ADAPTATION TO DIVORCE: MAPPING WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE USING
GROUNDED THEORY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
(Department of Counselling Psychology)

WE ACCEPT THIS THESIS AS CONFORMING
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THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

March 1994

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Abstract

A grounded theory design was used in this investigation of women's experiences of adapting to separation and divorce. The focus of the study was on explicating the social processes that shape the ways in which women negotiate the changes brought on by the termination of their marriages. In-depth interviews were conducted with eight women from the Greater Vancouver area. The women described (a) the circumstances that led up to their physical separation from their husbands, (b) what changes they felt resulted, (c) what they had to do to manage those changes, (d) what facilitated or hindered their coping efforts, and (e) what they would like for themselves in their new lives.

Results of the study highlighted the complexity and variety of women's experiences, and supported the notion that adaptation for these women was a dynamic process that reflected the interaction of various 'dimensions' of their experience. These 'dimensions' were linked in a conceptual model that reflected the basic social process of transforming. The model also situated the perceived impact of separation and divorce, and women's subsequent coping efforts in the rich contexts of their lives.
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Acknowledgements

The completion of this thesis symbolizes the end of my own transition from divorce. The journey has been challenging but rewarding. I would like to express my gratitude for the women in the study, who so openly shared their experiences with me.

Without the support of my dearest friends, this project as well as my time as a poor graduate student would have been much harder to bear. So, thanks Mary Trokenberg, Rosemarie Schiemann, Deborah Simpson, and Linda Ashmore. Several other women I've met in these last 2 years have made a difference in my life—Laurie Minuk, Claudia Collins, and Gek-bee Siow. Thanks for listening to me when I needed to talk.

I appreciate the support and feedback given to me by my committee members, Dr. Richard Young, whose question "What is theory?" gave me much to think about, and Wendy Hall, who taught me about qualitative research and encouraged me to stay 'grounded.' I thank Dr. Bonnie Long, my thesis supervisor, for her invaluable guidance, support, and encouragement over the course of this project.

Most of all, I would like to thank my 2 wonderful children—Elysha and Daniel—for being my sunshine on rainy days, my rainbow when things looked dim, and the loves of my life.
Introduction

Divorce has been conceptualized as a trauma that could lead to pathological outcomes (Albrecht, 1980; Fisher, 1981; Goode, 1956) as well as a form of emotional crisis that could lead to personal growth (Kraus, 1979; Wiseman, 1975). Most researchers agree, however, that almost in all cases, and across different circumstances, divorce causes some degree of personal disorganization and higher than normal levels of psychological distress (Albrecht, Bahr, & Goodman, 1983). These feelings of disorganization and distress appear to accompany much of the change and loss that may result from marital dissolution; adaptation to these changes and losses has been the focus of much divorce research (Buehler & Langenbrunner, 1987; Bursik, 1991; Faust, 1987; Goode, 1956; Holmes & Raschke, 1967; Spanier & Thompson, 1984; Weiss, 1975). However, our current understanding of adaptation to separation and divorce is lacking in terms of empirically supported theory and consistent data. This has been largely due to the fact that previous researchers have used narrow definitions of adaptation and focused almost exclusively on readily observable and quantifiable aspects of change. Moreover, much of divorce research is based on theoretical models (e.g., bereavement models) that have been borrowed from other research traditions and therefore do not represent complete and theoretically supported descriptions for divorced individuals.

The purpose of the present study was to investigate women's experience of separation and divorce; the focus was on the adaptation of those women who were physically separated from
their husbands and divorced or intending to divorce. In particular, the study examined (a) the impact of separation and divorce on women's lives, and (b) how they managed the changes that resulted.

An assumption of the study was that divorce is a major life transition. Individuals are seen as neither passive receptors nor total transformers of experience; rather, adaptation is a process that involves constant interaction between individuals and their environments (Gibson & Brown, 1992). The concept of "adaptation" comes primarily from the literature on life transitions and refers to the broader psychological process of coming to terms with change (White, 1985). It is particularly relevant to divorce research because it illuminates the process dimensions of how individuals manage the consequences of what is a major social phenomenon.

Two empirical traditions are relevant here—studies of life transitions, and of divorce. The life transitions tradition can be conceptualized as a crossroads for several different literatures—for example, stress and coping, personality, adult development, and bereavement. Of particular relevance to the present study is the general concept of a life transition as a turning point, a passage, or a bridge, that mediates between the end of one life phase and the beginning of another (Gibson & Brown, 1992). What appears to trigger the start of a life transition is change. Levinson (1978) conceptualizes change as internal developmental shifts. Change can also result from the occurrence of external events—e.g., job reentry, marriage, or
divorce (Schlossberg, 1984). Separation and divorce constitute a major life transition that, like other life transitions, requires individuals to make adjustments in the patterns of their daily living (Gibson & Brown, 1992). Unlike other life transitions, however, separation and divorce bring about simultaneous shifts in many areas of life, such as changes in economic status, roles, and relationships (Chase-Lansdale & Hetherington, 1990). No attempts have been made by divorce researchers to develop a divorce-specific transitional model that may bridge the gaps in our current understanding of how individuals come to terms with separation and divorce.

Within the divorce literature, there is consensus that adaptation to marital dissolution involves adjustment to the loss of a partner, and to the acquisition of a new lifestyle (Spanier & Castro, 1979). Beyond this conceptualization, however, little investigation into the process dimensions of adaptation has taken place. More often than not, researchers have focused only on measurable outcomes; discrete variables (for instance, demographic variables) have been correlated with outcomes, often with the assumption that there is a direct correspondence between one and the other. The manner in which individuals come to terms with change is poorly understood. Thus, gaps in our understanding of adaptation to marital dissolution lie partly in our lack of information on this process. Because I was attempting to formulate a theoretical conceptualization of the process of adaptation, which included what individuals perceived
to be the changes, and how they experienced them, a qualitative research method was used.

McPhee (1985) attributes inconsistencies in the research data associated with divorce to a lack of an agreed-upon conceptual framework. Some researchers have adopted the perspective of viewing divorce as pathogenic (e.g., Bachrach, 1975; Bloom, 1977). Yet these studies were based on clients who presented themselves for treatment of psychological problems, and reported disproportionately higher levels of suicides, alcoholism, and mental disorders for divorced people. Uncertainty exists as to whether these indices of pathology represent consequences of divorce or pre-existing mental health problems (Chiriboga & Catron, 1991).

Others have subscribed to the idea of divorce as having growth potential (Kraus, 1979; Veevers, 1991). The crisis theory perspective presents divorce as an emotional crisis that could lead to unique opportunities for growth and development (Kraus, 1979). Several studies have indicated that positive changes can result from marital dissolution (Veevers, 1991). Research implications emphasize the necessity to systematically investigate both positive and negative outcomes, as well as the contexts and conditions under which these outcomes occur. The present study attempted to achieve this.

Many studies have utilized models borrowed from other traditions (e.g., Wiseman, 1975); these have not been empirically verified with a divorced population. What has resulted is a literature replete with contrasting data that, in fact, reflect a
lack of theoretical coherence. Contradictions and ambiguities among existing studies point to the need for investigations aimed at reconstructing our understanding of some aspects of life after marital dissolution. Few researchers have turned to a rich source of expertise—the divorced woman—for her subjective account of what happened and why. Investigation of the experience of separation and divorce from a woman's frame of reference would provide rich narrative accounts that would be the basis for theory construction.

Divorce researchers have also wrongfully assumed that all individuals experience changes in similar ways. This approach decontextualizes an individual's experience, and ignores personal meaning and social context for that individual. A qualitative approach would "capture the practices and meanings of...lived experience" (Wilson, 1989, p. 460), and thus presupposes the importance of meaning and context. The present study is a qualitative investigation of women's adaptation to separation and divorce using a grounded theory design (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).
Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review was to critically examine current knowledge regarding adaptation or adjustment to separation and divorce. Discussion of prevalent notions of marriage and marital dissolution will precede examination of relevant theoretical perspectives and key studies. Lack of conceptual coherence in the literature strongly suggests the need for inductively-derived theory that addresses important issues that have been previously ignored, particularly those concerned with describing and specifying the process of adaptation.

Marriage and Marital Dissolution

Any examination of the phenomenon of divorce would be incomplete without mention of the social and cultural context in which it occurs. Clearly, marital dissolution is one of the most profound experiences that people can undergo. Along with gender, age, occupation, and socioeconomic status, marital status dictates a person's role and social status within society (Jacobson, 1983). The connections or ties that individuals share with various members of the family and with society are often disrupted or even broken in the aftermath of divorce. The deep psychological meaning attached to home (Jacobson, 1983) and to family cannot be underestimated, and underlies the impact of socialization upon the shaping of our value systems. Even though divorce is now an acceptable and sometimes desirable alternative to a dysfunctional or destructive marriage, the label of 'broken home' is still frequently used to refer to families undergoing this transition. That negative psychological outcomes are the natural consequences of a disruptive life transition has been the
assumption taken by many researchers, and represents a serious bias that characterizes much of early divorce research (Kraus, 1979).

Undoubtedly, the crisis of separation and divorce creates stress on many different levels, and is traumatic for most people for the short-term, and perhaps even permanently damaging for others. The breaking of multiple ties with the marital partner, family members, and sometimes members of the community can, and often do, wreak havoc in the lives of these individuals. Even positive changes, when occurring simultaneously, can cause some degree of distress in the short term. This much most of us can agree on, either through personal experience or conventional wisdom. How individuals actually manage separation and divorce—how they make sense of and cope with the changes in their lives—is less well understood.

A review of the divorce literature revealed attempts by researchers to understand the impact of divorce on people's lives. However, the picture is far from clear. Major in-depth studies have accentuated negative effects and minimized positive ones (e.g., Goode, 1956; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). Other studies reported feelings of relief in the short-term and emotional growth and well-being in the longer term for many individuals (e.g., Chiriboga & Cutler, 1978; Kaffman & Talmon, 1984). It is important to investigate both positive and negative effects of divorce; yet very little empirical work has been done in this respect.
Change and Challenge

Chase-Lansdale and Hetherington (1990) conceptualizes the short-term impact of divorce from a crisis theory perspective. Family members must deal with a multitude of stressors related to powerful emotions of loss, conflict, failure, and change during the first two years following a divorce (Chase-Lansdale & Hetherington, 1990; Hetherington, 1984; Hetherington & Camara, 1984). Challenges come from many or all aspects of daily living—pragmatic, emotional, psychological, and social. These challenges may threaten family functioning and cohesiveness, as well as the psychological well-being of those involved.

Rebuilding a life after termination of a long-term intimate relationship is at best a highly stressful task. Often, divorced women are forced to seek employment for the first time or to increase from part-time to full-time work (Devall, Stoneman, & Brody, 1986) in addition to managing households. This is particularly stressful in the context of conflict over custody and support payments. Task overload and role strain constitute two of the major pragmatic concerns for newly divorced mothers with young children. Another significant consequence of divorce for many women is the decline in standard of living. Women who have taken on traditional roles of home-making and child-rearing often find themselves living at or below the poverty level (Chase-Lansdale & Hetherington, 1990). Compared to men, women appear to be generally economically worse off after divorce. Some researchers argue that the drop in living standards may be temporary (e.g., Faludi, 1991). Individual circumstances (e.g.,
education, work experience) may play key roles in determining longer term economic consequences for women.

Much of what we currently know about the consequences of separation and divorce for women comes from quantitative investigations that have chronicled observable outcomes, such as decreased living standards or role strain (Chase-Lansdale & Hetherington, 1990). Yet the picture remains unclear. What appear to be missing are the elements of meaning and context that could deepen our understanding of how women adapt to this important life transition.

**Emotional Smorgasbord**

Although researchers differ in their view of what constitutes the most stressful period in the divorce process, findings suggest that commonly experienced emotions include depression, loneliness, guilt, regret, grief, continuing attachment, fear, disorganization, relief, and ambivalence (Albrecht et al., 1983; Chase-Lansdale & Hetherington, 1990; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1982; Kitson & Sussman, 1981; Spanier & Thompson, 1984; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Many of these emotions accompany any major life transition. However, the divorce transition may be unique in that these feelings often emerge simultaneously. What we have yet to understand is how women manage these feelings. In what contexts do certain feelings emerge? And how are they related to coping behaviour?

For example, Kelly (1982) suggests that the most intense feelings of anger, humiliation, and helplessness are experienced by those who did not initiate the divorce. However, research on the importance of decisional control is inconclusive. Although
Berman (1985) reported that women who were non-initiators had a harder time adapting to single life, Morris and Prescott (1975) found that initial differences between initiators and noninitiators diminished over time as both groups came to experience the pain of being uncoupled and feeling alone. This inconsistency illustrates the need to better understand the process of change.

Rossiter (1991) argues that "rigorous descriptions of the experiences of choosing or not choosing separation and divorce are needed in order to contextualize comparisons" (p. 141) between groups. Previous studies of initiator status were all quantitative--no attempts have been made to describe the experience from the individual's point of view. Our current confusion about the effects of initiator status reflects a lack of inductively-derived theory.

For many newly divorced women, continuing attachment to their former spouses appears to hamper their adaptation to single life (Chase-Lansdale & Hetherington, 1990). Women with primary child-rearing responsibilities and little or no employment-related or recreational social participation seem more likely to undergo social isolation (Berman, 1985). However, what we know about attachment and social isolation is primarily based on correlational data, and therefore speculative.

Some researchers posit that the key element in attaining emotional health and psychological stability following divorce is development of a significant, intimate relationship (Spanier & Furstenberg, 1982; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). However, the ability to develop a new intimate relationship may be predicated
on a variety of factors (such as opportunity, emotional stability, one's previous as well as current views regarding marriage and commitment, as well as how well one has come to terms with marriage dissolution). A qualitative approach would address some of these issues.

**Divorce as Pathogenic**

The disruptive potential of divorce has led many researchers to view marital dissolution as a high-level stressor that correlates with many negative psychological outcomes. Groups of separated or divorced people appear to be disproportionately represented in patient populations when compared to married people (Bachrach, 1975; Crago, 1972). Outcome variables that could differentiate between divorced and never divorced people have been reported by different researchers, for example, mental disorders (Bachrach, 1975), alcoholism, depression, hospitalizations, nervous breakdowns (Blumenthal, 1967), suicides, motor vehicle accidents, and death by illness (Bloom, 1977).

Kraus (1979) points out the biases that characterize studies that link divorce with psychopathology—the use of married couples as control groups, the use of psychiatric raters, and the failure to consider the role of cultural expectations in the responses of individuals as well as in guiding researchers' assumptions. Therefore there is a need to examine participants' perceptions of their experience of separation and divorce, in order to avoid a pathogenic bias.
Stage Models of Divorce

Researchers adopting a process view of divorce have attempted to identify a variety of stages within the divorce experience (Bohannon, 1970; Krantzler, 1973; Wiseman, 1975; Weiss, 1975). The implicit assumption underlying this viewpoint is that stage of divorce determines emotional response.

