

**THROUGH THE EYES OF ADULT CHILDREN OF DIVORCE:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH
TO UNDERSTANDING THE DEVELOPMENT OF RESILIENCE**

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the essence of the lived experience of resilient adult children of divorce and challenge the prevalence of positivist research, which examines divorce and resiliency as mutually exclusive phenomena. This study was embedded in an existential or constructivist perspective of reality, and conceptualized through application of family systems, socialist feminist, and risk and resiliency theories. The focus of this study was on young adults' perceptions of the process of their parents' divorce in an effort to identify the meanings they associated with the risk and protective factors they encountered growing up and the development of their self-defined resilient behaviours. The research process included in-depth retrospective interviews with adult children of divorce and an opportunity for them to provide feedback on the compilation of the data. The data were analyzed for descriptive statements relative to their structural and textural experiences, and for themes potentially related to the development of the co-researchers' resilience. Their structural and textural experiences were found to triangulate with findings from prior studies, which also enhanced credibility of these co-researchers definitions of success and resilience and the factors they identify as contributing to the development of their resilience. Implications for social work practice were derived through a combined family systems/socialist feminist analysis that identified areas of family functioning and patriarchal definitions that interfered with the process of reorganization, as well as acknowledgement of the meanings created by co-researchers that contributed to the development of resilience.

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INTRODUCTION

“In an attempt to understand, anticipate, and treat the pathological, the survivors and thrivers appear to pass almost unnoticed amidst the holocaust of disadvantage and tragedies of those who succumb to it” (Anthony & Cohler, 1987, p. ix in Palmer, 1997). This is the experience of many adult children of divorce who have grown into healthy, competent young adults despite the supposed, debilitating effects of divorce.

Between the 1960's and 1970's the rate of divorce in Canada more than doubled. By 1980, the divorce rate peaked and although it has declined slightly since then, it remains at an astounding 40% (Kirn, 2000). Forty years of accumulated research relating to the implications of divorce on the men, women, and children who experience it reflects the nature of the controversies and debates surrounding it.

Research focusing on men's experience generally highlights the structural and emotional barriers to successful post divorce parenting and highlights the trends towards emotional and financial disengagement following marriage breakdown (Kruk, 1993; Pearson & Galloway, 1998). Research focusing on women's experience identifies systemic forces that perpetuate oppression highlighting physical abuse, poverty, and increased stress experienced as a result of inheriting responsibility for being breadwinner and raising the children (Arditti, 1997; Kruk, 1993; Scott & Lochhead, 1997). Based on these findings, the assumption that parental divorce is inherently harmful developed and was instrumental in directing problem based research to focus on *effects of divorce* on children and on *adjustment* and *outcomes* for children of divorce (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Research focusing on children's *experience*, expressed through the voice of the child of divorce, is virtually non-existent (Howard & Dryden, 1999).

Hence, the problem emerges as one of limited understanding into the phenomenon of survivors and thrivers in the population of adult children of divorce, an accumulation of research findings based on problem focused research, and minimal perspective from the voice of the adult child in defining the concept and meaning of success and resilience. Consequently, findings are controversial and vary in terms of identifying variables deemed to decrease risk factors for children, defining outcome measures for children, and determining the degree of harm perpetuated by divorce.

Some research indicates that positive outcomes for adult children of divorce are possible despite the inherent potential for risk factors and negative influence on life course (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Positive outcomes for children have been correlated with maintenance of a close post divorce relationship with both parents, minimum of discontinuity in their lives, reduction of exposure to inter-parental conflict, and maintenance of similarity in standard of living (Kelly, 1993). Identification of these variables provides direction for post divorce parenting, but negates to embed findings in a paradigm of a constructivist perspective of reality, thus discounting the role of the child in creating outcomes through reflexive processes.

Measures of successful outcomes include ability to develop and sustain relationships in adulthood, pursuit of post-secondary education (Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998), high school completion, occupational status, level of satisfaction with life (Biblarz & Gottainer, 2000), and behavioural, psychological, and social adjustment (Cooney & Kurtz, 1996). Said outcomes or measures of success allow us to determine degrees of influence of divorce on children but are culturally defined, gender biased, and socially imposed upon research participants (Thompson, 1992).

A recent and controversial 25 year study examines outcomes for children and culminates in the overwhelming finding that the majority of children are harmed by the imposition of divorce into their life, experience deleterious lifelong consequences secondary to reduced access to opportunities and resources, and consistently achieve less as adults than their peers from intact families (Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blakeslee, 2000). Wallerstein's description is similar to descriptions of marginalized populations, indicative that children of divorce are either experiencing oppression or are being represented as such (Swigonski, 1993). Although she attempted to engage children in qualitative research, the lack of a comparison group, the lack of rigorous and systematic methods, and the over-utilization of clinical samples all served to reduce the credibility of this study. However, this study exemplifies the societal process that creates power, knowledge, and privilege through the influence of dominant ideology on particular research (Joyappa & Self, 1996; Thompson, 1992).

If research is conceptualized as an ongoing dialogue, then the contributions made by Wallerstein et al., (2000) to the conversation regarding adult children of divorce, perpetuate the myth of the unqualified superiority of the two-parent family and the image of children as passive victims to parental divorce. This is consistent with the majority of prior research that fails to question the oppressive societal structures that may contribute to reduced success amongst children of divorce or acknowledge the *outliers* or exceptions in the findings. This research is in direct conflict with inquiry completed from a strengths (Saleebey, 1997) or resiliency perspective (Howard & Dryden, 1999) that challenges existing research and attempts to answer questions from a novel point of inquiry.

Contrary to problem focused research, strengths perspective attempts to transform the “diction and symbolism of weakness, failure, and deficit (which) shapes how others regard clients, how clients regard themselves, and how resources are allocated to groups of clients” (Saleebey, 1997, p. 5). It attempts to develop an understanding of how to mobilize the inherent strengths of individuals and enhance access to their potential resources through increased understanding and knowledge of their experience.

Through this lens, research findings indicate that as many as one in three high risk children become healthy competent adults and demonstrate *resilience* behaviours (Jew, Green, & Kroger, 1999). Definitions of resilience behaviours abound. However, common to these definitions are concepts of being strengthened by experiences of adversity, demonstrating successful adaptation and manifesting competence despite exposure to stressful life events, and developing the ability to thrive and mature in the face of adverse circumstances. For the purposes of this paper, resilience will be defined as the ability to “love well, play well, work well, and expect well” (Jew et al., 1999, p.76).

Thus, the purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of resiliency from the perspective of resilient adult children of divorce. As such, it is to determine how they perceive their experience of the reorganization of their family and consequent redistribution of family resources and how this influenced development of their resiliency.

This study will contribute to present knowledge on this topic by informing from a new perspective – that of the adult child of divorce – and counter the problem focused, negative outcome research prevalent in the field. In addition to contributing to and challenging existing research, it is hoped the process and findings of this study will

reduce oppression of children of divorce through facilitating expression of their concerns, enhancing understanding of their experience, and focusing future research and inquiries into this phenomenon. From a practice perspective, the findings will inform the development of child and family policy and post divorce parenting educational programs and will enhance the practice of social work with divorcing families.

To achieve these purposes, the study will address the following questions: What is the experience of divorce for resilient adult children of divorce? How did their lives change and what meanings did those changes hold for them? What do they think contributed to the development of their strengths? The researcher will not be asking why some children of divorce do not succeed, or examine what aspects of parenting contribute to negative outcomes. Nor will predetermined measures of what contributes to defining and developing resilience be utilized. Rather, the approach of this research will be a more qualitative, phenomenological, inductive aim that attempts to understand the essence of the experience of divorce from the perspective of adult children who have emerged strong despite the supposed risks.

Although these questions and delimitations acknowledge that some children do not fare well, this research will be based on an underlying assumption that growing up in a lone parent female headed family is not inherently harmful. In support of this premise, recent studies examining differences between children who lost their father through divorce and those who lost their father through death, show that the latter group was indistinguishable from children raised in intact homes in terms of outcomes (Biblarz & Gottainer, 2000). These findings allude to the potential that something other than the phenomenon of an absent father is responsible for both positive and negative outcomes

for children residing in lone parent female headed households and introduce the possibility of implications relative to the process of divorce and post divorce lifestyle.

Divorce ritual is the term coined to describe the social construction of divorce – beliefs, rituals, feelings, and behaviours relative to familial reorganization, that are sanctioned and perpetuated by society and its structures (Larson, 1993). Inherent in divorce ritual are gender biases which affect women and consequently 86% of children of divorce who are awarded to their care (Pearson & Galloway, 1998), the negative definitions and ownership paradigms created by the language of divorce (Landau, Bartoletti, Mesbur, 1987; McWhinney, 1995; Ricci, 1980) and the redistributive rather than restorative basis of justice upon which the legal process is based (LeBaron, 1997).

Embedded in this study is an assumption that it is *divorce ritual* (Larson, 1993) rather than the experience of being raised in a lone parent female headed family that imbues the potential to create harm or develop resilience. Hence, it contains the bias that divorce is not inherently harmful. Accompanying this bias is the assumption that prior research is driven by a conservative ideology in an effort to perpetuate the notion of the superiority of the two-parent family and provide society with relief from responsibility for these lone parent female-headed families.

These assumptions and biases are derived from a review of the literature and the researcher's personal and professional experiences of divorce. For example, my exposure to numerous successful adult children of divorce and my own experience of being a self defined resilient adult child of divorce juxtaposed against Wallerstein's et al., (2000) research that culminates in the recommendations that parents should stay together without qualification, calls me to examine the phenomenon of resilience at a deeper level.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to challenge positivist research findings, create knowledge from the perspective of the adult child, and develop an understanding of resilience.

This report is organized into seven chapters. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature and explores the experience of divorce for fathers and mothers to the degree that it impacts on the experience of children. It also describes the experience for children and offers a summary of outcome studies. Chapter Three provides an overview of the conceptual context within which this research was designed and completed. In Chapter Four, the methodology of the study is outlined. Phenomenology is explored in relation to the underlying constructs of the study and chosen methodology. This section also provides a description of the techniques utilized to recruit participants and obtain and analyze data. Some critique is provided of the limitations and ethical dilemmas encountered in using this particular method. Chapter Five is a presentation of the findings from the perspective of the participants along with observations and interpretations of the researcher. In Chapter Six, the findings are examined through the lens of literature, theories, and implications for social work practice. Chapter Seven, the conclusion, offers a summary, some of the researcher's reflections, and suggestions for future research considerations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 1995, 47,000 children in Canada were subjects of custody and support orders under the Divorce Act (Pearson & Galloway, 1998). Half of these children likely have or will experience the total disengagement of their father as a result of structural and emotional barriers to remaining involved (Kruk, 1993). Current trends reflect a minimum of change since divorce became prevalent within Canadian society and continue to enforce a predominant structure of sole maternal custody awards. Children who are kept informed of the divorce process that is unfolding in healthy, age appropriate ways and have avenues to express their emotions, experience decreased anxiety, increased sense of control, enhanced understanding of the decisions being made and feel empowered to communicate their needs to their parents (Lansky, Swift, Manley, Elmore, & Gerety, 1996).

The experience of separation and divorce for the majority of families is characterized by chaos common to significant life transitions with emotions ranging from loss and grief, guilt and anger, ambivalence and relief (Cohen & Dattner, 1995). Often, said emotions can interfere with parents' ability to discern between theirs and their children's needs for the transition, and to make care decisions reflective of competent and insightful parenting (Cohen & Dattner, 1995). If anything can be said definitively about the implications of divorce and the subsequent trend for fathers to disengage from their families, it is that the psychological, emotional, and economic consequences of divorce are life long and affect all members of a divorcing family; especially the children (Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998).

Experience of Divorce for Fathers

The experience for fathers is one of grief and loss (Kruk, 1993). Stripped of parental rights throughout the process of divorce, left with insufficient social support and adequate role models of successful non-custodial fathers, men struggle to redefine their role as “father without children”. They attempt to meet their obligations to be a “visiting” parent and financially support their children, but identify many structural and psychological barriers to succeeding (Kruk, 1993; Pearson & Galloway, 1998).

The structural barriers rise up out of an adversarial divorce process that occurs within a system defined by many men as having considerable gender bias towards women (Pearson & Galloway, 1998). Although studies vary in number, it is accepted that custody is awarded to fathers less than 7% of the time (Pearson & Galloway, 1998). Men’s efforts to increase access, gain shared custody or, at the very least, exercise the access identified in the agreements are met with feminist critique that said actions are attempts to reduce financial obligations and interfere with a custodial mother’s power in relationship with her children (Pearson & Galloway, 1998).

Men indicate that attempts to remain involved with their children are usurped. In one study, 48% of the fathers interviewed reported that access was consistently denied or interfered with – children were unavailable, mothers criticized fathers or instigated conflict in the presence of children in presumed efforts to create disincentives for fathers to continue exercising access (Kruk, 1993).

Psychological barriers include grief and loss of a magnitude equivalent to the death of a child – perhaps deemed worse because the child lives but is inaccessible (Kruk in Pearson & Galloway, 1998). Fathers feel guilt and inadequacy at their inability to

parent in the manner they had been accustomed to and their inability to re-establish themselves in the lives of their children with perceived disincentive from the custodial mother (Kruk, 1993). A self-perpetuating phenomenon, if fathers can gain a sense of success in their new role of non-custodial father, the tendency is to continue to remain involved and provide both emotional and financial support to their children (Kruk, 1993). Similarly, if they are unable to achieve some level of being integral to their children's lives, they disengage and move on to attempt to create new lives for themselves in patterns of relocating and remarriage (Kruk, 1993).

Part of the cognitive justification that occurs at this time is that "if I don't have access to my children, then why should I contribute towards them financially". This is reflective of the patriarchal or capitalist values that permeate the Patriarchal Model of the family (Murphy, 2000), and the legal system's attempt to delineate traditional roles following divorce (Kruk, 1993), without ascribing the traditional "rights" of ownership to the male breadwinner in the family. Subsequently, it is understandable that men, once disengaged from their families, feel a justifiable anger at having to "pay" for something for which they are gaining no benefit (Pearson & Galloway, 1998), and being disadvantaged financially to move on to "purchase" a quality post-divorce lifestyle (Finnie, 1996). This is coupled by men's perception that their patterns of disengagement have actually been imposed by their ex-wives and sanctioned by a court system they had assumed would assist them (Kruk, 1993).

