, a time which is very difficult because the baby cries continuously. He isn't around much, spending time at friends. Subject feels very bitter about the situation but resigns herself. The above incident is the turning point for her. She feels devastated because everything seems exactly what he wanted and yet he is not responding as expected.

I.3    **Resignation.** Subject is unhappy about what is going on in the marriage but since her attempts at working it out with her husband have failed, she feels that she has no choice but to accept things the way they are. Feelings of powerlessness are dominant. (Freq = 4; PR = 4/20 or 20%)

**Examples:**

Subject is planning a tubal ligation. Her husband is aware of that. Nevertheless, subject is stunned when he refuses to sign a consent form required before the procedure can take place. In subsequent discussions, they are unable to resolve the issue to the subject's satisfaction. She feels angry and powerless and lets him

know that.    In the end, she feels she has no choice but to accept his decision, as without her husband's consent, her doctor will not proceed with the tubal ligation. (1.1)

************

After months of arguing back and forth, subject gives in to her husband about buying some recreational property. Her hope was that eventually they could buy a house with their savings.    She gives in because there seems to be no other way of keeping peace.  (10.5)

I.4    **Losing trust**.    Confidence in spouse is damaged as a result of a single event or a number of unresolved past incidents.    This coincides with a radical change in the perception of the spouse's personality.   (Freq = 8; PR = 7/20 or 35%)

Examples:

Six months after their reconciliation, husband who is a psychotherapist, becomes sexually involved with one of his patients.    Subject learns about it.    This triggers the sense that her husband is unable to grasp reality correctly, that he has severe problems. She confronts her husband who explains that he thought his sexual involvement with the young woman would help her. She discusses her feelings of hurt and the incongruency involved with regards to the fact that they have just gotten back together and are trying to make a fresh start and he is having an

affair.    As  a  result,  subject  becomes more emotionally
distanced  from  her husband.  She realizes that his actions
contradict  his spoken intentions of "trying to make a go of
it with [her]".

In  retrospect,  she says that this was the beginning of
the  end for her, that it was a breach of trust, and that it
also  made  her  question  whether  her  husband  could
distinguish  between  fact  and  fiction.   She  remembered
having  been  told by a psychiatrist before that her husband
was  a  sociopath,  something she had dismissed at the time.
However,  this  incident makes her wonder if that is not the
case.  (14.1)

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Subject  is very ill with a breast infection.  Her fever
is  so  high  that  she is hallucinating.  A week later, she
runs  into  a  friend who informs her that her husband spent
the  night  at  their  place on that day.  He told them that
"he  tried talking to her and that she didn't make sense, so
[he]  figured he might as well get out".  Subject is shocked
to  find  out that he has left her alone in the house with a
newborn  and  another young child when she was obviously not
able  to  attend  to the care of the children.  She thinks it
is  incredibly  irresponsible  on  his  part  and  tries  to
understand  how  he could do something like that.  A growing
suspicion  that  he  is  mentally ill is the only way she can

explain his behaviour.

She reports that she never believed or trusted him after this incident, and that it made a lasting change in her attitude towards her husband. She says that "she became very suspicious and like a detective", that she would listen to what he would say but wait to see how he acted. (15.2)

I.5     **Gaining emotional distance**. Subject is feeling emotionally detached. Part of her is watching what is happening rather than being totally involved in the interaction with her spouse. The experience is described as "pulling back" and "being the observer". For some, it is tantamount to deciding to no longer share their inner self with their spouse. (Freq = 6; PR = 5/20 or 25%)

Examples:

Subject has received individual counselling for a couple of years. Through this process, she is becoming more accepting of her own needs, values and feelings. She is starting to trust her perceptions and judgments more. She is also becoming increasingly aware of the marital dynamics in their relationship. One thing she learns in counselling that is particularly significant is the idea that if "you didn't like the way you're behaving, that means that that behaviour is not you. Dr. X taught that the self who didn't like the behaviour was the real self".

Whereas before the counselling, she got totally involved in their fights, now part of herself stands outside and watches. As the observer, she feels stronger, more in control of what is happening to her. Instead of feeling that she is losing control by responding in hysterics to whatever is happening between them, she learns to detach herself to some extent. She recognizes earlier than before the type of interactions which are likely to turn into a fight and feel she has the option not to respond as she has in the past. (2.1)

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

Subject convinces her spouse to begin marriage counselling. The couple attend eight sessions together. She reports that throughout counselling, she was detached to a certain extent. Part of herself was invested in the process and feeling encouraged that they were working at improving the marriage, but the other part was making mental notes about her husband's shortcomings. In her words: "That's when I realized what a long way he had to go to get in touch with himself. So in that sense, I pulled back" (6.3).

I.6     **Increased self-confidence.** As a result of acting independently and doing something which enhances her self-esteem, subject feels more confident about herself and her abilities. This can have two different effects: (a)

She becomes more assertive with her spouse and puts renewed energy into trying to change things to increase her level of satisfaction in the marriage, or (b) having regained some self-esteem, she is in a stronger position from which to contemplate the alternatives to her marriage. (Freq = 9; PR = 6/20 or 30%)

Examples:

Not having her husband's support to resign from her job, subject decides to separate their finances. This enables her to make other decisions without obtaining his approval first. Subsequently, she takes a battery of vocational tests, which ̣he finds too expensive, resigns from her job and returns to university for a graduate degree. Having gained confidence from making these decisions, she begins articulating her point of view more clearly and frequently in their discussions. As a result, the balance of power in their relationship changes. Mostly, she says,"it deflated a myth they both had about [her] abilities". Subject has hitherto felt inadequate about expressing herself in their discussions because she was not as widely read in social sciences and the humanities as her husband. This influenced her self-image negatively and her spouse's perception of her. Subject reports that she was becoming increasingly confident about asking for what she wanted from the relationship. (6.2)

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Subject begins to teach fitness. This gives her a lot of confidence. She reports having "this real sense of power all of a sudden". This is the turning point in her decision to leave. She is getting validation of herself as someone worthwhile instead of the verbal and physical abuse she has been getting at home. She realizes that she had marketable skills which she wants to develop further. She reports feeling "powerful, confident, happy and excited" about future prospects. (16.7)

