THE TRANSITION FOR WOMEN INTO A SINGLE LIFE

by

CLAIRE JOAN SUTTON

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Department of **Counselling Psychology**

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

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Abstract

A qualitative phenomenological paradigm was used to explore the phenomenon of the transition for women into a single life following the termination of their committed relationship. Five women were selected from the Vancouver area to participate in this study. In-depth personal interviews, which were audio-taped, were conducted with each participant. During these interviews, the women described their transition experience and successful adaptation to a single life. Six common themes emerged from the data using Colaizzi's (1978) method of phenomenological analysis. The results of the study indicated that as the women came to believe in their own self-worth, they rose above intolerable conditions and followed a life path that would continue to enhance their personal growth and strengthen their sense of self-efficacy.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

Statement of the problem

The divorce statistics continue to be staggering in the 1990's. One in 2 marriages today in the United States end in divorce (Vital Statistics, U.S.A., 1990). Canada is approaching the same dissolution rate of 1 in 2.35 marriages (Statistics Canada, 1987-1988). The significant decline in the fertility and mortality rates makes this society, like many others, an aging society. And, like other aging societies, family life is being re-defined because an aging society tends to be also a divorcing society (Hagestad, 1988). Many people are living longer today compared to the average life span of forty-five years in the early 1900's, and it may seem unrealistic to expect human beings to maintain the same monogamous relationship for fifty years or more (Stevens-Long, 1988). The changing roles and expectations of women in their progression towards emotional and financial independence are also contributing factors in the increase divorce rate over the last century (Stevens-Long).

Divorce is defined as the "legal dissolution of marriage" (Sykes, 1976). Fisher (1981) refers to divorce as a "trauma". According to Virginia Satir (1981), divorce is a "broken experience" and divorced people need to pick up the pieces before going on with their lives. For the purposes of this research, "termination of relationship" is used to encompass all possibilities that refer to the ending of a committed heterosexual relationship in which the couple have cohabited for
at least three years; with divorce being one possible "ending".

In terms of the consequences of divorce, researchers suggest that adjustment seems to be more difficult for women than for men (Clarke-Stewart & Bailey, 1989). Women seem to suffer more economic hardships, tend to carry the burden of responsibilities revolving around employment, home and childcare and seem to find their situation more psychologically stressful than men do. Divorced men seem better off financially after divorce because their income and their work usually continue without interruption (Clarke-Stewart & Bailey; Grasby, 1989; Weitzman, 1985).

According to Sheehy (1981), one of the biggest drawbacks for many women to overcome is the fear to risk. Such a drawback can leave a person feeling powerless (Jeffers, 1988). It appears that Fisher's (1981) concept of "trauma" is well-founded as morbid conditions prevail for many women following the termination of their relationship. Such conditions exacerbate their fear to risk any type of change that may lead to opportunity because they also see that it may lead to failure.

Men too have great difficulty coping with divorce and the divorcing man often hides behind a facade of an all is well social presence and a strong ego of self-reliance. Beneath the facade there is often intense pain (Myers, 1989). Since men do not readily seek help, many divorced men tend to fall between the cracks because they either receive no treatment at all or the treatment they do receive is inadequate. Thus, substance abuse, workaholism, crime and suicide tend to be experienced by some divorcing men (Myers).

The reasons for divorce are many, but common to this experience for all women and men is pain (Wymard, 1990).
Feelings of failure and self-blame are felt by most people during divorce (Myers, 1989). Myers explains that divorce begins as a psychological process affecting the separating couple and their children, if they have any. Within this process, the impact may also affect parents and grandparents, colleagues, classmates and peers. The repercussions may even be felt by the neighbors (Myers).

The major developmental tasks of young adulthood include the achievement of intimacy, commitment, fidelity and caring. These developments, for the overwhelming majority, emerge into courtship, mate selection and marriage or cohabitation (Stevens-Long, 1988). An ending of a committed relationship can also bring on a major transition according to Sheehy (1981), who views divorce as a "life accident".

Transitions are life changes consisting of shifts in roles and social identity (Hagestad, 1988). Hopson (1984) defines transition as a discontinuity and explains that transition is movement. In the present research Schlossberg's (1981) definition is used in which a transition is said to occur if "an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (p. 5). For the purposes of this research, the termination of a committed relationship qualifies as such an event. Schlossberg also emphasizes the phenomenological nature of transition, saying that it is not so much the change that precipitates a transition but the individual's perception of that change.

Moos and Tsu (cited in Schlossberg, 1981) explain that a transition may result in growth or deterioration. Although many
experience negative consequences in response to divorce, Myers (1989) explains that termination of a relationship can be seen as a catalyst in an individual's personal development that otherwise may not have taken place had the relationship remained intact.

Several factors have been reported to be associated with women's successful adaptation to the divorce transition. Independence in terms of money and freedom appear to be two important factors that influence a woman's adaptation to the termination of a relationship (Clarke-Stewart & Bailey). Money is equated with "autonomy, ego, freedom and independence, not merely with the acquisition of goods" (Wymard, 1990, p. 58). Freedom is viewed by many divorced women as having children beyond the pre-school stage as well as having satisfactory custodial arrangements. Other factors cited in the literature that positively influence women's adaptation to divorce include: competence as a self-supporter; owning or renting a home in one's own name; sound mental well-being; relocation; adequate social support and positive adjustment of their children (Ambert, 1983; Clarke-Stewart & Bailey; Duffy, 1989).

Education and income seem to be significantly related to the mental well-being of female heads of one-parent families (Duffy, 1989). Duffy explains that education reassures women of their accomplishments and their self-worth. It is a means to job opportunities and greater income. Education also breaks down traditional sex role orientations. Women with less traditional sex role beliefs reportedly adjust better to divorce because they are able to perceive the transition as an opportunity for personal growth and change (Bloom & Clement, 1984). Duffy explains that such women may find it easier to alter their pre-
termination assumptions.

Factors associated with less successful adaptation for women are also numerous. Mitchell (1983) states that the way women have been socialized to define themselves may overshadow any confidence they have in personal successes from other roles outside of marriage. It appears that many women, following the termination of a significant relationship, feel that they have failed at their major purpose in life.

Astin (1985) suggests that many women form gender-linked expectations in childhood. Girls learn through play that a woman's survival depends on marriage and caring for her income earning husband. Gilligan (1982) explains that women have been socialized to think of themselves in terms of their nurturing and helping role in the man's life cycle. Women may define themselves in terms of relationships but they also judge themselves according to their caring abilities. Therefore, many women may have difficulty letting go of their traditional sex role beliefs. Such beliefs are ingrained assumptions that many women have difficulty changing following the termination of their relationship. This difficulty in incorporating a new sense of self may impede their movement through the transition process.

According to Furstenberg (1982), about half of all women and a greater proportion of men remarry within three years following receipt of their divorce decree. However after age forty, men are three times more likely to remarry than women. It would appear that many more women than men seem to remain alone; a reality that may contribute to difficulties in adjusting to a single life.

Adjustment to divorce usually involves three periods: a
mournning period occurs immediately and is often characterized by emotional disequilibrium as the person reacts to the changes in her/his assumptive world (Duffy, 1989). The woman, for instance, may mourn numerous losses pertaining to her social, emotional and economic well-being. This period can take up to two years from the time of separation (Kolevson & Gottlieb, 1983). The second period, occurring between two and four years following the separation, is the re-establishment of emotional equilibrium (Duffy). In this stage, the woman incorporates a new set of assumptions by using proactive behaviors to seek out new goals and opportunities. Based on research with forty-seven divorced single-parent women, Duffy reports that approximately four years after separation, most of the female heads of these one-parent families have their new roles and life stabilized, signifying the final adjustment period.

It appears that many women following the termination of their relationship find adjustment to single life onerous in a society where couples prevail (Wymard, 1990). Given their socialization as nurturers and helpers, many women are plagued with feelings of failure as a result of the dissolution of their relationship (Astin, 1985; Gilligan, 1982). In consideration of all these factors, successful adaptation of women following the termination of their relationship is of great interest.

The concern of the present research was with women who felt they had successfully adapted to life after the termination of their relationship. This research was undertaken within the context of women and the termination of their relationships, with the intent of examining their transition into a single life. In particular, the researcher was interested in learning how some
women capitalize on this life transition in terms of realizing greater personal growth.

For the purpose of the study, successful adaptation was defined as a process during which individuals, over time, move from being intensely preoccupied with the transition to incorporating the transition into their lives (Schlossberg, 1981). With regard to the women in this research, successful adaptation was based on their subjective beliefs that they had personally grown from their relationship dissolution.

Purpose of the study

The question asked in this qualitative study was "How do women who perceive themselves as having personally grown from their relationship dissolution, experience the transition process?"

The literature reviewed for the purposes of this study underlined many of the losses and the difficulties people face following separation and divorce. The existing literature also helped explain the adjustment periods necessary for people to properly grieve these losses and to re-establish themselves, and examined the obstacles that many divorced women find difficult to overcome. The research also addressed some of the factors that appear to help women adjust following the termination of a relationship. However, little attention has been paid in the research to understanding the components involved in the process leading to the successful adaptation of women following their relationship dissolution. Information is also lacking on how women make the transition out of a committed relationship into that of a single life.

The goal of this study was to explore the experiences of
women who felt they had grown personally from their relationship dissolution. It was hoped that such exploration would yield an accurate understanding on how the women participants in this study successfully adapted to their transition into a single life and that such understanding might serve to generate further research into the successful adaptation of women following the transition to divorce.

It was anticipated that insight into the successful adaptation of women following the termination of their relationship would emerge, enabling counsellors to help other women facing a similar transition. Such insight may trigger society's recognition and support with regard to the needs of women dealing with this particular life transition.
Chapter II
Literature Review

Studies indicate that divorce is an event that brings hardship to both men and women (Crosby, Gage, & Raymond, 1983; Fisher, 1981; Krantzler, 1975; Myers, 1989; Stevens-Long, 1988; Vaughan, 1986). Not only does divorce effect the particular man and woman but it also involves their respective families and anyone connected to their social milieu (Myers, 1989; Vaughan, 1986). Sheehy (1981) has reported that divorce is a transition requiring considerable life style changes. The researcher will review literature on transitions and on the process of negotiating such transitions, as will discuss Schlossberg’s (1981) concept of successful adaptation to a transition. The current literature on the positive and negative effects of divorce on women will also be reviewed.

Transitions

Based on their research, Hopson and Adams (1977) define transitions as events that effect an individual. That is, the person experiences a specific discontinuity in her/his life. To adjust to this personal discontinuity, the person needs to formulate new assumptions and/or develop new behavioral responses. "Transitions are a particular type of change involving personal awareness and new assumptions or behaviors" (Brammer & Abrego, 1981, p. 19).

Schlossberg’s (1981) definition of transition states that "a transition can be said to occur if an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behavior and relationships" (p. 5). Schlossberg explains that given their
diverse abilities, people cope differently with change and to the
different types of changes that occur during their life span.
According to Schlossberg "the transition is defined by the
individual" (p. 7). That is, it is the individual's perception
of the change that precipitates a transition and not the change
itself. As people experience change and transition throughout
their life span, new relationships, behaviors and self-
perceptions often result. Schlossberg distinguishes between
expected transitions that refer to obvious life changes and those
that are not expected, and reiterates that the transition,
whether expected or not, is defined by the individual
experiencing it. She also states that an unanticipated
transition is more difficult to negotiate because of the lack of
time to adequately prepare for it and the uncertainty that may be
associated with its outcome.

Stevens-Long (1988) reviews the various developmental tasks
of adulthood which begin around the age of twenty and span for
fifty years or more. She highlights the concept of "anticipatory
socialization" which refers to the common occurrence of an event
during a person's life span. Such events are often age-related
such as maturational development, graduation or job entry.
Anticipatory socialization serves to prepare a person for such an
event given that a person's cohorts may be experiencing a similar
event within a comparable time period. Marriage is such an
event. Stevens-Long reports that most people on this continent
marry. Even if the decision to end a marriage is a mutual one,
both parties still tend to experience trauma (Fisher, 1981;
Myers, 1989; Stevens-Long, 1988). Adaptation is difficult,
therefore, for an event that is viewed as negative and one that
was not originally planned for (Schlossberg; Stevens-Long).

Hopson (1981) defines transition as a discontinuity and explains that transition is movement. Hopson (1984) sees the negotiation of a personal transition as a seven step process. As yet there appears to be little empirical evidence to substantiate Hopson’s model of the transition process. However, the model is of heuristic value in understanding the issues and emotions that may need to be negotiated in responding to a transition like divorce.

The first three steps of Hopson’s transition process model represent a pre-transition period in which the person is still, at least psychologically, attached to the past. These steps are: immobilization (a sense of being overwhelmed); minimization (a denial that the change has an impact); and depression (feelings of powerlessness, fear and frustration). The next four steps involve the transition itself. Letting go is the fourth step and is marked by a heightened awareness and acceptance of reality in which the person disengages from the past while a sense of optimism emerges. Testing is the fifth step, during which time the person has lots of energy and tries out new behaviors. Search for meaning, step six involves the cognitive process by which the person takes the time to reflect on the how and why questions pertaining to the transition event. The final step is internalization, signifying comfort with a new identity. Thus, this new identity comprises an experience of renewal and an acceptance that the transition is concluded (Hopson, 1984).