Experience of Divorce for Mothers

Based on this understanding of men's experience, it should come as no surprise that a woman's focus following divorce tends to be to achieve a "clean break" from her past relationship (Kruk, 1993). The two significant aspects of a custodial mother's experience are her experience of "role overload" subsequent to being a single parent and often alienated from extended family (Kruk, 1993), and the exacerbation of her economic vulnerability (Arditti, 1997).

Role overload is the experience of having to "do it all" (Kruk, 1993), and not having anyone to hand off to. The ambivalence of Canadian society is no more apparent than in this situation, where expectations of being *a gainfully employed, contributing member of society* and a *traditionally defined nurturing mother* are virtually mutually exclusive but expected of a lone female parent (Freiler & Cerny, 1998). As demographics change and an increasing number of women enter the work place (O'Hara, 1998), there is a trend towards fathers and mothers in intact families taking up more of a dual natured role (Kruk, 1993). During divorce, the legal system reverts to reinforcing traditional roles by imposing the bulk of child rearing on the custodial mother and financial responsibility on the non-custodial father (Kruk, 1993). Kruk, (1993) also points out that "maintenance of traditional roles (by the legal system) is integral to the conservative agenda" (p.16) and that employers have long experienced benefit from women's receipt of low wages and men's investment in career and the work place.

Other researchers identify the perception of shared parenting roles within two parent families as impacting child support policy when a couple divorces. For example, Freiler & Cerny (1998) identify the belief that if both parents can perform the dual role of

economic and emotional support, then a lone female parent is capable of financially supporting and nurturing her children without significant help from an absent father.

Absent from these assumptions, however, is the factoring in of economic prejudice experienced by women, and subsequently, their children, in the work place setting. Studies indicate that women tend to be more vulnerable economically because their economic security is directly linked to access to income of other family members (Lochhead & Scott, 2000). When women experience divorce, access to husbands' incomes is denied but, the responsibilities of feeding, sheltering, and generally providing for the children remains constant (Pearson & Galloway, 1998). Women's economic power is re-established through the orders and agreements determined at the time of the separation/divorce (Arditti, 1997), however, financial vulnerability remains if a woman is forced to depend on the integrity of an ex-spouse to provide reliable payments of said awards. Without child or spousal support awards and a means of enforcing payment, women remain victims of a labour market that provides them inadequate compensation for raising a family (Arditti, 1997).

Feminist analyses highlight the disadvantage women experience in the workplace subsequent to the caring responsibilities ascribed to them by society (Lochhead & Scott, 2000). Wages earned by women equate to \$.65 for every dollar earned by men, they make up only 17% of the population in work place positions earning more than \$51,000 per year, and in 1994, 71% of women earned less than \$28,000 as an annual pre tax salary (Scott & Lochhead, 1997). Essentially, "when women work, it is in a culture that pays them less than men, aggregates them in low paying jobs, and provides little in the way of parenting support" (Arditti, 1997, p. 82). As a result, children are being raised in

homes that provide reduced economic and emotional resources, and experience implications that are most significant and long lasting of all (Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998).

Experience of Divorce for Children

According to Wallerstein and Lewis, (1998), one of the leading researchers in the field of the impact of divorce on children, as a society we have grossly underestimated the debilitating and long lasting effects of the experience of divorce on our children. In her recent paper, The Long-Term Impact of Divorce on Children, she presents information from a developmental perspective, identifying the complications divorce renders on the normative developmental tasks and processes.

Keeping in mind the deleterious cumulative effect of the experiences of their parents, the children of divorce experience the fallout of their parents' choices throughout their lives (Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998). Children of preschool age suffer a decrease in parental nurturance and physical care. Children in middle years speak of losing their childhood, as they are required to take on responsibilities ranging from household tasks to providing physical care for their younger siblings and emotional support to parents. Young adolescents experience a lack of supervision, which renders them more vulnerable to the tension and peer expectations of teen years. As these children grow into young adulthood, they find their options for further education and career reduced compared to their peers from intact families because of the financial constraints inherent in lone female-headed households and the reduced involvement of fathers who had disengaged partially or completely over the years. As the children in this study approached their fourth decade, their ability to move confidently into creating families for themselves was

greatly hampered by residual anxiety emanating from the experience of their parents' divorce. Children's emotional experiences range from intense grief and loneliness, to fears of abandonment, vulnerability, disappointment, anxiety and a yearning for someone simply to take care of them, throughout their life span.

In addition to the emotional experience of children, this study also examined the effects of court orders pertaining to custody and access and the resulting relationships between children and their parents. These children experienced heartbreak over fathers who entered and exited their lives without provocation or notice. They felt frustration at being tied into custody and access agreements that had been determined at preschool ages but no longer met their needs as older children and adolescents. Many indicated feeling as though they were "pawns" who bore the brunt of their parents' conflict throughout the divorce process and their lives. The resulting relationships, especially with non-custodial fathers, were much less stable than parent child relationships maintained in intact families (Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998).

Despite the overwhelming psychosocial concerns this information inspires, it is the exacerbating effect of the economic reality for these children that has contributed most significantly to their inability to be successful adults. All of the children in the study originated from middle class homes and neighbourhoods with well-educated parents and most descended into standards of living more reflective of low income or impoverished homes. At the 25-year mark, only three of the 130 children were upwardly mobile compared to their parents' standard of living (Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998).

Although not all the children descended into poverty, the increased impoverishment in their lives had a significant effect on the ultimate direction of their

lives. (Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998). Impoverishment in Canada is defined quite differently than poverty in third world countries. For women and children, it is a reality of “deprivation and need” (Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD), 2000a, p.1), in a world of seemingly plenty.

When two parent families subsist at the poverty or low-income level, divorce results in both custodial mother and non-custodial father descending into poverty (Arditti, 1997). When the family enjoys a middle or upper class lifestyle, divorce results in a significant drop in the standard of living for the lone female parent and her children (Arditti, 1997).

Recent studies show that “1.4 million children reside in families that struggle to provide the basics for their children” (Novick, 1999, p.1) and 65% of these reside in lone female households (CCSD, 2000a). Compared to their counterparts in middle class families, children raised in impoverished or low-income homes are:

- 1.3 times more likely to grow up in substandard housing
- 1.9 times more likely to live in neighbourhoods where crime and access to drugs is prevalent
- 1.4 times more likely to engage in aggressive behaviour
- 1.5 times more likely to be hyperactive
- 1.8 times more likely to exhibit delinquent behaviour
- 1.7 times more likely to experience serious health problems such as speech, hearing, and cognition difficulties
- 2.2 times more likely to experience developmental delays
- 1.8 times more likely to be registered in special education classes
- 1.3 times less likely to participate in organized sports
- 2.5 times more likely to be “idle” adolescents rather than attending school or working (CCSD, 2000b)

The economic influence, coupled with the relational deprivation children of divorce experience, creates a life long effect impacting these young people’s opportunities and abilities to be successful in adult life.

Outcome Studies for Children of Divorce

The bulk of literature relevant to the current study is based on quantitative research (Amato, 1993; Gahler, 1998; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999), although some qualitative studies exist (Barnes, 1999; Palmer, 1997; Retig, Leichtentritt, & Stanton, 1999). Based on the accumulation of research focused on children of divorce, many review, critique, and summation articles are available which provide succinct synopses of the history and content of the research (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999).

The early research was based on two main assumptions: the superiority of the two-parent nuclear family for raising children, and the inherent trauma of divorce per se (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). These studies revealed inconclusive and conflicting results and were criticized for flawed methodology apparent in sampling. Also, they failed to acknowledge mediating variables and inherent biases and assumptions, which ultimately produced results confirming the hypothesis that divorce would harm children (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999).

Later studies acknowledged the inconsistency of results of the early studies and identified variables such as culture, gender, socioeconomic status, and age at time of divorce, and time lapsed since divorce (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Focus of examination was on the diversity in patterns of adjustment within various populations, between siblings, and on the interaction of the variables identified. These studies were based on cluster analyses, structural equation modeling, longitudinal designs, and use of multiple measures and observation methods (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999).

Criticisms of quantitative and qualitative research include reliance on clinical samples which provides a skewed and non-representative sample of the population, lack of comparison groups for longitudinal studies (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999), and lack of contextual information of pre divorce child and family functioning in crisis focused studies, critical to credibility of findings (Gahler, 1998).

Major findings indicate that most children experience emotions of anger, depression, fear and guilt in the time period immediately following the physical separation of their parents (Gahler, 1998; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Wallerstein et al., 2000). There is agreement among researchers that the long-term effects of economic hardship, loss of parental support, and exposure to parental conflict results in poor outcomes for children (Gahler, 1998; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 1999; Pagelow, 1990; Wallerstein et al., 2000). However, despite accumulation of research, the initial debate continues: Is divorce inherently harmful to children? Some studies show that children from divorced homes consistently score lower as an aggregate than peers from intact families (John, 2000; Wallerstein et al., 2000). Other research cites that children from intact homes with high conflict fare most poorly, which supports the idea that a good divorce is superior to a bad marriage (Gahler, 1998; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Further studies identify children, especially girls, who succeed in remarkable ways (Gahler, 1998; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Palmer, 1997).

Researchers have yet to achieve agreement on the joint – sole custody dispute. Some findings indicate joint custody results in better outcomes (Amato, 2000), while others show no difference in outcomes (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Some

studies have shown that children fare better in single parent father headed households than mother headed (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). A variety of hypotheses have been presented to explain this finding – most of which have been found to correlate to economic resources.

Additional debate remains in studies of gender differences (Gahler, 1998). Initial research indicated boys adjust more poorly than girls as determined by the tendency for boys to *externalize* and girls to *internalize* their emotional responses to parental divorce. Externalizing manifests itself in aggression and hostility while internalizing results in withdrawal (Gahler, 1998). Speculation that externalizing behaviours are easier to observe and tend to alienate external resources while internalizing behaviours are less observable or measurable and encourage external support provides rationale for the debate. Overall, studies show that gender differences diminish over time (Gahler, 1998).

Application of Literature to Proposed Study

Encapsulated within the literature review is a broad description of divorce ritual. The described experience of the various family members exemplifies the degree to which divorce has been conceptualized as the *ending* of a particular family unit. Current divorce laws, court processes, and family policies perpetuate the notion that the family is an economic unit within society. The descriptive language and focus of the process is on the legal rights of the adults to maintain ownership over specific family assets rather than acknowledging or addressing the changes that are occurring between the relationships of family members. Divorce agreements often pertain to ongoing financial responsibilities

in very specific ways rather than addressing the manner in which children's relationship needs will continue to be met.

The literature review suggests the existence of an inherent belief, within society, that the more completely ties are cut and connections reduced through the process of divorce, the more effectively people can move forward with their lives (Colman, 2000; Dudley, 1996; Landau, Bartoletti, & Mesbur, 1987). However, this creates mutually exclusive expectations in terms of roles and responsibilities of parents towards their children, financially and relationally, and does not provide a framework for reconstructing a co-parenting relationship once the ties of husband and wife are dissolved. Also, it condones behaviours between divorcing spouses, often aggressive, violent, and disrespectful in nature, that would not be condoned in any other social situation.

The outcome studies identify the presence of successful adult children of divorce despite suggesting that divorce is inherently harmful to children. Curiously, there is no evidence of explanation of this phenomenon, nor of it having been explored to any degree. It seems that, as divorce ritual has developed, many of its constructs are accepted by society as a whole as the only truths applicable to the divorce process and families who engage in a process more consistent with the reorganization of the unit and maintenance of cooperative family relationships are seen as the exception to the rule.

There is some reference in the literature to a *good* divorce and *bad* divorce (Larson, 1993), but there is minimal differentiation between outcomes for children based on the type of divorce they experienced. Nor are children asked, what constitutes a good or bad divorce for them. An assumption is made that every divorce is bad for children.

Also, there is no evidence in the literature of children having been asked what is important to them, at the time, or retrospectively (Amato, 2000; Barnes, 1999; Howard & Dryden, 1999).

Ultimately, the research questions emerged out of the researcher's need to reconcile some of the contradictions and incongruencies implicit in the literature and the desire to better understand some of the unexplored areas related to positive outcomes. The information provided by the literature will be used two fold within this study: 1) as representative of current divorce ritual and thus a valid framework for analyzing the experience of the co-researchers, and 2) to triangulate the data pertaining to described structural and textural experiences to enhance overall credibility of the study.

Finally, theories and constructs utilized in previous research include risk and resiliency (Amato, 2000; Fraser & Richman, 1999; Howard & Dryden, 1999; Jew et. al, 1999; Retig et. al, 1999), family systems (Barnes, 1999; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 1999), crisis theory (Gahler, 1998), developmental theory (Amato, 1993), feminist, attachment, attribution, and symbolic interactionism theories (Amato, 2000). In terms of rationale for the current study, recent research is utilizing and being strengthened by combining three or four perspectives to develop theoretical constructs in recognition of the complex nature of inquiry into family functioning (Amato, 1993; Amato, 2000; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Therefore, based on the literature, it seems there is strong support to examine the phenomenon of resilience in adult children of divorce, utilizing combined perspectives of family systems, socialist feminist, and risk and resiliency to organize and understand the data, from a sample of non-clinical participants purposively chosen as demonstrating self-defined resiliency.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL & CONCEPTUAL CONTEXT

One of the strongest criticisms of qualitative research is the propensity for diminished objectivity or introduction of bias on the part of the researcher. Qualitative researchers rebuke this criticism through suggesting that all researchers, quantitative and qualitative alike, bring bias to their studies by virtue of the theories, paradigms and beliefs, inherent in their being, utilized to construct their world view. Thus, qualitative research does not refute the presence of researcher bias nor boast a position of objectivity, but rather cautions the reader to maintain a healthy skepticism of results from any qualitative or quantitative study (Krueger, 1988).

Qualitative research recommends that bias and world-views be identified and declared. This is to enable readers to better understand where the researcher is located in the study and thus examine the results in their appropriate context. The process of identification and declaration also enhances self-awareness on the part of the researcher and provides a process for suspending, to the best of their ability, the bias they bring.