**Hindering Incidents**

I.7    **Depression.** Depression is not used in the clinical sense. Rather, it includes a range of emotions mentioned by the subjects such as feeling numb, withdrawn, hopeless, trapped, confused and self-blaming. It coincides with denial and thoughts of separation or divorce are quickly suppressed as soon as they surface. (Freq = 7; PR = 6/20 or 30%)

**Examples:**

Subject has a growing awareness of stress involved in home environment. She feels happy when at work, yet her job is very demanding. She dreads coming home. She feels herself becoming more withdrawn, sinking towards a depression. She reports not being able to see her way out of her predicament and feeling powerless. That summer, she specifically recalls telling her brother that "the only way

[she] could get out of the relationship was if [she] died of cancer and that [she] felt that [she] was promoting something like this in [her] body through [her] mental attitudes" (5.2).

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Subject becomes depressed. The depression begins approximately one year prior to separation and becomes more intense in the last six months of their married life. Except for going to work, subject spends a lot of time lying in bed unless absolutely forced to do something. She describes this period in the following words: "I felt like I was at the bottom of a big black pit". She reports never having felt so hopeless as she did during that time. She blames herself for the marriage not working out. She says that there were times when the thought of leaving surfaced, but it was quickly suppressed. (8.5)

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Subject starts to gain weight. She feels powerless in the marriage because she cannot make the simplest decisions without her husband checking on her. At the same time, she cannot see herself admitting to failure and returning to live with her parents. She cannot envisage any other alternative to her predicament other than dying. She recalls praying that a car would run over her and that she would die. (10.3)

I.8    **Hope**.  As  a  result  of  this  incident,  subject regains  confidence  that  the  marital  relationship  can improve  and  the  marriage  saved.  (Freq = 6; PR = 4/20 or 20%)

Examples:

When  subject  introduces  the  topic  of  separation, husband  agrees  that perhaps it is necessary.  However, the next  day,  he returns from work in tears saying that he does not  want  them  to  split up and that he is willing to make some  changes.  Subject  feels  encouraged  by  his response. It  is  the  first time in 10 years of marriage that he shows his  vulnerable  side.  This  abates  the  inner fears she had about  his not having much of an emotional investment in the marriage.  She interprets this as confirmation of his love and  caring  and  is  particularly  touched by his desire to "try  and  change  for  [her]".  Following this incident, the couple  begins  to  talk  more  about issues of concerns and subject  feels closer to her husband.  She "puts on hold the idea of splitting up".  (6.1b)

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Spouse  completes  a  residential  treatment program for his  alcohol  problem  and  he  remains sober for six months afterwards.  Subject  feels  very  hopeful  that they have "licked" the problem.  (16.4b)

I.9    **Fear**.  Subject    experiences    a    strong    and
unpleasant    emotion    which    is    triggered    by    anticipation    or
awareness    of    danger.    The    incident    prevents    her    from
following    through    with    plans    of    separation    or    divorce.    In
several    cases,    this    is    related    to    the    threat    of    physical
abuse.    (Freq = 4;  PR = 3/20 or 15%)

Examples:

Subject    returns    home    one    evening    after    a    meeting.
Husband    is    already    in    bed.    She    joins    him    and    snuggles    up
to    him.    He    pushes    her    out    of    bed    with    his    feet.    She
leaves    the    bedroom    and    goes    to    the    living    room    where    she
cries    for    a    couple    of    hours.    She    is    feeling    bereft    and
thinks    how    bad    the    marriage    is.    Her    husband    eventually
gets    up    and    asks    what    the    problem    is.    She    tells    him    what
he    did    but    he    explains    it    away    saying    that    he    must    have
been    dreaming.    She    initiates    a    discussion    about    the
marriage,    asking    him    if    he    is    unhappy    with    it.    This    is
prompted    by    the    above    and    also    by    the    fact    that    their
sexual    relationship    has    deteriorated.    It    has    been    a    couple
of    months    since    the    last    time    they    made    love.    He    responds
that    he    is    neither    happy    nor    unhappy.    She    tells    him    of    her
fear    that    he    will    leave;    he    replies    that    he    would    never
leave    because    of    the    children.    Subjects    reports    that    her
overriding    feeling    at    the    time    was    "absolute    fear".    She
was    terrified    that    her    husband    was    going    to    leave    and    that

she would lose everything. As a result, she worked even harder at keeping the marriage going. (9.1b)

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

After a 13-month separation, where husband visited occasionally, he returns one day, walks into the house and announces that he is coming back to live with the family. Subject objects and husband leaves angrily. He returns later and is physically abusive. Subject contacts her social worker and the RCMP in order to get a restraining order. However, she is discouraged from initiating proceedings by the RCMP. They mention other cases where this type of action has fuelled the husband's anger so much that an attempted murder ensued in one case, and suicide in another. The RCMP also indicates that they could not protect her adequately, should her husband decide to trespass.

Subject reports that this was the beginning of the "most horrible year of gut wrenching fear" for her. Though he did not stay at the house, she saw him on many occasions standing at the perimeter of the property. Townspeople would call to inquire about what was going on because he was seen around town, exhibiting very strange behaviours. (15.1b)

I.10 **Feelings of inadequacy.** Subject questions her ability to manage financially if she were to follow through

with plans of separation. In one case, the subject's self-esteem is so low that the feelings of inadequacy do not have a clear focus, but are experienced as general feelings of unworthiness and ineptitude which prevent her from thinking about separation as an alternative to her situation. (Freq = 2; PR = 2/20 or 10%)

Examples:

Subject has not worked in her field, nursing, for many years. A refresher course would be necessary and yet that course is not relevant to what she wants to do now nor does it relate to her former experience in public health and psychiatry. In her words:

> I was afraid, you know, I didn't feel I had any skills left, as an employee, and I was really afraid of that. I really felt I was a nothing. Even though, I was feeling firmer about myself in some ways, still bottom line I felt like I really had nothing to offer anybody... There isn't a clear incident. It was more a global, constant feeling (1.2b).