Bohannan (1970) conceptualizes 6 stages of divorce: (a) emotional divorce, characterized by emotional withdrawal and alienation; (b) legal divorce, occurring when a judge hands down the final decree; (c) economic divorce, when physical separation occurs and belongings are divided; (d) coparental divorce, the separation of parenting roles as a necessary consequence of physical separation; (e) community divorce, the severing of established social connections; and (f) psychic divorce, the act of individuation and the establishment of separate identities. These stages appear to describe both the structural changes as well as the concomitant pragmatic and emotional adjustments in the divorce process.

Elaboration upon these stages of divorce have resulted in variations of Bohannan's (1970) model. Krantzler (1973) views the divorce process as comprising simultaneous or alternate stages of emotional adjustment: shock, restoration of equilibrium, and mourning. Similarly, Weiss (1975) describes stages of: erosion of love and persistence of attachment, separation, and starting over. Wiseman (1975) elucidates divorce as a grief process involving: denial, loss and depression, anger and ambivalence, reorientation of lifestyle and identity, and acceptance and integration.
Stage models are often based on theories of bereavement; yet none of them have been empirically tested. In addition, Smart (1977) correctly points out that not all individuals will go through the stages automatically, or in the expected sequence. Furthermore, Caldwell and Bloom (1982) remind us that not all phases of the divorce process are equally stressful. The impact or timing of each structural phase on people may differ due to individual and contextual differences. These stage models leave out key elements in the divorce adjustment process—such as, the meaning and personal significance of the event, and the cognitive mechanisms (e.g., how people interpret experience or appraise events) that mediate between successful adaptation and maladjustment.

Configurations of socio-cultural factors that influence adjustment have not been addressed by stage models. For example, cultural connotations of divorce may dictate what constitutes acceptable emotional and behavioral responses to divorce. Personal interpretations of the experience of separation and divorce that emerge within individual contexts are important to capture because they prevent the imposition of rigid assumptions regarding the structure and content of experience.

The Relevance of Transitional Perspectives

Schlossberg (1981), as well as Brammer and Abrego (1981), view transitions as resulting in increased personal awareness, revision of established assumptions about the nature of things, and corresponding revisions in management strategies. However, this does not necessarily happen for all individuals. Understanding the experience of those individuals who achieve a
divorce transition with little insight or behavioral change would increase our understanding of the process of adaptation. The woman's perception of the transition, her particular way of making sense of and assessing personal significance may determine whether or not divorce is perceived as a crisis, and affect the subsequent coping efforts. Very little work has been done in this regard.

Chiriboga and Catron (1991) identify a recurrent theme in transitional theories: individuals experiencing major life transitions must often relinquish set ways of perceiving the world. Loss, in this context, refers to the giving up of one's "assumptive world" (Chiriboga & Catron, p. 99). Unexpected transitions, such as divorce or sudden death, often produce abrupt role changes, and successful coping may require revision of that certain, fixed set of beliefs and values we hold dear. In this respect, initial losses may pave the way to ultimate gains.

In a phenomenological study of 5 divorced women, Sutton (1992) described the themes and patterns of women who felt that they had successfully managed their separation and divorce. Sutton's work confirms previous findings that separation and divorce create a high level of distress for women, which are brought about by changes in major life areas. However, these women all came from middle to upper-middle classes, and had higher than average levels of education. They were extremely resourceful and managed the setbacks and frustrations in their changing lives by (a) self-confrontations that resulted in increased personal awareness and empowerment, (b) changing
previously held beliefs and values that were no longer adaptive/useful, and (c) learning to be resourceful and creative in their problem-solving and management strategies.

Sutton's (1992) work is an important contribution to understanding women's adaptation to separation and divorce. However, her study was limited to those who "successfully" managed their transitions; the focus on successful adaptation alone may leave out important elements of the basic social and psychological processes that constitute adaptation. Therefore it is important to identify the particular contexts and the conditions that determine whether women do or do not manage their transitions well.

Chiriboga and Catron (1991) add that anthropologists study rituals in order to "clarify the importance of socially-shared meanings and activities surrounding personal crises" (p. 99). The meaning and significance of personal crises are rooted in personal interpretation as well as social-cultural interpretations and behaviors. In-depth understanding of unique experiences and a comparison of those experiences can assist in the identification of commonalities in women's adaptation to marital dissolution. This may provide insight into the women's internalized beliefs regarding marriage and marital dissolution that may influence how well they manage to come to terms with it.

Adaptation

Researchers have documented numerous instances of individuals who have survived against the greatest odds or transcended the most profound life crises (Cassem, 1975; Dimsdale, 1978; Fabry, 1988; Frankl, 1970; Krapfl, 1983; Miller,
The ultimate psychosocial outcome of a life crisis appears to depend on the interaction of a host of personal and environmental variables (Moos & Schaefer, 1986). Whereas some individuals thrive on challenge and are able to convert adversity into strengthening experiences, others are psychologically threatened by even the most minor stressors.

Some researchers suggest that the process of adapting to a life transition is one of assimilation (e.g., Schlossberg, 1984), whereas others prefer to discuss it in terms of tasks or themes (e.g., Moos & Schaefer, 1986; Taylor, 1983).

For example, Schlossberg (1984) submits that assimilation involves (a) an introductory phase, in which there is pervasive preoccupation with the event, (b) a middle phase, in which new norms are established in the midst of the disruption, and (c) a final phase, during which integration occurs. This model is somewhat generic in nature and does not adequately delineate the processes that constitute adaptation for divorced women.

The conceptual framework developed by Moos and Schaefer (1986) outlines five major adaptive tasks that constitute the adjustment process for individuals experiencing a life transition or crisis: (a) establishing the meaning and understanding the personal significance of the situation, (b) confronting reality and responding to the requirements of the external situation, (c) sustaining relationships with family members and friends as well as with other individuals who may be helpful during the crisis aftermath, (d) maintaining a reasonable emotional balance by managing upsetting feelings aroused by the situation, and (e)
preserving a satisfactory self-image and maintaining a sense of competence and mastery.

This framework provides a way of mapping experience from the individual's unique point of view, and suggests factors that may differentiate between individuals who do adapt and those who do not. Moos and Schaefer's (1986) model may aide in the conceptualization of divorce as a life transition—however, it has not been verified in a divorce-specific context, nor does it deal with process.

Taylor (1983) proposes that three central themes characterize successful adaptation: (a) the search for meaning, which involves not only an attributional search for causality, but also the implications of the event, (b) the attempt to regain mastery over the precipitating event, and over life in general, and (c) efforts to restore self-esteem. These themes closely parallel Moos and Schaefer's (1986) adaptive tasks. Divorce-specific research aimed at discovering transitional conditions and contexts may pave the way towards the establishment of a more coherent theory of adaptation to divorce.

**Correlates of Adjustment to Divorce**

Divorce adjustment has been conceptually and operationally described in different ways. Most researchers seem to agree that the social, psychological, and economic changes and losses incurred by marital dissolution constitute the challenges or stressors that individuals undergoing this transition face. However, previous definitions of adjustment have not helped us to understand the impact of divorce on women's lives and how they manage their transitions.
For instance, Kitson (1992) defines adjustment as "being relatively free of symptoms of psychological disturbance, having a sense of self-esteem, and having put the marriage and former partner in enough perspective that one's identity is no longer tied to being married or to the former partner" (p. 20). She makes explicit that this definition did not assume that divorce-related problems and issues will not continue to arise—rather, it is the healthy psychological distance that the individual puts between herself or himself and the former spouse that enables her/him to move ahead with life. How does one create such a healthy distance? Kitson's conceptualization of adaptation does not answer this question.

Although researchers generally agree on the concept of adjustment, the literature reveals inconsistencies in operational measures of adjustment. Furthermore, many measures simply do not sufficiently capture the essence of much of the conceptualizations of adjustment. Many researchers use established standardized instruments that measure different components of psychological functioning to indicate adjustment. These measures have not been based on qualitative research using divorced populations. For example, psychiatric rating scales (e.g., Chiriboga & Catron, 1991; Kitson, 1992) and measures of affect or mood (e.g., Bradburn, 1969; Nelson, 1981; Zeiss, Zeiss, & Johnson, 1980) have been used to determine adjustment.

Quantitative studies of divorce. A landmark study, and one of the few that attempted to address psychological aspects of individual adjustment, is Goode's (1956) widely cited survey study of women's divorce adaptation. Goode equates a person's
emotional reaction to divorce to a degree of "trauma", which is measured by self-ratings on four behavioral indices: sleep, health, and memory problems, and work efficiency. High divorce trauma is associated with reports of three or more of these indices, medium trauma with two indices, and low trauma with fewer than two indices. Goode's findings suggest that emotional reaction to divorce depends on the stage of divorce, the length of marriage, and initiator status: highest levels of trauma were associated with recency of divorce, longer marriages, and the status of being non-initiators. These findings, however, fail to provide insight from the participants' perspectives about the experience of managing marital dissolution.

Goode (1956) assumes: (a) that there is only one emotional reaction to divorce, and it is trauma, (b) that four behavioral indices adequately reflect level of trauma, (c) that trauma, or any emotional reaction, is static, and (d) the experience of crisis necessarily precludes any concurrent experience of relief or other more positive emotions.

Chiroboga and Catron's (1991) longitudinal study followed the adjustment of 333 middle-class persons (199 women and 134 men) from the period immediately after separation to approximately 3.5 years after separation. Psychological adjustment was measured using (a) the California Symptoms Checklist (Chiriboga & Krystal, 1985), (b) an affect scale (Bradburn & Kaplovitz, 1965), and (c) subjective reports of happiness. Women reported more symptoms than men both at first contact and also at follow-up. However, this was also true for a control group of individuals undergoing normal transitions, thus
the linkage between symptomatology and divorce is tenuous. Men and older persons were more likely to report feeling "not too happy" in the impact phase, but converged with the rest of the subjects by follow-up. Chiroboga and Catron concluded that the significant drop in symptom levels between impact and long-term phases suggested that by about 4 years or so after separation people generally experienced a decrease in problems and an increase in life satisfaction. These findings underscore the need for qualitative investigation of process.

Chiroboga and Catron (1991) also found that individuals with negative views of themselves tended to have more psychological symptoms both at first contact and at follow-up. These results also indicated that the best single predictor of how well people fared during the long-term was how well they adjusted during the impact or crisis phase. Furthermore, those identified as high risk for maladjustment were those who had a relatively weak sense of personal mastery and control. This suggests aspects of transition management that may be related to self-concept, mastery, and control. Thus, individual characteristics and contexts would be important to examine.

Propst, Pardington, Ostrom, and Watkins (1986), in a study examining predictors of coping in divorced single mothers, examined the effects of demographic variables and coping resources on the adjustment of single mothers. One hundred and six volunteers (with ages ranging from 18 to 53, and time of separation ranging from 0 to 204 months) were given a 68-item checklist that described a range of behavioral and cognitive coping strategies, and were asked to describe a specific,
currently stressful situation, and then to indicate on the checklist those items they had used to deal with the situation. Adjustment was also measured using the Spielberger State Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 1970) and the Depression Adjective Checklist (Lubin, 1967). Results indicated that four classes of variables affected adjustment—phase of divorce/separation, numbers and ages of children, style of coping, and education. Mothers who were better adjusted generally (a) had been separated longer, (b) had children over the age of 5, (c) used coping strategies matched to their appraisal of events, i.e., they were realistic, and (d) were better educated. Even though this study addressed the important issues of appraisal and coping, adjustment was measured in terms of anxiety and depression. The use of negative, predetermined outcomes reflects researcher bias, and decontextualizes and restricts understanding of subjective experience.

Thiriot and Buckner (1991) identified five potentially predictive factors in postdivorce adjustment for single parents: (a) socioeconomic status; (b) single parent characteristics; (c) social networks; (d) quality of relationship with noncustodial parent; and (e) individual sense of well-being. Their findings indicated that the single strongest predictor of adjustment was the custodial parent's own subjective sense of well-being. In other words, successful adjustment for the single custodial parent has much to do with how good the parent felt about his or herself and how much in control he or she felt over life events. Thus, a woman's perception of her experience may affect how she
manages. However, measures were predetermined and the data analysis was correlational.

Using survey data from 106 divorced families headed by women, Nelson (1981) described the adjustment of women and their children. Adjustment measures included (a) Bradburn's (1969) Affect Balance Scale, (b) a negative feelings questionnaire, and (c) Weissman and Bothwell's (1976) Social Adjustment Scale, which assessed level of functioning in several role areas (work, social and leisure activities, and family). Nelson (1981) found that the best predictor of a woman's adjustment was the current relationship with her ex-husband, whereas her children's adjustment was strongly related to the how happy she felt in her marriage. Nelson also found that age was negatively correlated with adjustment. He speculated that less support from and greater conflict with former spouse contributed to poorer adjustment, and older women may have greater adjustment difficulties because of prolonged marital conflict, entrenched lifestyles, and problems related to social participation. Making causal inferences based on survey data is unfounded. Nevertheless, the approach of looking at adjustment in terms of functioning in different role areas is consonant with the recognition by most researchers that divorce brings with it simultaneous role changes.

Nelson's (1981) study represents one of the few in the literature that have avoided equating adjustment solely with the presence or absence of psycho-physiological symptoms. His finding that adjustment was strongly related to current relationship to the ex-spouse suggests that this may be an
important element in the adaptive tasks women face after separation or divorce. Women's perceptions of their ex-spouses may constitute a factor in their adaptation; no one has asked women what and how they think about their ex-husbands.

Berman and Turk (1981) attempted to examine adaptation to divorce from the individual's point of view—what the individual perceived as (a) stressors; (b) appropriate coping strategies; and (c) adaptive activities. Data from 106 participants indicated that only interpersonal and familial problems had a significant effect on adaptation to divorce. Berman and Turk noted that problems in daily living were positively correlated with higher levels of reported life satisfaction. They postulated that these problems provided opportunities for individuals to develop effective coping strategies, and consequently resulted in increased feelings of mastery, control, and self-worth. Additional findings indicated that greater social participation, expression of feelings, and autonomy were strongly related to successful adjustment. Berman and Turk's conclusions were based on correlational data; thus no causal links can be made between the variables. Moreover, this was a quantitative investigation in which data was obtained through one-time contacts with individuals, i.e., retrospective and cross-sectional. Furthermore, the employment of a single measure of adaptation (i.e., mood state) as well as a predetermined, standard, coping list limits interpretation of these results.

There is an inherent difficulty in overemphasizing the connection between what individuals indicate as problems and concerns on a standard checklist and what they report as
available coping strategies and resources—similar sets of events may mean very different things to different people, and hence, constitute different experiences. However, Berman and Turk's (1981) study does support the notion that stressors may mobilize individuals to develop new coping strategies and may be potentially beneficial.