Bias is also conceptualized in qualitative research as potentially a weakness and strength. Although it is acknowledged that undeclared, unsuspected bias can interfere with the research design, create selective attention to particular data, and result in the production of self fulfilling results (Creswell, 1998; Kvale, 1996), it is also believed that researchers who explore areas that are of interest or grounded in personal experience have potential to contribute knowledge and depth of understanding that may enhance the study in all areas of design, data collection and data analysis.

Thus, as part of this study, the researcher utilizes this chapter to declare the world view from which this study emerged which is a cumulative paradigm consisting of the theoretical underpinnings of family systems and socialist feminism, a belief in the possibility that a multitude of variables interact to create our strengths and vulnerabilities as expressed by writings on risk and resiliency, and personal experience with divorce as both a child of parental divorce and a divorcing parent.

Grounded in a biological conceptualization of the family as a unit of interdependent members who “function in reciprocal relationship to one another” (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, p.5), family systems theory provides a paradigm for describing, understanding, and predicting aspects of family functioning such as roles, rules, boundaries, and patterns of interaction (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). The underlying assumptions are that family members function in response to each other and that observable behaviours are indicative of unobservable emotional processes occurring within the system (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). The researcher believes that family systems theory effectively conceptualizes divorce as an ongoing family process, rather than a *life event*, and provides a framework for analysis of the multiple changes inherent in the divorce process (Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 1999).

Historically, marriage, and subsequently, divorce has created economic and social disadvantage for divorced women and their children because of patriarchal structures inherent in society (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986; Mahoney, 1996). Thus, it requires that family systems theory be informed by a critical theory that ensures analysis of power and oppression from a gendered perspective. The researcher holds as inherent in her world-view, the basic tenets of socialist feminist theory. Family interaction is

perceived through the lens of multi-layered oppression created by the intersection of capitalism and patriarchy. Of particular interest in this study is examination of the subsequent correlation between patriarchal structures and the economic disadvantage of individuals and families experiencing divorce (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986; Dominelli & McLeod, 1989; Payne, 1997; Pohl & Boyd, 1993; Tong, 1989).

The underlying proposition of socialist feminism is that women's current economic status and function is determined by her physical capacity to bear children and the consequent implications for her increased domestication and reduced participation in a patriarchal labour force designed to support capitalism (Bryson, 1993; Chafetz, 1997; Dominelli & McLeod, 1989; Donovan, 1985; Tong, 1989; Wright, 1997; Wuest, 1997). This *division of labour* (Tong, 1989) relegates men and women into breadwinner and domestic roles, respectively, influencing the social construction of marriage and reorganization of the family through the process of divorce. The researcher has developed a conceptualization of socialist feminist theory that encompasses oppression that occurs to men, women, and children through the process of divorce in terms of roles and responsibilities enforced through laws and family policy. It includes an understanding of the role expectations enforced by society that reduce a family's ability to reorganize to best suit its needs and of the economic disadvantage experienced by all of divorce's participants. It also informs the design, study, and analysis by challenging positivist measures of success, questioning divorce ritual, and providing a structure to examine power relationships and societal structures that may contribute to poor outcomes for children and parents. However, neither family systems nor feminist theories

acknowledge the phenomenon of diverse or unpredictable responses to risk factors and oppressive structures.

Rooted in a social constructivist assumption, resiliency perspective recognizes the existential and reflexive nature of reality (Saleebey, 1997). This perspective is especially pertinent to the study because of the focus on the development of resilience and its congruence with the researcher's belief system. Generally, researchers exploring the phenomenon of risk and resiliency agree upon the concept of risk factors "that either singly or in combination have been shown to render children's failure to thrive more likely" (Howard & Dryden, 1999, p. 308). Protective factors are generally categorized as internal and external assets (Howard & Dryden, 1999) and are believed to moderate the influence and potential chain effect of risk factors (Fraser & Richman, 1999). Internal assets refer to skills such as social competence, problem solving, autonomy, sense of purpose, and sense of control over one's destiny (Howard & Dryden, 1999). External assets refer to family, school, and community (Howard & Dryden, 1999).

The accepted conceptualization is that the presence of risk factors loosely correlates with cause of negative outcomes for children (Fraser & Richman, 1999). Other researchers attempt to extrapolate and identify relationships between risk/protective factors (Howard & Dryden, 1999; Jew et al., 1999), and describe thresholds of the moderating ability of protective factors (Fraser & Richman, 1999). The main critique of resiliency research lies within the construct of defining success and resilience. It seems there is controversy in terms of determining what level of functioning is considered *success* and in identifying absolute or varying degrees of resilience (Fraser & Richman,

1999). This critique supports the researcher's question regarding the measures utilized in outcome studies for adult children of divorce.

Finally, in relation to this study, the bias inherent in the declaration of a risk and resiliency paradigm is significant in that it is derived from personal experience and presupposes a belief in the human spirit to succeed despite immense obstacles. It is the underlying motivation for this study and the basis of the desire to better understand the *how* of this phenomenon.

As a self defined, resilient adult child of divorce and subsequently a divorced lone-female parent, I have developed theories and assumptions about the social construction of divorce, the reflexive process that creates people's realities, and the development of resilience. Although none are original ideas, I have woven concepts together over time to create a personal conceptualization of the experience of divorce.

Essentially, I believe the legal system has conceptualized divorce as a legal process with emotional implications. This perpetuates the adversarial nature of a process that could conceivably be reconstructed as an emotional process with legal implications, which might allow for greater compassion between those involved. The prevalence of negative language describing divorce and its participants contributes to unacknowledged shame and reduced opportunities to grieve losses associated with divorce. Language defines divorce as an event in time and divorcing family members as responsible for their circumstance rather than recognizing the psychosocial and economic structures embedded in the causes and outcomes. Such rhetoric provides society with relief from responsibility for the individuals and families affected by this lifelong experience.

Finally, I have observed in my family of origin and in my own children and stepchildren, the phenomenon of people responding differently to virtually identical circumstances of divorce. I have observed diversity in their conceptualization of the situation, in their definition of themselves, and ultimately, in the ability to actively create lives allowing them to love, play, work, and hold positive expectations of their future.

Inherent in the description of the theoretical and conceptual context are preconceived notions about family, power, divorce process, resiliency, and human spirit. It remains incumbent on the reader to understand this study as situated within this context and on the researcher to attempt to suspend these notions until analysis of data.

CHAPTER FOUR

DESIGN

Phenomenological Tradition informed by Feminist Perspective.

Based on the philosophical ideology of existentialism, this phenomenological study is grounded in the belief that reality is constructed through a process whereby individuals ascribe meanings to experiences and subsequently respond to the reality they've created (Creswell, 1998). Feminist perspective informs this understanding of reality through identification and deconstruction of gender bias inherent in society, which creates and perpetuates oppression (Joyappa & Self, 1996). In particular, the process of divorce is riddled with gender politics (Cohen, 1998) and an examination of adult children's experiences resulting from the dissolution of marriage requires analysis informed by a gender perspective (Mahoney, 1996; Mandell, 1995).

Based on a belief that knowledge is constructed by humanity and therefore fallible, phenomenological research establishes credibility through the rationale that:

“the evidence of introspection concerning the immanent realm of one's own subjectivity is immediate and infallible...potentially rigorous in character, capable of drawing factual conclusions which are certain and final, in contrast to the inherently contingent and provisional character of the results of non-phenomenological sciences” (Husserl, 1965, 1982, in Garko, 1999, p. 168).

Consistent with both phenomenological tradition and feminist perspective, the relationship between researcher and researched is one of co-researchers (Joyappa & Self, 1996; Omizo & Omizo, 1990; Riger, 1992; Swigonski, 1993). The researcher's goal is to establish a collaborative and mutual relationship with the co-researcher and immerse one's self in the exploration to gain a deep and thorough understanding of the phenomenon (Joyappa & Self, 1996; Omizo & Omizo, 1990; Riger, 1992).

Unique to the concept of phenomenological tradition, consistent with feminist perspective, and critical to the integrity of the research is the process of *epoche* or the *bracketing* of the researcher's concept of reality and truth (Creswell, 1998; Owen 1994). Contrary to "human science that has an interpretive or intentionalistic need" (Garko, 1999, p. 169), phenomenology distinguishes itself through a component of self-reflexive contemplation on the part of the researcher in an effort to "turn away from a priori assumptions, theory, and expectations and attempt to describe the subjective experiences of self or others" (Owen, 1994, p. 264).

Phenomenological research is a qualitative exploration designed to "capture the essence of co-researcher's experiences by integrating textural and structural descriptions" (Omizo & Omizo, 1990, p. 32). *Textural* aspects refer to the feelings, thoughts, and perceptual images connected by the co-researcher to the experience being explored while the *structural* aspects refer to the innate, unchanging framework or event that evokes the emotional response. In a phenomenological study, the focus of the researcher is to identify threads of similarity within the uniqueness of individual experience, synthesize findings into patterns, and prepare a document epitomizing the phenomenological interpretation. The strength of the document is found in the presence of direct quotes from the co-researchers, personal observations of the researcher's experience, and through the presentation of findings in language consistent with that utilized by co-researchers.

Given that *depth of understanding* of the phenomenon rather than *generalizability* of the findings is the priority of phenomenological research (Creswell, 1998; Maxwell, 1996), this study included purposive, criterion based selection of co-researchers, in-depth

interviews with co-researchers, and phenomenological analysis of the data, which focused on understanding the experience of the co-researchers and determining if any themes existed between specific experiences of divorce and the development of resilience.

As prescribed by a phenomenological approach to enhance credibility of the findings (Creswell, 1998) and a feminist perspective to meet goals of increased awareness and empowerment of clients, (Riger, 1992; Swigonski, 1993) the researcher also provided opportunity for co-researchers to review findings and provide feedback to the researcher. The purpose of the review was to clarify the accuracy of the data and to provide an opportunity to gather more information. In accordance with a phenomenological process (Creswell, 1998), the researcher kept a journal of her experience. These memos were shared with the co-researchers at the time of the second meeting in an effort to stimulate discussion and create new understandings of the experience.

Combined, the phenomenological tradition and feminist perspective allowed the researcher to challenge positivist research through prescribed methods for conducting the research and analyzing the results. In addition, it supported the researcher's objective to advance the goals of development of standpoint knowledge and emancipation of oppressed populations (Owen, 1994; Riger, 1992; Swigonski, 1993; Thompson, 1992) through developing a deeper understanding of the experience of divorce from the perspective of those who experienced it. Thus, although compiled by the researcher, the presentation of the findings is an offering of the co-researchers into the experience of parental divorce and provides unique insight into the priorities of the child involved.

Sampling.

For the purposes of this study, six co-researchers were selected to participate through a criterion based snowball sampling method (Sandelowski, 1995). Initially, in support of the design decision to avoid use of predetermined measures of risk, resilience, and successful outcomes, the intention had been to run an advertisement in the local newspaper for individuals to self-select. However, upon discussion with people about the study, it became apparent that a defining aspect of the participants was their reticence to identify themselves as successful by what they perceived to be society's standards.

The researcher embarked on a word of mouth search to find adults, who had experienced parental divorce, and seemed resilient in accordance with the definition used in this study. Potential participants were identified by the researcher from a wide body of social contacts, which resulted in participants being known to her through other social relationship roles. The researcher engaged them in a pre-interview discussion about success and resilience to determine suitability for participation based on previously established criteria.

Without exception, potential participants indicated during the pre-interview discussion that they would not have answered the advertisement had they seen it in the newspaper. They submitted that they would have perceived the term *successful* as not necessarily applicable to them, but rather more consistent with capitalistic, or patriarchal, definitions of achievement. However, when asked directly if they were happy with their lives and held an expectation that life would unfold well for them, each responded positively. A copy of the Recruitment Advertisement that was shown to the co-researchers, but ultimately, not used for recruitment, is contained in Appendix B.

Thus, participants were offered an opportunity to participate in the study based on the responses they gave during the pre-interview discussion and their self-identification as successful individuals based on their definition of same. As well, an attempt was made to recruit individuals that met specific sampling criteria. The criteria established were: 1) the person had experienced parental divorce; 2) the person identified themselves as a resilient or successful adult; 3) the person was in the latency phase of development (aged 5 – 12) at the time of the parental divorce; and 4) the person was between 29 and 45 years of age at the time of the interview. These criteria were derived from the purpose and underlying assumptions of the study.

Essentially, the first two criteria are the defining features of the phenomenon being studied. The third criteria was chosen because the latency phase is a critical developmental stage for divorce to take place; hence, significant in terms of life long impact and influence on outcomes (Kruk, 2000). The fourth criteria, current age of the co-researchers, was established to ensure that co-researchers had embarked on the *adult phase* of their life. Also, given the reference to gender differences within the literature (Gahler, 1998), and the underlying premise of the project that individuals of both genders are being oppressed by patriarchal values inherent in family and divorce, the researcher chose an equal number of male and female co-researchers. This choice provided the researcher with the opportunity to observe gender differences within assignment of meanings to the divorce experience and patriarchal oppression of male children as well as female, through the divorce process.

Research trends indicate that adult children of divorce tend to find success later in life than children from intact homes; sometimes subsequent to failed attempts at

relationships or false starts at education and careers (Wallerstein et al., 2000). A salient aspect of this research is ensuring that the co-researchers have had opportunity to mature into and develop recognition of their success as well as recover from any failed attempts or false starts. It should be noted that the researcher assumes said ability to recover is and will be taken to be a clear indicator of resilience.

Of the participants selected, four met the selection criteria completely while two did not meet the age criteria. One male was only 27 at the time of the interview and one woman was 15 at the time of her parent's divorce. However, due to the limited numbers of potential participants, the researcher determined through the pre-interview discussion that the intent of the age criteria was met. Specifically, the 27-year old man had embarked on the adult phase of his life through having been married several years, being a parent, and being established in a long-term career of choice. When asked about the implications of her age at the time of the divorce, the young woman who was 15 indicated a strong belief that the timing of her parents' divorce was critical to her development as a young woman and contributed to her present day experience of success and resilience. Thus, the researcher decided to proceed with the interviews of these two co-researchers despite their being slightly outside the parameters of the age criteria established for this study.