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Subject is afraid that she will not get custody of the children. Her husband is constantly threatening her that if she leaves him, he will take the children away to a foreign country. He even obtained passports for himself and the children. Her concern about not getting custody

can be attributed to feelings of inadequacy, powerlessness, and lack of information. In her words:

> There wasn't one specific incident. He just said that to me over and over again. Constant put-downs, like you're a lousy mother and a lousy wife. It's like a brainwashing process until you get to the point where you lose your power, you lose your sense of who you are. And the legal aspects were a totally foreign area to me, so anyone could have convinced me of anything (15.5b).

1.11    **Loyalty**.    Subject feels a responsibility to her spouse when is experiencing difficulties. She does not want to add to his distress by leaving the marriage at that time. (Freq = 1; PR = 1/20 or 5%)

Example:

Husband's mother passes away. Since his only brother died one year earlier and that he has no other family, subject thinks that her husband will turn to her for support and that they can make a fresh start. She feels overwhelmed at the thought that he has no one else in the world and decides that she cannot leave him. She renews her efforts to "try and get this marriage back on track" (9.6b).

I.12    **Concern for welfare of children**.    Subject is worried that the children will be neglected if she leaves them with their father. (Freq = 1; PR = 1/20 or 5%)

Example:

Subject has been sleeping on the couch for some time. In this incident, her youngest child gets up to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night and finds her there. She takes the time to talk and cuddle him before tucking him in his bed again. She specifically remembers wondering how she could possibly leave. At the time, she visualizes her husband's way of handling a similar situation which she describes as being more authoritarian and not taking the time to attend to the child's feelings. She is very upset at the thought of not being there for the children. (1.1b)

## II - COGNITIONS

### Facilitating Incidents

### II.1 Heightened awareness of dysfunctional

marital dynamics. Subject is struck with a particular problem in her marriage. This is not a new problem but one that has persisted over time. At that moment, however, she finds it particularly unhealthy and unacceptable. In some cases, subject tries to talk to her spouse about it but is unable to get through to him. (Freq = 13; PR = 11/20 or 55%)

Examples:

Finishing off the house is a symbolic issue in this marriage. Husband insists on doing the work himself but renovations are not progressing very quickly. Subject

repeatedly suggests that he hire extra help with the money from his inheritance in order to get the house finished and the mortgage paid off. Instead, he buys recreational property and a mobile home in the United States.

It is the Christmas holiday and husband is gone to the U.S. with the children. Subject could not get time off work, so she did not accompany them. They have been living in very primitive conditions for over two and a half years at that point, "without a proper kitchen, no insulation, no cupboards, just wood floors...The only finished rooms in the house were the children's bedrooms and the living room; the rest was like camping". Suddenly, she has an insight that his not finishing the house is his way of exerting control over the situation and over her. In her words:

> This was my punishment for not being what he wanted,
> because I had changed, because I had wanted to become a
> partner in the marriage. I had grown up and I had
> said: "Either we have a marriage and go for marriage
> counselling or we separate but we don't go back to the
> way it was seven years ago". It really hit home to me
> then, that he did not want me to participate in the
> marriage (9.7).

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Husband is epileptic and depends on medication taken at regular intervals each day to prevent grand mal seizures.

Subject reports that he began "to display disturbing behaviours" such as repeatedly forgetting to take his medication or taking chances with his personal safety, "informing [her] nonchalantly after each incident". For example, he rode his bicycle home for 20 blocks through traffic after sensing that a grand mal seizure was imminent and, subsequently, had the seizure at home. Subject is convinced that she and her husband are becoming increasingly embroiled in the interactional roles of rescuer and victim. She is unable to communicate this insight to him and equally certain that staying in the marriage perpetrates the "game". Given his lack of support for her career objectives and his expectations that she assume full responsibility for housework, she finds it almost impossible to become fully independent of him economically. With respect to this last issue, she sees herself in the victim's role. (12.8)

II.2 **Awareness of value differences**. Subject realizes that she and her husband have major differences with regards to fundamental values such as work ethic, money management, child rearing, religion. (Freq = 6; PR 6/20 or 30%)

Examples:

The couple's sexual relationship has deteriorated to the point where they rarely have intercourse. In this

incident, subject recalls that husband approaches her but she refuses, initially by making excuses and then, when he insists, by telling him directly that she does not want to make love. Her husband masturbates in the room before her. She feels angry because she thinks that he is trying to make her feel guilty for having turned him down. This incident crystallizes for her that there is nothing left in the marriage. She believes that marriage should be a meeting of two individuals on many levels, the spiritual, the mental and the physical. In terms of this hierarchy, the physical aspect is the last rung on the ladder and the fact that they no longer have any sexual life together means to her that they "are right down at the bottom of the road" (3.4).

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Subject returns from a visit with her parents. Husband greets her with the news that he has lost his job. Instead of being upset about it, he seems genuinely pleased. He explains that it will give him more time to practice music. The incident makes her realize that they do not share the same basic values and that, for years, she has wrongly assumed that they did. Her assumptions were that as a father and husband he would want to provide for the family, that he would be proud of it. (15.5)

II.3    **Altered    perception    of    spouse**.    Subject's
perception  of  her  husband's  personality  changes  suddenly.
She  gains  a  new  view  of  him  as  he  deals  with  different
situations  such  as  loss  of  employment,  conflict,  and  so
forth.    In    some  cases,  she  questions  whether  or  not  he  is
mentally  fit.    (Freq = 11;  PR = 9/20 or 45%)

Examples:

Subject    traces    the    downfall    of    the    marriage    to
something  which  happened  almost  two  years  prior  to  the
separation.    At    that  time,  her  husband's  application  to  a
tenure  position  at  the  university  was  not  supported  by  his
colleagues.    As  a  result,  he  lost  his  academic  position  as
well    as    the    social    network    they  had  been  involved  with.
Her    husband    was    very    bitter    and    blamed  everyone  in  his
department    for    "being    against  him  and  stabbing  him  in  the
back".