Standardized instruments commonly used to measure reaction to life transitions represent a positivistic approach and do not address the crucial element of personal meaning that mediates between events and outcomes. Personal meaning is, however, an important element of experience. Measures, thus, objectify and reduce human experience. Understanding personal ways of making sense of experience is a useful and necessary process for substantive theory development.

Qualitative studies of divorce. In a qualitative study, Spanier and Castro (1979) interviewed 28 men and 22 women using open-ended, unstructured interviews. They found that adjustment to marital dissolution involved 3 different levels of coping: (a) pragmatics—such as dealing with the legal system, property settlements, custody arrangements, reduced income, employment; (b) social—dealing with family and friends, reduced social participation, changed role demands; and (c) emotional—dealing with ambivalent and upsetting feelings related to the former spouse and to the demands of a new life, lowered self-esteem, and confidence.

Spanier and Castro's (1979) findings suggested that adjusting to a new lifestyle may be more problematic than adjusting to marital dissolution. Although individuals
experienced initial high levels of stress in relation to legal procedures and custody arrangements, most reported satisfactory levels of support from friends and family with regards to marital termination. In adjusting to a new lifestyle, gender differences were significant in the economic domain—most women reported being economically worse off after divorce; many had few marketable work skills and had problems finding employment. This was not true for men. Clearly, men and women experience divorce differently. More recent reports, however, indicate that the economic differences between men and women may be only temporary (Faludi, 1991). The scope of the present study precluded investigation of gender differences in adaptation to separation and divorce because it focused only on women's experience.

Single parenthood was another domain that created stress—the demands of child-rearing compound with needs for social and emotional adjustments. Furthermore, only 7% of respondents who had heterosexual love relationships had serious adjustment problems, whereas 45% of those who did not have heterosexual love relationships reported adjustment difficulties. Whether or not and how parenting affects social participation and subsequent formation of other intimate relationships would be important to understand in greater depth through qualitative investigations.

Spanier and Castro (1979) further suggested that individual differences in adjustment depend on the interaction of many individual and situational variables, a notion asserted by Kraus (1979). Thus, it would be unlikely that one could easily predict adjustment. What may expand on and extend Spanier and Castro's
findings is an inductive method that provides for contextual analysis, such as a grounded theory method.

Riessman (1990) examined the effects of divorce on men and women in a survey study. The initial interview schedule contained over 100 questions with fixed response categories, and several broad open-ended questions. The structured portion of the schedule included questions about role changes, social networks, custody, finances, worries, and pressures. A 20-item depression scale was used to measure psychological distress. The unstructured questions covered broad areas such as loneliness, changes in relationships, and phases of the separation process.

Three of the open-ended questions proved to be pivotal in changing the course of Riessman's research. These questions focussed on respondents' accounts of (a) the causes of their separation, (b) the greatest difficulties they experienced, and (c) the greatest benefits that resulted from the separation. The qualitative data that was collected required the use of a grounded theory analysis. What emerged suggested that similar sets of events, for example, meant different things to, and hence constituted different experiences for different individuals. Riessman's inductively derived categories yield important information about how men and women interpret and experience separation and divorce.

Riessman (1990) found that both men and women experienced disruption and upheaval in the aftermath of separation and divorce. Although it was a time of both threat and promise, the loss of structures of the past (attachment to a specific person, familiar routines and lifestyles) created a crisis of
discontinuity, and brought on intense grieving for both men and women.

Riessman's (1990) results support previous findings that marital termination results in particular economic hardships for women, which have direct impact on their mental health. Compounding this is the meaning that these hardships have for them. For example, women scored higher than men on the depression scale. Whereas other researchers have argued that women may be more vulnerable to psychological distress, Riessman suggested an alternative explanation: women are emotionally responsive to the needs of others. Guilt, self-blame, and sadness often result from women's empathy for their children and their spouses.

Riessman (1990) submits that divorce necessitates individuals to reorder their lives in significant ways. In learning to survive divorce, individuals reinterpret their lives, forge new identities, and develop narrative accounts of what happened and why. Positive changes—competence in management of daily life, changing meaning of social relationships, and a more integrated sense of identity—often coexist with feelings of distress.

What appears to be unclear in Riessman's (1990) analysis is how individuals' accounts of what happened and why affects the way they manage their transitions. How do women make sense out of their separation and divorce, and is this related to the way they cope with the changes? Thus, there is a need for more qualitative work in divorce research, both at the descriptive and the theory-building levels.
What is particularly relevant to the present study are Riessman's (1990) findings that similar events can mean vastly different things to different people, and even the same experiences can engender ambivalent and contradictory feelings within individuals. What individuals do to negotiate the internal as well as external changes resulting from marital dissolution is inextricably tied to how they make sense of these changes. The broader process of adaptation may then be a process of psychologically making sense of experience, which preempts manifested coping efforts. The present study attempted to construct substantive theory based on women's personal accounts of the transformations in their lives.

Summary

The process of adapting to a single life after marital dissolution is one in which women encounter various tasks related to uncoupling, creating new identities and life roles, and coping with a multitude of other changes. Previous research has failed to capture the essence of this adaptation to divorce because research findings based on reductionistic methods often lead to data that are inconsistent, and theory that is lacking coherence. The gaps in current knowledge lie in our lack of understanding of the process dimensions of adaptation.

Although many life transitions require adjustments in our habitual modes of thinking and in our patterns of daily living, divorce is unique in that changes often occur simultaneously in many areas of life. Not all the changes are negative, but even positive ones, when requiring significant adjustments, have the potential to be distressing.
To date there have been few qualitative investigations of the impact of separation and divorce on women's lives and on their management of this major life transition. Studies such as those of Riessman (1990) and Sutton (1992) pave the way for more inductive methods in divorce research by providing rich, empirically-based descriptions of individuals' experiences of adaptation to marital dissolution. The present study contributes to theory by developing inductively-derived explanations of the process of women's adaptation to separation and divorce. Because my goal was to develop theory based on an understanding of separated/divorced women's experiences, a qualitative procedure that employed a grounded theory method was used. The research questions were aimed at uncovering the conditions and contexts under which women adapted to separation and divorce. The discovery of a basic social process within the data that explains the phenomenon under investigation is the principle requirement for developing a grounded theory (Wilson, 1989).
Assumptions

The literature review highlighted the complexity of the phenomenon of adaptation to marital dissolution. Due to biases and omissions in previous research, a return to investigating the phenomenon in its natural or atheoretical state is proposed. The grounded theory approach necessitates the avoidance of a priori conceptualizations. However, as Pearce (1971) cautioned, "there is no pure looking with a naked, innocent eye." Therefore, it is important for a researcher to make explicit her own orientation to the subject matter, and the biases and assumptions that frame her vision of the project.

My basic assumptions underlying the present study are: (a) divorce constitutes a major life transition, a central feature of which is change; (b) individuals negotiate change within the context of their unique personal, historical, and socio-economic circumstances; (c) change, whether positive or negative, has the potential to be distressing--how a person manages change may depend on how it is perceived; and (d) women are able to describe the process of their adaptation to separation and divorce.

This research proposal has emerged from my personal interest and experience in the subject matter. I have been separated and divorced for a period of 5 years, and have experienced major changes (both positive and negative) in many areas of life. Thus, I am not biased in looking for either negative or positive results. Rather, my interest lies in understanding how other women go through the process of coming to terms with their marital dissolution and rebuilding their lives.
Research Questions

In a grounded theory design, the research questions are broadly articulated and reflect the researcher's initial sensitivity to certain issues, but may change or evolve as the data emerges. The following were sensitizing questions at the onset of the study:

(1) What were women's experiences of separation/divorce? Specifically, what was the impact of separation/divorce on women's lives? (Note: in the present study, 'separation/divorce' referred to situations where women were physically separated and divorced, or intending to divorce)

(2) What were the contexts and conditions under which the impact/changes occurred?

(3) How did women manage or adapt to separation/divorce?
Method

Design

Marshall and Rossman (1989) succinctly state that "one cannot understand human behavior without understanding the framework within which subjects interpret their thoughts, feelings, and actions" (p. 49). Thus, it is essential, in delving into the complexities and processes of human phenomena, that we know how individuals define and interpret experience.

Whereas deductive, theory-verifying research begins with a highly focused research problem, grounded theory research begins with a general sensitizing question that identifies the nature of the research problem. This is achieved through a preliminary literature review in which previous related work is identified, and the sensitizing question is articulated. Sampling and data collection, data analysis (coding, memoing, discovery of an overall analytical scheme, and sorting of memos to produce an outline), a return to the literature, and final write-up follow. For a detailed account of these procedures, refer to Wilson (1989, pp. 481-490).

The analytic procedures of grounded theory are designed to: (a) build theory, (b) give the research process scientific rigour, (c) help the researcher bracket the biases and assumptions that can get in the way of data interpretation, and (d) provide the foundation for generation of a sound explanatory theory that fits the reality it represents (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). According to Sandelowski, Davis, and Harris (1989):
The grounded theory approach to knowledge development is characterized by the simultaneous and ongoing collection, categorization, and interpretation of data, the deliberate sampling of comparative groups of subjects all of whom can illuminate the evolving phenomenon being studied, and the ongoing use of measures to ensure the validity of the study. Grounded theory research is a recursive process in which tentative theoretical explanations are continually generated on the basis of incoming data, and in which sampling and data collection techniques are continually modified to confirm or refute these explanations. (p. 79)

A tentative plan for sampling, data collection, analysis, and verification was initially developed to chart direction and to define the outer boundaries for inquiry. For example, the technique of purposeful open sampling dictated selection criteria at the point of entry to the field—the first participants were selected based on criteria that defined the general population of interest, and not on individual characteristics (Appendix A).

As the study evolved, however, theoretical sampling guided further selection of participants. Theoretical sampling was used to discover variation in participants and situations that explained the properties of the processes under investigation; data collection served the purpose of examining categories and relationships, and assured representativeness of categories (Wilson, 1989). Continued selection of participants was determined by information obtained during the course of the study. Final sample size and composition was determined when
data saturation occurred, i.e., when no new categories and relationships were identified (Wilson, 1989) in my data analyses.

Entry into field

Posters (Appendix B) were put up at selected day-care centers, community centers, and neighbourhood houses throughout the city. Further to this, I contacted women who led support groups for single mothers at several community centers, informed them about the study, and asked for any referrals they had to potential participants. In addition, I talked to women that I knew and elicited potential recruits through word of mouth. Respondents were screened vis-a-vis the selection criteria via telephone. All respondents were provided information about the general purposes and conditions of the study. Appointments for interview sessions were made by phone.

Site

Seven interviews were conducted at the participants' homes. One interview was conducted at a participant's place of employment in a conference room during her lunch break—this participant was living in her father's house, and preferred to have her interview elsewhere. This woman's ability and comfort level in talking about her experience did not differ from that of the other participants. All of the interviews were conducted in privacy.

Researcher's role

The researcher functioned as an observer-participant. Interaction was natural, respectful, and non-coercive. The goal was to establish trust and rapport with the participants. I was
at all times accessible to the participants via telephone to address any concerns or questions they may have had.

Participants

Eight participants were recruited for the study (see Table 1). Within this group, there was a reasonable level of heterogeneity. Seven participants were Caucasian; one was of Asian descent. The women ranged in age from 29 to 48 years. The length of marriage ranged from 2 to 13.5 years; length of separation at the time of interview ranged from 2 months to 12 years. Two of the women were divorced. Four had university undergraduate degrees, two had art school diplomas, and two had a grade 12 education. Level of income ranged from $20,000 to $50,000; three of the women had been on welfare for some period of time after separation. All but two had children ranging in age from 4 to 13 years. Three of the women either had ended or were in second relationships when interviewed. Notably, the woman with the highest income level (Sal) was only casually employed; she received substantial alimony and child support payments from her husband. There was one woman who shared custody of the children with her husband, and one other who relinquished custody because her husband refused to leave and she did not want to uproot the children from their home and community. All of the women in this study had received counselling previous to their interviews (e.g., for eating disorders, marital problems, abuse); several reported having read self-help books pertaining to marital breakups.
## Table 1

**Demographic Description of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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<th>8</th>
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<tr>
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<td>29</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Marriage (Yrs.)</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of separation (Mo.)</td>
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<td>144</td>
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<td>48</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced?</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>CD</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>CD</td>
<td>G12</td>
<td>G12</td>
<td>BS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
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<td>30g</td>
<td>30g</td>
<td>20g</td>
<td>25g</td>
<td>50g</td>
<td>30g</td>
<td>45g</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages</td>
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<td>7,10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8,10</td>
<td>4,11</td>
<td>11,13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Custody</td>
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<td>full</td>
<td>full</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>full</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>joint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Support?</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Initiator?</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
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<td>Employed?</td>
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<td>FT</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>PT</td>
<td>PT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Counselling?</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Y = yes; N = no; FT = full-time; PT = part-time; g = thousands; BS = Bachelor of Science; BA = Bachelor of Arts; CD = College Diploma, G12 = Grade 12.
Interview Protocols

Participants were interviewed for approximately one and a half to two hours. Interviews were of a semi-structured nature, in which the researcher used prepared questions as guides to focus the conversation and to generate descriptions in areas of interest, but were also open and flexible.

At the beginning of each interview, all participants read and signed two copies of the consent form (see Appendix C). I answered any questions they may have had regarding the form or the study. Each woman received a copy of the form for her records.

The 'general introduction' in Appendix D was used to preface all interviews. Interviews began with broad, open-ended questions (Appendix D) that allowed participants to identify issues of concern to them. As the study progressed, increasing "theoretical sensitivity" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 41) guided me in sampling for events that may have theoretical relevance. This was achieved through the ongoing and simultaneous processes of data collection and analyses--as concepts emerged (this included issues of concern identified by the participants themselves), I attempted to sample for variations of them in order to substantiate their descriptions. For example, although participants were allowed to guide the conversation as much as possible, I followed up on topics raised by them or suggested by previous data (i.e., by women I had previously interviewed). This was achieved through the use of clarification or elaboration probes (e.g., "What are some of those fears that you've just mentioned?", or "Tell me about the losses. What is being lost?")
and prepared questions (e.g., "Does the idea of losing a dream make sense to you?", or "Tell me about your relationship with your ex-husband?").

At the conclusion of each interview, participants were invited to add to what they had already disclosed or remark upon the experience of being interviewed. They were also asked to fill in a short demographic questionnaire (see Appendix E). I reminded them that I would be contacting them at a future time to arrange a second session with them during which I would invite them to add further to their stories, and to comment on some of the study's results that I would share with them. These second sessions occurred after completion of all interviews. They were arranged by phone, at the convenience of the participants, and lasted approximately 45 minutes on the average. The sessions were audiotaped, but the tapes were not transcribed. Instead, I obtained pertinent information from these tapes by listening to them and taking notes. In addition, observational notes and memos were also made when relevant. All of the women indicated that my analytic framework adequately captured their experience. Women's consensus regarding the themes reflected commonalities in their adaptation to separation and divorce. For a general description of the second session, see Appendix F.