Such a process is seldom continuous and a person may often fall back a step after having progressed. Many people fail to complete this process and become stuck in particular steps. This
situation may occur due to the person's failure to overcome the hardships or frustrations accompanying the new change. According to Hopson (1981) "all transitions result in people being subjected to some degree of stress and strain, the amount varying with the nature of the event and the demands it makes upon their behavioral repertoires" (p. 36). It appears that in the case of women failing to complete the transition process following the termination of a relationship, some of their cumulative frustrations may include: the financial setbacks, the inability to balance children, home and employment (Clarke-Stewart & Bailey, 1989), the lack of support and personal time (Buehler & Langenbrunner, 1987) and the fear to risk (Sheehy 1981).

Successful adaptation

Successful adaptation is the term used by Schlossberg (1981) to describe the successful resolution of a transition. Brammer and Abrego (1981) use the term successful coping and Hopson (1981) uses internalization. Schlossberg defines adaptation as a process which culminates in the individual no longer being completely engrossed with the event. That is, the event has been integrated into the individual's life. The individual moves from being totally preoccupied with the transition in terms of his/her attitudes and behaviors, to a state of boundedness, where the event is contained and integrated into his/her definition of self. With regard to the phenomenological nature of such transitions, internalization and integration encompass a state of acceptance and an experience of renewal (Hopson). The event becomes only one of an individual's many dimensions. Hopson explains that the event will always carry with it some significance and "it may still generate sadness or joy on recall."
Being integrated into one's total being, it will have an influence over future directions but it is not imprisoning one in the past" (p. 38).

For the purposes of this research, a woman was considered to have successfully adapted to the termination of a committed relationship when she felt she had personally grown from the experience. That is, the woman perceived a significant improvement in her overall life situation. Her relationship dissolution no longer dominated her every thought, feeling and action, it had become part of her history. The woman experienced the freedom to pursue her own life course.

A Divorce Transition Process

Many analogies have been used to describe divorce or the ending of a committed relationship. Satir (1981) describes such an ending as a "broken experience" (p. 1) in which the people involved need to pick up the pieces before they can go on with their lives. Satir (1981) also compares divorce to a "metaphorical surgery" (p. 1) which affects every aspect of a person's life and requires a period of convalescence if proper healing is to take place.

This period of convalescence is likened to Fisher's (1981) rebuilding process following the ending of a committed relationship. Fisher equates such a process with a designated time period in which the person can get to know his/her self better by reviewing the past and learning from it, and by tapping into parts of the self that were previously unknown. Fisher uses the metaphor of a mountain that needs climbing to describe the successful negotiation of the rebuilding process. The mountain is compared to a pyramid constructed of blocks in which all have
to be successfully climbed in order to reach the top of the mountain which symbolizes freedom. Fisher sees the negotiation of a committed relationship termination transition as a 15 step process.

The first step of Fisher’s rebuilding process is denial, a minimization of the impact from the break-up or an unwillingness to accept that the relationship is over. The second step is loneliness; an overwhelming feeling of aloneness. Next is rejection versus guilt in which rejection is usually felt by the partner who has been left and guilt is often felt by the partner that leaves. Grief, step four, is defined as a combination of immense sadness and despair, and is experienced by many to be physically and emotionally draining. Anger comes next and signifies a special rage towards the former partner. Anger helps the individual gain emotional distance from his/her former partner. Letting go is step six and refers to ceasing any investment whatsoever in the former relationship. Self-concept follows next and is marked by the focus on self in order to rebuild self-concept and self-worth. Step eight is friendship and is marked by the need to build up a network of friends. Leftovers is the ninth step and refers to confronting difficulties not worked through in the past including the former relationship. The ability to face and deal with such difficulties is essential before the person can begin to understand and grasp step ten.

Love is step ten and emphasizes the importance of self-love. Trust is next and refers to self-trust. Fisher explains that it takes time to heal a love-wound. Sexuality, step twelve, encourages each person to develop a personal and individual
sexual morality appropriate to the culture, attitudes, experiences and values of each individual’s personality. Step thirteen is responsibility and emphasizes the need to relate to others on an adult level. Step fourteen is singleness and signifies a time period devoted to growth as an independent person. The final stage is freedom and refers to freedom of choice as well as freedom to be oneself. Having completed these fifteen steps a person is seen as happy and able to be fully his/her self either as a single person or in a love-relationship.

There appears to be no empirical evidence to support Fisher’s (1981) conceptualization of the rebuilding process. However, based on his clinical expertise, Fisher does provide some basis for understanding the process involved in adapting specifically to a divorce transition.

The phenomenon under study in this research was the transition process that women who had successfully adapted to a single life post-termination of relationship, had to negotiate to perceive themselves as having personally grown from their transition experience. Fisher’s rebuilding process explains the steps that appear to be necessary for anyone to undertake for adjustment to a relationship’s termination. The process, however, does not address how a person, especially a woman, begins to pursue these steps.

With regard to women post-termination of relationship, the literature reveals a number of positive and negative factors associated with their adjustment. The literature does not address the issues that women must come to terms with in order to facilitate the transition out of a committed relationship into that of a single life, nor does it examine the very beginnings of
the process that these women must access for the relevant issues to be considered. It would appear that the exploration of such a process would be beneficial to furthering our understanding of women who have successfully adapted to their single lifestyle following the termination of their committed relationship. **Factors related to Successful/Unsuccessful Adjustment**

The review of the studies that follow pertain to the adjustment to life following separation and/or divorce. Previous research has investigated many of the consequences of this life transition. The researcher has organized the literature review so that the current understanding of the impact involved in a relationship termination can be grasped. Given the phenomenon under study, the emphasis is on as explicit an understanding as possible of all factors involved for women in their adjustment post-termination. Therefore, the discussion of the findings begins with the similar outcomes experienced by both men and women in what is characterized as the initial stage of adjustment, following the dissolution of their relationship. Following this, the discussion will centre on the difficulties that more men than women appear to have in adjusting emotionally post-termination of relationship. Lastly, the researcher discusses numerous studies that have investigated the positive and negative influences associated with women and their adjustment following the termination of their committed relationship. The chapter concludes with a discussion of gaps in the research.

Based on Chiriboga and Cutler's (1977) research on divorced men and women and their responses to stress, these authors reiterate that divorce is a disruptive force of paramount
significance for the men and women who experience it. Their random sample of 96 divorced men and 156 divorced women was drawn from the records of San Francisco and Alameda counties. All participants had been separated an average of six months and were actively involved in pursuing their divorce. The participants were interviewed with the use of structured and unstructured questions. The measures used in this study included morale scales, a symptoms checklist and a trauma scale. The findings suggested that there was an interplay between trauma and relief in the separation and divorce process. The findings also suggested that the process of separation was an extremely traumatic one for the participants and considered much more stressful than the unhappy marriages the respondents wanted to get out of. The problems in their marriages were on-going and ones that they had become accustomed to. The move from a couples identity to that of entering a single lifestyle was extremely unfamiliar and necessitated an enormous amount of new learning and relearning of suitable behaviors. It appeared that the decision to terminate a committed relationship no doubt ended known tensions and known behaviors, however it also introduced a new set of stressors and fears that could prevent people from adjusting post-termination. The findings also implied that during the separation period men seemed to be more vulnerable than women in terms of dealing with the emotional issues involved. More than 50% of the respondents recognized the many stress factors that they were faced with, yet experienced relief in that they were able to work through their troubling issues.

In his book Creative Divorce, Krantzler (1975) highlights the divorce experience as a new opportunity for personal growth
for both men and women. Based on his personal and professional experiences as well as the experiences of the men and women who participated in his divorce adjustment seminars, Krantzler explains divorce and why adjustment differs for both men and women. He relates that the emotional vulnerability of American men, experienced during the divorce process, is characterized by a denial or suppression within themselves of any emotional disturbance. According to Krantzler men suffer deeply with feelings of vulnerability, helplessness, loneliness and fear and are intimidated by these "womanly" reactions. With such denial and suppression, men avoid their feelings of grief. During the initial phase of separation, many separated men may find it easier to evade the problems and turmoil of their break-up by escaping into their work, hobbies or a hectic social life. At first, denial is a normal reaction yet on-going it can be an avoidance for many men in confronting themselves and coming to terms with their life. Krantzler suggests that this is a result of early socialization in which boys are taught to eventually build a wall between themselves and their emotions. Workaholism or excessive social activity may act as "buffers" for men who seek to avoid the problems and overwhelming emotions associated with separation and divorce. Krantzler found that the early socialization of women, on the other hand, made it easier for many women to tap into their emotional side without seeking avenues to escape. In this way, many women may plummet quickly into an emotional low yet may proceed faster through the resolution phase.

For Jordan's (1988) study, a sample of 168 separated men was chosen from the court files of the Brisbane Registry of the
Family Court of Australia. The men were separated between one and two years. Jordan's research was undertaken to understand the effect of separation and divorce on men in the Australian community. Written questionnaire's were used to obtain demographic and psychosocial information. Standardized tests were included to ascertain psychological and psycho-physical well-being. Two other measures were used to assess the degree of attachment to wife and children and the degree to which the men coped with general living. In this study the decision to separate was the woman's in 65% of the cases. Jordan found that immediately following separation, complaints and symptoms associated with severe loss and bereavement were reported by a high percentage of men. One in four of the men reported being unaware of either chronic problems or recurring conflict in their marriage. As well, one in four men indicated that they did not know why their wives wanted the separation. Jordan suggested that such results could be indicative of the man's lack of sensitivity to the marriage's emotional state. Jordan's research also indicated that many men felt that they had a lack of control over the marital relationship's continuance at the time of separation. Many of the men focused blame onto their wives for their separations and saw themselves in the role of victims. One third of the men were found to be at a high level of chronic distress two years after the separation. These men, who exhibited high levels of chronic distress, did not want their separations to occur.

It appears that both Krantzler's (1975), Chiriboga and Cutler's (1977) and Jordan's (1988) research confirm the experience of emotional disequilibrium and support the need to
mourn the losses associated with the termination of a committed relationship, as characterized by the initial adjustment period (Duffy, 1989). With regard to men and women, the studies attest to the fact that both suffer greatly following a separation. It appears that more women are willing to confront the emotional issues associated with the termination of relationship than men are. It appears too, that the studies emphasize the role of gender-role socialization in women and men's differential response to the early stages of divorce transition.

Weitzman's (1985) 10 year study of the economic, legal and social consequences of California's no-fault divorce law revealed the existence of a great disparity between women and their former spouses in their standard of living. Weitzman analyzed 2500 California divorce dockets selected by systematic random sampling. She began her random selection of cases in 1968, two years prior to California's no-fault divorce laws and completed the selection in 1977. She also conducted systematic in-depth interviews with 169 family law attorneys and 44 family law judges in California and a similar sample of legal experts from the United Kingdom. In 1978 she conducted in-depth structured interviews with 114 divorced men and 114 divorce women. On average, these latter interviews were conducted one year after the legal divorce was issued. Weitzman's findings show that following divorce, a woman's standard of living drops 73% while the standard of living of a divorced man rises 42%. These findings suggest that most of these divorce settlements were polarized, that spousal and child support was insubstantial and often went unpaid, and that the women generally did not have the same access to education, credit, pensions, insurance and jobs
following a divorce, that their partners had. Living in a poor financial situation may add greatly to a divorced woman’s stress and level of depression.

Many women who are working while married are in low-paying jobs in comparison to their husbands. Their income, though less than the man’s, is often used to help out and to buy the extras. With divorce, the woman’s income is the major source of money and must be exhaustively budgeted in order to take care of the family needs. Weitzman’s (1985) findings show that the new divorce laws in the United States may have profited many men and impoverished many women. Weitzman’s study was an extremely broad study of divorce law reform and limited to the California area. For many women following the termination of their committed relationship, it appears that the lack of adequate finances causes undue anxiety compounded by the inability to access opportunities and resources, and greatly impedes their successful adjustment to a single life.

Clarke-Stewart and Bailey (1989) conducted a study of forty-five single parents using a standard interview procedure. The procedure included open-ended and closed-ended questions, as well as written ratings and checklists on adjustment, stress and satisfaction. The participants consisted of 25 women and 20 men, all of whom had been divorced for less than three years. All participants were white, had some college education and were living in Orange County, California. Clarke-Stewart and Bailey found that many of the mothers seemed to have their goals repressed by the divorce more than single fathers did. Divorced mothers relayed feelings of being bored and trapped and therefore appeared to be more emotionally taxed in the single state as a
result of being stressed by parenting and a lack of time for themselves. Many women could not find jobs or had to accept low-paying ones to survive. Clarke-Stewart and Bailey found that the men in their study seemed to have higher levels of occupation, better job security and higher incomes. The men seemed to value their careers more than the women did, suggesting that their goals and identities were not as affected by the divorce. The women seemed to value being part of a couple. Clarke-Stewart and Bailey reported that the women who adjusted best were those who owned or rented their own home, had substantial financial assets, had less financial stress, enjoyed their jobs, had more social support, had no pre-school children and seemed to have control over the custodial arrangements. Therefore, these findings suggest that structural barriers may impede women's adaptation and adjustment to divorce.

Note that Clarke-Stewart and Bailey's (1989) sample was drawn from a specific county in California. Overall the men in the sample had higher levels of education than the women. The researchers cautioned that given the rarity of single-parent fathers, the men in the sample may have been an exceptional group and therefore better able to deal with the psychological stressors associated with divorce and single-parenting.