Two    years    later,    when    he    encounters    similar
difficulties    at    work,  subject  notes  the  similarity  of  both
situations    and    begins    wondering    if    her    husband    is
paranoid.    Although  she  is  supportive  out  of  loyalty,  she
subsequently  finds  herself  questioning  his  judgment and
attitudes  about  a  lot  of  things.  This  is  when  she  begins
to  ask  herself  whether  or  not  she  wants  a  family  with  this
man.  She  still  values  him  for  his  intelligence  and  his
sense  of  humour  but  she  does  not  respect  his  lack  of

self-awareness.    In her words:

> I  could recognize that he was causing certain things to
> happen  in his job but he couldn't recognize it...and he
> demanded    absolute    loyalty.       Although    he    never
> verbalized  it,   I   got the message when, for example, I
> suggested  that  he  change  his  behaviour at work.  He
> would  just  never  even  consider it.  And then he would
> start  to look at me as someone who was taking the other
> side  of  things.   It was always black or white for him.
> His  whole  life  was  like  that  and  the  relationship
> (2.2).

<div align="center">************</div>

Subject  has  been  looking forward to this trip to visit
her  sister.    There are tensions because her spouse and her
sister  don't  get  along.    A  confrontation  takes  place
between  them  which,  in  turn,  stirs up a heated argument
between  the  subject  and  her  spouse.    Following  the
incident,  her  spouse  refuses to talk to her for 24 hours,
despite  several  attempts  on  her part to discuss what has
happened.    Furthermore,  he decides to return home earlier
than  planned.    When they finally talk about it, he blames
her for everything.

Subject's  perception  of  her spouse  is  drastically
altered after that.  She says:

> I  had  seen  other  sides  of  him, parts of him that I

hadn't seen before. And I couldn't close the door on that anymore...Yea, it was a real turning point for me as far as putting everything in concrete form for me to see. Up to that point, I had just had a lot of doubts and worries. But after that point, it was just obvious to me that things couldn't continue, that I would have to leave him, that it was escalating, things were not getting better, they were getting worse.

From that time on, subject reports "seeing more clearly and becoming more objective". She explains that she was less willing to overlook things as she had done in the past. She also mentions having lost respect for him through that incident and no longer being able to see him as an adult. (5.1)

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Husband is unemployed and his unemployment insurance benefits are held up. Nevertheless he buys a guitar on credit as well as an assortment of equipment such as mikes and amplifiers. Meanwhile, there is no food in the fridge and there are two children to feed. He is getting heavily into drugs. This indicates to the subject that her husband is not thinking straight: "He was totally oblivious and remained obsessed with this idea of becoming a rock and roll star" (15.4).

**II.4      Acknowledging dissatisfaction to herself.**

Subject is one step beyond vague discontent with the marriage.   She is actually telling herself that her marital relationship does not fulfill her needs and expectations. (Freq = 4; PR = 4/20 or 20%)

Examples:

Subject participates in a women's consciousness-raising group a few years before the break-up of her marriage.  She identifies strongly with some of the issues raised by other group members, in particular that of the division of labour.   The women want to pursue careers and feel that their husbands are not supportive of their efforts to make the shift from a traditional to a more egalitarian marriage.

This is when the subject begins acknowledging her dissatisfaction with her marriage. She feels discouraged, hurt and angry about the fact that she and her spouse have tried to resolve this conflict for years but have been unable to do so to her satisfaction. (12.1)

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After the birth of their second child, husband is drunk when he visits subject in hospital.  She is very upset about that, especially because birth is such an intense emotional experience, a time when she feels very vulnerable.   She feels betrayed because her husband knows

how upsetting his drinking is to her even in ordinary circumstances. She also feels helpless because the traditional value system that she espouses does not view divorce as an option. Yet, at that time, she remembers thinking vividly "This is not a man I want to be with" (16.1).

II.5 **Comparing marriage to that of others**. As a result of having an extra-marital relationship or by observing interactions in other couples, subject becomes acutely aware of the problems in her own marriage. (Freq = 6; PR = 5/20 or 25%)

Examples:

Subject notices the parallel between her marriage and that of her husband's parents. She fears that she will become like her mother-in-law whom she describes as a submissive, whining, manipulative woman who is very angry underneath. The following incident is critical in the subject's decision to leave her marriage.

On Christmas day, they are having dinner at her in-laws. There is much tension in the air. Her sister-in law makes an off-hand comment to her mother. The latter has just been humiliated by her husband in front of everyone. She overreacts to her daughter's comment and starts hitting her. Subject remembers thinking "this is a crazy family". She remembers her own family and the fact

that she has not been brought up that way. She is very upset about the whole scene, something which her husband is unable to comprehend since this is normal in his family.

Subject is also aware of her own unexpressed anger towards her husband and she decides that she does not want to turn into a shrew like her mother-in-law. She does not act on this insight for lack of self-confidence. Nevertheless, the incident crystallizes for her that she has to get out of the marriage. (10.6)

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Subject visits her family to see what support they might be able to provide if she were to leave her husband. During her visit she observes an incident in which her parents "enacted one of their ongoing interpersonal conflicts and ineffectual method of resolving the disagreement". Subject recognizes this pattern because it is similar to the way she and her husband resolve difficulties. She believes that the only way the vicious cycle can be broken is for her husband to "demonstrate willingness to give in on some issues". However, given their history of constant power struggle, she is certain that this is not going to happen. (12.10)

*************

Subject does not feel appreciated or valued by her husband. She compares her experience with him to her

relationships with other men who make her feel good about herself. For example, he does not give her any feedback when they make love. She describes him as "the classic case of a stereotype macho guy who doesn't cry and doesn't show feelings..." (18.4).