Data Collection

The data collection technique used was the method of in-depth interviewing. Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. Each transcript constituted a description of the process of adaptation to separation or divorce as it was experienced by a particular woman in a particular situation. Additional
information about the participants was obtained through a demographic questionnaire (Appendix E) administered at the end of each interview.

Transcripts were the primary sources of data; field notes that recorded participatory observation were made at the end of each interview. These became important secondary sources of information. For example, one woman's crying for the entire duration of her interview strongly suggested to me that the grief caused by her marital breakup had not yet been resolved even though she had adapted well to it in other respects (such as achieving financial stability, and even committing to another intimate relationship).

As the data emerged, minor referral to the literature and other sources aided in focusing and developing concepts and questions. I was very aware of the need to not 'rely' on the literature too early on in the process, as well as the need to bracket my own biases. In these regards, I continuously questioned my own findings, checked them against the data, and looked for variations in the data.

Substantial analytic and process memos were also maintained throughout the course of the study. According to Sandelowski et al. (1989), analytic memos are the researcher's "notations of...ongoing efforts to theorize about the data" (p. 82), and process memos are the researcher's "notations describing... observations about subjects' behaviors and interactions and about the researcher's own behaviors in interaction with the subjects and decision making regarding the conduct of the study" (p. 82). Wilson (1989) suggested that memoing aids in the
conceptualization, summarization, and integration of data, and ultimately relates your analysis to other theories.

In this study, I used process memos to direct myself with regard to sampling, formulating questions, and following leads provided by participants. For example, it was particularly important in the early phases of the study to word probes so that they were clear, concise, and not misleading. In one early memo, I recorded,

Sept. 20/93. I was fumbling with asking about "coming to terms". This may be a loaded/confusing phrase. I could ask "How well do you think you have coped overall?", or "What would coping well mean to you?" Must think on this further.

My analytic memos were copious notes related to analyzing the data and forming theoretical propositions and schemes. In these notes, I speculated about the properties of categories, or relationships between categories, preserved emerging ideas, and recorded thoughts about parallels between the emerging theory and established theories. For example, in one memo I noted,

Oct. 5/93.--In responding to the immediate demands of the situation, whether they be money for food or a place to live, women are forced to expand their sense of themselves (e.g., through being more assertive, accessing previously undiscovered "strength" (Pam), or in one case, having to conceal part of the truth). The resulting newfound sense of--agency and competence--appears to reinforce an emerging sense of self and self-worth. Growth through crisis? --negotiating relationship with ex-husband is challenging.
--self-in-relation? See Gilligan. When structure for self-in-relation disintegrates for no apparent reason, and there is no alternate structure or focus for relating that are significant, identity is fractured--may result in search for validation through transitional relationship.

These memos helped me to record emerging ideas, clarify my own thinking, chronicle my decision-making and proposition-formulating process, and finally, consolidate the overall analytical scheme.

Data Analysis and Verification

In a grounded theory study, data collection, analysis, verification, and the emergence of theoretical concepts occur simultaneously. Raw data taken from transcripts were coded according to the concepts they indicated. The codes were then organized into meaningful and interpretable categories and categories into two subsequent higher levels of abstraction. A variety of techniques central to the grounded theory method were used for content analysis and verification of data:

1. CODING--initial reduction of the data was achieved through identification of concepts and the naming of these concepts with "tags" or "codes" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Wilson, 1989). Three major types of coding were used: open or substantive codes, selective coding, and axial or theoretical coding.

Open or substantive coding was used to name individual meaningful units of data in the transcripts. Selective coding was used to cluster codes into categories, and axial or
theoretical coding was used to organize categories by relationships.

2. INDUCTIVE INFERENCE--tags or codes were recontextualized into distinct categories, and a preliminary organizing system was created. After the identification of possible variations of a core variable, I selectively coded for the full range, variations, and properties of that category (Wilson, 1989). Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggested steps to achieve this goal: explicating the story line, relating subsidiary categories to the core category, relating categories at the dimensional level, validating those relationships against data, refining and developing categories as needed.

3. CONSTANT COMPARISON--this method, which involved moving back and forth among data sets (transcripts) to determine and verify the presence of relationships, was used throughout to (a) verify and saturate individual codes and categories, (b) modify and refine the preliminary organizing system using emerging data, (c) develop guidelines for subsequent interviews (e.g., verification and elaboration of emerging concepts), and (d) consider theoretical saturation.

The search for variations and the constant comparison of each incident with existing ones assured me that major conceptual variations that existed under the set of circumstances examined were not left out. The inter-relationships between codes and their relation to a possible core variable or basic social process (Wilson, 1989) became the building blocks of the preliminary organizing system that would later be refined into the final analytical scheme.
In addition, diagrams were used to display and verify various interpretations of data (Sandelowski et al., 1989).

Verification of data analysis occurred on two levels: (a) confirmation of my initial analysis of each participant's storyline was achieved through a follow-up session, and (b) in consultation with the thesis supervisor and committee members. The following steps constituted the procedures for data analyses:

1. Identification and naming of concepts (open coding). Each transcript was read through carefully and meaningful 'units' identified. For each, the question "what concept does this indicate?" aided in creating a name, called a code (or 'tag'), which was written on the margin of the page next to the relevant section of transcript. These codes were often words used by participants themselves that described "dimensions, properties, conditions, strategies, and consequences" (Wilson, 1989, p.483). For example, words such as 'developing', 'choosing', and 'finding' indicated strategic action taken by participants; words like 'caretaking' and 'emotionally separating' indicated conditions and consequences. An inventory of codes was kept separately. Process and analytical memos were kept and referred to throughout data analyses. Field notes also aided in these procedures.

2. Reorganizing the codes into distinct categories (selective coding). Several readings of each transcript ensured the accuracy of codes. A separate list of codes was kept for each participant that included the locations of the concepts within an individual transcript. These codes were then reorganized into categories using diagrams ('storylines') and
cutting/pasting techniques. For example, categories in the list for structural changes in significant life areas were 'family structure', 'life pragmatics', and 'connection to others.' Relevant open codes were clustered into one of these categories, which were collectively called structural changes.

3. Creating a preliminary organizing system (axial coding). A set of file cards was developed for each major category, and relationships between categories were postulated. In this way, a preliminary analytical schema was created. Inductive inference aided in the development of higher levels of abstraction.

For example, in listening to women talk about their experiences of separation, I postulated the existence of an aspect of the divorce experience called context. In this respect, 4 major categories that emerged from the data appeared to be related to each other; that is, they comprised the background of each woman's situation prior to physical separation; thus, these categories (family-of-origin influences, characteristics of marriage, circumstances of separation, and level of self-development) came under the heading context. In my analysis, context became one of the 5 major 'dimensions' of women's adaptation to separation and divorce.

4. Modifying and refining the preliminary schema (constant comparison). Emergent data helped in the clarification, elaboration, refining, and verification of concepts, relationships, and the overall schema. The data that emerged from each interview was used to verify, elaborate, extend, modify, or refute propositions about categorical properties or relationships that had been made. Sometimes, this resulted to
reorganizing of categories or reassignment of codes to categories.

5. Developing guidelines for further examination of concepts and/or variations (theoretical sensitivity). Inventory lists, file cards, memos, and field notes aided in the preparation of guidelines for sampling as well as questions for subsequent interviews. Constraints of time, resources, and availability of diverse populations limited subject selection to some extent. However, I was fortunate in obtaining a reasonably heterogenous sample, in which variations in background and the divorce experience existed. For example, there were parents and non-parents, initiators and non-initiators, and women who had experienced transitional relationships and others who had not done so. The fact that all the women had previously received counselling probably helped them to articulate their experiences more easily.

6. Consideration of theoretical saturation. No new concepts emerged from the last 2 interviews. Thus, a decision was made to stop data collection.
Results

Data analyses resulted in four levels of abstraction, in ascending order from I to IV. At the lowest level, codes indicated concepts that emerged directly from the data. As much as possible, these first (I) order codes were words that participants themselves used in their narratives. At the highest level, five major categories were identified: context, impact areas, tasks, facilitators/obstacles, and outcome. These major categories or variables were defined as 'dimensions' of the women's experiences of adapting to separation and divorce. All levels represent aspects or themes in the women's transitions.

The levels are displayed in figures. Counter to the displays, levels will be presented in descending order of abstraction from the five highest major categories down through the respective lower categories in order to simplify discussion.

Context

The context variable was defined as the circumstances surrounding women's physical separation from their spouses. It constituted women's descriptions of the 'background' to their experiences as they began to talk about their transition into single life. Context described different perspectives of women's lives (familial-historical, circumstantial, and personal) that were salient in their perception, and imbued meaning upon their transitions and the changes that would follow (see Figure 1).

This theme emerged from four lower categories: family-of-origin influences, characteristics of marriage, circumstances of separation, and level of self-development.
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<th>I</th>
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<td>not wanting to repeat Mom's or siblings' mistakes</td>
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<td>determining to emulate Mom's tenacity &amp; strength</td>
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<td>wanting to be the one to stay</td>
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<td>marriage is a girl's destiny</td>
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<td>choosing men who are abusive</td>
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<td>husband's absenteeism</td>
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<td>being the one to leave or be left</td>
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<td>having emotionally separated while in marriage</td>
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<td>having made pragmatic moves towards being ready for the 'end'</td>
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<td>husband's abusive behavior</td>
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<td>own desire to leave an intolerable situation</td>
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Figure 1. Context - the circumstances surrounding women's physical separation from their husbands. (For this and subsequent figures, theme levels show increasing abstraction from left to right. Starting with level I on the far left, each successive level represents a higher order theme comprised of the themes on its left. Brackets indicate themes clustered together. The highest order, level IV, represents a major category)
Family-of-origin Influences were defined as the factors originating from the women's original families that influenced their behavior patterns in intimate relationships, their ideas about and dreams of marriage and family, and their thoughts and behaviors surrounding their own failing or failed marriages. 'Divorce in family' was about (a) a woman's determination not to repeat the mistakes that she saw her mother or sisters make in their failure to deal with their divorces—"she got stuck very, very many years back, and it's frightening for me to see that, because I'm her daughter, am I gonna do this [later on in life]...because I never dealt with my marriage breakup?" (Sue), (b) if a woman saw her mother cope successfully with divorce, she looked up to her as a role model—"she was very strong, my mom...being able to deal with 6 kids and no education...go out, and after being abused for 10 years, get out of that situation, and raise 6 kids, and within a few years be making a big success in real estate" (Meg), and (c) in the midst of multiple divorces or dysfunctional relationships in the family, wanting to be the one who stayed in her marriage—"my mother was married twice, my sister was remarried and divorced...I was gonna be the one to stay in the family, gonna make the marriage work...so I did stay for all the wrong reasons, for a lot longer than I wanted to" (Meg).

'Ideas about marriage and family' were about (a) women's ideas about marriage—"I was married at 20, and I remember thinking 'once I'm married, life's wonderful, I'll never have another worry. It's almost like a done deal. For life I'll never have to worry again, I'm safe'" (Sal); "we had a child together,
I thought this was going to be forever" (Pam), (b) their hopes and dreams of finding a perfect, everlasting relationship--"I still have that fairytale dream, that when you grow up, you meet somebody who will love you and then you will live happily forever" (Deb), and (c) their beliefs about family--"this isn't supposed to happen, kids are supposed to have two parents that stay and love each other and love them, and get through the good times and the bad times. I'm still really stuck in that [belief]" (Sue).

'The legacy of an abusive childhood or a dysfunctional family' was about women who were abused as children, women for whom role models of functional adult relationships were absent, and women who grew up in families with alcoholic parents; these women showed patterns of choosing relationships with men who were abusive, were substance abusers themselves, and often emotionally unavailable. One woman, now in her late 40s, had been in an abusive marriage prior to the current one--both marriages involved alcohol, she was physically and emotionally abused in both, and the transition between the two was short-lived. She appeared to have entered the second abusive relationship, as a vulnerable woman with a young child, with little insight, confidence and self-esteem, only to have the horror of the first relationship replayed over a subsequent 13 years or so. Another woman, in her late 20s, recalled how her mother (who had been abused herself as a child) and father had remained emotionally distant from the family for many years, and how she had spent many years seeking her mother's approval, and subsequently the approval of the men she had been with.
Another aspect of coming from a dysfunctional family appeared to be manifested in women having a relatively weak sense of themselves—they perceived themselves as secondary to their partners in their marriages. One woman said: "I felt that emotionally, without my husband I would be dead. I would crumble. I thought that he brought excitement, made life worth living because he's got a very big personality. And it's like he could fill up my dreams—all his antics and all the things he was doing. I could just be the support person and that was enough. And do everything very well, be a very good second breadwinner, and excellent teacher, an excellent mother...but I put [most] value on my role as his wife" (Sue). Another recalled that "I looked to someone else to say that I was okay" (Deb).

*Characteristics of Marriage* were defined as descriptors indicative of the quality of the women's relationships with their husbands. 'Dysfunctional relationship' referred to relationships in which (a) women were abused by their husbands, (b) communication was poor between spouses, (c) both spouses appeared to possess very little by way of effective problem-solving, negotiation, or conflict resolution skills (e.g., they did not know how to resolve parenting conflicts and differences in values and needs), and (d) there were high levels of anger, resentment, distrust, and feelings of betrayal on the women's parts. For some women, their inability to convey their needs to their husbands and their husbands' denial and emotional distancing contributed to these emotions festering for years before the breakup; for others, infidelity led to strong feelings of rejection, betrayal, and deep grief. One woman, who had been
separated for over 12 years, remembered that: "I wanted so much a normal little life, because I didn't have the family normal little life. I swore that's what my kids were going to have, and because he wasn't contributing in any factors, I resented him for that. I started to hate him" (Meg). Another woman, separated only 2 months, recalled that she had felt angry and resentful for many years and finally left her husband "because he's made all kinds of promises to me my whole life and never delivered on any one of them" (Amy). This anger and resentment emerged from years of grieving lost dreams and broken promises, and may have provided a buffer that lessened the trauma of separation for this woman, as well as her raison d'etre for leaving.