Several factors contributed to this decision. First and foremost was that the co-researchers wanted to be involved in the study and felt they had insights to contribute for the betterment of others. Secondly, the researcher could find no literature determining an optimum adult age or passage of time since a parental divorce for this type of study. In their case, both of them had experienced the divorce of their parents, 16 years prior.

Finally, the researcher allowed the variance because of the limited numbers of potential co-researchers available to interview.

However, in terms of rationale for the decision, and in keeping with the concept of participatory research, it seemed appropriate to let go of preconceived, potentially positivist notions of age criteria temporarily, engage in the interview, then examine the findings in light of the overall goal and integrity of the study. The researcher determined her first priority was to facilitate the expression of voice of adult children of divorce and her second priority was to assess the implications of varying from the established criteria. Of interest is that the contributions of these two researchers both supported the themes determined in the first four interviews, and added an additional layer of understanding in terms of the possible developmental process experienced by adult children of divorce. Thus, their contribution was included in the final report.

Data Collection.

The data collection included the pre-interview discussion, consent signing, participation in an in-depth interview, and providing feedback to the researcher about the findings she had derived from the interviews. Four of the interviews took place in participants' homes and two in their place of business. These locations were determined through mutual agreement. The researcher spent approximately half an hour providing a description of the purpose and format of the study, explaining the consent to participate and be audio-taped during the interview, answering questions pertinent to the study and long term use of data, and establishing rapport. The possibility of emotional reactions to the interview was explored and information was provided pertaining to support available

should they feel a need to debrief at some point in the future. A thorough explanation was provided regarding freedom to withdraw at any point in the process of the study.

In accordance with feminist research (Swigonski, 1993), the researcher provided a thorough description of the goals and purpose of the research as part of obtaining consent and ensuring that the co-researchers were fully informed. As part of this discussion, the researcher included a description of her own location within the research as a resilient adult child of divorce, a request for input into the interview guide prior to embarking on the interview, and a brief explanation of feminist research being a mutual effort between researcher and co-researchers (Swigonski, 1993). The outcome of this stance seems to have been that the co-researchers felt comfortable contributing to the development of the study through the consent signing discussions and subsequently established some ownership for the results. A copy of the Letter of Introduction and Consent used as a guide during the consent signing discussion is contained in Appendix C.

Once the consent was obtained, the researcher engaged the co-researchers in a semi-structured interview, guided by seven questions. Consistent with phenomenology and feminist perspectives, the questions were quite general and were utilized to enhance consistency between interviews and provide a framework for discussion, rather than control the specific type of information gathered (Maxwell, 1996; Riger, 1992). As each interview contributed to the development of new insights into the phenomenon for the researcher, the scope of the guidance broadened to encompass experiences identified in previous interviews and deepened to explore identified emerging themes. This process, known as *Hermeneutic interpretation* or *inquiry* (Kvale, 1996; Tesch 1990), includes introspection on the part of the researcher to examine meanings as they relate to self and

co-researchers, and then to engage in repetitive and reflective questioning to gain a deeper understanding of the data. As directed by phenomenological inquiry (Creswell, 1998), the researcher utilized prompts and questions to probe, clarify, and encourage reflective responses relative to the meanings co-researchers attached to the experiences they described (Padgett, 1998). This technique was employed in an effort to deepen understandings of the data, reduce the potential for the researcher to make assumptions or interpretations, and ultimately enhance the reliability, reporting and understanding of the essence of the co-researcher's experience.

As the researcher developed a preliminary report on findings for each co-researcher, she shared the compilation and requested feedback in relation to clarity and comprehensiveness of the findings. The co-researchers were each supported then to correct interpretations or elaborate on descriptions. In several instances, the co-researchers included additional memories and thoughts that had surfaced since the interview took place.

Data Analysis.

Each interview resulted in the production of a cassette tape, approximately two hours long, which was transcribed by the researcher for analysis. The researcher produced two copies of each interview and analyzed them: 1) from a phenomenological perspective, and 2) in relation to theories and prior research findings. Kvale (1996), identifies a six step process of qualitative analysis which includes: 1) the co-researchers describe his/her experience, 2) the co-researcher experiences epiphanies during the reflexive interview process, 3) the researcher interprets data during the interview process,

4) the researcher interprets the transcripts through a three step process following the interview, 5) the researcher engages in a re-interview, or checking in with the co-researcher to confirm interpretations made, and 6) an action, or change in behaviour occurs in either researcher or co-researcher as a result of the interview, interpretation process, or findings (p. 189-190). These six steps created the underlying framework utilized for data analysis. During step 4, interpretation of the transcripts, a manual process was used that was congruent with both the three phases of step 4 identified by Kvale (1996), and phenomenological analysis methods. These were utilized to prepare the transcript for analysis and develop interpretations and meanings.

Phenomenological analysis included the combined processes of horizontalization (Creswell, 1998) and meaning condensation (Kvale, 1996) to draw out the structural and textural essence of the experience of parental divorce and the development of resiliency. Horizontalization refers to the process whereby each statement made by a co-researcher is examined for its relevance to the central question of the study, which in this instance is: What is the experience of divorce from a child's perspective and are there themes that contribute to the development of resilience/success? It includes the elimination of statements that do not relate to the central question(s) as well as repetitive statements. The goal of horizontalization is the development of a coherent story that describes the essence of the structural and textural experience being explored. Meaning condensation is the process of grouping the statements into "natural meaning units" to encapsulate the essence of the meaning of various descriptions of the phenomenon (Kvale, 1996). The goal of meaning condensation is to draw meaning from the co-researchers' stories and condense the transcript into meaningful themes.

For the first set of transcripts, the researcher identified five components of the central questions as part of *structuring* the transcript for analysis (Kvale, 1996), and utilized them to colour code statements made relative to those themes. The themes identified were: 1) structural experience of parental divorce, 2) textural experience of parental divorce, 3) lifespan implications of parental divorce, 4) definitions of resilience/success, and 5) contributing factors to resilience/success. The researcher reviewed each transcript several times, sometimes with the accompaniment of the audio tape recording of the interview, for the purpose of colour coding statements relative to their theme and making notes in the margin about potential meanings or other thoughts thus *clarifying* and engaging in *analysis proper* (Kvale, 1996, p. 190).

The statements were then used to create a coherent story of the essence of the structural and textural experience for each co-researcher. Once a coherent story of the essence of their experience was developed, statements were grouped together according to the researcher's interpretation of which statements seemed to communicate similar meanings. As the stories emerged, it seemed that three kinds of experiences were present in the lives of the co-researchers, so these were additionally grouped together and meanings were examined in light of the diverse experiences.

In addition, the researcher developed, from the colour coded transcripts, a description of lifespan implications that co-researchers attributed to parental divorce, a cluster of statements relative to a personal definition of resilience/success, and a summary of factors identified by co-researchers as contributing to the development of their resilience/success. These were examined to determine if there was a correlation between the kind of divorce experienced and the development of resilience/success.

The second set of transcripts was analyzed in relation to the presence of divorce ritual, the conceptual context of the project, and the consistency or lack thereof with findings presented in the literature review in an effort to triangulate data and analyze from a theoretical perspective. The researcher derived five themes from the literature review and conceptual context: 1) process of divorce, 2) relationships with parents, 3) financial implications, 4) societal context of the parental divorce experience, and 5) sources of human strength. The researcher again read the transcripts several times, colour coded the themes, and examined them, through a combined family systems and socialist perspective lens, in relation to the kind of divorce experienced. The goal of this analysis was to integrate the meanings of the co-researchers' experiences with theory to develop a more comprehensive and useful understanding of the findings.

Validity, Reliability, and Generalizability

The concepts of validity, reliability, and generalizability are quantitative constructs utilized to determine the integrity of a particular research design. In quantitative research, specific measures can be made to determine if data collected is valid and reliable while detailed sampling procedures ensure the generalizability of the findings. Validity is defined by Krueger (1988) as "... the degree to which the procedure utilized to measure a phenomenon really measures what it is supposed to measure" (p. 41). While reliability is defined as the degree to which a consistent measure can be achieved across different groups. There remains some dissention amongst researchers as to whether or not these principles should apply to qualitative research projects. However, it is the belief of this researcher that the concepts should be pondered, at the very least,

when designing a qualitative research project, and that contemplation of these concepts in relation to a particular study, increases the integrity of the overall design.

Although, in qualitative research, there is no concrete procedure to determine validity or reliability, specific traditions, such as phenomenology, derive within them, particular underlying beliefs, principles, procedures for sampling, and directives for analysis for the sole purpose of enhancing validity and reliability. This combined construct of validity and reliability is referred to as credibility in qualitative research (Kvale, 1996).

For example, a major critique of qualitative research is the potential for the introduction of bias on the part of the researcher. Phenomenology prescribes the use of epoch or bracketing to reduce the potential for researcher bias (Creswell, 1998; Kvale, 1996). The process of acknowledging the researcher's conceptual context and the subsequent process of consciously setting aside those beliefs reduced bias during the design phase and the interview process. The act of writing memos and journaling, also assisted the researcher to identify when particular information created a personal response or particular interest. The goal of acknowledgment, epoch and journaling is not so much to eliminate bias, but to create awareness of its existence, encourage the researcher to examine the bias, and to advise readers of the particular frame of reference within which a researcher is situated (Creswell, 1998; Kvale, 1996; Swigonski, 1993).

One of the basic underlying tenets of phenomenological study is the belief that if a co-researcher defines something as their reality, then there is no basis for dispute (Creswell, 1998; Gahler, 1998). The information is valid and reliable because it is defined by the person to whom it relates. Validity and reliability are threatened through

the imposition of inaccurate interpretations and assumptions (Creswell, 1998, Gahler, 1998; Padgett, 1998). Thus, a key credibility enhancing procedure prescribed by phenomenological tradition is that of confirming findings with the co-researchers (Creswell, 1998; Kvale, 1996). In this study, because of the intimate nature of some of the findings shared, the researcher approached each co-researcher with a summary of the essence of their structural and textural experiences and facilitated a discussion allowing for correction, clarification, and addition of new information.

Finally, in this particular study, and as will be explained in greater detail in the discussion of the findings, the triangulation of data enhances the credibility of the findings (Creswell, 1998; Kvale, 1996; Maxwell, 1996). Triangulation is the process whereby other data is utilized to support or refute the credibility of particular findings with the underlying premise being that if data are found to be congruent with prior findings, then it enhances credibility. Conversely, if it is found to be in variance with prior findings, this does not, in and of itself, reduce the credibility of the findings but rather requires the researcher to determine other methods of establishing credibility and speak to the variance identified.

Of interest in this study, is that the essence of the structural and textural experience of the co-researchers in this study was found to be similar to other studies of note (Wallerstein et al, 2000). However, the meaning attached by the co-researchers to their experiences was found to be significantly different from those determined by positivist researchers through the utilization of imposed societal measures of success on the study's participants. Thus, the stories shared by the co-researchers in this study can be deemed credible in as much as they can be triangulated with prior research.

However, it requires the cumulative effect of a variety of credibility enhancing strategies to allow the researcher to declare credibility of new findings or suggested interpretations of data (Creswell, 1998; Maxwell, 1996). Given the strict adherence to phenomenological design and analysis and the triangulation of the structural and textural experience described by the co-researchers, the researcher is taking the liberty to suggest that the co-researchers' definitions and perceptions regarding success and its development, as reported and confirmed by them in this study, can be seen to hold a high degree of credibility as well.

One of the underlying premises of phenomenological inquiry is that the researcher and co-researcher develop a mutual and collaborative relationship (Creswell, 1998; Kvale, 1996). One of the goals of this premise is to enhance the depth of sharing between the two, however, there is potential for the reliability of data to be affected by a familiar researcher/co-researcher relationship as well. In this particular study, social desirability bias (Kvale, 1996) may have been introduced through selection of co-researchers who had pre-existing relationships with the researcher.

Social desirability bias can undermine the reliability of data if the co-researchers feel motivated to please the researcher, or particular to this study, know the goals and purpose of the research and have a desire to assist the researcher achieve those goals. Also, given that the co-researchers all wanted an opportunity to participate in the research because of feelings of somehow being negatively labeled by society as *children of divorce*, there was a degree of self investment in the outcome and thus, the possibility that the responses were more positive pertaining to the success in their lives.

However, an observation made by the researcher was that co-researchers who had a pre-existing relationships with her tended to provide more personal and comprehensive information and were more comfortable with intimate self-disclosures, of both a positive and negative nature, than those with whom she was not as familiar. Also, the familiarity between researcher and co-researcher that was introduced by a type of selection bias (Rubin & Babbie, 1993) seemed to contribute to the co-researchers feeling more comfortable correcting interpretations or inaccurate reflection of meanings. Thus, it is fair to speculate that the reliability of the information shared by co-researchers may have been affected by social desirability bias, but the pre-existing relationship with the researcher may have also contributed to data and interpretations being more valid and reliable than if the relationship was not as familiar.

Finally, Kvale (1996) identifies leading questions within the qualitative interview as potentially reducing the credibility of the findings. This occurs when the researcher is highly directive in relation to the collection of particular data rather than having it emerge from the co-researcher. This was apparent in one interview when the researcher commented on her observation about lack of childhood memories and the co-researcher responded that she had childhood memories but that wasn't the focus of the interview. This may also be related to the co-researcher's extensive knowledge of the goals of the study and her pre-existing relationship with the researcher. Within this study, the researcher attempted to enhance credibility of the information gathered by engaging in a reflexive interview style, encouraging feedback about the interview guide from co-researchers, and utilizing a variety of interviewing skills (Kvale, 1996). A copy of the Interview Guide is contained in Appendix D.

Ethical Considerations.

Given the potentially emotional experience of the research interviews, the researcher engaged in ongoing assessment during the interviews to ensure that discussion topics were not creating a negative emotional reaction. She engaged in “checking in” behaviours – throughout the interview to confirm that none of the discussion was particularly upsetting.

In two instances, with two different co-researchers, the topic of discussion created a negative emotional reaction. In both situations, the audio-tape recorder was turned off and a decision was made regarding continuation of the particular topic and the interview in general. For one co-researcher, the decision was made to discontinue discussion of the topic – relationship between himself and his mother. In the other instance, the researcher and co-researcher engaged in a discussion as to why discussion pertaining to the topic – success in relationships – was an emotional topic. The decision was made to reschedule the interview at the co-researcher’s initiation. He contacted the co-researcher a few days later and set a time. He confirmed the notes the researcher had made pertaining to the discussion and consented to the use of the information. As well, he engaged in a description during the second session about his response to the topic and described the cognitive processing he had done since the initial interview.