II.6 **Acquiring a new perspective to analyze the**

 **marital relationship.** Subject gains a new perspective of her marriage through reading or attending self-help groups. This results in a radical change in her perception of herself in relation to the marriage and her behaviours towards her spouse. (Freq = 5; PR = 4/20 or 20%)

Examples:

Subject begins to read feminist literature. This results in a "transformation of perspectives", a radical change in how she sees herself in relation to her marriage. She discovers a commonality of experience with other women which is validating, liberating. She coins it "a psychological boost, a pep pill". This reassures her that the marital difficulties are not due to her own inadequacies. She begins feeling more positive about herself, questioning what she wants for herself more and being more assertive about it. Her focus changes from the need to mold herself around her husband to herself. She says:

Suddenly, it struck me that I couldn't be a black hole

or an empty vacuum which molded itself around his desires or what I thought his desires might be, because he never told me anyway, so it was a little difficult to know (7.3).

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Subject begins reading feminist literature. She describes it as a "conversion experience". It gives her a framework to organize her thinking around questions of personal responsibility. She realizes that she has been looking to her husband to fulfill her emotionally and in every other way and decides that this is no longer acceptable to her. She says that it was "a genuine revelation and an inner experience" which resulted in her becoming more assertive. She stops rescuing him. This is interpreted as non-caring by her spouse and tensions between them increase. Subject is feeling increasingly estranged from husband. She is finding it very difficult to respond to him emotionally and sexually. She states:

He had really become very isolated and I had gained a sense of personal power and I thought, there is no going back. I knew there was no going back...into that traditional role of cajoling him into good health, of pleading, of manipulating....I had this inner conviction that there is no way I am going to manipulate this person into being a healthy person or

even into staying into this relationship. He's got to take responsibility. And I just backed right off (14.6).

II.7    **Integrating the feedback of others.** Subject receives feedback about the marriage from others, namely friends, family or helping professionals. This prompts her to reevaluate the marriage and particularly her responsibility for the way things are. (Freq = 5; PR = 4/20 or 25%)

Examples:

Subject is confronted by her daughter's therapist. She is told that one of her daugther's problems is that she does not stand up for herself. As a result, she becomes more aware of her own behaviour. She takes another look at her way of smoothing over situations and making excuses for her husband. Subject feels hurt and offended at the time but, after giving it some thought, she realizes that her daughters are right. She begins to see herself differently, as somebody who "had to take responsibility".

Something happened inside me. It was definitely a moment of reckoning when I was told that my own daughters could not see me as a person who could stand on her own two feet. Because, up until that point, I really was outwardly in many ways a person who stood on her own two feet. I kept on with my job, I kept on

going to school, I was gaining more responsibilities in my job. Outwardly, I was a pretty together person. Inwardly, I was so tied in to this relationship whereupon I had expectations which were one thing and the reality was another thing and I wasn't growing as an individual (14.5).

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Subject has visited her physician several times for stress related symptoms. During one of those visits, he asks her what she is going to do about her situation, in reference to her marriage. At that moment, it strikes her that no one can "bail [her] out", something she expected would happen somehow. She ponders his question for awhile and decides that she has to assume full responsibility for changing her life and that she is no longer willing to settle for what this marriage has to offer. (17.5)

II.8    **Experiencing validation of self outside marriage.**
Subject gets confirmation of herself as someone who is either capable, attractive or worth listening to. She feels understood and supported, something which is missing in the marriage. This positive feedback comes from various sources such as co-workers, friends, casual acquaintances or lovers. The experience enhances her self-esteem.
(Freq = 14; PR = 11/20 or 55%)

<u>Examples</u>:

Subject starts doing community work, teaching parenting classes, doing things that she enjoys. She grows more confident in her own abilities. In contrast with the home climate, she is getting positive feedback from people she works with. Subject begins to believe in herself again. She is feeling more optimistic about the future. (1.6)

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Attending Alanon in the last three years of her marriage is significant in coming to terms with the decision to leave the marriage in the following ways:
It is an opportunity to explore her feelings in a supportive environment instead of suppressing them as she has done in the past. She is encouraged to take stock of her life and live to her full potential. She becomes more aware and accepting of her feelings. Furthermore, the idea of herself as a "divorced woman" becomes acceptable to her.

She feels inspired by the other group members who are striving to accomplish the goals they set for themselves in spite of the confusion and turmoil in their lives. These relationships are important because she can see how these other women are working on improving themselves, how they are taking risks. "[They were] showing the way in a non-aggressive kind of way" through sharing their own struggles and efforts. Their support was critical at a time where her self-worth was at a very low ebb. (16.4)

II.9    <u>**Acquiring a concept of the alternative**</u>. Subject starts considering the alternatives to her marriage. For some, this comes about as a result of having an extra-marital relationship. The affair instills hope that she will be able to form fulfilling relationships with others even though her marriage is unsatisfactory. For others, the concept of the alternative stems from reassessing life goals and identifying other objectives worth pursuing outside of marriage. (Freq = 6; PR = 5/20)

<u>Examples</u>:

A valued and respected family friend lets subject know that he wants a romantic involvement with her. This comes as a surprise to her. She feels both intrigued and flattered at his disclosure. In his letter to her, the friend writes that everything her husband complains about as faults of hers, he views as virtues. In the subject's own words, "this was refreshing and almost irresistible" especially since it was in sharp contrast to the negative messages she was getting from her spouse. This incident means to her that, even though her husband does not respect or value her, someone else will. (2.5)

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Subject has been teaching fitness. She realizes that she has marketable skills and decides to invest her time and energy pursuing a career in this field. She thinks of

this as a means of becoming self-sufficient and a stepping-stone in leaving her marriage. (16.7. Cross-reference [X-ref.]: Increased self-confidence)

II.10 **Heightened awareness that dysfunctional marital dynamics have deleterious effects on the children.** Subject is worried about the children's immediate welfare and/or the possible long-term negative effects of the dysfunctional marital relationship. In some cases, the child's symptomatic behaviours such as frequent nightmares, rebelliousness or promiscuity alert her and make her question the value of remaining in the marriage. In other cases, extension of physical abuse to the children prompts her to leave. (Freq = 8; PR = 7/20 or 35%)

Examples:

Subject notes that her three-year old son is having nightmares with increasing frequency. She realizes that he is the barometer for what is going on in the marriage. Her husband's ways of dealing with the boy has been an on-going source of friction between them. She has been "running interference" to protect the boy from his step-father's erratic and harsh discipline. When the child gets embroiled in one of their fights, subject decides that she no longer wants this man as a role model for her son. She becomes acutely aware that their marital problems are taking a toll on the child as evidenced by nightmares and

tantrums.    This  is an important factor in her decision to
leave the marriage. (5.5)

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Drinking  is  a` major problem in the marriage. Husband
often  goes  out drinking all night.  When he returns, he is
physically  abusive  towards  subject  and  the  children.
Subject  starts  thinking  that  she might as well be on her
own.    She  reports  that  it  was  not  one  incident  in
particular,  but the accumulation of similar incidents which
made her decide to leave eventually.