'Little role sharing' characterized all of the marriages, and manifested in the women bearing primary responsibility in communication and attempts at problem-solving (e.g., seeking the help of a counsellor), caring for young children, and managing household and other daily requirements of life (e.g., paying bills, grocery shopping, buying birthday cards or presents). For several of the women, their husbands' absenteeism or non-involvement was often tied in to the men's problems with drugs and/or alcohol--"I was getting all the kids up in the morning, getting his two off to school, and he was still in bed and he wouldn't get up to say goodbye. He would just stay in bed and then get up and lay on the couch and watch TV. And at that point I was even going to work. He seemed to be going through a depression, and part of that was drug-induced" (Pam). This characteristic of women's marriages would contribute significantly to women feeling overworked and worn-out.
Circumstances of Separation were defined as the events, characteristics, or components of the women's experience of separating from their husbands. 'Role strain' was about women feeling overworked and worn-out, and emerged from (a) women caretaking young children with very little support or involvement from their husbands, and (b) high levels of career or work stress on the part of either or both of the spouses. Six of the women in the study had children aged 4 to 13; in four of these families the husbands were substance abusers, and contributed minimally to childcare and household responsibilities—the women in these families were especially at risk for high stress and role strain.

'Level of preparedness' was defined as the extent to which a woman had mentally or otherwise prepared herself for the perceived or forseen inevitability of the relationship's demise. This preparedness was predicated upon her (a) being aware of existing problems while in the marriage, (b) being the one who decided to leave, (c) having emotionally separated from her husband within the marriage, and (d) having made pragmatic moves towards being ready for the end (e.g., setting up a support network, or going back to school). In this last respect, one woman vividly described:

I spent three years building friendships, building my own self-esteem, working with counsellors, going through an employment program...always preparing myself. I was in this destructive relationship--I knew it was going to kill me if I didn't do something. And I couldn't leave because even if I left I would just go into another one. And so I brought the nurturing, positive stuff into it. And as soon as that
was in place...it was like being on a pinnacle, standing on this pinnacle, and I couldn't go anywhere. So this stuff came in and it made a web of net all around it...so all I had to do was fall, and I was caught. It was all this prep work that made the difference" (Ann).

'Precipitating factors' were defined as the conditions or events that led up to the marital dissolution. For all of the women, one or more of these factors featured prominently in their understandings of what happened and why. These conditions or events were (a) husband's addiction/s--four of the husbands had problems with drugs and/or alcohol, (b) husband's abusive behavior--several of the men were often verbally abusive; two were also physically abusive, (c) husband's infidelity--three men had affairs while in their marriages; one of them had several, (d) husband's dissatisfaction--several of the men who initiated separation felt dissatisfied with their marriages or wanted to be free to meet other women--one man simply felt that his wife was too dependent on him--"he said that he wanted to be free, he wanted to meet other women, he didn't want to be tied up as a married person....he didn't want to feel that he always had to come back, you know, that I would be waiting for him" (Deb), and (e) own desire to leave an intolerable situation--for women who initiated separation, at least one or more of the first three factors featured:

We got married and we had 2 kids and we bought a house, all the things you are supposed to do. But along the way there were job problems, especially with him. Can't get a job, or not the right kind of job, or lay-offs. And he just started
changing and alienating people, and getting real cranky, and having no motivation and having drug problems and drinking problems. You know, all these things which I supported him and tried to get help over, but it wasn't changing and it wasn't getting any better....It's not as bad as it was, but there is no motivation and there is no participation in the family life and what's going on in there. And the house that we bought is being neglected....And finally I got to the point where I forgot who I was in all of this. One day I just said to myself, 'I don't want to be doing this any more. I don't want to do it tomorrow. I don't want to be here next year' (Amy).

Level of Self-development was defined as how a woman experienced herself in her marriage; this reflected the extent to which she perceived herself to be dependent on her husband and the personal issues and struggles that emerged for her within the context of that marriage. For all of the women, the experience of self included components of ongoing personal struggles as well as, at the time of separation, a vague, diminished, or attenuated sense of identity or personal integrity. 'Ongoing personal struggles' emerged from women (a) struggling with finding their identities--"I need to get out and find out who I am and where my life is going, 'cos I spent most of my adult life with him and I wasn't happy" (Amy); "I got to know myself [after we split up]. I got to know my wants, and needs, and desires, and dreams, and my fantasies and my nightmares. I explored each one of them, and it was, I mean I still am. I am still learning learning about myself. And I never, ever knew myself. I went from living at
home, to living with my sister, to living with John. A lot of people have time to live by themselves and think about things and get to know themselves. I never did" (Sal), (b) dealing with eating disorders; two of the women revealed histories of eating disorders--this was strongly tied in to lifelong concerns with body image and self-worth, (c) feelings of low self-esteem--many of the women had very little sense of their own value and tended to minimalize their achievements and skills; this of course manifested for some as problems with body image/food, needing approval from, or feeling very dependent on others, (d) seeking meaningful and challenging work/careers, (e) discovering personal resources--many of the women evidenced tremendous personal resourcefulness, endurance, and creativity in their lives, often juggling work, children, and household duties amidst dysfunctional relationships that held unresolved conflicts, unmet needs, and abuse; and recognizing and validating their strengths seemed to have been challenging for these women, and (f) developing and sustaining meaningful relationships with others--for several women, their total preoccupation with the problems and/or demands of their marriages made it difficult for them to cultivate or value personal friendships with female friends--"I used to think that my friendships were an obligation, a duty...I would resent the energy that I had to put into a friendship sometimes because I felt that I didn't have enough energy to share" (Sue). For many women, the onset of their transition from marital life would see changes in their attitude and commitment towards relationships with others.
'Diminishing of self in marriage' reflected women's (a) emotional dependency on their husbands—many initially perceived themselves as unable to survive without their husbands, (b) perception that these men were the primary focus of their lives, and (c) perception that they were secondary rather than equal figures in their marriages; they saw themselves as supporting their husbands. In many families, women generally deferred to their husbands in what appeared to be areas of major decision-making (e.g., such as vacation plans, purchase of household furniture); certainly they were frequently the ones to compromise their values and needs. Women often took responsibility for initiating action when problems arose (e.g., through attempts to talk to their husbands, or seeking counselling). Several women had endured marriages in which they felt diminished for years on end through constant verbal abuse or endless invalidation and minimizing of their needs and efforts or achievements by their husbands.

'Positive personal characteristics' reflected women's (a) tenacity, (b) determination, (c) resourcefulness, and (d) endurance. Many of these women had these and other positive qualities, which had taken them through years of problematic relationships. Some needed them to survive the verbal or physical abuse of their partners, or years of struggling with a failing relationships—"I learned to control his violence. I learned to control it over the years that we were together. And I could trigger it and I could tamp it down" (Ann); "I tried for a long time. Like I love this man, I want this marriage to work."
I'll struggle, I'll work hard, I'll do anything to make it work. And I did that for a long time" (Amy).

The overall 'picture' of context initially appeared disproportionately negative. In providing contextual information, most of the women did not identify personal strengths as something they had been aware of both before and around the time of actual physical separation. Some alluded to positive aspects of family life (such as their husbands' parenting, family time), but only in minor ways. In talking about what led up to their separation it seemed important for women to maintain reasonable raison d'etre's (probably both for themselves and for me) for what happened, which was about making sense out of the negative aspects. In other words, women's experience of their inner and outer lives around the time of physical separation, as well as their later recollection of that time, centred around negative aspects of their relationships. The transformations that would happen for women later on in their transitions, particularly in the area of self-awareness and self-esteem, can be contrasted against what was most salient for them in their recounting of what led up to their marital dissolution.

It soon became clear that understanding context was crucial in my quest to examine the process of women's adaptation to separation and divorce. What they would do to manage the changes that resulted was inextricably tied in to their contexts. This has clear implications for counselling, and will be discussed later in this paper.
Impact Areas

The impact areas variable was defined as the felt changes in significant life areas as experienced by the women as a result of their separation and divorce. The felt changes were indicators of what were to become important transitional tasks for women, the things they needed to do to manage. This theme emerged from four lower categories: structural changes, emotional changes, perceptual changes, and physical changes (see Figure 2).

Structural Changes were defined as changes in family structure, life pragmatics, and women's connections to other people. Changes in 'family structure', as experienced by women, meant (a) ending sexual intimacy with their estranged husbands—they were physically separated, they would not live with their husbands anymore and would not have sex with them, (b) becoming a single parent—for many women, questions like "where would I go?", "what would I do?", or "how can I live?" predominated, and (c) reorganizing roles and relationships with children, family members, and the ex-husband—for most of the women, separation also brought about changed relationships with the significant people in their lives—"My mother and I were able to have a much more honest relationship. I didn't have to pretend my marriage was okay. And when she didn't have to pretend my marriage was okay we got along a lot better. My sister had been mad at me all these years for marrying Robert and was so mad she couldn't support me. My sister became less for me and my mother more for me [after the breakup]. But now my sister is coming back a little bit" (Kim).
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<td>relocating, needing new home</td>
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<td>affirming personal rights to freedom, safety, joy, &amp; love</td>
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Figure 2. Impact Areas - felt changes in significant life areas as experienced by women after separation.
'Life pragmatics' included women needing to (a) find a new place to live, (b) find paid employment, (c) manage their finances on their own, (d) organize their children's visits with their fathers, (e) organize childcare or afterschool care, and (f) learning how to live on less money—this was true for all but one of the women. Most of the women were forced into a lower standard of living; several received government assistance for short periods.

Women's 'connection to others' also changed after their separation: (a) they began to reach out more to friends or family for emotional, sometimes financial support, and for help with the children, (b) they began to access their communities for resources (e.g., support groups, counselling, legal assistance, etc.), and (c) women with older or no children now had more time and opportunity to make new friends.

Emotional Changes were the changes in intensity, frequency, or state of women's emotions. Many women were, at the onset of their transitions, overwhelmed by their emotions. They (a) grieved intensely for their losses, (b) worried about their futures, and (c) felt intense feelings of shame, guilt, anger, rejection, fear, depression, loneliness, and despair.

In this study, the most intense feelings of grief (defined as mental anguish and sadness caused by loss) appeared to be experienced by those who did not initiate their separation, immediately after it happened—"I was at the depths of despair" (Sue); "I don't know how long it would take before I wouldn't feel the pain" (Deb); "I remember the night he told me he didn't love me anymore. And it just felt like, I mean I can still feel
it. You feel like someone has just punched you in the mouth, or put a knife through you" (Sal).

However, most of those who left their husbands talked about having "done the grieving" while in their marriages. One woman summed it up by saying: "The emotional stuff? Because this has been going on for so long, all these years when I was going through all of these things--I was very emotional through all of it. So when I finally came to my decision, the emotion was gone, it was over, I had done it already" (Amy). Another added: "I had done a lot of my separating while we were still married, and the crying that I did at my house was for giving up the marriage and giving up the hopes" (Ann).

The grieving process, that is, the process of coming to terms with the pain of loss, appeared to be common to all the women interviewed. However, after separation the severity or intensity of the grief reaction and the length of the grieving process depended on how well prepared the women were (i.e., how much they had expected the ending), how much they had emotionally distanced themselves from their husbands within their marriages, and thus how much grieving they had done before separation. One woman spoke of the first month as "overwhelming, devastating... deep shock and grief....I thought I might be on the verge of an emotional collapse, and that I might need to be hospitalized" (Sue). At the time of the interview, not yet four months after the separation, she had seen some significant "letting up" of those initial intense emotions of grief. This woman's husband had been an alcoholic, and she spoke of having had "inklings" during the marriage that their relationship might come to an end-
-although she did not initiate the separation, she had in a sense expected it.

Another woman, four years post-separation and currently in a stable second relationship, spoke thus:

It is a loss, it's like a death. It's the death of a relationship, and I think [I] can't really ever say that I am totally over that. When you are truly in a relationship, like heart and soul....I can say, yes I am moving on, which I am, and I feel great about myself, I have someone that loves me and I love that person, [but] to me the relationship died. The marriage died. And that's a loss to me. The whole unit, family unit is lost. It died. I will never have that back--[there] will never be the mother, father, children. So that to me is...nothing will ever replace it. I don't think I'll ever be okay with that. I will always, when I talk about it, have pain. It's just a different level of pain (Sal).

For yet a third woman, four years post-separation, talking about her marriage in the interview led to intense grief (manifested in her crying for the entire 2-hour session). This woman had invested all of herself, her hopes and her dreams into her marriage, and when it ended her whole world disintegrated. Even though she was currently a year into another, loving relationship it was obvious that she was still resolving her grief: "It took more than two years to recover. Two years was, you know, like only the top layer. I don't know how long it would take before I wouldn't feel the pain" (Deb). For her, the ending
was completely unexpected—her sense of rejection and betrayal was immense.

Despite the initial negative emotions, many women reported feelings of relief soon after. 'Feeling relieved' came from (a) removal of the anguish and frustration/stress that came from dysfunctional relationships, (b) freedom from alcoholism and/or abuse, and (c) a greater sense of personal safety that came from removal of the threat of physical abuse.

Many women also reported 'feeling renewed hope.' This came about through their efforts to cope, which in turn brought them (a) increased self-esteem, (b) a greater sense of self-efficacy, and (c) more positive connections to others.

*Perceptual Changes* were defined as alterations in the women's intuitive awareness and understanding of the transformations within themselves. 'Expanding sense of self' reflected increased self-awareness in women beginning to (a) perceive themselves as stronger, more independent, self-reliant, and resourceful, (b) discover more positive aspects of themselves, (c) give more attention to their own struggles and needs, and (d) affirm their personal rights to freedom, safety, joy, and love.

'Changing view of relationships' reflected, for many women, changes in their ideas about love, marriage, family, and friendships. Women (a) began to question their own previous notions about what love or marriage constituted; they also began to rethink their long-beheld ideas of "family life", and (b) attached new meaning to their female friendships.
Physical Changes were defined as health-related changes. They were (a) sleeplessness, (b) loss of appetite/weight, (c) fatigue and low energy levels, (d) general malaise, (e) work-related ailments (e.g., tendonitis, back problems), and for some, (f) gradual increase of energy and feelings of fitness. The overall effect of these changes for the women in the study was a reduced vitality.

Tasks

The tasks variable was defined as the things that needed to be done by the women in their transitions to cope with felt changes and demands of a new life. Not every single act or behavior was adaptive or maximally effective, but all represented their efforts to cope with simultaneously occurring changes or demands in multiple life areas. This theme emerged from six lower categories: responding to reality demands, strengthening the connection to others, managing a sea of emotions, making sense and seeking meaning, working towards personal identity, and re-establishing vitality (see Figure 3). The lowest order of tasks reflected types of coping behavior.