General information was provided to all the co-researchers regarding available support services, if required. As well, the researcher made follow up contact via phone with the two co-researchers who experienced the emotional reactions to ensure that they were not requiring any sort of follow up support. The ethical dilemma of dual relationships surfaced during both of these situations in terms of the co-researcher’s

expectations of the researcher to take a counselling role and of the researcher's awareness that the pre-existing relationship might cause the co-researcher to continue to engage in the interview despite a desire not to.

Dual relationships existed at several levels between the researcher and each of the co-researchers. Because a snowball sampling method was used, co-researchers were people known to the researcher through various other aspects and relationships in her life. In two cases, the co-researchers were individuals that the researcher knew through their professional roles in her life, with whom the topic of thesis arose through natural conversation. Both of these individuals identified themselves as adult children of divorce and offered to be interviewed if they met the criteria. Two co-researchers were parents of friends of the researcher's children, and two others were the wife and brother-in-law of friends of the researcher.

The presence of dual relationships both enhanced potential for ethical dilemma and reduced it. For example, all the co-researchers were aware of the researcher's professional role, thus expected, even hoped, that emotional reactions would be resolved with her and within the parameters of the study. This was discussed directly and the freedom to withdraw at any time was reinforced. It also presented a problem in terms of the potential for the co-researchers to feel obligated to participate for fear of interfering with the primary relationships or roles shared in each other's lives. This is consistent with Swigonski's (1993) recommendation to examine one's personal social power when engaging in standpoint research and develop an understanding of how it may affect the research process.

In this particular study, the researcher was adamant about discussing directly and openly the various roles and relationship that were shared, especially as it pertained to power, benefits of the study, and confidentiality. As well, when the co-researchers shared particularly personal or difficult aspects of their lives, the researcher consciously shared a similar experience to enhance and reinforce mutuality, thereby reducing power imbalances (Garko, 1999; Joyappa & Self, 1996).

In terms of reducing ethical dilemmas, the awareness of dual relationships made it more apparent to the co-researchers that the potential existed for complicated post-study relationships, thus empowered them to take responsibility for protecting vulnerabilities they preferred not to share. The issue of power imbalance was essentially eliminated because of the pre-existing peer relationship between researcher and co-researcher and the subsequent reduction of the mystique that usually accompanies a professional or individual engaged in research (Swigonski, 1993). Due to established patterns of communication and pre-existing trust between researcher and co-researcher, the interviews were experienced as a discussion between acquaintances, rather than a formal interview. Each of them had volunteered rather than been recruited per se, and each seems to have taken on a degree of ownership or a vested interest in the project, which the researcher believes is partially facilitated by the pre-existing and continuing relationship with the co-researchers.

Feminist literature identifies possible ethical issues relative to the researcher co-researcher relationship (Thompson, 1992). Within feminist research is the expectation that a mutual relationship will develop, however, in reality, the researcher ultimately benefits from completion of the research. Thus, potential power differentials exist.

Within this study, the power differential all but disappeared. The pre-existing and mutual relationship between researcher and co-researchers seemed to demystify the role of the researcher. There seemed to be some correlation between the pre-existing or mutual nature of the relationship and the degree to which the co-researchers became involved and invested in the project. Also, the co-researchers seemed to be strongly committed to the overall goal of the research, which was to contribute to the development of improved processes and subsequently, experiences for other children of parental divorce. It is interesting to note, that by sheer definition of the population being studied, the research tended to preclude vulnerable people. However, it remained the responsibility of the researcher to be aware of and protect co-researchers from potentially vulnerable situations.

This was especially relevant in a small community such as the location of this study, where people tend to hold a variety of relationship roles with other individuals. It became apparent that there was potential for co-researchers to share dual roles with each other unbeknownst to the researcher. Originally, the researcher included a focus group in the study design as a means of providing opportunity for the co-researchers to clarify the findings and explore their experiences at a deeper level within a group context. However, as the stories emerged, the researcher determined that co-researchers were particularly vulnerable to participation in a focus group given the degree of sensitivity and intimacy of the issues shared and the propensity for people to share other roles within this community. Thus, the researcher decided to consult with co-researchers regarding the findings on an individual basis even though a focus group would have likely provided valuable insights and inspired the sharing of more information.

Finally, an ethical dilemma emerged as a result of the juxtaposition between maintenance of confidentiality and acknowledgment of contribution in a standpoint, or feminist study (Joyappa & Self, 1996). In this particular study, confidentiality was negotiated individually through discussion of what the concept meant and how they would like it enacted. In addition, the option was provided to each co-researcher to be acknowledged for their contribution to the final project.

Limitations.

Consistent with phenomenological research, the potential for the findings to be generalizable to other populations is quite limited (Maxwell, 1996). However, the goal of this study was not to develop findings or theoretical constructs that were applicable to a general population of adult children of divorce. Rather, the goal was to explore, in depth, the experience of a small number of individuals in an effort to contribute to the development of understanding of this phenomenon and generate some hypotheses to be tested in broader studies.

Even if the findings are not generalizable, it does not discount that the experience described through this study occurred, nor does it negate the possibility that others are engaged in similar experiences during the process of divorce. Regardless of generalizability, the information contained in this report adds, with credibility, to the possibility that this experience is being lived by others, that the coping mechanisms identified are effective in contributing to success as an adult, and that recommendations for social work practice should be informed by these findings.

Given that the researcher is the instrument of the research (Kvale, 1996; Padgett, 1998), the researcher's lack of experience conducting research interviews and engaging in research in general may have impacted or limited the findings and outcomes. The incorporation of a feminist research perspective and the conscious effort to engage co-researchers on an equal level, facilitating the expression of their expert knowledge of themselves and their experience, will help reduce this particular limitation.

Finally, an interesting limitation, and one that will be explored in the presentation of findings, is the effect of memory on data collection in a retrospective study. Inherent in the decision to utilize retrospective interviews is a set of limitations created by the propensity of those interviewed to have limited memory abilities or choose to remember only certain aspects of one's experience. The choice of the phenomenological tradition was partly based on an attempt to reduce this limitation as it would seem that selective memory and cognitive processing of recollections is an aspect of assigning meaning to one's experiences and thus, is examined in the findings section, not as a limitation, but rather as a means of coping with the experience.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS: ESSENCE OF EXPERIENCE OF PARENTAL DIVORCE

Demographics

The six co-researchers, three male and three female, ranged in age from 27 to 42 years old, at the time of the interview. Their age at the time of divorce ranged from 5 to 15 years old. The number of years passed since their parents' divorce ranged from 15 to 35 years. See Figure I for a summary of the breakdown of their demographics.

FIGURE I: DEMOGRAPHICS OF CO-RESEARCHERS

Gender	Age at time of interview	Age at time of divorce	Number of years passed	Type of divorce: D, R, or M	Current marital status	Current occupation
Male	40 years	5 years	35 years	Dissolution	Widow	Self Employed
Female	42 years	10 years	32 years	Mid-Continuum	Married	Teacher
Male	35 years	10 years	25 years	Reorganizing	Married	Self Employed
Female	31 years	15 years	16 years	Dissolution	2 nd time Married	Legal Assistant
Male	27 years	12 years	15 years	Mid-Continuum	Married	Ranch Boss
Female	36 years	10 years	26 years	Reorganizing	Common Law	Self Employed

As the stories emerged, the researcher observed that co-researchers described a variety of experiences that seemed to range between her own experience of parental divorce; a process that dissolved family relationships, and that of a more cohesive process that supported the reorganization of the family unit, and maintained family ties. She also noted the central location of child parent relationship within the stories.

Throughout the interviews, the co-researchers spoke of their pre-divorce, post divorce, and current relationship with their parents. The poignancy of the descriptions of parent child relationships evoked an emotional response from the researcher's personal experience and resonated as a significant aspect of the data. It seemed that our identities as women and men, wives and husbands, mothers and fathers, were rooted in our experience of parental divorce and the subsequent relationships with our parents. Thus, themes were derived from descriptions of parent child relationships and used as a pivotal point to organize the volumes of data that accumulated throughout the conversations.

Being visual by nature, and holding inherent the concept of ebb and flow of relationships and family structures, the researcher utilized the concept of a continuum in an attempt to develop a flexible, and somewhat value free, means of organizing and presenting the findings. The paradigm of the continuum was developed through identifying themes within the structural experience of parental divorce relative to parent child relationship. Themes relative to the divorce process, the restructuring of family relationships post divorce, and the financial interactions between divorcing parents and children had a tendency to correlate with the organizing concept of parent child relationship, and thus support its use as an organizing concept. Also, descriptions of contributing factors to resilience/success seemed inherently tied to the parent child relationship and the meanings the co-researchers had developed in response to changes within that relationship as a result of their parents' divorce. Thus, the concept of a continuum emerged through a reflexive process of analysis of the transcripts, discussion with the co-researchers, and a desire to create a simple paradigm to present the themes and tell the stories.

Although not pure in classification, the researcher labeled the continuum to organize what she perceived to be three fairly distinct experiences of the parent child relationships, and ultimately the experience of parental divorce: *Experience of Reorganization*, *Experience of Mid-Continuum*, and *Experience of Dissolution*. The assigned continuum locations were initially based on the degree to which we were provided opportunities, post divorce, to engage in meaningful relationships with our parents. However, the classifications developed into an encapsulating description of the overall trends within the stories, which allowed for greater understanding of the development of resilience and success in relation to the experience of parental divorce.

Essence of the Experience: Synthesis of the Textural and Structural Experience

The amalgamated story of the essence of the experience of divorce that emerges from these successful adult children of divorce commences with a total lack of preparation for the divorce. Emotions range from shock to anger, deep sadness to confusion, even hatred for the parent seen to have caused the family breakup.

“I was about 10 when they split up. It happened fairly quickly... I didn’t have any idea it was coming...then they broke it to us and we moved out of the house really quite quickly after that... like I want to say a week later or something... like it really happened quickly. Right when it happened, I can’t imagine anybody who says its okay, cause it wasn’t. I remember wailing sort of like, real wailing, I can’t believe this is happening to me... what does this mean... how can this be happening.” (36 year old woman)

The suddenness of the announcement was grounded in the circumstance that the family functioning pre-divorce was quite good, at least as perceived by the children.

“As a 12 year old kid, seeing that your parents are together, they seemed really happy, you never see them fight or anything. Then, bang, you’re hit with it... and I know I hated my mom for the longest time because of it, because I thought it was her fault because she was cheating on my dad.” (27 year old man)

Experience of Family Reorganization. Despite the suddenness of the announcement, two of the co-researchers experienced a significant effort on behalf of the parents to provide appropriate information regarding the decision to divorce. They perceived their parents as united in their decision and had no impression of one parent harming the other. Their structural experience was thus framed by the security of both parents communicating they had made a decision together and then demonstrating their intentions to continue to provide the parenting and nurture to their children as they had in the past.

“There was lots of talking throughout the divorce, both parents were like, I think they had really talked about it a lot before the divorce so they were really united in what they presented. Which I think saved the whole thing, probably, because, now looking back with adult eyes, I think both of my parents hid a lot of adult stuff from us at the time. They both could have been bitter and vindictive and neither of them were. So, we were sat down, it was kind of formal... like there’s something we need to talk to you about... but also not dragged out. I can’t really remember how much notice we got, but they sat us down and I really can’t remember who spoke first or what the exact details were, but I remember the gist of the whole thing, that they were separating, they both loved us...” (36 year old female)

Parents provided reasons for the divorce that related to the marriage and were completely unrelated to the parent child relationship. Upon reflection, the co-researchers felt that over the years, their parents never compromised their initial position through sharing with the children any derogatory information pertaining to the other parent or undermining the other’s relationship with the child.

“The reason they gave was something like they didn’t love each other anymore, and I think that’s what made it okay was that they always made it really clear that it wasn’t about us.” (36 year old female)

Throughout their growing up, they enjoyed a sense of trust that their lives would be relatively unchanged, especially in terms of their parent child relationships, because parents were able to communicate the “okayness” of the decision to divorce.

These co-researchers received the supported opportunity to choose who they would live with and felt that their choice was respected by both parents. Thus, they enjoyed a sense of control over their destiny during the upheaval and felt their needs were valued despite the emotionally painful process they were engaged in.

“There was tons of support, I really honestly felt like could have said anything... like I could have said yeah, I want to stay with dad. And I think, and this was the thing I hadn't thought about for a long time, was that the 2 day warning I got was that my dad had come to the school, where my brother and I were. And he had talked to us saying your mom and I are thinking of splitting up and I think that if both you guys say you want to stay with me, then she won't leave. Which, has its own thing when I think back on it, like that was a little inappropriate, but in the moment it didn't even cross my mind really that we would stay with him. But I felt totally free to make that choice even though he had said that and they were both sitting there.” (36 year old female)

At some level, these children knew their parents were struggling with their own emotions and had reason to malign or be angry with each other. However, their parents remained openly supportive of each other and respectful of their continued role in their children's lives.

“I remember them both saying a lot, we both love you. We both love you. Even about the other person... my mom saying, your dad really loves you. Or my dad saying, your mom really loves you. So they really like, I give them so much credit for doing that... nobody harshed on anybody else and I just can't believe that when I think of it as an adult. There would have been a lot of motive to do that from everybody's part, but I think it just kind of happened behind closed doors, not in front of the kids, and we really had no idea” (36 year old female).

Few changes, other than those associated with the initial upheaval occurred in the months immediately following the divorce...

“We changed schools but we didn't go far geographically. Though at age 10 it probably wouldn't have made much difference. It was far enough... like I didn't play in the same playground, I didn't keep any of the same friends, but the lifestyle, if you have a lifestyle when you're 10 (laughter) was the same. Like you would get up and go to school and when you got home, mom was there waiting for you and that was kind of it.” (36 year old female)

...aside from the fairly immediate remarriage of their resident parents. However, even the remarriage contributed to re-establishing a flow and pattern of living reminiscent of their pre-divorce family structure.