In  this  incident,  he  chokes  her.  She is frightened
about  his  losing control altogether.  She is also concerned
about  how  this  kind  of  family  atmosphere  is  going to
influence  the  children.   This  is  significant  in  her
decision  to  leave.  She does not want them to grow up in a
home where father is always drunk. (16.3)

II.11  **Accepting that marriage is unworkable**.  Subject
has  a  clear and distinct awareness that the probability of
significant  improvement  in  the  marriage  is  minimal  or
non-existent.   This  coincides  with  the  repetition of a
familiar  pattern,  something  that has been going on for so
long  that  she  loses  all  hope  that  it  will  ever  be
different.    With this realization, she moves a step closer
to  making the decision to separate or divorce.  (Freq = 11;
PR = 10/20 or 50%)

<u>Examples</u>:

Subject is alone steam cleaning the carpets before the end of the school holiday. She is having a lot of recollections about the marriage. More specifically, she remembers the numerous times that she suggested marital counselling throughout the years and how her husband would initially agree but withdraw after a few sessions. She realizes that she has been investing a lot more emotional energy than he in trying to make things work. Suddenly, she feels that a great weight has lifted from her and that it is alright if the marriage does not continue. She resolves to talk to him and suggest that they separate unless he is willing to invest more of himself in the relationship. She describes this moment of insight in the following way:

> These things were all coming back together. It's like the lights when you're sailing and you are waiting to get back into the harbour. The lights have to line up for you to find the right course. The lights were lining up and the penny was about to drop that I didn't have to live this way any longer...I realized that I have to stop manipulating him to stay in this marriage. Because every time I am conciliatory and tell him, "Come along, we can make it", he kind of grudgingly gives in and then nothing happens...I had

been struggling for 23 years trying to keep this all going and now, finally, I am saying to myself it is okay for it not to work out...Because what I realized is that I had lived all these months and years knowing that we were not going anywhere and hoping that we would and finally I'm saying to myself, it's okay if it doesn't work. I can actually live without this relationship. It's like a weight had lifted. All the excuses that I had, all fell by the wayside. The most important thing for me was to stand up and be counted (14.9).

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

Subject makes the necessary arrangements to move including obtaining a transfer for her job and finding accommodation for herself and the children in another city. Once everything is finalized she tells her husband that she is moving. She also indicates that he can join them if he wants. He joins the rest of the family but is unable to find work in the area. Shorthly thereafter, he resumes drinking heavily and physical abuse escalates to weekly episodes. Over the years he has suffered from manic-depressive episodes and, as he gets older, subject notes that the depressed states are more frequent and severe. When he was in his manic phase and things were going better for him, subject felt hopeful about the

marriage. She thought that he would overcome his problems. But after several disappointments, she is finally accepting that the situation will not improve. In her words:

> It took me a lot of years to realize that this is what it was going to be like, up and down, up and down, that it was never going to stabilize. Because every time he would climb up and be a reasonably okay human being with acceptable social behaviour, I figured it would stay that way. But it didn't. I had to accept that, face it and then make a decision as to whether or not I wanted to be part of it (17.3).

II.12 **Shifting focus from marriage to self.** Subject decides to invest her emotional energies into developing her own aspirations rather than to continue focusing on the marriage as the most important part of her life. (Freq = 5; PR = 5/20 or 25%)

<u>Examples</u>:

Subject attends a women's consciousness-raising group. In this group, she has an experience of lasting significance. The women are requested to do a life-goal exercise. In so doing, subject realizes that she has never considered her life in "such an organized and thorough fashion". Her objectives are vague, abstract and consequently, she realizes that she has put her aspirations on the "back burner" and going along with her husband's

career plans which are more concrete. The exercise helps her focus on her own career development. She realizes how important it is to her and resolves to find ways of pursuing her goals. (12.2)

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Subject becomes a Bahai. Her religious conversion has important consequences for her marriage, especially since her husband does not follow suit. She reports having transfered her need for an authority figure from her spouse to God and having learned to take responsibility for herself instead of relying on her husband. She also makes major lifestyle changes such as no longer drinking or using soft drugs. This widens the gap between herself and her husband. (3.6)

II.13 **Making the decision to separate**. The decision is triggered by a feeling of hopelessness. Once more, the subject is confronted with an issue that has not been resolved satisfactorily. This is something of a "last straw" phenomenon. The incident reinforces the belief that the subject has had for some time about the marriage, namely that it is unworkable. It is the culmination of a long process of questioning and soul searching. For the majority of subjects, making the decision was related to having some idea that they would be able to implement it in the near future. Hence, making the decision and

implementing it were usually simultaneous and often contingent upon on another. (Freq = 17; PR = 18/20 or 90%)

Examples:

Subject is cleaning a box of old diaries and in the process comes upon something she wrote when she and her husband were in the first stages of their relationship. It is an eye-opener because she realizes that the difficulties she complained about in those days are the same as now, 15 years later. She feels she has done all she can to be a good wife, showing her support by helping him in his business and being supermom. However, it does not seem to make any difference. This incident is a turning point and subject resolves to leave the marriage. She goes up to a neighbour and informs her of her decision. Subject feels relief at having made the decision to leave. She describes that moment in the following terms:

It was a relief, like it was so clear. All these feelings and messiness and the fog and the fuzziness and the depression. This was like a beacon that I could hold onto. It was a real decision...It was like so rational, it was like saying 1 + 1 = 2, you know, like it was that clear...It was an irrevocable decision from the moment I walked up the street to see [neighbour] (1.6).