Responding to Reality Demands was about dealing with whatever needed immediate attention. 'Handling legalities' involved (a) dividing assets and properties, (b) obtaining legal separation agreements that would include child support and custody, and (c) officially filing for divorce. The women in the study were at different stages in this respect; only two were divorced at the time of interview, one had recently separated and had not even involved legal assistance.
<table>
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<td><strong>negotiating child support</strong></td>
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<td><strong>filing for divorce</strong></td>
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<td><strong>joining babysitting co-op</strong></td>
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<td><strong>joining neighbourhood support groups</strong></td>
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<td>developing career</td>
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| (cont.)
feeling valued through close friendships with women
feeling lovable/desirable through sexual contact or romantic involvement with men
exercising
eating better

II

forming intimate relationships with others

III

reestablishing vitality

Figure 3. Tasks - what women needed to do to cope with felt changes and demands of their new lives. (continued on next page).
'Managing finances' included (a) negotiating child support with husbands, (b) earning money through paid work, (c) accessing social assistance, (d) receiving money from family, (e) learning to budget and stretch resources—"I spent two months living on welfare wages, yeah, $50 a week. How did I do it? Well, I guess we became vegetarian. Not strict vegetarians...we bought chicken when it was on sale and made lots of soup, learned how to stretch it...make up a big pot and that would last a while, and do free things, or not go out" (Pam), (f) obtaining credit from financial institutions, and for one woman, (e) declaring personal bankruptcy in order to clear up previous student loans.

'Creating a home' was extremely important for women with children, and involved (a) finding suitable and affordable housing, or (b) obtaining subsidized housing. For many women, the concept of home was symbolic: creating a home would become important to them—"it would represent a return to their own values, hopes, and dreams—"[I found] that the dreams I had as a young woman were coming back....living close to nature, living within my needs, living in tiny spaces and taking very little from the environment was back to being a reality because I didn't have to live someone else's lifestyle" (Ann). One woman explained her evolving awareness of the importance of "home": "the concept of home for me, I'm learning is that it involves beauty, light, a garden, nature. Feeling that there's beauty in my home, feeling that when I wake up there's light streaming across my room, and that I have big enough windows to look out and feel lightness in my life...where I can have fun with people. That's a revelation about my home life!" (Sue).
A woman who stayed in an abusive relationship for 13 years because she wanted security and stability and had thought that her house represented those things said:

[about] my house, it's odd to look back on it, and see that it got me married, it kept me married and I struggled so hard to keep my house and not lose my home. Home was really, really important. The house meant home, it meant family, it meant security. It meant financial security, emotional security. That I could come into my home and be safe. It's a safety. The idea of giving up my marriage meant giving up my safety and giving up my home. As it turns out, I've given up my home and quite gladly, but it took a long time to realize my safety wasn't in a building. That it was inside me and in a couple boxful of things that I really liked having around. That was what made home (Ann).

She added later: "This is my space...I have the power to choose what happens in this space."

Not every woman had an easy time creating a home. One woman encountered discrimination from prospective landlords on account of her having a young child; she was able to subsequently obtain government subsidized housing, but had to contend with mice and cockroaches therein.

'Caretaking young children' was about (a) the day-to-day tending to the needs of the children--the younger the children, the greater the demands on women, (b) dealing with the children's reactions to separation--women were concerned about the effects of marital breakup on their children and thus spent time talking to them about it; often, they provided explanations that they
thought would not create conflict or hurt for the kids, (c) obtaining subsidies for daycare, for those who needed to work, (d) finding inexpensive ways to take breaks—such as joining babysitting co-operatives, and (e) asking personal friends or family members to help out.

*Strengthening the Connection to Others* involved creating a support network and accessing community resources. 'Managing changing roles and relationships' led to women (a) paying more attention to their own mothering skills—often women's relationships with their children improved as a result of their being able to focus more on these relationships, (b) having to negotiate access and custody issues with their husbands—this was for many a difficult and often emotional task; sometimes husbands did not want to be involved with their kids, other times husbands and wives had to contend with intense emotions that got in the way of their attempts, (c) developing working or workable relationships with them—this was challenging for the same reasons, and (d) dealing with the reactions of family members and changes in these relationships—women's marital dissolution sometimes brought them closer to and other times alienated them from their families.

In 'creating a social/familial support network', women (a) put more effort into their friendships, and spent more time with friends, and (b) maintained their connections with their families.

In 'accessing community resources', women (a) sought free counselling, (b) joined neighbourhood support groups, (c) accessed social services/welfare, and (d) joined babysitting co-
operatives. Many of the women in the study had received counselling at some point during their marriages; some had received post-separation counselling only, and some both. For all the women, separation or divorce brought about changes in their important relationships.

*Managing a Sea-of-Emotions* was defined as coping with the variety of emotional needs that arose from the felt changes in women's experience of their emotions. For some women, 'working through negative emotions' entailed (a) getting help from therapists/counsellors, (b) talking to friends and family--"I just absolutely was at the depths of despair and I had to reach out....I just felt that it was the kind of despair I couldn't go through alone" (Sue), (c) joining support groups, and (d) talking to their husbands.

For others, 'shutting out negative emotions' was another way of coping, especially when reality demanded that they attended to other things, such as caretaking young children, or getting enough money to live on. Women achieved this through (a) denial, (b) over-focusing on their children, (c) over-involvement with work, drinking or overeating, and (d) avoiding men--for some women, avoiding contact with men served as a way for them to avoid facing their own feelings of rejection, hurt, and hopelessness.

Another aspect of women's attempts to maintain emotional equilibrium was distancing themselves from their husbands. Women spoke of (a) moving out of their family homes--"it allowed me to clear out a lot of memories" (Sue), (b) minimizing time spent with their husbands, (c) being abrupt with their husbands, (d)
finding a reasonable way to understand what happened—for example, one woman, whose alcoholic husband left her for another woman, said: "my husband is in a disease process...he's caught up in the disease and he can't do anything else right now, so you know you can get less personal about it when you become educated about the situation. And also just the amount of emotional withdrawing that I have done in the past three months is starting to help me feel, take it less personally" (Sue), and (e) entering into transitional relationships in order to distance themselves emotionally from their husbands—several women became involved in short-term transitional relationships in order to separate themselves emotionally from the pain of losing their husbands.

In 'grieving the losses', women (a) cried in solitude, (b) cried in the company of friends, (c) acknowledged their losses, and (d) sought counselling.

For all of the women, previously held ideas and beliefs about love, marriage, and family became important in their adaptation to marital dissolution. These ideas and beliefs were rooted in their parents' values as well as in a socio-cultural milieu that strongly condoned the institution of marriage and the place of women as keepers of that marital hearth. Hopes and dreams based on these belief systems would be painfully shattered when marriages broke up, resulting in multiple layers of losses and the subsequent launching of a process of grieving.

Even when there were strong reasons for ending the marriages, such their husbands' addictions, abusive behavior, or infidelity, women grieved the loss of their marriages beyond and deeper than the obvious severing of a physical and emotional
connection with their mates—"It was a grieving process, for about a year...like not losing him, not missing him, but losing the relationship. I had this fantasy relationship in my mind, so I had to grieve that fantasy relationship too" (Pam); "...letting go of that ideal that I was gonna have this nice little family" (Meg). The loss of the dream of love and the ideal of an intact "disneyland-type" (Meg) family would result in significant disappointment, disillusionment, and grief.

Making Sense and Seeking Meaning represented women's attempts to understand what happened and why. Women looked to 'finding ways to understand what happened and developing insights into their own roles in the breakup' by (a) talking to people, (b) reading self-help books, and (c) talking to counsellors. They often questioned themselves: "What did I do wrong?", "What could I have changed?" They attempted to further make sense of their marital dissolution by 'maintaining a reason for the breakup', such as their husband's (a) addiction or abuse, (b) infidelity, or (c) lack of commitment or involvement.

Working Towards Personal Identity was an extension of the women's perceived changes in self-awareness. In working towards 'improving self-awareness, self-efficacy, and self-esteem', women (a) got in touch with their own values, (b) learned to be alone--"it's a great feeling. It's a really neat feeling, to feel like I'm going to be myself. And if you want to be with me, great. If you don't that's okay too because I can be alone. And that's the biggest thing of all!" (Sal), (c) accepted their own limitations, (d) recognized and valued their own abilities and achievements--"I have a VISA and I have a bank card. I never had
these things before, and I'm proud of myself for getting them" (Sue), (e) affirmed their own rights to happiness, (f) learned new behaviors and coping skills, (g) recognized their own needs and worked on personal struggles, (h) recognized their own growth through crisis, (i) explored creative interests, and (j) developed their careers.

Women had some very poignant things to say about their growth through crisis: "I don't know where I would be if this hadn't [happened]. It's almost like it was inevitable, it had to happen this separation. Because I had no identity. None. And when you have no identity eventually that person that is with you is going to tire of it...it's a lot of learning, growth. I grew. And I feel like I started as a bulb, and I haven't totally blossomed yet" (Sal); "I became stronger as I overcame each obstacle" (Pam).

Another woman happily summed up:
And everyday I find myself more capable of taking on whatever sort of task the universe puts in front of me, and that's a nice thing to be able to do....Like one of these days this little seed [that is me] is going to turn into this great big fat red tomato, you know. It's going to nourish one little tiny corner of the universe in some essential and important way...I've been censored and pruned and kept in a jar for so long that I was almost dead...and now I'm blooming (Ann).

For the women in the study, separation brought about transformations in their sense of self in positive and significant ways.
Essential to women's identity were their relationships with people. In 'forming intimate relationships with others', women felt (a) valued and loved--through close friendships with female friends, and (b) lovable and desirable--through sexual contact/romantic involvement with men: "they gave me the feeling that I was okay..still attractive..not damaged" (Deb). Several women had short-term love affairs; the two who at the time of the interview had been in stable and loving second relationships spoke of these relationships as more equal and of themselves as more independent, assertive, and expressive in them. Others spoke of their visions of future relationships that mirrored similar characteristics or qualities.

Women did not ignore their physical health. Re-establishing vitality was the result of women taking better care of themselves by (a) exercising, and (b) developing better eating habits. Women became increasingly aware of the importance of taking care of their bodies and staying healthy.

Facilitators/Obstacles

The facilitators/obstacles variable was defined as the factors that either helped or hindered women's efforts to cope with the demands of their transitions. This theme emerged from a total of 12 lower categories. They were: education and employability, financial security/stability, personal characteristics, support network, preparedness/ expectation of ending, making sense of what happened, having intimate relationships, frustration, decreased standard of living, role strain, emotional vulnerability, and physical health concerns (see Figure 4).
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<tr>
<th>education &amp; employability</th>
<th>financial security/security</th>
<th>personal characteristics</th>
<th>support network</th>
<th>making sense of what happened</th>
<th>having intimate relationships</th>
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<td>possessing college/university degree</td>
<td>possessing a marketable skill</td>
<td>possessing work experience</td>
<td>child support payments</td>
<td>earned wage</td>
<td>gifts/loans from family</td>
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Figure 4. Facilitators/Obstacles - the factors that either helped or hindered women's coping efforts.
'Education and employability' was about possessing (a) a college or university, (b) marketable skills, and (c) work experience. Being educated and employable meant that women were potentially able to make at least enough money to survive; however, sometimes juggling childcare with work proved to be challenging for women.

'Financial security/stability' came from (a) child support payments—only three of the six women who had children had this advantage; a fourth received minimal payments, but only intermittently, (b) earned wages, (c) gifts or loans from family or friends, (d) government assistance, and for one woman (Kim), (e) owning her own townhouse.

The 'personal characteristics' that contributed positively to women's adaptation were their: (a) resourcefulness and creativity, (b) determination, (c) gradually increasing self-esteem, (d) tenacity, (e) ability to grow through crisis, (f) courage, and (g) insightfulness.

Having a 'support network' also helped. Women received (a) emotional support from family and friends, (b) financial support from family, in several cases, (c) help with their children from family, friends, and neighbours, and (d) support from counsellors—"it was a real validating experience for me, that I was worthy of somebody's attention for an entire hour. And that it was important to somebody how I was doing...there was a regard for me as a human being there. And that was really important for me. What it helped me do was to come to the understanding that I was worthy of the same kind of positive regard for myself" (Ann).
Women were able to perceive that it had been their own level of 'preparedness or expectation of ending' that made it easier for them to cope: for example, (a) being the one who made the decision to leave, (b) having emotionally separated from the husband while in the marriage, (c) having grieved during the marriage, and (d) having prepared themselves for the forseen ending. Not all these conditions applied for everyone; it seemed that the women having the hardest times were those for whom very few or none of these conditions existed.

Several women accorded that 'making sense of what happened', that is, being able to (a) explain what happened, and (b) being able to understand the personal significance of the breakup also helped.

'Having intimate relationships' was another factor that provided focus, purpose, and validation for women: (a) needing to focus on their children's needs, (b) feeling loved and valued by others, and (c) feeling a sense of connection to others. In this last respect, one woman's story was particularly touching: "I was new to this country. I had nobody here. I only had my work, which was very important to me, and my marriage. He was the only person in my life and the the most important person in my life. So it was like everything that I put my energy or my faith in, or half of that, was suddenly gone. I mean, all of it just disintegrated. There was nothing I could do about it...all of a sudden I lost my home" (Deb). Deb's only personal connection to the world at large was through her husband--when that connection was severed half of her world ceased to exist. That made her
work of rebuilding a life and coming to terms with her losses very difficult.

'Frustration' constituted a factor that made women's tasks during their transition harder. This arose from (a) facing discrimination from potential landlords, (b) dealing with government agencies, and (c) feeling abused by employers.

For several women, a 'decreased standard of living' meant that they (a) had to live on less money, and therefore could no longer afford the lifestyle that they might have been used to, (b) received little or no financial support from their husbands, and (c) sometimes lived under poor housing conditions.

Another obstacle for women was 'role strain', which was defined as feeling over-worked and worn-out due to being in the role of having to bear responsibility for all that needed to be done. Women often (a) cared for young children, (b) received inadequate help with them, (c) did not get enough breaks/leisure time, and (d) endlessly juggled work and their children's needs. Women with younger children were especially stretched.

Their own 'emotionally vulnerability' also hindered their progress at times. Women felt vulnerable when they (a) experienced longing for their husbands, and (b) felt lonely, rejected, unattractive, and depressed. For several women, their husbands' involvement with another woman contributed to these feelings. One woman expressed her feelings in the following way:

I guess my biggest reaction to the separation was not separating from my husband, but the fact that he recoupled immediately....It meant to me that he had never really cared about me. It meant that I was replaceable. It meant that
we couldn't be friends. It meant that we couldn't separate slowly from each other. It meant that he found someone who was better than me. And that was all hard. And it meant there was no reconciliation. And that all really hurt my pride (Kim).

For Kim, feelings of hurt pride and rejection would result in her involvement in several short-lived transitional relationships in which she sought affirmation of her own attractiveness and sexuality.

Furthermore, 'physical health concerns' sometimes added to the women's worries. These included (a) fearing for personal safety—two of the women feared that their husbands would hurt them, (b) loss of appetite, due to depression and anxiety, (c) work-related ailments, and (d) general fatigue.