The findings of both Weitzman (1985) and Clarke-Stewart and Bailey (1989) suggest that adjustment to life after divorce seems more difficult for women who have a reduced standard of living post-divorce and who have all or most of the responsibility pertaining to childcare. These findings reinforce the importance of adequate finances, employment satisfaction and reduced home and childcare responsibilities in adjusting to divorce.
Daniels-Mohring and Berger (1984) conducted a pilot study of thirty-two recently divorced females and ten recently divorced males, including both objective and subjective data. The instruments used were a social network questionnaire and an interview. The researchers found that higher self-concept and greater mental well-being seemed to be reported by those who experienced little change in their social network from pre-to-post-divorce. These results appear to reinforce the importance of social support in adjusting to termination of relationship.

Buehler and Langenbrunner (1987) conducted a study of eighty parents who had been legally divorced between 6 and 12 months. The respondents, 45 women and 35 men, completed a 140 item questionnaire pertaining to eleven categories of divorced-related experiences. The researchers found that following divorce, men's leisure time and social activities increased due to the reduction of home and childcare obligations. The women in the study, however, tended to be overburdened with responsibility and to lack time for themselves. The discrepancy between former spouses in their standards of living as well as the increase in childcare and other demands placed on women, appeared to make it difficult for many women to enjoy leisure and social activities, resulting in their difficulties to adapting to their divorce transition. The overwhelming demands together with the lack of relaxation outlets seem to exacerbate women's adaptation and adjustment post-termination of relationship.

It is important to note that in Buehler and Langenbrunner's study, 80% of the women had maternal custody while only 10% of the men had paternal custody. This study seemed to highlight the uneven distribution of responsibility between men and women.
following divorce. Interestingly, although most of the women complained of moodiness and of lack of time for themselves, most also reported many positive sentiments such as, worthiness, growth, relief, feeling close to their children and competence. It appears that despite the difficulties experienced by many women following the dissolution of their relationship, many reveal that feelings associated with self-concept ameliorate. Also, the importance of a social network appears to emerge as paramount for the positive adjustment and adaptation of women to their divorce transition.

Norton and Moorman (1987) examined the contemporary trends and future prospects of marriage and divorce patterns for women in the United States between the ages of 20 and 54. The data was taken from the 1985 Current Population Survey. Norton and Moorman report the average age of divorce to be between 25 and 35 with an average marriage duration of seven to eight years. Therefore many divorced women would be the mothers of pre-school aged and school aged children. Given these results, it would appear to add further understanding to the findings of both Clarke-Stewart and Bailey (1989) and Buehler and Langenbrunner (1987) regarding the overwhelming responsibilities and demands placed on many divorced women.

Menaghan and Lieberman (1986) conducted an on-going panel study which consisted of interviewing 1106 adults at two different time periods. The researchers investigated the issue of marital status and psychological well-being. The initial Time 1 sample of 2299 adults was obtained through cluster sampling of households in the state of Chicago’s urban area. Each participant was interviewed at Time 1 (1972) and 82% agreed to be
interviewed four years later at Time 2 (1976). The participants that the researchers examined were limited to those married at Time 1 and those still married to and living with same spouse at Time 2 (n=758) as well as those divorced at Time 2 (n=32). The researchers also examined the data of those respondents who were divorced at Time 1 and still divorced at Time 2. During the interviews, demographic information was gathered which included prior and current life conditions as well as intervening life events. Measurements used included a depression symptoms checklist and a marital distress scale. The researchers found that depression was significant in the newly divorced men and women and the men and women who remained divorced. A decline (or the perception of a decline) in standard of living was apparent in these latter groups, where current economic difficulties prevailed and few reliable sources of support were available. These results appear to suggest that the negative life conditions shared by many divorced individuals contribute greatly to their persistent feelings of depression and therefore impede their successful adaptation. A replication of the study with larger groups would seem necessary given that the sample of the newly divorced participants at Time 2 was quite small in comparison to the still married participants.

Riessman and Gerstel's (1985) study examined several sets of United States Census data pertaining to a variety of health issues. It was an exploratory study to describe gender differences across a variety of health indicators for separated and divorced men and women. Ratio analysis was used for gender comparisons. With regard to mild physical and emotional stress related symptoms, the researchers found that the period of
separation tended to be more detrimental to the health of the women in this study, whereas divorce appeared to be worse for the men. The findings also suggested that more divorced men tended to experience severe health problems which require hospitalization or result in death. The divorced women in this study, however, tended to suffer more acute and lasting physical and mental health problems.

The researchers speculated that the trying separation that many women reported experiencing could be a result of working through emotional issues and the uncertainty arising from the legal aspects not yet finalized. The pervasive and acute mental and physical health problems that many divorced women appeared to have, could have resulted from financial difficulties as well as the demands from children, home and employment. Focusing on good health habits, re-prioritizing and taking control of such responsibilities would appear to be essential for many women following the termination of their relationship.

Mitchell (1983) did a comparative study of thirty-one divorced and twenty-eight remarried white suburban middle class mothers. Both groups had been single-parents for at least two years, and had similar educational backgrounds and job histories. The participants completed questionnaires relating to their sense of competence and well-being. Mitchell reported that the divorced mothers scored significantly lower on both competence and satisfaction with life. Mitchell argued that "Women consequently are not socialized to view single-parenthood in a positive light" (p. 41).

Mitchell’s (1983) findings also indicated that her group of divorced women were satisfied with parenting, friendships and
work, however they did exhibit less control over their lives, in terms of time and future plans. These women felt 'powerlessness' and dissatisfied with their love life, their homemaking, their finances and their community which they felt did not endorse a single-parenting lifestyle. This stigma was related to feelings of depression regarding their overall well-being and sense of competency. Therefore, overcoming this stigma may be necessary for women following the termination of their relationship.

Duffy (1989) conducted an exploratory qualitative study of 47 female heads of one-parent families. The participants were selected through theoretical sampling, a technique used to involve a wide spectrum of women and to insure variety on the variables of interest. The researcher found that number of years as a single parent did not correlate with higher levels of mental well being. The researcher also found that both higher education and income were two important variables that seemed to enhance mental well-being of the participants. It would also appear that opportunities for personal accomplishment and worthiness are important for some women to achieve successful adaptation post-termination of relationship.

A study by Brown and Manela (1978) involved structured interviews of 253 black and white separated women living in the city and suburbs of Detroit, Michigan. All the participants were currently involved in the divorce process. Each woman had at least one child under the age of 18. Eighty-one percent of the women had completed high school and thirty percent had some college education. There were two interviews scheduled for each woman during their marital dissolution process. One interview took place at the time that they each contacted the court
measurements for sex role attitudes and psychological outcomes were constructed for this study. The findings were arrived at through quantitative and qualitative analyses. Each woman was asked at both interviews eighteen questions about her sex-role attitudes. During the second interview they were also asked open-ended questions related specifically to women’s roles. Brown and Manela’s (1978) findings suggested that non-traditional sex-role attitudes were significantly related to positive psychological well-being. Their results also indicated that as a group, the women became less traditional between the first and second interview on factors such as ‘Women in the Home’ and ‘Job Inequality’. Given the diverse backgrounds of the participants and the range of original attitudes, the results, following their second interviews, implied that the women recorded a similar amount of change towards non-traditional sex role attitudes. Research seems to be needed in understanding how and to what extent women can change their traditional sex role attitudes and act effectively once those changes are made.

Bloom and Clement (1984) conducted a study of 143 newly separated adults (59 males and 84 females) in which each respondent was interviewed at four specific intervals over 30 months. A marital sex role orientation measure was completed initially and other dependent measures of adjustment were completed at the three subsequent interviews. Bloom and Clement found that women who did not follow traditional sex roles had less difficulty adjusting to divorce. They appeared to view divorce as an opportunity for personal growth and change.
These findings are similar to Brown and Manela's (1978) findings in that non-traditional sex role attitudes for divorced women were found to lead to feelings of enhanced well-being and proactive behaviors in a variety of life situations. Bloom and Clement (1984) also reported better post separation adjustment in women with higher self orientation. Therefore, helping women let go of their traditional beliefs to rebuild a new belief system would seem to be a necessary step towards personal growth. Such a step would enable women following the termination of their committed relationship to confront the pros and cons of their beliefs as well as to acknowledge their strengths and their desires. Thus, a wider range of opportunities would be seen as available to them which may have been previously denied due to their earlier socialization and their committed relationship.

Ambert (1983) conducted in-depth interviews of twenty-six women who experienced marital disruption. Ambert reported that low remarriages rates were seen in women who were better educated. These women seemed to have made the decision to either avoid remarriage altogether or to delay it. The researcher found that while financially secure (FS) women did not have any less of an emotional need for marriage than did financially insecure (FI) women, FS women were able to pursue leisure activities, choose to be alone rather than unhappy and could afford to make such a choice. FI women did not feel they had the time nor could they take the time for leisure. FI women would also put up with abuse and would be more willing to remarry for the wrong reasons. The elements that appeared to be related to the FS women's sense of self-esteem and independence were: choices, assets and control. Such elements tended to strengthen the FS women's personalities.
by allowing them alternatives in their life styles. It appeared that the lack of these elements in the lives of the FI women were related to lower confidence and self-esteem. These results seem to reinforce the importance and the freedom that money allows divorced women. Many women may see remarriage as the only way out of their financial difficulties. FS women, however, appear to see remarriage as something they may want to do, not something they need to do.

Davis and Aron (1988) conducted a study of fifty-four recently divorced midlife women (ages 35 - 55) in which each participant responded to a number of instruments. The instruments included a divorce adjustment scale and a checklist of perceived causes of divorce. All participants volunteered to take part in this study, limiting the study's representativeness and making the conclusions tentative. Davis and Aaron found that better post-divorce adjustment occurred with the women who saw the causes for their divorce to be due to either their husband's fault (substance abuse) or to neutral occurrences (financial and/or communication problems). Women who blamed themselves for the divorce had poorer adjustment in terms of negative feelings of self-worth and low measures of self-orientation. Their husband's rejection of them is an example of self-blame. Greater adjustment was also found among the participants who attributed the cause of their marriage breakdown to their personal need for independence. A stronger 'internal locus of control' was evident for these latter participants than the participants accrediting the cause to other possible self-attributions such as 'My Affair or My Alcohol Abuse'. These results appear to suggest that adjustment for many women, in terms of enhanced well-being and
opportunities for greater independence, emerges from the recognition of their own personal needs.

**Limitations in the Current Literature**

The researcher's examination of the literature on transition, divorce and women's adjustment to their relationship dissolution attempts to illustrate both the positive and negative factors associated with the divorce transition process. Adjustment appears to be equated in the literature with happiness, satisfaction and freedom of choice in terms of lifestyle.

Factors that were found to aid in women's adjustment and adaptation post-relationship termination included higher education and sufficient income (Duffy, 1989); employment satisfaction, competence as a self-supporter and custodial satisfaction (Clarke-Stewart & Bailey, 1989); non-traditional sex role attitudes (Bloom & Clement, 1984; Brown & Manela, 1978), and a good support network (Clarke-Stewart & Bailey; Daniels-Mohring & Berger, 1984).

The literature also highlighted numerous and complex combinations of stressors that appear to impede the adjustment and adaptation of many women when their marriages or committed relationships break down. Such stressors include the inability or the unwillingness to work through the numerous losses associated with the ending and the emotional turmoil that results from attempting to cope with the change (Duffy, 1989; Krantzler, 1975); negative health symptoms resulting from the stress associated with the life disruption (Duffy; Riessman & Gerstel, 1985); the difficulty in changing traditional sex role attitudes (Bloom & Clement; Brown & Manela); financial worries and
hardships (Clarke-Stewart & Bailey; Grasby, 1989; Weitzman 1985); pressure associated with children, employment and home responsibilities, lack of support resources and a lack of personal time (Buehler & Langenbrunner, 1987; Clarke-Stewart & Bailey).

Researchers have identified the occurrence of transitions in a person's life as well as providing an explanation for successful negotiations (Hopson, 1984; Schlossberg, 1981). There has also been some discussion in the literature regarding the divorce transition process (Fisher, 1981; Vaughan, 1986). However, currently there is no data available that has addressed the salient themes associated with women and their successful adaptation to single life following the ending of their committed relationship.

The period of transition is a lengthy one and it entails grieving and emotional upheaval in addition to the financial, childcare, employment and other worries which are compounded by the termination of a committed relationship. It would appear that an explanation as well as examples, now lacking in the current literature, are imperative in furthering the understanding of how women who feel they have successfully adapted to their transition to a single lifestyle negotiated their transition process.
Chapter III
Methodology

The qualitative method of phenomenological psychological research was the chosen methodology for this study. Giorgi (1985) explains that "phenomenology is precisely that discipline that tries to discover and account for the presence of meanings in the stream of consciousness. It is a discipline that tries to sort out and systematize meanings" (p. 6). Phenomenology explains in-depth how a particular person orients to lived experience (Van Manen, 1990). Experimental research in terms of rigorous and precise methods and procedures have worked successfully with the phenomena of nature, however they have reached only a minimum success level with human phenomena (Giorgi). Yet, researchers need to be precise and rigorous when dealing with complex human phenomena. In looking at what has been lived and experienced by a person, this phenomena may be overlooked, misrepresented and/or simply not grasped in the methods of the natural sciences. Giorgi proposes that an extremely different perspective is required for understanding human phenomena.