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Subject goes out with friends and does not inform her husband of her whereabouts or the time she plans to get back. When she returns late into the night, husband is waiting up and he is very angry. The next day, she tries to explain the circumstances but he refuses to talk to her. Husband maintains this silence for a couple of days after the incident. This prompts subject to reassess the marriage, making a balance sheet of the positive and negative. She reaches the conclusion that there are major problems which have not been resolved and decides to separate. When husband returns home from work, she informs him of her decision. (6.10)

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

Subjects reports getting up one day and just knowing that she was going to leave. She says that this time differed from previous occasions where she had left in that it was not out of desperation nor self-pity. She just knew that she wanted to be alone. In her words: "I wanted to have my children and to have the opportunity to live my life without this pain and torment". She reports feeling calm, no longer ambivalent or confused. (16.9)

## III - BEHAVIOURS

### Facilitating Incidents

III.1    **Confiding   in   others**.      For   some   subjects, confiding   their   marital   problems   to   a   third   party was   an important   step   in   reaching   a   decision.   (Freq = 6;
PR = 5/20 or 25%)

Examples:

Subject   is   talking   to   a   lawyer   friend   at   a   party.   She has   been   feeling   very   unhappy   for   a   long   time   and   suddenly it   all   comes   pouring   out.   They   are   in   the   kitchen   at   the time   and   the   friend   pulls   her   chair   around   to   shield   her from   the   look   of   other   people.   This   is   the   first   time   she ever   confides   in   anyone.   The   friend   is   sympathetic.   She gives   her   the   telephone   number   of   a   good   marriage counsellor   whom   she   recommends.   Subject   wipes   off   her tears   and   joins   the   rest   of   the   party.   Two   months   later, she   decides   to   throw   the   telephone   number   away   because   she feels   that   she   has   made   all   the   accommodations   that   she   is willing   to   make   to   save   her   marriage.   (1.4)

**********

The   summer   preceding   the   separation,   subject   begins opening   up   and   discussing   her   unhappiness   about   her marriage   with   a   co-worker.   At   that   time,   she   and   her husband   are   having   a   lot   of   arguments.   She   feels understood   by   her   co-worker.   He   urges   her   to   leave   before

she gets tied down with children. She begins to give it serious consideration. (8.6)

III.2 **Testing new behaviours**. Subject behaves in ways which are atypical for her vis-à-vis her husband. This is the key element in that it denotes a shift in the balance of power in the marital relationship. Subject is becoming more assertive and acts independently of her spouse.

(Freq = 11; PR = 9/20 or 45%)

Examples:

After much negotiating with her spouse, over a four-month period, subject gets his support to take a trip alone to visit friends in another province for a week. She views taking this trip on her own as a test situation. Doing so accomplishes two things: (a) She proves to herself that she can do something independently of him and (b) that she can stand up for something that she considers important. (5.3)

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Subject is disappointed that her husband is not getting ready to go out with her at the agreed upon time. Instead, he has left her a note saying that he is playing ball at the park and that on his return he has to do a series of exercises prior to going out. This has happened several times in the past and she would usually wait and nag him to get ready. Although she has really been looking forward to

their evening out, subject decides to go out on her own, much to her husband's dismay. She goes out to dinner and to a movie by herself. (6.7)

III.3 **Becoming self-sufficient.** Subject goes back to work or acquires training which will enable her to look after herself and the children. (Freq = 2; PR = 2/20 or 10%)

Examples:

Subject takes nurse training. This results in a growing feeling that she can look after herself and the children. It is an important factor in her leaving her marriage. (3.7)

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

Subject has not worked outside the home except on a volunteer basis for almost 12 years. She decides to get a job and is successful in doing so. The experience is positive and enhancing for her. In addition, it means that she can take care of herself and the children in the event of a separation. (9.4)

III.4 **Engaging in extra-marital relationships.** Extra-marital relationships had a positive impact on the subjects' self-esteem. For several of the women, the affairs were also a catalyst in making the decision to seek a separation or a divorce. (Freq = 5; PR = 5/20 or 25%)

Examples:

    Subject meets another man for whom she develops "a real infatuation". She feels understood by him in a way that she does not feel with her husband. It makes her realize that she "can have a totally different relationship with a man..." She feels more at ease with him than with her husband whom she thinks of as "being so uptight". Knowing he is there gives her the strength to carry through with her decision to leave. She considers the possibility of of continuing the relationship with him in the future. (6.9)

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    At work, subject meets a man with whom she has a brief affair. The affair is not emotionally satisfying. It is strictly a sexual attraction. However, it is significant in the following ways: (a) Subject learns that she can be very responsive sexually given the "right partner"; (b) it also means to her that "the marriage [is] lacking in that and every other area as well". The affair confirms her inner feeling that the marriage is dead. Subsequently, she brings up the topic of a separation with her husband but readily accepts his answer that they cannot possibly separate at that time for practical reasons. (9.5)

III.5    **Receiving counselling to assist with decision-**

**making.**    Subject    sees    a    counsellor    to    work
through   her   feelings  surrounding  the  decision  to  leave  the
marriage   or   to discuss  the  logistics  involved.   (Freq = 3;
PR = 3/20 or 15%)

Examples:

Subject   contacts   a   counsellor   that   she has met at a
conference.    She sees him on a weekly basis to work through
her   decision,   particularly   with  regards to how it relates
to the children.   (1.9)

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After   many sessions with a psychologist to whom she was
referred   for   symptoms   of   depression,  subject is finally
able   to   accept and implement the decision to separate.  At
one   point,   he   confronts her about the fact that she seems
to   be   asking for his permission to leave the marriage.  He
instructs   her   not  to return for counselling until she has
gone   through   with   it.    She   realizes   that   she   cannot
continue   talking   about it and that it is time to act.  She
informs   her   husband   of   her   decision   to seek a divorce.
(10.8)

III.6    **Implementing   the   decision   to separate or divorce.**
Subject   has   made   the   decision   to   end   the marriage and
takes   it a step further.   She either informs her husband or
makes   preparation for leaving without informing him lest he

becomes abusive. As mentioned earlier, for some of the women, implementing the decision was dependent upon having outside support to assist them in that transition.