**Outcome**

The *outcome* variable was defined as women's visions of what they wanted for themselves in their new lives. *Outcome* was a dynamic process, not a stable or fixed phenomenon. It was neither the predetermined result of isolated variables (e.g., demographic characteristics, or personal circumstances) nor simple reflections of particular coping efforts, although each of these factors played a role. *Outcome* was a result of the interaction between the social processes of context, impact areas, tasks, and facilitators/obstacles. It emerged from three lower categories: coming to terms with the past, envisioning a future of hope and possibilities, and working on self-growth or development (see Figure 5).
Figure 5. Outcome - women's visions of what they wanted for themselves in their new lives.
Coming to Terms with the Past meant for women (a) being able to maintain emotional equilibrium, (b) accepting the losses and resolving the grief--"working through grief, getting beyond the total preoccupation with it" (Sue), (c) focusing on self rather than on the past relationship or on the husband--"my feelings aren't focused on him anymore and what he's doing and how he's affecting my life. It's more focused on what my needs are" (Pam), (d) being emotionally detached from husband, (e) having formed or forming a new, working relationship with husband (especially for families with children), and (f) giving up further hopes for reconciliation--one woman described it as "letting go of the dream" (Amy).

Envisioning a Future of Hope and Possibilities stemmed from women (a) continuing positive connections to others, (b) feeling excited about their own lives, (c) enjoying rewarding and fulfilling careers, (d) living by their own values, (e) being financially secure, (f) developing creative interests, (g) being physically fit and healthy, and (h) being in new love relationships.

Working on Self-growth and Development was, for the women in this study, important ongoing goals. They aspired to work towards (a) greater self-awareness, (b) greater self-acceptance, (c) having higher self-esteem, and (d) feeling more efficacious or competent.

The women in the study were at different stages in their transitions. They came from different contexts, but their experiences of coping with the effects of marital dissolution reflected some common themes. Moreover, their vision of the
future encompassed similar goals and hopes—of letting go of the past and embracing the future. Women wished to come to terms with their marital breakups, have hope for more fulfilling lives, and to continue working on personal growth and development. Not everyone had achieved all these desired goals; some were well on their way, almost being at the end of their adaptation, and others had more "work" to do. All had struggled with some or all aspects of their transitions; all were already "successful" in mastering many of their transitional tasks. Outcome, therefore, was not a static, or unilinear event. Rather, it was an evolving phenomenon that manifested as a result of the interaction of a variety of factors, such as women's personal circumstances, their changing perceptions, as well as their coping efforts.

Most of the women in the study were employed full-time; several had careers that were reasonably established (e.g., teacher, occupational therapist, office manager), although not all of these women felt completely satisfied with their jobs or what they made in terms of income. However, in this respect, and in other areas of life management including parenting, most women were generally pleased with what they had accomplished. For those who had been more recently separated as well as those who had not become involved in serious relationships there were some uncertainties as to whether they would ever have relationships that they thought they now needed. These women feared that (a) if they had men in their lives again, they might have their ability to choose taken away, or (b) they might become desperate enough to return to their former destructive relationships. These women believed that they could never allow themselves to
enter into relationships that would rob them of their newly-found, expanded sense of self.

In summary, the women in this study differed in contexts, and experienced separation and divorce in personal, unique ways; however, the data has revealed some shared meanings common to all of them. One woman's graphic summary of her experience adequately reflected elements common to everyone in the sample:

My image is this--when I was married, the core of who I am was encased, like in a cage...it was smothered...I couldn't reach it. My very core was damaged. As soon as I was out [of the marriage] my core was released. My outside was a mess, but my inside was free. In my marriage it was the other way around--the outside was stable, but the inside was all messed up. I saw my life as a puzzle. When I was married, the puzzle was very stable; the picture looked very unhappy, but the puzzle was intact, all the pieces were there. When we split up, it was like I had taken this puzzle and thrown it up into the air. For a long time, the pieces were all over the place; there were no boundaries between myself and the world. It took about a year before the pieces started to fall into a frame. There was a frame but the parts still had not fallen into place. When I bought my house, one part of the puzzle came together. When my career came into place, another part of the puzzle came together. The pieces are still falling--every now and then whole sections emerge, come together. I feel a sense of accomplishment and relief whenever that happens (Kim).
Conclusions

For the women in the study, separation and divorce engendered disruption and disorganization in multiple life areas, much like a dismantled puzzle. The process of adaptation then was one of piecing together the puzzle. This detailed examination of process for the women in the study situated their struggles, losses, grief, and gains in the rich contexts of their lives. Results highlight the multi-dimensionality of women's experience of adapting to separation and divorce.

I have chosen to view the different aspects (major categories) of women's adaptation to separation and divorce as 'dimensions' rather than 'phases' or 'stages' because I believe that 'phases' and 'stages' imply temporality and sequentiality. The results from this study suggest that shared experiences differed in intensity, duration, and time or order of occurrence. Thus, 'dimensions' more accurately portrays the different elements of the process of women's adapting to marital dissolution. These dimensions (context, impact areas, tasks, facilitators/obstacles, and outcome) can be thought of as subprocesses, elements, or properties of a central overiding process, alternately called core category or basic social process (Glaser, 1978; Wilson, 1989).

Glaser (1978) identifies 'dimensions' (elements, properties, aspects) as one of the families of 'theoretical codes', and suggests that any one of the types of theoretical codes can be a core category or basic social process. In this study, divorce is viewed as a life transition, a bridge between the end of the marital state and the beginning of single life. Thus, the
process of negotiating this life transition is one in which a series of subprocesses interact with each other in response to change. These interactions themselves create more change. The most central category (basic social process), the one that most adequately captures the essence of the changes that women experience in their divorce transition is Transforming (Figure 6). This term adequately reflects the interactive nature of the dimensions of women's adaptation to separation and divorce, as well as the transformations, shifts, or changes that result from the process of adaptation. During the divorce transition, discontinuity resulting from the severing of intimate ties transforms into balance and harmony, losses transform into gains, emotional and social ties strengthen, and women's sense of themselves shift and expand. The category outcome would mark the end of women's transitions, wherein equilibrium has been re-established in their lives and all major transformations have happened. As the data has indicated, however, this does not necessarily mean that all issues and concerns are completely resolved (e.g., some women spoke of ongoing or unresolved grief). Perhaps, for some women, the process of resolving grief may go on into the next phase of their lives. For some of the participants in the study, the initial severity of the grief reaction seemed to have been transformed into a less traumatic, less disruptive sadness.
Figure 6. Transforming: A conceptual model of women's adaptation to separation and divorce. (The figure displays the five major categories that emerged from data analyses. Lines between boxes indicate relationships between categories. Although the whole process is reciprocally interactional, arrowheads highlight the dominant direction of influence in some interactions. All interactions reflect the existence of the core category or basic social process transforming. Note: a = onset of transition; b = end of transition)
Discussion

The conceptual framework displayed in Figure 6 emphasizes the interactions between the five major categories described in the results section. The theory proposes that women's experience of divorce (impact areas) and thus the tasks that they face in their divorce transitions are influenced by their personal contexts, as well as by environment-related factors (facilitators and obstacles). The outcome, which in this study is defined as the women's visions of their own future after marital dissolution, can then be conceptualized as a description or portrayal of a dynamic state of affairs that would both reflect the ending of their transitions and the beginning of a new phase of their lives.

Thus, the process of women's adaptation to marital dissolution is a process of transforming—it consists of reciprocal interactions between these five dimensions or aspects of their experiences of separation and divorce. If divorce is viewed as a life transition that is the 'bridge' between the end of one life phase and the beginning of another, then transforming constitutes the process of 'crossing the bridge.'

Women prefaced their narratives by telling about the events and circumstances surrounding their physical separation from their husbands. In other words, they situated their stories in the contexts of their marital dissolution. What appeared to be contextually significant for the women in the study, that is, what they told me about what was going on for them around their separation, was largely negative. This may have been what they
needed to do in order to make sense of a perceived 'negative event' (i.e., marital breakup).

Context would be linked to what women perceived to be changes in their lives that resulted from separation, i.e., to impact areas. More importantly, these felt changes (structural, emotional, perceptual, and physical) were affected/transformed by women's transitional tasks, which at the lowest level were their coping behaviors. Both of these subprocesses were influenced/transformed by what women perceived to be facilitators/obstacles. Moreover, women's management of their transitional tasks lessened or intensified the felt changes. Thus, in their interactions, these subprocesses transformed each other.

An alternate way to view this model is to draw parallels to the stress-and-coping literature. In stress theory, causal antecedents that include person variables (such as values, commitments, and beliefs) and environmental variables (such as circumstances, availability of resources) interact with mediating processes (such as coping behaviors) and moderators, resulting in both immediate and long-term effects (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Context, from a stress and coping perspective, would be seen as causal antecedents, and impact areas as economical, social, and psychological stressors. Facilitators/obstacles would be thought of as moderators, or variables that were present at the onset of the divorce transition. Within the present model, however, some of these facilitators/obstacles (e.g., being able to make sense of what happened, or dealing with loneliness) were themselves emerging processes; others such
as gifts/loans, or discrimination, may not have been present at the onset on women's transitions. Furthermore, positive changes identified in impact areas suggest that some environmental conditions were reinforcements rather than stressors (or demands) for women. Nevertheless, a coping theory perspective would view tasks as coping efforts that mediate between the moderating processes and stressors to produce effects, which in the present model would be outcome.

The theory proposed in this study highlights the conditions and contexts under which women experience separation and divorce and through which they negotiate the changes that ensue. This schema does not emphasize 'precursors' to or 'results' of successful coping, although it does suggest that those factors are involved. Rather, it stresses the interactional aspects of the different dimensions of women's experience.

Results from this study confirm previous findings that there are both positive and negative consequences of divorce for women (e.g., Veevers, 1991). Studies to date have documented emotional distress, role strain, lowered living standards, economic hardships, changed roles and relationships, as well as feelings of relief, improved social relationships, and increased self-esteem for women. The women in this study experienced varied levels of these aspects of the divorce experience; thus, their narratives shed further light on themes alluded to in the literature. For example, the data indicate that positive consequences can co-exist with distress even for women who are chronologically recently separated. What may put them at risk for further or continued distress are perceived as well as real
obstacles. The extent to which they can overcome these real or imagined difficulties, and thus be 'successful' in their short-term efforts appears to reflect the extent to which transforming occurs. In the longer term, outcome portrays what would be the result of transformational forces as well as envisioned conditions and contexts for a new life after divorce.

Results from the study also augment our understanding of the importance of decisional control, i.e., initiator status—it is not merely a question of who "dumps" whom, but rather that a rigorous understanding of context is necessary to ascribe significance and meaning to initiator status. Women who were non-initiators experienced significant emotional trauma early in their transitions; the extent to which they were able to resolve, accept, or come to terms with (transform) their grief depended, however, on many factors. For example, a woman's context would reflect personal (the quality of her marriage, her sense of identity), historical (her previous relationships, ideas about love and family), situational (circumstances surrounding her marital breakup) factors that shape her emotional and behavioral responses to separation/divorce. Women who were mentally and emotionally 'prepared' for marital dissolution appeared to have been better able to deal with their grief. Those who were the ones to leave spoke of having 'grieved' before they left; although they found it easier to adjust to separation, they nevertheless needed me to know that it had not been because grief was absent. Grief, certainly, was not the only emotional reaction women experienced. The pain of rejection, betrayal, and abandonment were other emotions women
had to deal with. The extent to which they could cope with these emotions also depended on their contexts.

Furthermore, women's ideas about love, marriage, and family featured prominently in their adaptation. These ideas (beliefs, fantasies, hopes, and dreams) would affect their perception of distress, disappointment, and disillusionment, which would in turn influence their experience of separation and divorce. Women's accounts pointed to familial and cultural antecedents in the formulation of these beliefs, hopes, and dreams. After physical separation, the women experienced questioning and revision of these ideas, as well as their willingness to accept dysfunction and abuse. In terms of transitional theory (Chiriboga & Catron, 1991), they revised their assumptive worlds. Revisions in previously held assumptions would also result in more meaningful connections to others for these women. In other words, they changed their attitudes towards friendships and recognized their own needs to establish meaningful connections to other people. This change in attitude was also directed towards the women themselves as they began to believe in their rights to personal safety, freedom, joy, and love.

Another notable theme that emerged from the data was the expanding sense of self—a significant transformation—that women experienced. This notion is consonant with a growth-through-crisis perspective (Kraus, 1979). The disruption and discontinuity of marital dissolution necessitated, amongst other things, that these women undergo an expansion of the roles they had previously seen themselves in, thereby accessing their undiscovered strengths and developing new coping behaviors and
skills. Through these efforts, they paved their own way towards greater self-esteem, self-efficacy, and consolidation of identity. Women perceived their own vulnerability (i.e., continued attachment to their husbands, and unresolved feelings of rejection and loneliness) as potential threats to their newfound sense of self.

The concept of self-in-relation as espoused by Gilligan (1982) was also reflected in these data. Divorce, as a major life transition, engages women's experiences of attachment and individuation (i.e., their connections to others, and their development of separate identities) and challenges them to redefine their sense of self. An integral part of 'self' for women is, according to Gilligan, their need for meaningful connections to others. The women in the study were confronted with having to sever their connections to their mates; the extent to which these connections represented primary structures of validation of identity (i.e., as much as their identities depended on and were fused to their husbands), such was the intensity of their grief. According to Gilligan, when existing structures disintegrate and there are no alternate structures women are forced to seek validation through other connections. In this study, women with children refocused their energies towards them and became more aware of the quality of their relationships with them. Women without children sought connections with others; in particular, the intensity of personal trauma experienced by the childless woman who had no family or close friends supports this notion of women's relational needs.
These data also support Bohannon's (1970) notions of various aspects or stages of divorce, but indicate that not all women perceive these aspects to be equally stressful, and their onset, impact, duration, and intensity varies between individuals. However, women did speak of (a) losses and changes on many levels, e.g., financial support, house, neighbourhood, mutual friends (economic & community divorce), (b) altered parenting roles and arrangements (coparental divorce), (c) emotional distancing from their husbands (emotional divorce), and (d) separating from their husbands and forging their own identities (psychic divorce). Women's accounts of their experiences indicated that these themes did not manifest as static or unilinear events, but rather as dynamic, evolving processes that did not necessarily occur in any order or predictable manner.

Separation and divorce brought about for the women in this study confrontations with critical junctions in major life areas. Their adaptation or adjustment was simply not a unidimensional phenomenon; rather it constituted resolution of crises in different areas. Much of what was happening for them—in their efforts to come to terms with the past and to build new lives for themselves—reflected a process of transformation, or transforming. Women transformed not only themselves, but also their connections to others. They transformed their losses into eventual gains. The outcome, or what would mark the end of major transformations, appeared to be freedom from the past, a restored and stronger self, and hopes for a better future. The data also suggests that successful resolution of transitional
issues, and thus, the extent to which outcome is achieved depends on the transformations that women are able to effect in their transitions. In other words, women who do not successfully complete transitional tasks (particularly in the area of self-development) would achieve fewer outcome criteria; they are at higher risk for maladjustment, and are likely to repeat previous mistakes, and/or to have unresolved issues and conflicts.