“But when my father remarried, she took over the role of stepmother and she did a wonderful job. She never made us feel like we were step children to her and we were, if anything, taken care as good, if not even better as what my mom had done up until then. So my lunch was ready and my clothing was ironed... and her family is as close to us as we are to them so I have three sets of relatives in that sense so then when I go back I visit them as much as I visit my mom.”(35 year old man)

The new spouses were accepted into the family and seen to contribute, in a valued way, to the lives of the children involved, by both the non-resident parent and the co-researchers.

“My step father and I interact superficially, kind of go out for a beer and laugh, but he didn't parent. He really stayed hands off in terms of discipline... and my relationship with my dad changed for the better and I always felt like I was this lucky kid who had these three parents who were all at these extremes. My dad who is very liberal in his view and let us do things that other kids weren't allowed to do... and my step dad who was quite conservative and then my mom who was quite in the middle. So I kind of always had all perspectives which was kind of neat, I thought. I felt like it was an advantage. Especially cause I could kind of pick and choose in a way, which perspective I wanted encouragement from on any particular thing” (36 year old woman)

The co-researchers enjoyed and maintained a strong post-divorce relationship with their non-resident parent. Time spent with the non-resident parent was regular and flexible, and adapted to the co-researchers' changing needs as they matured, established outside interests, and became more able to determine visitation for themselves.

“Access was structured to start with and it became more organic as time went by, by our choice. As we got older, my brother and I began to belong to more clubs and I'd decide, oh I'm not going to go to dad's on Wednesday night or something. And actually, I never thought about how that was for my dad, but from my perspective, I knew it was totally good. And I knew that if at any point I said, oh I want to go see dad tonight, somebody would have picked me up or driven me there.” (36 year old woman)

When their non-resident parent engaged in romantic relationships, neither co-researcher felt a diminishment of the parenting they received or usurped as a priority in their parent's life. Both co-researchers felt reassured by the non-custodial parent of their value in his/her life, regardless of new relationships.

“He (non-resident dad) went out with a few women, all of them for quite awhile actually. Well this is one of the things that was really cool from my side... my dad used to say to all his new girlfriends was you are in line behind my kids and if I ever have to choose I will choose them first, which I think is probably true for most people, but its kind of a harsh thing to say to somebody that you are first starting to date. So my dad had a series of 5 year relationships mostly with women who I actually really liked.” (36 year old woman)

Overall, the co-researchers experienced an improvement in the parenting they received and felt that relationships were enhanced with both resident and non-resident parents throughout the years following the divorce and initial upheaval.

“I think maybe, my dad's parenting, even though I didn't notice what was missing before, because there weren't really things that I felt I needed, but I felt things improved with my dad's parenting... and our relationship, the connection really improved after the divorce. And I think the relationship with my mom was already really good and I think that stayed exactly the same.” (36 year old woman)

The relationships they shared with siblings were close and protective at the time of divorce and has been maintained as such, into adulthood...

“I could have fallen into certain background, I don't know how you would describe it, stereotype people, you know, single parent children who have nobody to go home to so they hang around the schools and create chaos, but I think I had my brother who looked out for me quite a bit.” (35 year old man)

...and relationships with their extended family remained virtually unchanged.

“Both of my parents' parents live in Germany, and my other dad's family is in South America. They're both really small families to begin with so there really wasn't any direct extended family interaction. We did go see my grandmother in Germany quite a lot when we were kids so we must have gone just after the divorce at some point but I don't remember that trip any more than any other one.” (36 year old woman)

Their standard of living did not deviate, or at least was not experienced as different from what the co-researchers implicitly expected from their pre-divorce lifestyle. They were not able to discern if their financial situations actually remained the same or if they had been protected from the financial concerns often associated with divorce. The researcher, having witnessed financial conflict between her divorcing parents and having engaged in it with her children's father post divorce, was in awe that the parents of these co-researchers were able to negotiate provision of the material needs for their children. In addition, she understood the inherent security and sense of value that was communicated to these co-researchers through being provided for without the accompaniment of angst, guilt, and financial worries as a child. Thus, the practical needs associated with financial support were met, as well as the inherent emotional needs of feeling cared for.

“We didn't notice any financial changes... like we didn't get more allowance or less allowance. I really have to give my mom credit cause she didn't end up asking my dad for a lot of money and later when I was going to university, my dad did help support me, I think more than he might have if they had just kind of stayed together, and I think its because he realized he got a good deal on child support all along and he could cough up a little more.” (36 year old woman)

The co-researchers continued to enjoy the celebration of holidays and special occasions through the development of family rituals that focused on their needs as children and acknowledged the milestones of their childhood and adult life.

“We were the kids who got two Christmases, two birthdays, and sometimes two summer holidays... the weekend before or after a birthday was usually when we would celebrate with my dad. And there was this little ritual we developed around it, ... create a zoom back in time... You know, now we're going back in time, now its Friday, now its Thursday, now its Wednesday, and its L's birthday... You know and that's what we would do and it was totally cool and we never felt deprived. In fact it was like, when it was about presents... it was like oh cool a whole nother day for presents and when it was about celebration, it was like a whole nother day of celebration.” (36 year old woman)

Overall, the structural experience for these co-researchers was one that began with surprise, but rapidly became predictable through the provision of adequate and appropriate information pertaining to the divorce and anticipated changes. Options were offered within the context of support. Minimal changes were experienced. New members were accepted into the family. Relationships with both parents remained strong or improved. Access was both structured and organic to allow for the flexibility of the children's lives. Siblings supported each other through the time of crisis and maintained close bonds into adulthood. Financial support was provided to further education and career goals by parents without hesitation. Holidays and family rituals were developed and participation of parents in the milestones of their childrens' lives continued in a supportive and cooperative manner. The subsequent textural experience was one of deep sadness at the initial shock of learning of the planned changes. However, as the process unfolded, the co-researchers felt empowered, respected, parented, protected, fortunate, secure, valued, supported, loved and continue to feel that they belong to a family today.

Thus, the meaning these co-researchers attached to their overall experience was one of minimal upheaval but positive influence on their life. They do not identify the divorce as a major lifespan event, nor themselves as *children of divorce* unless they are consciously drawn to think about it. As adults, they speak of the ongoing healthy functioning of their families and have achieved some sense of appreciation for their experience relative to the experience of other adult children of divorce. Both of these co-researchers state unequivocally that their life was significantly improved by the divorce of their parents despite the situation prior to divorce being a positive family situation for them.

“I think my parents’ divorce affected me in a very strong way... and I think in a very good way, but I have to think that way because it’s my belief (laughter). I don’t believe that it is always bad for people to split up because I see that it was better for both my parents. I didn’t see it at the time, but I see that now. And because it was non-negative... there wasn’t any pain other than the short lived initial thing, there was no loss of anything, in fact there was a lot of gain. My parents could never have been who they were for me if they had stayed married to each other. They had to compromise too much of themselves to make that work. And I see that now, as an adult, if they hadn’t been able to be who they really were, they never could have given all they gave to me of who they really were. So it was better for all of us, in the end.”(36 year old woman)

As a result, the co-researchers developed non-traditional paradigms or philosophies about relationships, roles within the family, styles and structure of marriage, and beliefs about commitment.

“I really don’t believe in till death do us part or because we have a ring or a piece of paper we have to stay together forever and so I feel really strongly about that obviously. I actually don’t think it is the worst thing when people divorce. In fact I would rather see people split up, whether it’s a formal divorce or leave your partner, than stay together in a situation where it’s crappy. I still have a really strong sense of commitment. I don’t believe the minute something is bad you should turn away. In fact it’s quite the opposite. I feel that if you do commit to somebody, you commit whole heartedly. But when that commitment is over, its over.” (36 year old woman)

As well, their definitions of success were very philosophical and varied from materialistic or other traditional measures of success. There was a distinct independence inherent in their definitions that spoke to their self esteem and sense of self worth as individuals, separate and apart from their roles as spouses, children, or parents.

“Well I think an important aspect of defining success is that it is self defined and its not about a certain bar that you have or have not leapt over at all. And I’m sure that I have some personal lines about whether something is successful or not. but ultimately I believe that if your goal in life is to collect sand off the beach and store it in jars on your windowsill while you collect welfare and that’s your choice and if that’s successful to you then you should do that. It’s not my personal goal for me but ... but just be the best sand collector you can be, follow your passion, follow your heart. Follow your head. And I think it has to be really broad based, like it has to be everything, like its not just money which I think is how we often measure it.” (36 year old woman)

Co-researchers whose experience of divorce was conceptualized as a life event rather than a crisis, and perceived as something that contributed in a positive way to their overall development, seemed to be expansive – without limits – in their discussion of what constituted success and how one achieved it.

“You’ve got to do what’s going to make you and the people around you happy, and if that makes money, that’s great. But I always said, if you do something that you love and you put enough passion into it eventually you will also make money at it. It’s a cycle. And you’re not going to make money just for the fact of it. And it’s not important because you’ve got to be healthy first of all. That’s what I always say you got to do something that you enjoy doing, love what you’re doing, have passion and it will show in almost everything. It will show passion with your relationships, your friends, family, and you live more content life... maybe that’s success. That’s how I look at it.”(35 year old man)

Conversely, they struggled to identify particular aspects of their experience that contributed to the development of their success as though it is something they take for granted to some degree. Thus, it would seem that these co-researchers developed into self-defined successful adults without negative lifespan implications or variance from the process of people who are raised in intact families. However, they acknowledged parents for contributing to their development as successful adults...

“A lot of it would have to be how we were brought up and a lot of it would have to be how my stepmother the way she came into our lives. How she structured us as well. She took over my mom’s role. She did not just become my father’s wife. So there was a period where we did not have a mother but when she came into our life everything came back to normal in a sense... I think we were brought up well enough before to accept her not resent her and I think her and my father continued bringing us up in that way” (35 year old man)

... and identified the expectations their parents held of them and conveyed to them as contributing to their motivation and ability to be successful.

“For sure my parents were a big contributing factor to my success. They were always, we had a lot of very overt conversation about self value or self worth. You know that we could do anything and we could succeed... succeed being what made us happy and what we wanted to do with our lives.” (36 year old woman)

Finally, they confirmed that their experience of parental divorce reinforced their worth as children to their parents virtually throughout the entire process, with no identified deviation from that theme and that this contributed to the success they enjoy as adults.

Of interest to the researcher, and again unique from those of us whose experience of parental divorce is towards the dissolution end of the continuum, was that resilience seemed to be less relevant to the conversation for these co-researchers than the concept of success. Although we discussed success and made connections between it and resilience, the researcher needed to ask questions to draw this concept out in conversation. It seemed and was confirmed through reflexive conversation, that resilience was not as important, hence had not been as necessary a part of their success as the co-researchers who experienced significantly more hardship subsequent to parental divorce. Thus, it would be interesting to explore more thoroughly if and how resiliency contributed to success within this population of co-researchers, especially if they did not experience the divorce as a hardship.

Experience of Mid-Continuum Process. Following the initial shock of the recognition that their parents were separating, some co-researchers' experience, as well as that of the researcher, was characterized by the inadequate or non-existent provision of information concerning the parents' divorce and reorganization of families. The reasons we, co-researchers and researcher alike, received for the divorce were vague or non-existent and as such, we were left to cope with the situation without much explanation or guidance.

"I didn't see it coming maybe cause I was young I guess. But my mom took me downstairs in my aunt's house, and she just said your dad and I are getting a divorce, we can't be together anymore. You know, we're not happy and this and that. And I was devastated cause I didn't see it coming. I was obviously upset and I cried for awhile, and as soon as we got back to Merritt, I moved out with my dad. And we lived in a little camper for jeez, I don't know how long, couple of months, in Barriere, just camped out on the back of a truck. Just the two of us. And I wouldn't talk to my mom, wouldn't phone her, nothing like that." (27 year old man)

We perceived the divorce as a destructive experience – a process where one of our parents was deserting, and therefore hurting the other, rather than it being a mutual decision that held potential of benefit for both.

"I think they had a trial separation but they never really told us what was going on, so it was just, dad moved out. And then, I didn't know it at the time, but less than a year later, my mom moved in with her boyfriend which is who she had left my father for, so my dad moved out because my mother didn't love him anymore and she was seeing someone else." (42 year old woman)

Despite our parents' attempts to provide explanation and support us, their own emotions often rendered them unable to do so adequately. Decisions were imposed that resulted in significant physical separation from one parent and siblings and as children, we were left feeling lost, confused, and without control of important aspects of our lives. In addition, the decision-making atmosphere was wrought with open expressions of frightening emotions and conflict on the part of our parents towards each other.

“I remember my parents calling me into their room one morning, and both of them crying, and them just telling us they were getting a divorce. I don’t remember what was said, but I remember being really scared that my dad was crying... really crying hard, because I’d never seen him do that before. So I knew this was really serious. And within a couple of weeks we had packed up what we could take in my mom’s car and moved back to Vancouver... 1000 miles away from my dad and we didn’t see him again for months and months.” (researcher)

“...it was understood I would stay with my mom and my brothers would live with my dad, like I don’t remember ever being asked...so not only did my parents divorce but our family was immediately split up...” (42 year old woman).

We responded to this loss of control and the dismantling of our families with denial...

“I kind of missed my mom and whatnot. Then she went down to Whistler and she worked down there for just about a year. We went down and saw her a few times, but throughout the most part of it... I never really thought about it, about them divorced. I just thought, ah yeah, they’re apart, I can deal with it.” (27 year old man)

“We moved so, I ended up with a whole new set of friends and I never saw my old friends again. So I could start fresh and they just knew us as a new family that had moved in and for whatever reason the dad’s not in the picture but they didn’t know for sure cause there was this boyfriend in the picture that was living with us. So they would have just thought it’s a blended family.” (42 year old woman)

... and we continued to witness our parents engage in verbal and physical conflict of varying degrees throughout our childhoods. Fear and birth position contributed to our response to the conflict and we gained an increased sense of responsibility that caused us to vacillate between attempting to protect our younger siblings, to intervene in the conflict, or to simply run away to avoid it.