From a phenomenological perspective, conducting research is a caring art, meant to question the world we live in, to question the way we experience the world and to know what is fundamental to being (Van Manen, 1990). W.H.. Auden's comment (cited in Van Manen) explains that 'individual' is a biological term whereas the term 'person' relates to the "uniqueness of each human being...As persons, we are incomparable, unclassifiable, uncountable,
irreplaceable" (p. 6). Due to this uniqueness and given an atmosphere of dialogal trust between the researcher and the participant, the latter may be willing to examine personal presuppositions without threat, and to generate existential insight. In this way, this psychological human research pursues a form of existential therapy, though is not displaced by it. Given the dialogal nature of the relationship between the researcher and each one of the women in her study, the terms participant or co-researcher was used in lieu of subject (Colaizzi, 1978).

Both Giorgi (1985) and Van Manen (1990) refer to Husserl's dictum "Back to the things themselves" (Giorgi, p. 8). In order to endorse this dictum the researcher, unlike a counterpart in experimental psychology, must forego any passion for control and abandon any thinking along technological lines (Colaizzi, 1978). To begin the meaningful study of psychological phenomenon the researcher must descriptively identify the phenomenon. Thus, this research begins by getting in touch with that phenomenon as the people have experienced it (Colaizzi). For the purposes of this research, the phenomenon was the successful adaptation of the transition process by women following the dissolution of their relationship.

In the analysis of the participants' descriptions, the researcher, using creative insight, formulated meanings by reflecting on the significant statements verbalized by each woman and then thoroughly understanding such statements. Thus, the aim of this research was to explore the
salient themes that emerged from the stories of the participants, as they articulated their successful adaptation to their transition to a single life. Use of a qualitative paradigm made it possible for the deeper feelings and thought processes of the women in this study who have grown from their relationship's termination experience, to emerge and be understood in the context of their lives.

Researcher's Experience

As a researcher, my interest in pursuing this study arose from my own transition into a single life following the dissolution of my (1987) committed relationship, five years ago. After having carried through with my decision, I continued to uncover within myself an inner strength that elicited relentless determination. Such determination kept me focused on my goals and my priorities.

Also in my clinical practice, I became acutely attentive to similar difficulties experienced by many of my female clients following the termination of their relationship. These clients were feeling overwhelmed by the on-going struggles that appeared to burden their life and weaken their sense of self-efficacy. They were also feeling uncomfortable with their single status especially in social, family and/or decision making situations. I was sensitive to the numerous issues that emerged for these clients as well as for my clients who were considering leaving their committed relationships. Due to both my personal and professional concerns, I was curious to understand how women adjusted successfully to their divorce transition.
Participants

Five women were selected to participate in this study. Although it is not a large sample, the five women were information-rich participants who allowed for variance in their experiences regarding their transition into a single life following the termination of their committed relationship. Given such variance, the sample was large enough to have the themes arise from their stories and not occur by chance.

Participants in the study met the following criteria:

i) The participants had not been out of their committed relationship for longer than six years to insure accuracy of recall. Note that the emotional leaving by a partner in a relationship can take place while the couple are still living together. Therefore, there can be no discrete time frame justified by the researcher to the actual ending of a relationship. The date of physical separation is used to satisfy only some of the conditions.

ii) The participants had not lived common-law with anyone since the termination of their relationship and had adapted to a single life.

iii) The participants felt they had grown personally as a result of their transition process following the termination of their long term relationship. The participants conveyed the reasons for such feelings to the researcher’s satisfaction in the initial telephone conversation. The participants were able to articulate their perceptions of having grown personally from their experience.
This criteria was based on Schlossberg’s definition of transition being phenomenological in nature.

iv) The participants were amenable in talking openly about the range and depth of their feelings, attitudes and experiences. According to Colaizzi (1978), a person who has experience with the phenomenon under study and is able to articulate that experience qualifies as an appropriate participant.

Procedure

According to Colaizzi (1978) "human experience is an essential and indispensable constituent of human psychological phenomena" (p. 57). Therefore, in identifying a particular psychological phenomenon, the researcher must start by seeking that phenomenon as individuals experience it (Colaizzi). Thus, in-depth interviews were conducted with five women who were currently out of their common-law or marital relationship.

To know what has been lived and experienced, descriptions need to be obtained through in-depth interviews. Such interviews fall into the broad context of descriptive psychology. Giorgi (1985) states "that a qualitative analysis of descriptions can yield psychological insight of a value at least equal to what quantitative approaches yield, although different in character and style" (p. 2).

Participants were recruited through announcements posted in areas where women predominantly frequent such as The Women’s Resources Center and the YWCA and by word of mouth
to friends and acquaintances in the helping professions who were likely to know of women who met the inclusion criteria. The posted announcements briefly highlighted the study, outlined the criteria for the participants, welcomed any questions or interests pertaining to the study and/or criteria to be met and listed the researcher's phone number (see Appendix A).

Women who were interested in the study contacted the researcher. All possible subjects were screened over the telephone regarding the inclusion criteria. Some women who called the researcher were not at the point in their transition process where they were able to perceive themselves to have personally grown from their transition experience. Such women were referred wherever possible by the researcher to mental health professionals, agencies or support groups as requested. All the women who were interested in being participants and who, after the initial telephone conversation qualified for the study, were later phoned to arrange for the tape-recorded interviews. The first five women to qualify were selected for this study. The women were oriented to the type of interview involved, and given a few sample questions to think about from a list that the researcher had prepared (see Appendix B).

One of the researcher's roles was that of an interviewer. In conjunction with this role and beginning prior to the interviews, the researcher kept a field diary in which notes, comments and thoughts pertaining to each participant were noted. It was during the initial telephone conversation that basic personal information was taken such as age, years in and out of the relationship, number of children, type of employment prior to
termination and afterwards and religious affiliation. Monitoring feelings in terms of trust and rapport was done during the initial telephone conversation between the potential participants and the researcher and these were noted in the field diary.

Four of the participants were individually interviewed in a room at the department of Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia. One participant was interviewed in her home. The participants signed a consent form prior to beginning their interviews (Appendix C). No one else was present during the interviews so that complete openness and confidentiality were possible. A high quality tape-recorder was used so that the interview could be transcribed and analyzed in its entirety which included a manual recording of emotions, length of silences and changes in tone of voice. Accurate recordings and precise transcripts contributed to the internal reliability of the research.

The participants were interviewed for as long as it took to tell their stories. The duration of the interviews were between two and three hours each. Each participant required only one interview session to tell her entire story. Prior to responding to the orienting statement, each woman was made to feel at ease by the researcher's reassurance and gentle manner. Such conduct deepened the trust and rapport between the researcher and participant. Trust and rapport were earlier established during the initial telephone conversations.

The interviews were unstructured. Questions were open-ended, allowing for individual responses yet keeping the individual focused in the specific direction of their experiences throughout their divorce transition process. Verbal tactics such
as probes were used to acquire clarification of experiences and to exact depth of feelings.

A probe can aid the participant to talk further about herself as well as help her define the issues more concretely and specifically (Egan 1986). Periods of silence were used in order to allow the participants full expression before utilizing a probe.

Each interview was taped and transcribed. Once transcribed and interpreted, the researcher wrote a brief description of the participant and her experiences. The researcher also listed for each participant all the themes that were present in their individual transcript together with a definition and an example of each theme. To each participant, the researcher delivered a copy of their entire transcript as well as an envelope containing their description and list of themes. Each participant read their description and the list of themes after they had read through their transcript. Each participant made any necessary changes in terms of adding or deleting information as well as clarification of certain issues or facts presented. Validation interviews were set up in-person between the researcher and each participant within two weeks of delivering the specific material. These interviews were for further clarification so that the researcher thoroughly understood any changes and/or additions that each participant made or contributed to the interpretation. The validation interviews took place so that the researcher and each participant were both certain that each participant’s experience was understood. This step served to increase the internal validity of the data.
Analysis

The researcher's small group of participants were unique, as were their experiences. These women perceived themselves as having personally grown from their relationship dissolution. Given their different experiences, the researcher looked for common threads between these participants that contributed to their successful adaptation.

Colaizzi's (1978) method of phenomenological analysis was applied after the descriptions or protocols (i.e. transcripts and notes in field diary) were acquired. Once the interviews were transcribed, the data for each participant was analyzed. First, the researcher read each protocol to acquire a feeling for and to make sense out of the women's descriptions. Each transcript was then re-read in order to extract the critical sentences or phrases that related directly to the participant's successful adaptation to her relationship termination. Next, the researcher used creative insight to formulate meanings from the significant statements that had been selected. Many of these meanings were "hidden in the various contexts and horizons of the investigated phenomenon" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59), yet did not dissociate themselves from the original transcript. In uncovering these hidden meanings, creative insight allowed the researcher to "go beyond what (was) given in the original data and at the same time stay with it" (p. 59).

The protocols of all participants were again reviewed in order to organize the aggregate formulated meanings into "clusters of themes" (p. 59). These clusters of themes were referred back to the original protocol for validation. Each
protocol's cluster of themes accounted for everything said by each participant and no theme proposed anything that wasn't implied. From the results of each protocol, the researcher wrote an "exhaustive description" of the transition experience, "in as unequivocal a statement of identification of its fundamental structure as possible" (p. 61).

Prior to the validation interview, the researcher gave these descriptions to the participants for their feedback in order to determine if these descriptions were consistent with their experiences. Relevant data that resulted from these validation interviews were worked into the final descriptions of the women's transition experiences. This procedure added to the integrated understanding of each woman's story, clearing up any discrepancies that the researcher may have had and clarifying that which the participant deemed necessary. From these complete descriptions, the themes for each protocol were as precise as possible. Finally, the researcher noted the themes that were common to all protocols. Thus, this research produced descriptions of stories in which similarities among women who perceived themselves as growing personally from their successful divorce transition process were explored.

Validation and Limitations

In this study the researcher attempted to ensure the internal validity of the data, in the development of trust and rapport between the researcher and participants. The shared experience of divorce transition experienced by the researcher seemed to strengthen the trust and rapport between her and each participant. The participants felt at ease and felt understood, knowing that the researcher could personally relate to their
experience of the dissolution of a committed relationship.

Having experienced a similar transition, the researcher was sensitive to the issues that emerged. This similarity contributed to the internal validity of the study. In accordance with McMillan and Schumacher (1989) internal validity in qualitative studies is explained as relating to the extent to which the generalizations and conceptual categories have mutual meanings for the participant and the researcher.

Triangulation also added to the strength of internal validity, as cross-validation occurred among the various data sources. These data sources were the researcher's field diary which included notes regarding each participant. These notes were taken during the initial telephone screening calls. Other data sources included the researcher's observations and reflective comments, which were also noted in her field diary. These valuable sources strengthened the researcher's interpretation of each interview. These sources were part of each participant's protocol and were incorporated where applicable, according to Colaizzi's (1978) method of phenomenological analysis.

Given the criteria the participants had to meet and following Colaizzi's (1978) seven step methodology, external validity in this research seemed to be achieved. A small sample of participants were chosen who were knowledgeable and informative about the phenomenon under investigation. The criteria for selection seemed to strengthen the reliability of the research because consistency in the descriptions of the phenomena under study resulted, as well as consistency in the meanings for the participants involved.
The limitations of this study pertained to the fact that the results cannot be generalized. The small sample of women had met the researcher's criteria. The women were considered to be information-rich key participants and were thoroughly interviewed. These information-rich participants were knowledgeable and informative in the phenomena under study. Such a strategy allowed the researcher to come to understand these select cases without expecting to generalize (McMillan & Schumacher).
Chapter IV

Results

In this chapter the common themes that emerged from the participants stories are presented. The women’s experiences of their committed relationships, their break-ups and their lives afterwards were different. However, there were a number of similar experiences that contributed to each woman’s successful adaptation into single life.

Prior to identifying and discussing each one of the six common themes of this study, a condensed description of each participant’s story is presented. These descriptions will serve to familiarize the reader with the uniqueness of each woman’s story, as well as with the prominent aspects of her experience.

The Women

Eliza S. Eliza is 37 years old. She is a Canadian citizen, though she was born and raised in East Africa until she immigrated with her parents and sister to Canada at age 14. She has a B.A. in sociology/gerontology. Most of her work, however, had been in sales and marketing with the airline industry. At the time of this interview, she had been laid off work yet she believes that she is resourceful enough to always find work and pay her own way.

Eliza ended her eight year common law relationship five and one half years ago after attempting to end it several times before. There were no children. It was a relationship which worked well for awhile. Both partners had their own careers and both careers entailed a lot of travelling. Travelling a lot and then reuniting were exciting times according to Eliza. Gradually
she became aware that there seemed to be no sense of "settling down" like their couple friends who were starting families and moving into houses.

The deciding factor that led Eliza to leave Bill, a quantity surveyor who was eight years older than her, was her realization that his drinking problem was not her problem.

Eliza describes the relationship as being on an "emotional roller-coaster" and said that staying in it was making her physically sick, from catching colds to a hospital stay for colitis. She reports having felt chronic hurt from what she describes as Bill's subtle hints of rejection. Such rejection, according to Eliza, resulted from her constant "trying" to make the relationship work and she reveals that all such attempts were to no avail. Such emotional abuse escalated over the years to where Bill in the end was having insignificant affairs and not returning home for days. Eliza remembers blaming herself for Bill's behavioral change into that of a "monster" which occurred, she said, due to his drinking. She reports being extremely needy for his affection. When he was sober, she feels she played a "mothering" role. Eliza feels she did everything she could to try and help Bill including attending Al-anon.