(Freq = 10; PR = 10/20 or 50%)

<u>Examples</u>:

Subject seeks legal advice to obtain a separation agreement, custody of the children and a restraining order because her husband is not respecting their informal agreement and has been physically abusive to her. She is informed that this is going to be almost impossible unless she starts divorce action. Subject is emotionally upset at the idea of divorce and cannot understand her own reaction. However, when a friend from out of town comes in to attend his own divorce hearing, the whole thing is demystified. He explains the process to her and the fact that she has no money is no longer an obstacle because she has been refered to Legal Aid. Subject decides to proceed with the divorce action. (15.7)

<p align="center">*************</p>

A critical factor in subject's decision to leave the marriage is that a woman's shelter has opened in her area. It is really important to her to have some place to go where she will not feel that she and her three children are a burden to anybody. In the past, she left once and went back to her parents with the children, but her husband had

come to take them back home a few days later. The shelter makes it feasible for her to leave without involving anyone else in her decision. (16.8)

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It is Christmas day and subject's family is visiting. Husband starts hitting her. One of her brothers throws him out of the house and offers to stay around for a couple of weeks to protect her from harassment. She accepts his help and thereby implements her decision to separate from her spouse. (17.7)

## Hindering Incidents

III.7 **Advice of professionals.** Subject is given advice from experts which hinder her efforts to separate permanently from her spouse. (Freq = 2; PR = 1/20 or 5%)

## Examples:

Subject and her spouse have been separated for over a year. One day, he returns and informs subject that he is coming back home to live. When she objects, he becomes physically abusive. Subject contacts RCMP to inquire about obtaining a restraining order but is discouraged from taking such action, lest her husband become more desperate and violent. The RCMP inform her that they cannot protect her adequately (she lives out of town) if her husband trespasses. They mention other cases where the husband was so angry that it resulted in an attempted murder and a suicide. (15.1b. X-ref: Fear)

Although the couple was separated and the husband was living in another town, he returned every second weekend to visit the children. He had found work and an apartment, had started some courses and his life seemed to be going better. Subject reports that he "was a totally different person". Husband started putting pressure on her to move to the same area because he found the distance and driving too burdensome.

Subject consulted the psychiatrist who had previously seen her husband for an assessment. He recommended that she move to the city where her husband lived, lest all the gains he had made were lost. Moreover, he suggested that there would be more resources available to her in the city, should she need them. He helped the couple draw an informal separation agreement which specified how far apart they would live, visiting privileges, and that they would attend marital counselling. Subject agreed to move because she was worried at the prospect of husband becoming violent again. (15.2b)

III.8 **Physical abuse.** Subject is physically abused by her spouse. Her fear of him and low self-concept combine to keep her in the marriage longer. (Freq = 4; PR = 4/20 or 20%)

Examples:

Subject is trying to get some information about her

predicament and what she can do about it. She is feeling devastated and very much alone. She has just finished some calls and is crying when her husband unexpectedly walks in. Without any warning:

> His eyes just bulged and he went beserk. And he was
> pounding me against the wall screaming, "Don't you fuck
> up my life, don't you fuck up my life." He just kept
> pounding, and pounding and then he threw me on the
> floor and ran out of the house...

Subject has a cut lip and bruises all over her shoulders. Getting out of the marriage is a very slow process because subject is afraid of her husband. He is dangerous. His moods are unpredictable. In her words: "Everything was fine one minute, and the next he was throwing dishes at the wall. Just sudden and unexpected violent behaviour" (15.4b).

<p align="center">*************</p>

Physical abuse has increased considerably in the last year. It is now a weekly occurrence and has gotten to the point where husband is threatening subject with a loaded gun to her head. He even shot at her a couple of times and missed because she ran. (17.6)

## APPENDIX D

## Interview Questions

General Statement of Aim

I am studying divorce from the perspective of women who made the decision to dissolve their marriage. More specifically, I would like to know how you came to that decision and what were the critical events which played an important role in your decision to leave the marriage. I would also like to know what significant factors, if any, made it more difficult to come to that decision.

Questions:

1. I would like you to focus on a time in your marriage when you began to have serious reservations or doubts about your relationship. When was it?

2. Can you remember a specific incident or several small incidents when something significant happened, either between you and your spouse or outside the relationship, which made you question your marriage and consider separation or divorce?

Please take a few minutes to recall the incident(s) in detail and when you are ready to describe it, let me know.

3. Can you describe exactly what happened?

4.  What led up to it?

5.  How was that particular incident important and meaning-
ful to you?

6.  What changed for you through this incident?

7.  How did you feel about the incident at the time?

8.  How did you respond?  What actions did you take, if
any?

9.  Did that make a permanent and lasting change in your
attitude towards your marriage?

This format will be followed to elicit as many
incidents as possible.  A similar set of questions will be
asked to bring forth descriptions of critical incidents
which impeded your getting a separation or divorce.

## APPENDIX E

### Subject Consent Form

<u>Title of project</u>

A critical incident study of the decision-making process leading women to dissolve their marriage.

<u>Principal investigator</u>: Ginette M. Proulx

I am doing a master's thesis to understand the process that women go through in making the decision to end their marriage. I will be asking you to recall and describe specific incidents which were significant in your decision to leave the marriage. I will also ask you to describe incidents which were significant in that they prompted you to stay in the marriage despite the difficulties that you were experiencing.

There will be one interview lasting approximately one and a half hour. The interview will be tape-recorded and transcribed. The information you give to me will be <u>strictly confidential</u>. Confidentiality will be maintained by deleting any personal reference, not using the surname of anyone you may mention and only using the first initial of your first name in the transcript. Once the research is completed, the taped interviews will be erased.

If you have any questions about the research and how I plan to use the information, I will be more than happy to explain it to you. Your participation is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to answer any question or to withdraw from the study at any time.

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE AND CONSENT TO BE A SUBJECT IN THIS RESEARCH

Name of subject:          _____

Signature of subject: _____

Date:                     _____