“I remember one time they got into a pretty good scrap. Mom was throwing shit at dad and dad was throwing it back at her. The three of us were around but as soon as the yelling started, I kind of grabbed my younger brother and said “let’s go, we don’t need to see this” and my older brother tried to break them up. He was trying to be the mediator and get my dad out of the house so they didn’t kill each other. (27 year old man)

“I remember taking my little sister out to the car at night with our blankets so I could keep her safe when the fighting started. I don’t know how I thought we were safer sleeping out there in a car, but that’s certainly how it felt.” (researcher)

We experienced a change of home, friends, community, and financial status.

Also, we assumed a significant increase in the responsibilities that were required of us to assist in running a single parent household, which were truly more consistent with a parent’s roles than a child’s.

“Probably the hardest part was leaving the house in Merritt, because we were there for so long... I’d lived there 8 years and that’s where I spent the formative years of my life and where we formed the memories that we had as a family. So we moved to Barriere, and as far as school went, I knew everybody in Barriere within about 3 days anyways, so that didn’t matter. We took on a lot more responsibility. They were split between my brother and I. I like to think the two of us had a pretty good hand in raising our younger brother because he was so young. I think we influenced him in some good ways... and some bad ways. I was the household banker cause dad was never there. And I was the first one to move in with him so I took on the responsibility to make sure his cheque was in the bank and the bills were paid... and I was around 13 by then...” (27 year old man)

Although no mention was made of grief or loss of childhood, and the recollection of sadness has faded with time, some of the phrases, such as the reference to the memories of family and loss of friends were reminiscent to the researcher of grief she had experienced. Thus, the comments seemed indicative of some level of recognition that a particular phase of childhood, or the ability to be vulnerable, was experienced as lost to the divorce.

Relationships between the resident parent and these co-researchers improved post divorce for the co-researchers, though that was not the case for the researcher, whose experience became more congruent with the experience of dissolution of family at this point, thus supporting the concept that the classifications are not pure. However, these co-researchers experienced resident parenting as involved and quite liberal.

The co-researchers interpreted this as a communication of trust in their ability to make good decisions, which contributed to their maturation process and ultimately, resilience.

“we were let go pretty good to just grow up on our own... live life, learn by our mistakes. I got into drinking when I was pretty young because there was no parent, like my dad was on night shift, and I had a bunch of older friends and so we'd go out and party on the weekend, and I staggered home more than once. And dad, he was pretty free that way, he says you know, if you're gonna drink or you're gonna do drugs, do it responsibly. So, I learned pretty young when enough was enough... and if you did something stupid, you paid for it. And you lived and learned by your mistakes.” (27 year old man)

The co-researchers sensed that their resident parent made a special and concerted effort to nurture them, when possible, as though to make up for the absent, non-resident parent, or out of guilt for the decision to divorce. As adults, and now parents themselves, the co-researchers were truly able to appreciate the love that must have been inherent in their parents' commitment to them, as children.

“My mom changed her work schedule and got Wednesdays off and we used to come home for lunch on Wednesdays. Everyone went home for lunch then, all the time. But we would always come home for lunch and my mother would have left a sandwich for us. So just like we would pack a sandwich for our kids. So we would eat by ourselves then lock the door and go out. But on Wednesdays, she would be home and I just remember that... loving that... coming home and it would probably be her day for doing all her chores cause it wasn't like she worked full and had a cleaning lady. I mean, she didn't, so we would come home to something like soup or some kind of hot meal and CBC radio would be on and I remember finding that extremely comforting, you know.” (42 year old woman)

The co-researchers developed somewhat non-traditional relationships with their resident parents which expanded to encompass activities and bonding that was peer like.

“After the divorce, my mom was left a lot on her own (by her friends) and I think that was difficult for my mom, but having said that, it was a really good experience for me because my mom became kind of this feminist and we would go to these retreats and go to all these interesting feminist sort of rallies and meet a lot of interesting people...” (42 year old woman)

Conversely, the co-researchers experienced the diminishment of relationship with the non-resident parent following the divorce. One co-researcher described a deep loss of trust in his mother, while another felt relief when her father left their community.

“I was really close to my mom before the divorce. I was a big time mamma’s boy. And now its kind of ... well I’m a little bit standoffish towards her with certain things. I really watch what she’s doing and what she says and I always take it in and process it right down to the... like tear everything she says apart to ask why did she say this, or what does that means, or is she trying to hide something.” (27 year old man)

“I was close to my mom (resident parent) and felt very protective of my mom. I hated my dad at times... was embarrassed by him and wished he would move away and he finally did when I was in grade 11. He moved to the island and I remember feeling like I’d lost about 70 pounds because he was such a horrible figure in my life at that time.”(42 year old woman)

Co-researchers felt insignificant to their non-resident parent for a variety of reasons and found that visitation was not always a positive experience. One co-researcher expressed a sense of actually feeling not valued at all by her non-resident father in terms of him wanting a relationship with her as a child.

“When I went to his place, we would just go to the hockey rink because that’s what my brothers did. I never felt any sense that I was important to him. I mean, I guess I knew I was. It’s just that he wouldn’t know anything about me... who my friends were or what grade I was in or what I was doing... I just tagged along to my brother’s hockey games reluctantly, forcibly went to his place for the occasional weekend but would have rather stayed home. And I didn’t miss him, it was just easier to be away from him and I was happier to not have him in my life.” (42 year old woman)

Some non-resident parents went on to develop relationships with new partners without consideration of the effect of the new alliances on their children.

“...he had billions and billions of really young girlfriends and I found that very, very disturbing because I was now 11 or 12 and his girlfriends were like 22, 23...all these young nurses in town,” (42 year old woman).

However, of significance, and probably the feature that defines this experience as mid-continuum rather than dissolution, is the degree to which the co-researchers understood that both parents were committed to them at a deep level. This sense of commitment was experienced and understood despite the physical absence of the non-resident parent, the seeming lack of actual non-resident parenting, and the ongoing tension and conflict inherent in their parents' relationship.

“But I always felt, from both of my parents, no matter how bad things were, that they would have done anything for us. I always felt that even through my dad (non-resident parent), in many ways was selfish and didn't know how to raise me, I knew that if I was in huge trouble, because he was so committed to us, if we needed something, he would find a way to get it for us.” (42 year old woman).

“You know, even if I was coming from a divorced family, it was no big deal. You know, I had both parents there, whether they were together, or I didn't see mom (non-resident parent) much, I knew they were both still there. Its not like my mom abandoned us or my dad abandoned us, or anything like that. It was, even though we didn't see each parent every day, it wasn't a big deal.” (27 year old man)

Relationships between siblings were convoluted by the conflict and tension occurring between the parents and the subsequent division of loyalties they experienced. Tensions seemed to be rooted in the formation of alliances between family members within the context of unstable and shifting roles.

“My younger brother was way more pulled between my parents than I was. Dad would phone him every day when he was living back with my mom – every day and say to him “have you told your mother you're coming to live with me?” Everyday. And every time the phone rang, it was always at dinner time, and I remember this so it must have affected me too because I knew he never phoned to talk to me. He'd phone and say “hi K, is P there?”. Like not, how are you, how's your day? I mean, I was only two years older, but I new I was never as good, I was just not P.” (42 year old woman)

The co-researchers were aware of the financial implications of the divorce, experienced loss of financial status and understood that head games were played by parents to control and punish the other parent through the use of withholding money.

“We owned a house in Merritt, and as soon as my mom said that’s it, I want a divorce, my dad quit paying for the house, quit paying the mortgage, so I know we lost the house. The bank took it, or foreclosed on it because the mortgage payments weren’t being made.”(27 year old man)

“The financial implications were bad because my dad refused to pay child support and in the 70’s you could get away with that. So we went on welfare for awhile until my mom got a job, And my dad said he’d pay child support if we lived with him, so he kind of blackmailed my mother, but my mom didn’t want that. And then we’d go to my dad’s house and he’d give us maybe a \$100 bucks and he’d become the hero right, and my mom would be thinking, that’s nothing, you know that doesn’t pay for anything.”(42 year old woman)

For some, shame and embarrassment were experienced subsequent to these private aspects of family life becoming public knowledge...

“...they stayed in this same small town and that’s really hard because people in those days divided their opinions ...my dad was very volatile so people were scared to talk to him and some people thought my mom was this wanton woman... and so I’d go to school and people would say, “Is your dad (name)? He’s a fucking asshole” and I’d just go “right”. And he was. And I never stood up for him and I always felt guilty because he had a lot of good qualities and he was a darn good doctor.” (42 year old woman).

Finally, within the process of mid-continuum reorganization, there were destructive structural and textural experiences that included being used as a messenger and feeling like being a pawn between warring parents...

“He (non resident dad) was so angry that he couldn’t even be around me or my mom without being angry, right, except he would use me... like, what’s your mom doing... and I just hated it.” (42 year old woman)

... as well as more constructive structural and textural experiences as indicated by stories of celebration of holidays, special occasions, and the sense of attempted continued

connection and relationship. At some level, the co-researchers understood the compromise required to achieve this being together.

“My mom (resident parent) always tried to have a sense of normalcy. My dad came back for Christmas for many, many years... and my dad will come up this Christmas, and they’ll all probably stay here in this house.” (42 year old woman)

Thus, the essence of the structural experience described by co-researchers whose process fell mid-continuum was characterized by ineffective attempts by parents to provide information to the children about the reorganization of their family. It included decision making on the children’s behalf without consultation of any kind, being subject to derogatory comments made by one parent about the other, and the realization that one parent was being very hurt by the divorce decision.

Verbal and physical conflict was part of this experience to a moderate degree. Changes were experienced that disrupted their day to day existence in terms of lifestyle and connection to community. Relationships changed between parent and child in terms of roles, time spent, and parenting received. Private aspects of their lives became public. Sibling relationships were strained, but repaired over time. Finally, there were a variety of experiences interwoven of both a destructive and constructive nature as the families caught mid-continuum struggled to resolve the ongoing issues relative to the divorce.

The textural experience for the children began with shock and angst, which developed into tentativeness; a stage of self-protection where they existed trying to determine what was going on with their lives. The protective feeling extended to their resident parent and younger siblings, in addition to the anguish they felt subsequent to witnessing conflicts between their parents.

As the changes unfolded, the co-researchers experienced a mixture of loss of childhood combined with a rising sense of competence at being able to assume the responsibilities and be successful at meeting the new experiences resulting from the divorce. They felt secure in their relationship with their same sex resident parent, but experienced feelings of mistrust and anger towards their non-resident parent. Also, there was a residual feeling of being somewhat insignificant to their non-resident parent despite the underlying recognition of the commitment of both parents to their basic needs.

The meaning these co-researchers attached to their overall experiences was one of juxtaposition between feeling valued by the resident parent and unworthy to the non-resident parent – of a sense of security and predictability within their lives with the resident parent compared to the instability and tension with the non-resident parent.

As young adults the co-researchers pursued the liberal lifestyle that was condoned by their parents, but they developed traditional goals about expectations for their adult life and family relationships.

“...I knew way before I met (husband) that whoever I was going to marry was going to make enough money that I could stay home if I wanted to with my kids. People go...that’s ridiculous how do you know, and I’d go, I just know I wouldn’t want to marry someone who didn’t. I married like a business deal. I’m not a hopeless romantic...I am going to live in a suburb with a white picket fence and they go no you don’t and I go yah I do. Never had it. You’ve had it. And you don’t want it now. I never ever had it. That’s what I want and I made that a goal. It’s been my goal my whole life until I got it. What I have.” (42 year old woman).

The longing for family – relationships, traditions, hearth and home, social acceptance, and a sense of belonging – contributed to the motivation to maintain adult marriages at all costs. It is within this *family of marriage* they are offered a second opportunity to create a cohesive family, challenge societal judgments imposed on them as children, and afford their children the security and stability they were not offered.

“...I’ve already been through divorce. There’s no way I’ll ever get divorced. And I say that wholeheartedly. If (my husband) had an affair, it wouldn’t be the end of the world. Wouldn’t like it but ah, that’s minor in the big scheme of things. I really do just think, big deal. Because that’s not what it’s all about. That’s part of marriage for sure but its not the be all and end all. And I don’t think he would cause, I mean he might, maybe one day he might have a one night stand or whatever, but its not the be all or end all to me.” (42 year old woman).

Despite the success experienced, they struggle to simply relax and enjoy their achievements, but rather fear its destruction and *await the other shoe to drop*. The need to maintain control, expressed sometimes as a sense of foreboding, was described with poignancy surprising of these successful adults that seemed, in every way contradictory to their otherwise competent and capable persona. Each of them connected the fear to a feeling of *lack of control* relative to life forces such as death or the state of the economy.

“The biggest problem I have is this huge fear that something will happen to (husband). And he is the reason for all this. That’s how I perceive it. I mean I know *we* are the reason for this. When I say *this*, I don’t mean this big mansion, I mean the stability...the house, the vacations, the fact that he coaches the kids soccer and hockey and that he believes in them and believes in me and all that kind of stuff. And I know it’s *us* but ultimately I see it as him. And I think – if he’s taken away... like that’s my biggest, biggest fear...cause I think I couldn’t ... I just couldn’t - I think...fuck... dammit...I did everything right and I got what I wanted and now its gone and that’s one thing I can’t control. I mean...I can’t control his death. And it drives me crazy. I bet there’s not a day goes by that I don’t think that if he’s gone it will all fall apart and it makes it feel a bit fragile... I’m always afraid to relish in the pure joy too much...” (42 year old woman).

Upon reflection, they have decided their need for control and fear of that which they cannot control, is likely connected to the unexpectedness of divorce. They experienced, at a young age, life altering devastation of their security that came without warning. The lack of support and information received about the changes reinforced this worldview and caused them, as children, to take control of that which was within their reach and only as adults did they fully begin to accept the extent of their impotence.

Within their relationships with spouses and friends, they fear rejection and thus attempt to understand the reasons for their parent's divorce, to somehow ensure that it doesn't happen to them...

"Maybe one bad thing that's come out of my parents' divorce is I'm a bit of a control freak. I have to be in control of everything at all times. And I'm always waiting for something to go wrong. Cause its like I said with my parents, I never saw it coming. I always thought they were happy but obviously they weren't. The one thing I'd like to know is what caused the divorce. Just for peace of mind. Its something that has bothered me in a way ever since. I just wonder if it was an all of a sudden thing, or if there was something that led up to it. And if there was something that led up to it what was it so I don't make the same damn mistake. Like if there was something my dad did to make my mom say "screw you", then what the hell was it so I don't make the same mistake." (27 year old man)

... or try to control their relationships by contributing enough to demonstrate their worthiness and secure their place of belonging.