In recovering post-termination, Eliza credits the psychiatrist that counselled her and educated her on the benefits of relaxation and Eastern philosophy. Such counselling occurred sometime after her separation from Bill when two subsequent and brief relationships deteriorated. Eliza says she confronted herself regarding her emotional neediness for a relationship. Eliza credits her initial schooling in East Africa for her
confidence in her employment abilities as the educational system prepared her for life's 3 D's: Death, divorce and desertion. Yet, she acknowledges that the role model her parents exhibited contributed to her emotional dependence on men and like her mother she took on the sole role of fixing the relationship. The memories of her childhood reveal her father's explosive bouts of anger and his control over the household. Counselling, Eliza says, heightened the issues that needed to be worked through so that she could become her "own best friend". She continues to enhance her personal growth through workshops and meditation retreats. Spiritually, Eliza says she has acquired a strong belief in the process of life and adapted many healthier lifestyle changes. She is grateful to three long-time girlfriends for their emotional support.

Today, Eliza is aware of her own personal strength. She is aware too that she is a very giving person, by nature. Having always given to others, she now indulges in giving to herself. She sees herself as "a cactus that has finally bloomed".

Pam M. Pam is a 36 year old Asian woman and the mother of a nine year old son and a five year old daughter. She has a B.A. in psychology and is a graduate student in the human sciences. Pam's marriage ended two years ago. Except for one brother and his wife, Pam's entire family live in Asia. Although the separation was a mutual decision, Pam initiated divorce proceedings.

Pam met Harry at an Eastern Canadian university while she was a foreign student there. Later, Pam returned to Canada to marry him. Pam was a traditional housewife and mother for most
of her ten year marriage to Harry, a child psychologist. Harry is Jewish and is eight years older than Pam. Pam says she was a devoted mother to her children and constantly tried to be a better wife. Pam feels that she fell into a subordinate role in her marriage, given her culture and Harry’s professional status. Pam recounted Harry’s subtle criticisms which occurred even during their lovemaking. Harry insisted that every penny Pam spent was accounted for. She says Harry would often point out to her a better way of doing something. She recalls how he was angry and critical for days because she bought a commercial brand of Parmesan cheese. Over time, Pam believed that there was something wrong with her.

Prior to the separation Pam says they tried different counsellors including group counselling. Harry would tape the counselling sessions and insist that Pam go over the tapes with him again at night. Pam pushed for a trial separation and Harry agreed to it.

Pam felt intimidated by Harry and his professional status. Pam recounts that his criticisms, though subtle but persistent, had shattered her self-esteem. Though they had sought counselling, an overall malaise prevailed in the relationship as Pam recalls. Pam says that she wanted time alone to "soul-search", to get to know herself and to come to believe that she was okay. Once separated, Pam had to look for work and in so doing, she became aware of her need to interact with more people both for her professional and personal goals.

While separated, Pam held on to some hope and to her dream that they would reunite and live a model existence as a happy and
loving family. Such hope dissipated when Harry got upset over something Pam said while starting out on a motor trip. He then left everyone upon arriving at their destination. Pam had agreed to go on this trip as a family because Harry’s adult niece and nephew were visiting. This incident, reports Pam, was unacceptable and she vowed to herself that it would be Harry’s last unacceptable behavior towards her.

Although Pam and Harry sought marriage counselling, Pam recalls feeling stressed and intimidated by Harry’s insistence of rehashing each session. While separated, Pam pursued individual counselling for the validation of her feelings and to strengthen her self-esteem. A turning point in the sessions occurred when a recurring dream Pam had been having was analyzed. The dream analysis revealed for Pam that staying in the relationship was equated with emotional and spiritual death.

Pam feels she inherited her mother’s fighting spirit that, although latent for years, emerged to restore her own self-worth. Pam gradually saw that she was alright and she focused on what she did have. She enjoys working with people. Given her experience in group counselling, she enrolled in leadership courses and was asked to facilitate workshops. This confirmed for her that she was employable and she enrolled in a Masters program.

Today, there is less tension in Pam’s house, she enjoys the freedom in pursuing her goals and making herself and her children top priority. She renounced spousal support because the mental anguish and expense associated with the contested and prolonged legal proceedings were overwhelming, especially in the area of
custody. Believing that she was the better parent at this stage in her children's lives, Pam relinquished maintenance for herself and Harry gave up fighting for 50% of custody. Pam now resents her financial struggles.

A brief affair with a writer gave Pam the freedom for total sexual expression. During this relationship, she also discovered she had editing abilities, which contributed to the writer's work being published and increased her own self-confidence.

Pam is grateful that Harry has become a more involved father, yet is envious of his lavish lifestyle. Pam has a small and supportive group of friends and is beginning to reach out even more to them. Her metaphor for herself is that of an eagle who can see clearly above the clouds.

Anne T. Anne is 38 years old and the mother of two girls and a boy, ages 4, 5, and 9. Anne was married for ten years. Anne is Irish-Catholic and the second eldest of five children of a prominent family, all of whom live in Ireland. She emigrated here with her husband, Peter, eleven years ago. Peter returned to university to upgrade his standards and told Anne that only one of them could go back to school.

Anne planned for the separation one year earlier and initiated it about 18 months ago. She is involved in a contentious divorce. Anne was a traditional housewife for most of her ten year marriage.Anne describes Peter, a psychiatrist, as a man who controlled, criticized and humiliated her over the years in extremely subtle ways. She says that his personality was that of a "Dr. Jekyl and a Mr. Hyde". She explains that to
the outside world he was a handsome, charming and witty professional man with an attractive wife and three lovely children. Physical, verbal and economic abuse intensified over the years in Anne’s relationship with Peter.

Anne recalls being constantly reminded by Peter that they were in debt and that it was so important for her to be careful with money. Consequently, Anne was given little pocket money and was careful to purchase few things for herself and only when they were on sale. Peter wore top of the line business suits, drove a Jaguar and belonged to the best of clubs. Unhappy and dependent, Anne says that she upheld the facade expected of a doctor’s wife and shared her unhappiness with no one.

A turning point for Anne occurred, she recalls, 2 1/2 years ago after an argument in the car which culminated with Peter telling her he was leaving. It prove to be a ploy to only scare Anne. The incident forced her to think about such an outcome. At this life-stage, Anne still had two pre-school children at home. Since emigrating to Canada with her husband, Anne had a record of frustrating attempts at employment. She was dependent on her husband who continually failed his board exams and ran up huge debts. Anne perceived Peter to blame her for these setbacks.

Anne recalls carefully looking at her life, examining her feelings and focusing on her self. Since she had acquired a realstate licence in Ireland, she enrolled in the realstate course offered in Vancouver. With this course, she says came her secret decision to build enough equity so that she could earn a living for herself and the children should her marriage end.
As Anne took more responsibility for herself, passed the exam and enjoyed her work, Peter reacted more violently with ensuing arguments. Anne spoke out about the abuse to a close friend and found out about Peter's unfaithfulness. One affair that she found out about occurred during the time that Peter was suppose to be committed totally to his studies for his medical board exams. Such revelation destroyed for Anne her last bit of trust in the relationship.

In their last year of married life, Anne was involved in a freak accident which subsequently scared Peter. He insisted they go to Seattle to "get to know each other again". According to Anne the intimacy could not be rekindled, yet Peter insisted anyway that they throw a major party for all their friends to celebrate their upcoming anniversary.

Anne had sought counselling in the fifteen months prior to leaving. Peter was angry that she did and refused to participate. Given her Irish-Catholic upbringing in Ireland, where the church rules the state, divorce was not a possibility for anyone. Anne often commented on the loving relationship her mother and father had. Her mother was a traditional housewife as were the women of that generation in Ireland. Once Anne started confronting herself about her relationship and that it wasn't at all like the one her parents had, she sought counselling in order to make the relationship better. In her counselling sessions Anne began to perceive the depths of her troubled marriage and came to realize that she could no longer live in such an abusive relationship. Gradually, she came to the decision of having to leave her marriage and gathered strength from the support that
she received from her therapist.

Anne initiated the separation following the revelation of a subsequent affair of Peter’s with a woman in his office. Anne reports that once she left the marriage, Peter sought the same marriage counsellor that Anne had originally gone to and they both attended a session together. The counsellor at the end of the session told Peter, Anne says, to accept the fact that the marriage was over. According to Anne, upon separating, Peter had access to the house. With such access Peter could be manipulative and threatening in attempting to get her to stop divorce proceedings. He would often provoke an argument and once choked Anne. She sought medical attention the next day to have the bruises recorded. She told friends of the abuse, obtained a court order barring Peter from the house and for sometime afterwards slept with a knife under her pillow.

Anne says she is relieved in being able to get on with her life and in giving her children a more confident and stronger mother. Her metaphor is that of a prisoner who has finally been let out of jail.

Karen S. Karen is 44 years old and owns her own writing company. She is the mother of two college aged daughters. Karen was married for 18 years to David, an urban land economist who was two years older. The marriage ended 18 months ago.

Karen recounted the numerous losses she has suffered since the ending of her marriage such as a relocation, both her daughters attending university in the United States as well as the death of her mother and her brother’s suicide.
Karen grew up "a nerdy kid" in a family where alcohol was prevalent and where Karen was physically and sexually abused. Karen reports that she was a pleaser and a parentified child. She recalls making family decisions at the age of seven.

Karen reports that there were many incidents of David's insensitivity and lack of respect for her accomplishments. His acceptance of a job in another city without Karen's consideration and his acknowledgement of an affair brought their marriage to an end. Given these incidents, Karen reports, David chose to physically leave the relationship. Karen recalls feeling relief and not anger when hearing about the affair. Relief, she says, because "society" could not blame her for not following her husband to his new job.

Karen says David controlled the "purse strings" and even though both of them kept separate accounts, Karen was responsible for all the families expenses except the mortgage payments. Karen explains that she emotionally left the relationship seven years earlier when she lost a basic trust in David who invested money without telling Karen and subsequently lost it. It was Karen who had to budget and deny her children in order to recoup the losses.

During her marriage Karen recalls the constant undercurrents she felt from her husband regarding her inability to please his every need as his mother did. A sense of failure overcame Karen in her marriage.

While married, Karen worked part-time as a critical care nurse, pursued a Master's degree in Health Administration and subsequently worked as a health administrator. Karen stayed home
for one year when the children were babies and recounts how David did not treat her as an equal because she wasn’t bringing in any income. She returned to work and to school while her children were still young, one of whom had a severe learning disability. She also maintained a sense of family and a home. Karen says she overfunctioned to please her Italian-American husband who expected her to earn an income as well as to provide the conveniences of a traditional home. In her words: "he expected a full Italian dinner on the table at 6:31 every evening."

Karen left her Health Administrative job and turned to freelance writing while the children were young. She explains that although the writing venture was extremely demanding, it provided her with a sense of sanity in her life where she could be so focused in her work and forget the "emotional roller coaster" she was riding on when at home.

Karen had sought some counselling in her adult life, she says, in order to come to terms with her traumatic childhood. For years Karen had suggested to David that they seek marriage counselling. David had always refused, recounts Karen. Due to Karen’s furious reaction to David’s acceptance of the U.S. job offer and purchase of a house in that city, they sought counselling upon David’s suggestion. It was approximately one year prior to their official separation. Karen reveals that the counselling session highlighted for her how totally disconnected David was with his feelings. Karen went to a subsequent session in which the therapist conveyed to her that David was the most narcissistic man that he had ever met. At this point Karen realized that David would have to tune in to his feelings if
their marriage was to survive.

In negotiating her transition to single life, Karen credits her willingness to confront herself as well as a supportive network of friends including her business partner. She acknowledges David's attributes, considers him a wonderful father and is concerned for him. With regard to the financial assets, she settled for less (out of court) because she could not withstand being on the opposite side of a "dealing" with David. Karen saw herself metaphorically as a compressed spring during her marriage and now with the freedom to uncoil she wants to experience life without missing out on anything.

Linda M. Linda is 44 years old and the mother of two sons, aged 10 and 15 years and a daughter, aged 13 years. Linda is a part-time elementary school teacher and a part time student in a diploma programme. Linda was married to Barry, an accountant, for 16 years. Their marriage ended 2 years ago. Linda left her husband, now 42, when all attempts at counselling failed.

Linda deferred to her husband. Linda reports of the pervasive emotional, economic and physical abuse that she was subjected to in her marriage. There was no meaningful communication between them. Linda says Barry would degrade anything she said. She reports that his rebuttals were articulate and seemed so logical at first that Linda did not have the energy to pursue an argument any further. She says that he criticized her for any purchases she made without his input. Barry insisted that Linda keep track, literally, of every penny she spent. According to Linda, Barry often reminded her of his
superior education. When the children were present, Linda was often the "butt" of Barry's jokes.

Linda recalls herself being in a very vulnerable position as a housewife with three small children and working part-time for "pittance". Her salary was required to meet many of the household and children's needs. Barry did not account to her regarding his spending nor did he give her information pertaining to their financial affairs, his employment status or pension plan. Linda recalls that the house had to be re-mortgaged because Barry lost a substantial amount of money and at one time he had no pension plan.

Looking back on those years Linda recalls being extremely tired. She says that Barry never helped out around the house. Linda recalls a room needing to be repainted and having to do it herself. She says Barry would get angry at her for keeping her books in boxes and yet he denied her bookshelves. Linda recalls being under tremendous pressure always having to have things the way Barry demanded them. If dinner was late or a minor mistake made, Barry would lose his temper and blow the incident out of proportion. Even sexually, Linda says, Barry only considered his needs.