Previous studies have not provided adequate explanations of the process of women's adaptation to separation and divorce because their notions of 'adjustment' were too reductionistic. These narrow conceptualizations do not reflect the complexities of women's lives and the range of their experiences. Theoretical perspectives such as transitional theory (Moos & Schaefer, 1986) or stress-and-coping theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) outline models that are too generic, and have not been verified and expanded for divorce-specific populations. For example, Moos and Schaefer's transitional framework runs parallel to the present model in several respects--individuals negotiating transitions encounter challenges in (a) having to make sense of what happened, (b) coping with situational demands, (c) maintaining connections to others, (d) dealing with emotional upset, and (e) preserving self-esteem. This validates the use of a transitional perspective in studying separation and divorce. The contribution this study makes lies in its development of a divorce-specific transitional model that is more detailed and extensive than Moos and Schaefer's model. In particular, its emphasis on the interactional aspects of the
components of a basic social process (transforming) that shapes women's adaptation to separation and divorce, as well as its description of outcome add new insights into what we currently know about how women manage this major life transition.

In conclusion, the present study has provided contextualized descriptions of women's experience of marital dissolution and identified dimensions of that experience. The conceptual framework that was developed postulates relationships between these dimensions, and suggests that women play active roles in reshaping and rebuilding their lives after separation and divorce. They negotiate their lives by confronting and responding to opportunities and constraints encountered during their transitions. The interactions between external circumstances, their continual efforts to make sense and define their situations, and their coping behaviors shape the very course of their adaptation to the changes and demands they encounter in these transitions. These women made sense of their marital breakups by finding reasonable explanations for what happened. For example, they used their husbands' abusive behaviors or addictions as 'reasons' for ending their marriages. Through counselling and also through talking to friends they attempted to learn about their own roles in their breakups. These efforts allowed them (a) to distance themselves from their husbands, and from the losses they suffered, and (b) to normalize their experiences.

By revising previously-held assumptions and beliefs, and by renewing personal values, these women were able to develop a vision for the future that was positive and hopeful. Through
their own coping efforts, they developed increased personal awareness and expanded on their repertoire of management strategies. They learned new skills, and discovered existing strengths and capabilities. In addition, they also learned to self-validate, i.e., they learned to recognize and value their own coping efforts.

Thus, many losses were eventually transformed into gains; others became transformed to 'par for the course'--these (such as the loss of the 'ideal family', or the loss of their marriages) would become part of their lives, yet would eventually be minimally disruptive or painful for them. For the women in the study, initial decreases in living standards were not permanent; all of them were able to achieve reasonable (though not ideal) measures of financial independence. Financial stability contributed to women's successful accomplishment of other transitional tasks.

Limitations

In this study, external reliability was enhanced by the researcher making explicit five aspects of the research design: researcher role, participant selection, social context, data collection and analysis strategies, and analytical constructs and premises. Cross-validation by other researchers or peers was difficult given the nature and limitations of the masters-level study. However, support and feedback with regard to research decisions, data collection, and analysis techniques were provided by the primary supervisor and committee members. Feedback and confirmation from participants in the second interview also enhanced internal reliability.
In the case of personal narratives, information supplied by the respondents may be subject to distortion due to memory inaccuracies, and hence may not be representative of the true state of affairs. However, the argument can be made that all truth is relative—how a person interprets experience may be truth for that person. Although internal validity could be strengthened by extending the length of the data collection period, due to the time and logistical constraints of a study of this nature, that was not possible. However, some measures were taken to diminish the effects of a relatively short data collection period: using language in the field and during interviews that was understandable to participants, using natural rather contrived settings for research (in this respect, observations may validate participant remarks), and continual questioning and reevaluation of the research process and the interpretative formulations.

Although the sample of women interviewed was small, the variety of contexts and conditions examined lent validity to the concepts explicated. However, all of the women had received counselling at some point in their lives; this may have resulted in a particular bias—they were probably more able to articulate their experiences than those who had not received counselling. These women also appeared to have possessed good coping skills. Moreover, the sample on the whole was also slightly biased in the direction of socio-economic level, that is, most of the women were financially self-supporting or secure. Therefore, it is not known whether basic social processes are the same for women who did not achieve financial stability. However, details of the
women's experiences indicate that they did have struggles, make mistakes, have yet unresolved issues, and were products of different familial, cultural, and socio-economic environments. None had previous psychiatric histories. This sample thus represented a reasonable slice of the population at large—women with normal adjustment problems, personal struggles, hopes, and dreams. Furthermore, the use of the constant comparative method to illustrate that different women shared similar experiences increases the credibility of individual accounts (Rennie, Phillips, & Quartaro, 1988).

According to Rennie et al. (1988), the grounded theory method:

provides the investigator with the opportunity to explore subjective, idiographic events....[and] emphasizes the necessity to replicate the evidence of such events by addressing more than one individual....[thus] the investigator gets a foothold on a commonly experienced phenomenon....The object of the approach is to create new theory that is directly tied to the reality of individuals. The object is not to verify the theory so generated beyond the verification yielded by saturation of categories. Additional verification is deliberately left to subsequent studies and/or other investigators. (p. 147)

Implications

Findings may be non-generalizable, but the rich narrative descriptions that this qualitative study accessed provide important avenues towards understanding this complex and important adult life transition. In particular, these findings
provide clinical insights for counsellors and therapists—understanding how people account for the events in their lives, how they make sense of major losses, and how they cope with a multitude of changes would facilitate the process of therapy. Furthermore, as Fischer (1989) so eloquently retorted, in response to questions about the generalizability of qualitative data: "...each description or protocol describes a specific, situated instance of that general human possibility that we refer to when we speak....Hence, my task, as a researcher, is to analyse these specific instances in such a way that I am able to comprehend that which constitutes them as concrete and yet diverse examples of this general human possibility" (pp. 133-134). Theory building constitutes specific attempts to describe situated instances of human experience.

The theoretical model I propose awaits more systematic and extensive verification with larger and more diverse samples. For example, a series of contrasting groups could be compared. These groups could comprise women who differ in terms of personal (e.g., coping style) or environmental (e.g., access to resources such as counselling) contexts. The systematic selection and examination of these comparative groups would lead to greater theoretical diversity. In addition, studies with larger groups of women could be aimed at developing questionnaires based on the categories identified—these may also lead to the subsequent development of empirically-derived measuring instruments.

The richness of the data from this study also points to the need for future qualitative investigations of separation and divorce. The insights and conclusions derived from the study
can be applied to and tested with other groups in different environments. For example, investigations with groups of men may provide support for the proposed transitional model, and detailed descriptions of gender differences in the divorce experience.

This model offers useful insights for the counselling profession in that (a) it stresses the importance of understanding clients' unique personal and situational circumstances in attempts to facilitate their adjustment, (b) it suggests that individuals' coping strategies are related to their perceived or felt changes; conversely, felt changes are continually modified by efforts to cope and by the acquisition of new thoughts and behaviors, (c) it projects outcome as essentially a product of the interaction of all the other dimensions of women's experience of separation and divorce, (d) it suggests that understanding what women perceive to be facilitators or obstacles may be important in assisting them to move along in their transformations, (e) it highlights the significance of divorce as a critical juncture for women, particularly in area of self-development, and (f) it suggests that women who do not cope successfully with marital dissolution may be 'stuck' in any of these dimensions or aspects of their experience; thus, it would be important to explore in detail each of these aspects with these women so that movement can be facilitated in the right places.
References


Books.


Appendix A
Initial Selection Criteria

(1) Participants were separated from their spouses and either divorced or engaged in the legal process of divorce.

(2) They had been separated for not more than 5 years. This was somewhat of an arbitrary decision, for no discrete time frame can be applied across all situations—for instance, emotional divorce can take place long before actual physical separation. Five years appeared to be a reasonable cut-off point in terms of women adjusting to separation and divorce.

(3) They were married for more than 1 year, and were over the age of 20. I assumed that for individuals married for less than a year, and also for adolescents the conditions under which divorce or separation occur, as well as the consequences, may be different in crucial ways from the desired sample. For example, termination of marriages of short duration may not result in as many changes and losses as termination of long-term marriages. No upper limit was imposed on age.

(4) They were separated or divorced for the first time, i.e., from a first marriage. It was another way to initially specify a population of interest.

(5) They were open, willing, and able to discuss their feelings and experience.

Note: As the study progressed, some of these criteria were altered to allow for sampling of variations in properties and dimensions of the processes under investigation. Data collection was thus influenced by results of emerging data analyses, a method referred to as theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss,
The initial selection criteria were designed to reach participants who seemed most likely to represent the subject population I was interested in, that is, separated or divorced women, and who were relatively similar. This was done in order to increase the likelihood that aspects of the separation or divorce experience would emerge clearly. Such an approach may facilitate the development of categories and consensus about their properties (Rennie, Phillips, & Quartaro, 1988). As the study progressed, I attempted to sample for variations in participants' attributes that would reflect variations in the properties and dimensions of the emerging concepts. For example, the first participant had been separated for about 4 months when she was interviewed. Subsequent participants varied in lengths of separation from 2 months to 12 years. One woman had been married twice, and talked to me only about her separation from her second husband. Another woman had had a significant transitional relationship that ended in separation as well.
Appendix B

SEPARATED OR DIVORCED?

VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED TO TAKE PART IN A RESEARCH PROJECT ON SEPARATION AND DIVORCE

Are you a woman who has been SEPARATED OR DIVORCED? How are things working out? How have you come to understand what happened? I am interested in talking to you about your experience.

You are:

- separated from your spouse and either divorced or divorcing.
- separated for not more than 5 years.
- are coming out of a marriage that lasted more than 1 year and are over the age of 20.
- separated/divorced for the first time.
- open and willing to discuss your feelings and experiences.

WHAT'S INVOLVED: Two interviews lasting about 2 hours each. Confidentiality assured. Time and place to be arranged at your convenience.

If you have any questions or wish to set up an appointment, please contact POH ZAIDE at 879-5790. This study is supervised by Dr. BONITA LONG, Department of Counselling Psychology, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia (822-4756).
Research topic: Women's adaptation to separation and divorce.
Purpose of research: M.A. thesis.
MA Student: Pohsuan Zaide (Tel: 879-5790)

Faculty Adviser: Dr. Bonita Long
Department of Counselling Psychology
Faculty of Education
University of British Columbia
Tel: (604) 822-4756

The purpose of the study is to explore how women cope with separation and divorce. I hope to gain greater understanding of how women adapt to marriage break-up.

You are consenting to be interviewed by myself. I would like to talk to you on two occasions. Each session will last about two hours. The second session will allow you to add to and check the accuracy of what you tell me the first time. Each session will occur at a mutually convenient time and place.

The sessions will be audiotaped. All audiotapes and information pertaining to you will be kept strictly confidential. The final write-up of the results may incorporate direct quotations from the interviews but no one will be identified by their real names. Access to confidential materials will be limited to myself and my research supervisor. When the study is completed, all audiotapes will be erased.

Any questions about the study are welcomed. You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at anytime during the study. These actions will in no way affect your participation in other projects.

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE CONDITIONS OF THE STUDY AND CONSENT TO BE A SUBJECT IN THIS RESEARCH AS OUTLINED. I hereby acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form.

NAME:_____________________________________

SIGNATURE:_________________________DATE______________
Appendix D

Interview Schedule

The following constituted broad questions intended to generate descriptions of events of interest. The content and structure of each interview varied with participants' responses. In accordance with a grounded theory design, the order of questions was changed according the demands of specific situations and individuals.

In addition, probes were used, and the interviews became more or less structured depending on the information already collected.

General introduction: "For some people, separation or divorce is very difficult; for others less so. Changes often happen in many areas of life. I am interested in your thoughts and feelings about your separation or divorce. I have some general questions for you, but please feel free to add whatever you think would be important for me to know."

1. How have you been doing since your separation?
2. What changed for you as a result of the separation?
3. How have you dealt with these changes?
4. What has made it harder for you to manage? What has helped?
5. Do you have any thoughts about the future?

Note: As the study evolved, questions became more focused because they were intended to examine variations of emerging concepts. For example, additional questions were: "Tell me about the circumstances around your separation", "What is your vision of the future?", "What have you learned about yourself from this experience?".
Appendix E

Confidential

Demographic Questionnaire

Name ____________________________ Date of Birth ____________________________

Date of Marriage ____________________________

Date separated/divorced _________ Ethnic background ____________________________

Occupation ____________________________ Full-time ___ Part-time ____________

Education ____________________________

Income Range ____________________________

Ex-husband's income level & education ____________________________

No. and ages of Children ____________________________

Who has custody of child/children? ____________________________

Type of custodial arrangement ____________________________

Previous experience with counselling/therapy? If yes, please describe:

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________
Appendix F

Outline of Second Session

All second sessions were informal and prefaced with invitations to the women to add to their stories. I asked them: "Have you had any further thoughts to what we talked about last time?" Most women did not have any comments, probably because it had been some length of time since we first met and our discussions were remote in their memories.

Then I provided each woman with a brief synopsis of their 'storyline' as I understood it to be from data obtained from her own transcript and from my notes. She was then invited to comment on the accuracy of my rendition of her story.

Finally, I shared some of my major findings with the women and asked them to comment on these results. I used language that I believed to be easy to understand, clear, accurate, and as faithful to the concepts explicated to my final analytical schema as possible. The following were the points I covered:

1. "Women experienced separation and divorce in different ways, but in talking to me about their experiences it was important for them to refer to the circumstances that led up to their separation. For example, some women told me about..." (note: the idea of context, or background in which a woman's experience is situated)

2. "Women faced the challenge of rebuilding their lives after separation or divorce. Many of their coping efforts were attempts to deal with the changes they felt in different aspects of their lives. For example, some changes were..."
3. "There are some other themes common to women's experiences, such as:

- women felt great sadness because of the loss of home and family life. This sadness appeared to be tied in to the loss of their dreams and hopes of love, marriage, and family. For example,....

- after separation, women found themselves questioning and revising their previous assumptions and beliefs about aspects of themselves and their lives, and in doing that,

- as well as in coping with new challenges they learned more about themselves, and achieved greater personal independence and self-esteem. (note: the idea of an 'expanded sense of selves')

- For the women in the study, ending their transition from marital breakup meant coming to terms with the past (and that included...), building a new life in which they have more friends, a satisfying career, more financial independence, etc., and continuing to learn more about themselves and feel better about themselves. (note: the idea of outcome)"