A critical incident occurred for Linda when Barry mocked a poem she had written as a member of a committee for the PTA. She read the poem anyway and was astounded at the praise she received. Linda began to have more faith in herself.

Linda reports that when her youngest child started school, she seemed to have time to reflect more on the relationship and
the demands that Barry placed on her. One year prior to separating, Linda sought counselling. Such a decision came about, she explains, to satisfy any self-doubt as to whether she had done everything possible to make the relationship work, should the marriage dissolve. She had attended the first few sessions on her own in order to explore her own feelings as well as to be reassured that the marital problems were not entirely her fault as Barry, she says, had indicated. Following those initial sessions, Linda insisted on couple-counselling and Barry agreed to attend the sessions. Looking for a sign of hope that the marriage could work, Linda recalls her willingness to be satisfied in their relationship if she had seen even the slightest positive effort from Barry. Barry conveyed to the counsellor, Linda recounts, that there was nothing more that he could think of doing for the relationship. In recalling Barry’s answer to the counsellor’s question as to what he did to contribute to the relationship, Linda says, Barry replied that he took out the garbage, that he made bran muffins and that he raised the seat when he used the toilet.

Feeling hurt and frustrated from Barry’s responses in the counselling sessions as well as from his lack motivation in working at their relationship, Linda recounts that she moved out of their bedroom and onto the living room couch. Linda reports that Barry started dating shortly after she moved out of the bedroom. During this time, Linda recalls, waiting up at night and wondering where Barry was and with whom until two in the morning. This behavior was totally unacceptable and Linda asked for a divorce. Linda continued to see her counsellor, she
explains, for emotional support until Barry was out of the house. Barry remarried upon receipt of his divorce papers.

The divorce settlement did not provide Linda with any spousal support and Linda says the child support she receives is not sufficient for the children’s needs. Linda says that although money is tight and the emotional and physical needs of her children come first, she no longer subjugates all of her interests. Linda also spends time caring for her ailing mother and her elderly father.

Linda has a network of women friends that she can rely on and credits one special girlfriend in giving her constant emotional support. Linda sees herself as a songbird, a metaphor that she came up with in the counselling sessions. She is doing and thinking for herself without waiting for approval.

Common Themes

Six common themes emerged from the analysis of the researcher’s data. That is, each one of the themes described experiences and/or feelings that were shared by all five of the women participants. Each theme reoccurred repeatedly in the stories of the women as they attempted to meaningfully construct their experience of relationship dissolution.

The common themes are listed below. They are listed in the relative order in which they emerged according to the transition process experienced by the women as they adjusted to their single lives. Each theme is defined and explained within the context of the women’s stories. Quotations are used to further clarification. The common themes are:

1. The Experience of Rejection and Betrayal
2. The Experience of Self-Confrontation and Reaffirmation of Self

3. The Experience of Relief

4. The Experience of Coming to Terms with Multiple Losses

5. The Acknowledgement of the Importance of Supportive Relationships

6. The Creation of a New Life Structure

The Experience of Rejection and Betrayal

When reflecting on their relationships, each of the women in the study recalled repetitive and deeply wounding feelings of rejection and diminishment. Lack of control over finances and decisions, constant critiquing of their behavior, and the invalidation of their needs left the women feeling rejected and unworthy. Each recalled how they did not feel their needs or wishes were considered as important or valid by their partners. Such invalidation of their needs and strengths was experienced as a betrayal by the partners whom they had committed themselves to and who they believed had made a reciprocal commitment to them. Such betrayal left them feeling devalued and powerless.

All of the women reported numerous incidents with their partners that they experienced as rejecting. For example, in reflecting on Bill's repeated refusal to meet her and pick her up from the airport upon her return home after several weeks away, Eliza said: "I'd say you know I'm flying in tomorrow...will you be at the airport and he'd say 'well we'll see'...and he never was."

The women also reported unmet needs and the experience of invalidation in their sexual relationships with their partners. As reflected in Pam's words when recalling Harry's response to her request to have her back stroked during their lovemaking:
"he told me that my neurons were in the wrong place." In spite of their attempts to ensure that their partners' sexual needs were met, each of the women experienced their partner's apparent rejection of their sexual needs and desires as a fundamental betrayal of their intimate relationship.

Their inability to count on their partners when they were in difficulty also contributed to the experience of abandonment within their relationships. Karen's words in recalling David's lack of support during the medical investigation of a possible malignancy in her breast reflect the experiences of all of the participants: "the real message [was] sort of panicky fear that he [didn't] want to deal with it...If I had any needs and presented them he would react in a bizarre, bizarre way." Each of the women recalled feeling emotionally and physically abandoned by their partners, throughout their relationships.

The women in the study experienced such repeated invalidation of their needs as a rejection of the importance of their relationship in their partner's lives: leaving them feeling abandoned and betrayed. These feelings were acutely painful and personally wounding, resulting for all in emotional pain and for some in physical distress and illness. Ultimately, it was through facing the reality of these feelings and experiences that the women were forced to take action to leave their relationship.

The Experience of Self-Confrontation and Reaffirmation of Self

When recalling the beginnings of their decision to leave their committed relationship, each of the women in the study recounted how they began thoroughly questioning themselves about
their relationship with their partners. All of the women in the study reported suffering a significant amount of emotional and/or physical pain that forced them to face themselves honestly. The women reported taking the time to contemplate their life and their relationship in order to admit fully to themselves the depth of their prevailing feelings and the pervasiveness of their suffering. Feelings such as rejection, humiliation and diminishment dominated their existence resulting in a need to examine their commitment to their relationship.

All of the women reported many incidents with their partners that they subjectively reviewed in order to explore their true feelings. For example, in recalling the turning point in her separation where she let go of all hope for a reconciliation with Harry, Pam said: "I mean I loved him and that's when I learned that even though you love somebody that there were certain conditions which were totally unacceptable to live under because if you did allow yourself to live under those conditions that means you are heading towards eventual death, you know, spiritual, emotional death." Each of the women recalled reaching a specific turning point which prompted them to carry through with their decision to end their committed relationship.

The women also reported how they overcame their own denial about the state of their relationship and the future it held for them. As reflected in Karen's words when recalling her thoughts when David admitted his unfaithfulness to her, she said "I was shocked...and honestly the thing I felt was relief, overwhelming relief. And what I should have felt was anger...what I said [was] that's really very telling...I [was] ready to get out of
this marriage. And it was such a powerful emotion to say 'What do I really feel' as opposed to 'What should I feel'."

All of the women recounted how linking their negative feelings with their adverse health symptoms influenced their decision to leave. Pam's words in recalling her reality in her relationship with Harry reflected the suffering endured by all the participants: "I mean I was never good enough...I was walking around for years with this pain in my throat and I finally said I couldn't do it anymore." Similarly, Eliza recalls her decision to leave her relationship with Bill: "I had to do it because I ended up getting really sick and I just knew that I couldn't go on this way."

The women also reported that while confronting themselves on their true feelings, they searched incessantly for strengths and their own definition of self. In recalling her Asian roots and her mother's fighting spirit Pam said: "there was always a little sprite in her that stayed alive and I think that [was] what I got, [mother] encouraged me to go on, to be independent ...somehow [that] got transpired to me ... the little bit that says 'you just can't give up'."

The women in the study experienced many private sessions of self-confrontation in order to acknowledge their true feelings and to begin facing the reality of their lives. They searched for their own meaning in life, they deemed what was acceptable and unacceptable treatment, and they gradually validated their decision to leave. All the women reported that only after leaving their relationship could they fully understand the debilitating effect that their relationship had had on them.
The Experience of Relief

When reflecting on their initial feelings subsequent to ending their relationship, each of the women in the study described the feeling of relief. The women reported that the constant giving of themselves in attempting to attend to all of their partners' needs had greatly depleted their emotional and physical energy. In their relationship, all of the women felt that they had fallen short of their partners' expectations of them. Given this feeling of failure and their partners' invalidation of their needs, the women felt a further drain on their mental and physical well-being. Carrying through with their decision to leave, the women experienced an end to such negative investment in an unhealthy relationship. For all the women in the study, such an end re-energized their entire sense of being. The women reported that their initial feelings of relief reassured them of their own personal strengths and the opportunities opened to them.

The women reported that the full impact of their unhealthy relationship did not seem to be realized until they were finally on their own and their relationship was over. As explained in Karen's words when she reflected on that time immediately following the ending of her marriage: "What I didn't realize, when he left, it was more like I had been a spring that had been compressed and I didn't even know the extent of how his unhappiness had weighed on me until it was released and then I just felt enormous relief."

The women reported that acting on their decision to leave acknowledged personal signs of strength, determination and self-validation. Such a decision propelled them towards the pursuit
of their goals, both personal and professional. The feeling of relief following the ending of their relationship indicated, for all the women in the study, that they could begin giving to themselves. For example, in reflecting on her time following the ending of her relationship with Bill, Eliza said: "I started taking better care of myself in terms of everything, lifestyle... I needed to relax...and I guess thinking differently." Each of the women recalled finally having time to focus on themselves and reassess their priorities in terms of their needs (and those of their children). All the women reported higher energy levels and an end to many of the ailments they had suffered while in their relationship.

Many of the women reported experiencing somewhat of a euphoric state when they were finally out of their relationship. As reflected in Linda's words when recalling the time when Barry was finally out of the house, she said "It was almost a high that he had gone."

The women in the study initially experienced a period of respite from the "emotional roller coaster" that many said they were riding on while in their relationship. Though relief from the relationship continued, other emotions overcame them as the women adjusted to their single life.

The Experience of Coming to Terms with Multiple losses

All of the women in the study acknowledged suffering numerous losses as a result of the ending of their committed relationship. When reflecting on these losses, each of the women recalled feelings of pain and sadness. The women reported grieving for what they didn't have in their committed
relationships, for what they may have once had and for the fantasies that will never be realized with their former partners.

All of the women reported their need to completely grieve the ending of their relationship. Pam's words in recalling the ending of her marriage reflect the descriptions conveyed by all of the participants: "there is a sadness for the loss of a family and a loss of a dream." The women reported that such feelings continue to be recalled, especially on significant dates, such as anniversaries, birthdays and Christmas.

The women reported losses pertaining to their status in the couple relationship, such as social networking with either friends, family or business acquaintances. They reported that the nature of these relationships change, now that they are single and they also said that some people, act differently towards them because they are not part of a couple. For example, in reflecting on the relationship she and David had with David's sister and her husband, Karen said: "It's actually one of the things I feel the biggest loss for...I am still very good friends with his sister and her husband who moved up here and partially it is because we were here...But they wouldn't have moved here if we hadn't been here. And then David left (the marriage and the province)."

When reflecting on the loss of their partner following the termination of their committed relationship, some of the women communicated a paradoxical quality to the relationship. For example, focusing on the sober Bill and when he did give her his attentiveness, Eliza said: "I lost a real good friend."

All the women reported missing the man they entered their
relationship with many years before. As reflected in Karen’s words when recalling her first meetings with David, twenty years ago, she said: "I keep a picture of him when he was 22, when I first met him, and that was the person I fell in love with, he was sort of a fun person. What the hell happened in twenty years? Where did that guy go? Where did the playfulness go?"

The women reported mourning the loss of a healthy sexual relationship that many of them once had with their partners. As reflected in Anne’s words when she recalls her attractiveness to Peter, she said: "I only used to have to see him, when we were dating, Oh God and I loved going to bed with him. From some point very early in our marriage it didn’t work for me anymore." With regard to their sexual expressiveness, all the women mourned for those times in which their needs were met.

The women in the study reported grieving tangible losses; losses pertaining to their home, their belongings and financial status. For example, in commenting on her relocation and its effect on her family, Linda said: "It (the house) is pretty run down and everything...It isn’t really a neighborhood. There are no kids around, and that really distresses me."

All of the participants experienced numerous losses associated with the ending of their committed relationship. All the losses had to be acknowledged in order for the women to work through emotions of grief and move forward in their life. Many of the losses the women in the study suffered were compounded by subsequent losses not associated with the dissolution of their
relationship. Such losses included the illness of elderly parents for Linda and the death of a parent for Karen.

The Acknowledgement of the Importance of a Supportive Relationship

When reflecting on their transition to a single life, each of the women referred to a support system that they had sought out. Such a system included understanding friends as well as professionals in the helping profession. All of the women reported that they had been able to reach out to their significant others since the beginning of their transition. Each of the women recalled how they needed to talk endlessly about their experiences and their feelings regarding themselves and their relationships. They each recalled their desperate need to be understood, validated and supported.

The support in terms of personal validation and help from their significant others were reported by all of the women to be paramount in coping with their transition to a single life. Numerous references to their significant others were made by all the women when referring to their coping strategies. For example, in recounting the distress associated with the sale of the matrimonial home, Linda made significant reference to her supportive girlfriend and said: "I will never forget, it was about the last week in the course and my girlfriend who I had relied upon was off on holidays with her family, although I must say she was keeping an almost daily contact."

Interestingly, all of the women also reported a perceived lack of sufficient support from their own parents and siblings. The kind of support that they needed from family members was not available to them. Three of the women had no family members even
remotely near them and two of the women were criticized by their parents for leaving their relationships.

As a result of not turning to family and unable to always turn to friends, all of the women had sought counselling at some point in their transition. They entered counselling in order to be understood and accepted, and to explore their own purpose in life. In reflecting on her initial counselling sessions, Eliza said: "I went regularly like it was very important to me to make this appointment and I was very honest, I cried a lot and I told my whole story ... he was just a lovely man [therapist] I mean the first three sessions I just sat there and cried, he kept giving me Kleenexes."

The women also reported their immense gratitude in being able to reach out to significant others. All of the women reported that in addition to their overwhelming emotions, they were required to make immediate decisions regarding numerous responsibilities affecting their life and for some the lives of their children, too. All of the women doubted whether they could have dealt with their transition without a supportive network. As reflected in Karen's words when recalling her transition and the importance of her supportive friends: "I could not have gotten through this. People who think they can do this alone are nuts."

The women in the study invoked the support of significant others throughout their transition to a single life. They also reported that they continue to value and to build up their network of friends. The importance of such support was reinforced by all the women who felt this support to be critical
to their process of recovering and healing. Significant others helped them in redefining themselves and in appreciating their own self-worth. All the women reported that such re-definition and appreciation advanced their own personal growth.

The Creation of a New Life Structure

When reflecting on their transition and where they were at the time of this interview, all of the women reported happiness with their life and in being in control of their own destiny. They also reported a renewed sense of self-efficacy and strength, and elaborated on the personal and professional goals that they were pursuing.

All of the women had conveyed a feeling of renewal. They all reported pleasure in rediscovering their personal strengths and assets as well as in finding out who they really were. Anne’s words in explaining her renewed sense of self reflect the sentiments of all the women in the study: "I have got me back. I got me who was frivolous and carefree and successful enough. I probably have done better than that. I am probably for the first time in my life getting to know me... I am way stronger." All the women, too, recognized the sacrifices that they would never again make in a relationship and Anne’s words reflect the personal convictions of all the participants: "I will no longer let me disappear to make [relationship] work."

The participants in the study reported tremendous satisfaction with their personal growth. When reflecting on their adaptation to their single life, Karen’s words reflect the personal assessments made by all the women: "More productive in
the sense that I am resolving problems, trying new things and so I am more productive personally."

The women reported, too, that throughout their adaptation to a single life they had acquired a strong sense of self-confidence and a firm belief in their own ability to survive. Eliza's words reflected the convictions of all the women: "I know I can make it...I can look after myself emotionally and that was a biggie and I learned to be there for me, I became my own best friend...I have gone through an incredible change." In looking after themselves, all the women reported monitoring their mental and physical well-being and many made reference to a renewal in their spiritual lives.

In conclusion, the women in this study gave credence to their own self-worth in order to rise above conditions that became no longer tolerable to them. Only after trying an infinite amount of times and giving until they had no more to give were the women able to plough through their own guilt and confront themselves with the reality of their relationships. In confronting themselves many were getting to know themselves for the first time and others were reconnected to and building on that part of themselves that had been dormant for years. They knew they would never compromise so much of themselves again in a relationship. Many of the women had experienced a transitional relationship in which they were fully able to express themselves sexually, reaffirming for them their own sense of being a sexual woman. All five women were pursuing clear goals both in their professional and personal lives. With regard to the future, all of the women were looking forward to it with a positive outlook.
Chapter V
Discussion

The reason for undertaking this study was to explore the phenomenon of the successful adaptation of women to a single lifestyle following the termination of their committed relationship. The research question was: "How do women who perceive themselves as having personally grown from their relationship dissolution experience the transition process?"

A condensed description of the women’s transition experiences will be presented in this chapter. Results of the study will be compared with the existing literature. Implications for counselling and for future research will be presented.

A Description of the Women’s Experience

The women volunteered for this research in order to tell their stories so that they could be heard and understood. They also hoped to alert, prepare and enlighten other women, facing similar circumstances, regarding the journey into a single life. They all communicated that such a passage is both challenging and traumatic, and well worth it. From their stories, it is clear that all five women persevered through a difficult transition process. In recounting their experiences, the women recalled their intense pain. Chronic pain and hurt described the pervasive feelings that they all experienced in their relationships with their former partners. They all endured such feelings until they each reached a point where they could take no more. Pain, too, resulted from the numerous losses suffered following the termination of their relationships.
The women reported how they blamed themselves when things were not working in their relationships. Attempting to alleviate the blame, they constantly tried to make things better, always giving more of themselves. If their partners criticized them, the women either felt the criticism was justified or simply attempted to rectify matters. Thus, they tried to correct either themselves or the situation under attack in order to meet their partner’s approval. They each recounted their experience of endless giving of themselves, attempting to attend to all of their partner’s needs. Such constant attending reinforced their hope for an improved relationship with their partners. Many of the women reported witnessing their own mothers and other women in their culture defer to their husbands. For example, many women of Irish-Catholic heritage circumscribed to their culture’s submissive role of women as well as to the dogmatic teachings of their religious faith. Given their cultural backgrounds, their early socialization and/or their partner’s control over them, all of the women in the study were submissive to their partners. All of the women recounted how their own needs were considered secondary by their partners and even by themselves.

Gradually, it appeared that the women would reveal and acknowledge only to themselves that things weren’t right. So began the experience of self-confrontation. As each one dared to confront their vulnerable self, they were able to see the role that they played in their relationships, the role their partners played and the personal costs and consequences of being involved in these relationships. They were also able to see their strengths, no matter how latent they may have been. Eventually,
all the women reached a point, virtually a rock-bottom point, in which the conditions they were living under were no longer acceptable to them. For some of the women their point was triggered by health problems. Whatever the trigger when that point was reached, ultimately, a fierce determination emerged within each woman to take responsibility for themselves (and their children) in order to seek meaning in their own life. They rethought their priorities and their belief systems, they outlined their goals and aspired towards them, no matter how many obstacles seemed in their way. Their goals reflected personal freedom, defined as emotional and financial independence. When contemplating on what they wanted if ever they committed themselves to another relationship, they all disclosed convincingly that they would never sacrifice themselves so totally again for the sake of making a relationship last.

Many of the women however, did not realize how difficult and traumatic their passage to a state of singlehood was going to be, yet they persevered through what at times seemed like insurmountable frustrations. Having withstood years of suffering and after securing the emotional wherewithal to carry through with their decision to leave (or in Karen's case, welcoming the ending), each of the women conveyed that the period of relief, immediately following their relationship termination, was all too brief. Reality set in for all of the women with the recognition of their numerous losses and the overwhelming responsibilities facing them. Such demands exacerbated the societal, legal, social and familial pressures that inundated all of the women, hurrying them to re-organize their lives. Given such demands,
once again, the emotional needs of the women were not to be considered by anyone but themselves. All of the women realized their limitations when affronted with such overwhelming stressors. They reached out, both to friends and to mental health professionals, for support and validation. The strengths that they had initially tapped into when facing the reality of their failing relationships intensified, accelerating their determination to survive. No matter what, the women reflected, they were going to derive satisfaction and meaning from their lives. Many were in charge of making decisions for the first time and they all told how they commended themselves with each sign of progress, no matter how small. With any success, the women reported noting the conquest and often revelled, if only for a moment, in their acquisition of a new competency. All of the women had long range goals both personal and/or professional, yet they each reiterated the importance of taking one day at a time and really living in the here and now.

Loneliness was a critical factor in the lives of the women post-termination. They used their time alone, which to some appeared to be a massive amount, and they continued to face themselves honestly in order to find out who they were at this life stage, where they had been and what conceivable goals were realistic, exciting and mobilizing for them. Again, many of the women reported reaching a point in which they could no longer just ruminate on the dormant aspects of their lives; they had to act on them. All of the women learned to like themselves and to be their own best friend.
Health was of paramount importance to all of the women in the study. They all conveyed a firm belief that if they could take good care of themselves, they would make it through the complex challenges of their new life structure. They would also be better able to relate to the significant others in their lives; a concern highlighted many times by the women who had children at home. Given the continued exploration of their true feelings and thoughts and the monitoring of their health symptoms, all of the women reported making significant lifestyle changes. Three of the five women renounced support or settled early in the proceedings because, they reported, the emotional anguish associated with the contentious litigations was not worth the toll on their overall health. The other two women found that the legal proceedings taxed overwhelmingly their emotional and physical energy.

Each of the women in the study continued to listen to themselves, they focused on the various aspects of their health, they identified their own needs, they reached out to others for support and for help and they acted. They acted by taking responsibility and mobilizing their resources in order to accomplish both personal and professional goals. And today, they are fully cognizant of their shortcomings yet they continue to be proactive in their quest towards an enhanced sense of self and a satisfying and fulfilling life.

Comparison to the Literature

As earlier mentioned, there are many definitions of divorce. Among them are Satir’s (1981) description of divorce as a "broken experience" (p. 1) and Krantzler’s (1975) as an emotional crisis
provoked by a sudden and often unexpected loss. All definitions appear to stress that it is a death of a relationship. Such a death must be mourned and laid to rest before self-renewal can take place (Krantzler). All of the women in the study reported feelings of pain and sadness with the end of their relationship. They also expressed the importance of mourning all their losses associated with the relationship before accepting totally the reality of their new lifestyle, reinforcing the losses inherent in the experience of divorce.

According to Vaughan (1986) "uncoupling" starts with a secret. Usually one of the partners begins to feel ill at ease in the relationship. The partner with the secret, the initiator, weighs all factors within the relationship. The initiator attempts actions to try to bring a sense of harmony back to the relationship. If the harmony does not occur eventually the initiator may decide to separate. Such dissatisfaction prior to physical separation for the initiator could be present for years, and confrontation and acceptance by the person who has been left could take years following divorce (Crosby, et al. 1983; Vaughan, 1986). Thus, the initiator begins the mourning process while the couple are still living together.

All of the women in the study were the initiators of their relationships termination. Even Karen who admitted to having emotionally left her marriage years ago, expressed enormous relief when David physically moved out. Prior to leaving, they all recounted how they constantly gave of themselves to make their relationships better and many expressed their discomfort to their partners. Linda, Pam, Anne and their partners went to
marriage counselling. Eliza went to Al-anon because Bill, an alcoholic, wouldn’t go and Karen, with a prospering business, agreed to visit and consider the city of David’s job offer. Each of the women felt the disease from their relationship and their entanglement within it. Prior to leaving and/or divorcing all the women confronted themselves and their role in their relationship. In so doing, they faced themselves honestly and focused on how they really felt and thought. In accepting that their committed relationship was no longer viable, they also accepted that they had done the best they could and leaving appeared to be equated with personal survival.

According to Stevens-Long (1988), more women than men are leaving marriages because of the need to achieve emotional and financial independence. All five of the women felt inhibited in their marriages because of their subjugation to criticism and control by their partners. Due to these feelings of suppression, the women experienced varying depths of powerlessness in their relationships.

In accordance with the three periods of adjustment to divorce outlined by Duffy (1989), all of the women began reacting to the changes in their assumptive world while in their relationship. Prior to leaving, they had begun proactive behaviors arising from their new set of assumptions. Although they feared failure, a fear of not making it on their own, they risked themselves. They risked to escape despair and the overwhelming feelings of powerlessness which they all felt in their relationships. According to Jeffers (1988) fear can permeate every aspect of a persons life preventing them from ever
taking charge and therefore rendering them powerless. The women in the study began taking charge.

Each of the five women had defined their own transition as an opportunity to pursue goals that would entitle them to emotional and financial independence. That is, they would no longer live in a relationship in which the conditions were unacceptable to their mental and physical well-being. As they reflected, the women all communicated that their transition into a single life was a pivotal change in their life course. Such a change allowed them, they reported, to focus on their personal strengths and assets, to strive towards their full potential and towards a sense of life contentment. The transition into a single life allowed each of the participants the freedom to express their own inner strength and revive their sense of self-efficacy.

All the women experienced trauma and relief upon separating, which is consistent with the results of Chiriboga and Cutler’s (1977) study. According to Chiriboga and Cutler separating people who left the familiar stressors of an unhappy marriage to the unknown stressors of a single lifestyle required new learning and new behaviors post-termination. All the women in this study experienced relief from being officially apart from their partners. They also reported experiencing trauma, given their range of emotions arising from the acknowledgement of their losses and the complex combinations of responsibilities they suddenly had to face. Determined to find meaning in their own lives, all of the women reported having to learn to adjust to their new lives and unfamiliar stressors.
The women emphasized the significance of their close friends as paramount in adjusting to their transition process; a finding which is very consistent with the literature (Brammer & Abrego, 1981; Daniels-Mohring & Berger, 1984; Schlossberg, 1981). Also, the women recognized the limitations of their friends capabilities during crucial periods in their transition and sought help from counsellors.

Regarding their research on transition, both Schlossberg (1981) and Brammer and Abrego (1981) underscore the importance of a support network. Such a network provides support and validation for the person undergoing a transition. All of the women reported the importance in knowing that their friends accepted them, appreciated them and were there for them. Such support contributed to the women acting on their desires for change. Daniels-Mohring and Berger’s (1984) results indicated that a better self-concept and overall mental well-being were seen in the participants in their study who maintained their support network post-divorce.

Throughout their transition process, while experiencing different intensities of stress and strain, the women assumed responsibility for themselves (and their children) and acted on decisions and opportunities. Such on-going action propelled them to make decisions and advance towards their personal and professional ambitions. They moved forward unwilling to be stopped by any kind of impediment. Such action is consistent with Hopson’s (1981) explanation of a transition process, that it is movement. According to Hopson "Nature abhors a vacuum and stability. A stable state is merely a stopping point on a
journey from one place to another" (p. 39).

Each woman's story contained relevant markers that could be interpreted within the model of Hopson's seven step transition process. The negotiation of the steps were not always continuous for the women who appeared to skip a step or two and then fall back. Such a procedure is also consistent with Hopson's (1984) explanation of the process. With regard to the first three stages of the transition process, many of the women experienced a point of 'immobilization' in their relationship which finally instigated their decision to leave. Hopson's stage of denial could be equated with the feeling of relief that the women initially felt, although briefly, once on their own. Depression was experienced by many within the relationship, yet post-termination it occurred with the realization of their losses, their overwhelming responsibilities and their need to deal with their aloneness. Working through their feelings of depression allowed the women to emotionally detach from their relationships and move into step four. Letting Go signified that the past had been put away.

Once the losses had been mourned and the current reality accepted, the women expressed a keener and more confident attitude about the pursuit of their goals and the management of their lifestyles. Testing was experienced by all the women and they reported that the trying out of new behaviors and experiences in all areas of their lives continued. They reported looking forward to exploring hidden talents and strengths. Step six refers to the cognitive process that was experienced by all of women. Here, they reflected on their life to date,
acknowledged who and where they were, where they are now and where they are headed. Internalization, Hopson's final step, was implied by all the women in terms of a comfort zone that they have reached thus far. They talked about the attainment of an inner peace, a satisfaction with their accomplishments to-date and awareness and acceptance of their human failings. Their quest towards self-enhancement continues. Hopson's final step is synonymous with Schlossberg's (1981) definition of successful adaptation in which the event, successfully negotiated, is now only a part of the individual's personal history. The women recounted that while their transition into a single life was a profound experience, it was now one of many experiences in their lives.

In accordance with the literature on stress and coping (Brammer & Abrego, 1981), the women, at the onset of their transition, constantly met with frustrations and/or setbacks. Such hassles were seen as challenges to be conquered for the pursuit of their goals. It was during these times that such relentless determination to forge ahead was reported by the women. Such frustrations and set-backs indicate the need for new behaviors and adjustments to their new lifestyles.

All the women reported having suffered to some degree financially post-termination. These results are consistent with the literature that highlights the economic disparity between women and their former spouses (Clarke-Stewart & Bailey, 1989; Grasby, 1989; Weitzman, 1985).

When rethinking their assumptions and their priorities, all of the women conveyed their liberation from traditional sex role
attitudes and beliefs. With the release of such attitudes, the women learned how to truly care for themselves. That is, they reported focusing inward in terms of exploring their feelings, thoughts, needs and wants. As a result, the women were freer to pursue their personal and professional goals. The relationship between successful adaptation to divorce and letting go of traditional sex role attitudes is consistent with the literature. Bloom and Clement (1984) reported that women who had not followed traditional sex roles appeared to adjust better to divorce. Better adjustment has also been reported for divorced women with higher self-orientation (Bloom & Clement; Brown & Manela, 1978; Davis & Aron, 1988).

All of the women had a focus on professional goals in which they could, either immediately or eventually, support themselves financially. Some of the women were pursuing diplomas or degrees in order to reach their status of independence. The goals and attitudes of these women are consistent with the literature in which educational fulfillment and/or employment income are contributors to greater mental-well being and positive outcomes post-termination of relationship (Ambert, 1983; Duffy, 1989).

Following their separations, all of the women experienced feelings of relief, personal growth and worthiness, and increased competency in conjunction with experiencing the full range of losses associated with this critical life event. These results are consistent with the many positive sentiments expressed by many women post-termination (Buehler & Langenbrunner, 1987). Given that such an event yielded both positive sentiments as well as sad and trying symptoms for all of the women, highlights the
paradoxical quality of the experience.

The three women who had children at home, found their quest towards independence at times an immense struggle given all the responsibility and constant hassles, yet each also experienced a renewed closeness to their children. This closeness to children is among the positive sentiments expressed by the participants in the study by Buehler and Langenbrunner (1987). Also the overwhelming responsibilities reported by the mothers in the study are consistent with the findings of other studies (Buehler & Langenbrunner; Clarke-Stewart & Bailey, 1989) suggesting that divorced mothers may be overburdened with the demands involving home, children and employment.

All the women were aware of the importance of their physical and mental health and were taking steps to enhance it. They had reflected on their health while in their relationships and recalled numerous symptoms. Physical pain was felt by many of the women and mental anguish experienced by all of them. Their health became a prime focus in their adjustment post-separation. This is consistent again with the literature suggesting that women with higher self-orientation adjust better to their divorce transition (Bloom & Clement, 1984). Focussing on health is also consistent with the literature reporting that women who practice preventative health care behaviors enjoy better physical and mental well-being post-termination of relationship. The literature also suggests that separated and divorced mothers, practicing primary health care behaviors, experience a positive redefinition of family life (Duffy, 1989). All of the women in the study reported the importance of good health in terms of
feeling positive about themselves and their families as well as having the energy to face the challenges and pursue the goals of their new lifestyle.

With regard to redefining family life, the four women with children were confident as mothers and satisfied with the adjustments that their children had gone through. They acknowledged the losses their children had to face yet knew that the re-defined family situation was better than the intact marriage for all concerned. Women and their successful adaptation to a single life is associated with primary health care practices resulting in a more positive outlook for themselves and their families.

**Implications for Future Research**

The findings of this research are consistent with many of the diverse findings in the areas of transition, divorce and the effects of divorce on women. The undertaking of this research was an attempt to understand the successful adaptation of women following the dissolution of their committed relationship. Given that it was an exploratory study, many fertile areas exist for further research on women and their transition into a single life.

A repetition of this study using a larger sample would facilitate verification of the findings and expand the information obtained in the present study. Further research too would be beneficial in the exploration of each one of the common themes as well as in the variations of the themes. Such findings may yield more refined themes than the ones that emanated from this research.
All the women in the study were from middle to upper-middle class income groups. Four of the five women had undergraduate degrees and the fifth woman had some college and a number of business diplomas. All of the women were pursuing professional career goals. Further research is needed with diverse groups of women following the termination of their committed relationship. That is, it would be of interest to explore successful adaptation of immigrant women and women from different cultures. Also, it would be necessary to look at women from different socioeconomic groups as well as women with different levels of education and different career aspirations.

All the women in the study were considered the initiators; a factor that may have influenced the speed and extent of their adaptation to this major life transition. It would be of research interest to explore the transition into single life from the perspective of women who have been left by their partners. Further research is also needed on the transition experiences of women who have not adapted well.

Implications for Counselling

Given the results of this study, several implications for counselling women following the termination of their committed relationships emerge. Practitioners in the helping professions will benefit from an understanding of the salient themes and related issues within the termination of relationship transition process. Such understanding would allow the therapist to be better able to assess his/her client and facilitate change towards successful adaptation. An awareness of the difficulties and losses associated with the termination of relationship would
persuade the therapist to refer the client in other areas, where necessary, such as medical doctors, lawyers and financial planners.

All of the women in the study recounted their need to mourn the losses they had experienced as a result of the ending of their committed relationship. An understanding of the numerous and diverse losses that could be associated with a relationship dissolution would enable the therapist to facilitate the necessary grief work with his/her clients.

The women in the study were all considered to be the initiators. The willingness to honestly face themselves by allowing their true feelings and attitudes to emerge, was a key experience in their decision to leave their relationships and in accessing their inner strengths. When encountering a woman client, the therapist would be better prepared to facilitate change if s/he was aware of the importance of self-confrontation of the client, especially in the early stages of the process. In this way, the therapist could help the client face her true feelings about the relationship as well as help her realize latent strengths and rethink prior beliefs and assumptions. Women, who do not seek therapy in the early stages or who were not the initiators, may be stuck or unable to adapt. The therapist with a knowledge of the process and its salient themes will be better able to work with the client and challenge her on issues and subjective beliefs that may be impeding her progress.

Within the process of self-confrontation, the women in the study began acknowledging their personal needs and wishes as well as reclaiming their latent strengths. The understanding of this
salient theme would enable the therapist to facilitate his/her clients in the use of "I" statements so that personal power is not relinquished again, especially in future relationships, whether personal or professional.

The women in the study reiterated the value they placed on their support network throughout their transition to a single life as well as the on-going importance of such friendships. The need to reach out, and to be accepted and validated was paramount for the women in the study. Understanding the value of a supportive network during this time, the therapist would help the client develop a network or build up her current one and guide her on how to use it efficiently.

Non-traditional sex role attitudes contributed to the successful adaptations of the women in the study. All of the women were able to rethink such attitudes and re-list their priorities in order to redefine family life as well as to forge ahead and pursue their goals. Therapists would be better prepared to facilitate change if they could challenge clients on the traditional sex role attitudes that may be impeding their adjustment and adaptation to a single life.

Goal setting, professional and personal, was extremely important for the adjustment and adaptation of all of the women in the study. Financial independence emerged as an important issue for all of the women. The therapist with such knowledge would help the woman client set professional goals that would lead her towards self-sufficiency. Personal goals, including health care, were also mentioned by all of the women. The client’s pursuit of personal goals towards a renewed sense of
self-efficacy would be facilitated by the therapist. Having a clear set of both personal and professional goals inspired all of the women to the creation of their new life structure.

In consideration of a remarriage or a future committed relationship, understanding the transition process involved for successful adaptation to a single life would enable the therapist to facilitate the client’s continuing pursuit of personal and/or professional goals. The analogy of the letter "H" could be suggested when exploring the union of two partners in a healthy committed relationship. Each partner would be seen as a vertical post with the freedom to grow both personally and professionally. The horizontal bar that would join the posts would signify the strong commitment each partner has towards the other in terms of love, trust, respect and support. Such a commitment would allow each partner to give to the other and willingly, each would assess any necessary compromises for the sake of strengthening the relationship as well as contributing to the growth of each individual involved.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of successful adaptation for women following the termination of their committed relationship was explored in this study. The results undoubtedly indicated that the transition process for each one of these women was one that was extremely challenging and required determination to persevere through it. Not only did these women confront themselves and refuse to live any longer in a relationship they deemed unhealthy; but they also took the responsibility to question their lives and they embraced the challenge with its unforeseen
obstacles to reach their aspired goals and seek the meaning and self-respect that they so deserved.
References


Riessman, C.K., & Gerstel, N. (1985). Marital dissolution and health: Do males or females have greater risk? *Social Science & Medicine, 20*(6), 627-635.


Announcement
Are you divorced or out of a long term committed relationship? Have you experienced personal growth as a result of the dissolution of your marriage or relationship?

I am a graduate student at the University of British Columbia, and I am looking for participants to interview for my master's thesis in Counselling Psychology on "The Transition For Women Into A Single Life." The project is being supervised by:
Dr. Judith Daniluk
Department of Counselling Psychology
Faculty of Education
University of British Columbia

CRITERIA FOR PARTICIPANTS:

* That you feel you have personally grown as a result of the dissolution of your marriage or relationship
* That it has not been longer than 6 years since the separation
* That you have remained single
* That each participant be open and willing to discuss their feelings and experiences regarding their relationship termination process and transition to a single lifestyle

Note: Names will not be used in the research study, and all information will be held confidential.

All responses will be greatly appreciated.

PLEASE CALL: CLAIRE at 925-2393
Appendix B

Sample Questions
SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

Leading Question:

***CAN YOU TELL ME HOW YOU FEEL YOU HAVE POSITIVELY GROWN AS A RESULT OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP’S TERMINATION?

Other questions that may follow:

How have your priorities changed? or did they?

Looking back, what key differences/changes do you detect within yourself?

What experiences stand out in recalling your separation and your life afterwards?

How do you see yourself, your expectations, five years from now?

With regard to your adjustment post-termination, could you comment on the following issues and their effect on your transition process: financial; rent/own home; employment; support network; custody arrangements; children’s adjustment?
Appendix C

Consent Form
CONSENT FORM

Research Topic: THE TRANSITION FOR WOMEN INTO A SINGLE LIFE

MA Candidate: Claire Sutton

Faculty Adviser: Dr. Judith Daniluk
Tel:  (604) 822-5768

The MA Candidate will meet with the participant in a private session for the purposes of interviewing the participant on issues related to the research study in question.

The purpose of the study is to explore the feelings, attitudes and experiences of a small sample of women who have successfully adapted to the termination of a committed relationship. The objectives to be reached with this study are: the complete understanding of each participant's own transition process; the notification of similarities and differences in the transition process between participants; and, the opportunity for participants to share their stories.

Each participant will be interviewed in-depth by the graduate student. Each interviewing session will last no longer than two hours with each participant having as many sessions as necessary to tell their story.

The session(s) will be audiotaped. All audiotapes and other information pertaining to the participant will be confidential and will be kept safely in a special container in the home-office of the graduate student. The audiotapes will be transcribed, and together with the other information reviewed only by the MA Candidate and her faculty adviser. A pseudonym for each participant will be used to mark tapes and files so that the participants' names do not appear on any label or written material. As soon as the study has been completed, accepted and returned to the MA Candidate, the audiotapes will be erased.

The participant can refuse to participate or can withdraw at any time during the study if she wishes to do so.

I, ____________________________, agree to be interviewed in an audiotaped session(s) as outlined above. I accept a copy of this form and thereby ensure my consent to participate in this study.

Signature: ______________________________

Date: __________________________