"I have huge control issues, still, I think I do. I think I need to control and that's why I have all these people over for dinner... and do all these things... its from the sense that if I keep doing all these good things, then people will like me and I know that's a big hang up of mine. It's like I've got to keep bringing people into my life and then in case everyone else falls away, then I'll have this huge circle." (42 year old woman)

Over time, and with love and support of friends and spouses, they have begun to develop trust in relationships, however, within the descriptions is a thread of continued belief that if they are not *good enough* rejection will occur again.

"I have this horrible feeling that if I have a really good friend or before it was with boyfriends, that I can be wonderful but if I make one mistake, that there's no sense of trust. I have a real problem with trust. And I have it with female friends now too... and I just think that if I'm not perfect... like if I had someone for supper and I forgot to include them. Or if I didn't really appreciate they looked after my kids and I didn't thank them 15 thousand times, that they might think I don't want to be her friend, she's awful. And I know that I'm starting to get to the point where I'm realizing, I have 2 really good friends in town and I've talked a lot about this with them. And I realize I can do something really terrible now and they'll still be my friend. You don't just get kicked out of the team for making a mistake." (42 year old woman)

As adults, they often fall into patterns of trying to prove that they are competent to their parents. They recognize the behaviours as irrational, however, co-researchers whose resident parent was supportive and nurturing throughout their childhood, feel the need to provide reassurance of the positive parenting received and assuage the guilt associated with initiating the divorce. Conversely, in adult relationship with the non-resident parent, and sometimes, resident parents, if they were absent from our life, we continue to seek the approval and nurturance that was unavailable to us as children.

“...I still try to connect with my dad on his level - sports...it’s important that my kids do well at sports because that impresses him...and it’s kind of how we connect and what we talk about...” (42 year old woman).

Many of the patterns that were established in their childhoods around visitation and competition between their parents continue to exist, and many of the emotions related to the divorce live on in those patterns.

“but it still bothers me. I would love to go stay at my family’s house with my kids as opposed to I go to my mom’s house and my dad says when are you gonna come to my house? It starts all those things up again cause now I have to pick and choose cause now I’ve got grandchildren that are being pulled between. And its not that bad cause I don’t live right there anymore, but I hate it. I really, really hate it because it’s just another headache that’ll continue my whole life and I’m so glad that my kids don’t have to do that.” (42 year old woman)

The co-researchers’ definitions of success are tied to their ability to establish families and re-create that which was lost to them as children. They yearn to be content and happy within a traditional family structure.

“A lot of people say success is how much money you have... I don’t think so... money actually... I would be happy living in a cardboard box cause you have to be happy with yourself, with your life, um... Success to me is happiness... if you’re happy you’re successful. It doesn’t matter how much money you have by any means... I think I’m successful, I’m happy. I have a good marriage, I have a helluva wife, a happy healthy 10 year old boy. You know I’ve got a good job, and it’s a job that’s forever,” (27 year old man)

They feel that a complex combination of experiences contributes to their success and resilience. They are thoughtful and insightful individuals. They have spent many hours examining the experience of parental divorce to better understand themselves and realize they have become incredibly independent.

“If there is one thing, being successful, its just being able to just grow up... being able to learn by your mistakes, it makes you think... makes you be a problem solver. Lets you think for yourself. Then you don't depend on anybody to do anything for you. Figure it out for yourself. And if there is one thing that contributes to success, that has got to be it.” (27 year old man)

They have created stories about their parents' lives and divorce in an effort to understand them as fallible human beings and forgive them where appropriate.

“My dad had grown up on the wrong side of the tracks and he grew up in orphanages, and he had a lousy family life as a kid so he really wanted a true family but he didn't know how to do that, I don't think. But, I don't think it was necessarily my dad's fault, cause in those days you kind of married whoever you were going out with at that time. And my dad was quite a bully in many ways and he kind of bullied her... well wore her down and so she married him. So then 6 years after they were married, my dad moved her to Canada, and my mom never really got over that. Then my mom met this guy that she left my dad for and he was the first person, and well she was extremely inexperienced and had gone to a girls' school right and so this guy was the first real chemistry... where your heart feels like... you know that whole thing... And she said maybe if she and my dad had stayed in England, maybe they would have stayed together cause the family wouldn't have allowed them to split up...”(42 year old woman)

They recognize the need to take personal responsibility for their response to the experience of parental divorce and as such have developed personal philosophies around the experience that reinforce the strengths derived from hardships they experienced.

“I know if I dwell on it, I wouldn't be where I am today, sure all wounds take time to heal, some heal faster than others, and it is a huge scar, when your parents get divorced, but you can't dwell on it, because you did nothing to cause it. I don't know. I think maybe people that aren't successful that come from broken homes, maybe they dwell on it for too long or they don't have any drive. Maybe they figure why try with my life because my parents tried with theirs and it didn't work for them... you know, maybe its hard to say.” (27 year old man)

“I think at some point as an adult, you’ve got to realize you gotta get on with your life... you can’t just say, well my parents are divorced and so’ I’m like this... I find people that do that constantly really irritate me... it’s a big copout I mean eventually your parents stop raising you and you start raising yourself ... you’ve got to make some decisions so it really irritates me when people say well I didn’t do this cause I never had the opportunity. Well you got an opportunity now.” (42 year old woman)

These co-researchers have transcended many negative societal expectations that were imposed on them as children of divorce and reduced their sense of shame through developing an understanding of family functioning and observing other people’s lives.

“Well my family was so openly dysfunctional I thought “ I just want to live this picket fence suburb life” and then I realized that all my friends who had parents who stayed together who seemed really functional... well I find out now that their dad was a drinker, or another dad was a womanizer, or the mom was like chronically depressed and never got out of bed for weeks... or the dad was abusive to the mom, and these were good friends... and I keep thinking everyone knew I was dysfunctional cause it was so open and I was labeled this person from a divorced home, but I guess we all had our troubles.” (42 year old woman)

They have reframed many of the difficult experiences that were part of their parents’ divorce thus developing acceptance of their past and positive meanings about their lives. In essence, they attribute many of the challenges they experienced to the development of their resilience and thus, success. The taking on of responsibilities created a strong work ethic within them...

“Hard work and dedication. You work long hours and learn absolutely everything you can about your job. Don’t be afraid to ask a question. The only dumb question is the one that isn’t asked in my eyes.” (27 year old man)

... taught them life skills necessary for resilience and success...

“Maybe because we had to fight for things too, I’ve always had to pay for my own stuff because there wasn’t any money. So I got family allowance which was given to me in grade 8 which was \$20 and then whatever baby sitting money I made. So like my mom would buy school supplies just the bare basics and I would buy everything else. And my brothers were the same way so you become independent and you value a dollar.” (42 year old woman)

... and nurtured the development of self sufficiency.

“So I would go on the weekends to some swim club meet and I would just go with whatever family took me. And looking back now, like I don’t... I think my mom was just trying to survive. I don’t think she slipped them a couple of bucks and said you know here’s money for the hotel or here’s money for this campsite. You know, I just went along. But again, I just think I wanted to do that and I knew I had no parental support to do that but I’d have to ask people, so it would be like M (daughter) saying to you guys “oh if you guys are going, can I get a ride”. Every single time. And no one begrudged me it. I certainly didn’t sense it. They all took me under their wing. So that’s how I did get extra curricular activities. I also hitch hiked places and I didn’t think anything of it. It was just what I did. And we were never told that it’s just that there was not that my mom said you can’t do it because I can’t pick you up. I just knew what her hours were and I knew she wouldn’t be able to do that. ” (42 year old woman)

The loss of family unit instilled in some co-researchers a strong reverence for re-establishing and retaining the relationships amongst its members now that they are adults.

“We’re a very close family considering we grew up apart and I’m wondering if we are close now because we did grow up apart on and off and all that. My brothers come up here for Christmas every year and they always have. And we get together for Thanksgiving and Easter. And my brother who lives in L.A., we talk every day for hours and he’s truly my best friend... And I think its because of our parents being apart that sometimes brings you closer together, and creates an importance of the family thing”. (42 year old woman).

The co-researchers acknowledge the contributions made by parents – resident and non-resident alike – to the development of their resilience. As adults, and subsequent to reflecting about their parents’ lives, they developed appreciation for gifts received despite the parental absences that were part of their life. Parents provided modeling...

“My father is unbelievably determined and resilient. And my mom is a tough person too. So they were always hard working and I think if both parents model that all the time I don’t think you can be anything but that. But I think that being hard working makes you resilient because you start to feel you have accomplishments – you achieve the things you want to achieve. And in our society that’s considered successful” (42 year old woman)

... held high expectations of us which we understood as their belief in us to do well and make responsible choices, regardless of what path we chose in life...

“My parents always had high expectations of all of us, not unrealistic but high... And I think that makes you strong too, because someone has given you these expectations that they believe in you. They realize there are these things out there and you could get into trouble and yet they say, here are your choices. And I mean none of us made bad choices... I mean we’ve all drank and stuff like that but not significantly... so I’m sure that’s part of what makes you resilient, the expectations from your parents.” (42 year old woman)

... and ultimately for the time and support that was offered when they were able.

“I think I can thank my dad for who I am. I’m a lot like my dad and that probably comes from him being a major part of my life at such a tough time... “ (27 year old man)

Finally, they wonder if there might be something inherent in their make up that predisposes them to being resilient people and pursuing success as they define it.

“I don’t know if its that... if its genetics that makes us hard working cause my parents were hard working you know what came first the chicken or the egg... I really don’t know in that situation. My brothers and I are hard working and my mother and father are both hard working so is it genetics or is it modeled behaviour, or expectations, I don’t know.” (42 year old woman)

Of interest to the researcher, is the degree to which those whose experience of parental divorce falls mid-continuum, as characterized mainly by a strong and nurturing relationship with the resident parent, are quite secure in their success. However, their description of success and the factors they identify as contributing to their achievement of it, are inherently tied to the development of resilience. There are residual lifespan implications that include: issues of control, a sense of foreboding, frustration with ongoing logistical issues of the divorce, and the desire to prove worthiness to parents. However, these co-researchers have established lives and life philosophies that contribute to the re-establishment of their familial relationships and are, overall, positive in nature.

“Live life to the fullest and to me, live it, day by day. There’s no sense living in the past because it’s gone and there’s no sense living in the future cause you’re not there yet. Right, so live for the moment and pretty much take the bull by the horns and just give ‘er.” (27 year old man)

Experience of Family Dissolution. The structural experience of family dissolution seemed to begin prior to the actual leave taking of one of the parents. Prior to the divorce occurring, the fabric of day-to-day lives often included verbal, psychological, and physical conflict within the households. The violence, conflict, and overall disrespect within relationships that were part of pre-divorce life became part of the divorce and post divorce experience. Fear and angst were often the resultant textural experiences.

“...what I remember is that my mother and father fought and I don’t know how much they fought because I think as a child you’re a little bit...it scares you... my father lost his temper and pulled some drawers out of a dresser and somehow the phone ended up getting ripped out of the wall...” (40 year old man)

“Before the split up, I definitely wouldn’t describe them as a happy couple, they just sort of cohabitated. My dad traveled a lot so he was gone a lot. And my mom was really moody. I think she was on pretty good behaviour when my dad was there and when he left she just went bonkers. And now, I think maybe it was just the stress of her being on her own, having to take care of everything and having to be a single mom for 3 weeks. But at the time it was really erratic and lots of yelling and lots of screaming and physical stuff. Not beatings or anything, just, it was sort of a house of terror where you didn’t want to piss her off and you didn’t want to do the wrong thing. It was a dysfunctional home, it was really not normal.”(31 year old woman)

Learning of the divorce was consistent with their lives and patterns of interaction, as could be said for the other experiences, but this was so in a difficult and challenging way. For some, the learning came from witnessing a horrendous argument and violent scene played out in the presence of the children. For others, it was simply the disappearance, without warning, of the other parent.

“Supposedly she kicked him out because he had cheated on her several times. I guess that day she was with my grandmother and she was driving in Burlington and she had stopped at a red light. And she looked over and she sees my father with another woman in the car and she recognizes the woman because it was some woman he had been having an affair with. And that was supposedly what finally did it... she just kicked him out and I think the phone got ripped off the hook because she had called this woman...”(40 year old man)

The co-researchers interviewed received no additional information or support. Life was expected to proceed from that moment forward as though nothing untoward had taken place. There were no particular arrangements made for access or visitation. The situation was simply not discussed.

“My father just disappeared, as far as I can remember. That time I was sitting on the stairs waiting for him, I don’t think he ever came back. What happened was he moved to Vancouver and I think he lived in Vancouver for about a year and he met another woman and married her, and then they moved to Holland and I never saw him again until I was 14 years old... so 8 years passed, before I saw him again.”(40 year old man)

“All I can remember him saying was, why can’t everybody just be happy. But it was never talked about really... it wasn’t how are you feeling? Or this isn’t your fault. Nothing. Nothing was ever talked about.”(31 year old woman)

Within the void of information, co-researchers maintained hope that that absent parent would return...

“Over the next few weeks, I remember reading the horoscopes and it said something positive and I thought oh, maybe they’re going to get back together. So obviously, the typical thing, I wanted them to get back together despite the fact that my mother had a lot of issues and all that sort of thing. So I still, at the time even though it was probably for the best, I still wanted them to be together.” (31 year old woman)

“...I was between five and six when my father just kind of disappeared...I remember sitting on the stairs by the door for the longest time waiting where he just didn’t show up...” (40 year old man).

...and longed for time and relationship with the absent parent.

“...just a little bit of time he was around was treasured...he could just take me for a drive and that was the greatest thing in the world...” (40 year old man).

They became sounding boards for angry parents who provided inappropriate information pertaining to the other parent’s activities and lifestyle choices to the children in an attempt to malign and alienate that parent child relationship. As children, they were torn between loyalties and internalized the criticisms of their same gender parent.

“I remember, my mom telling us she was sleeping in the office and pulling guilt trips and pulling the poor me routine and talking to us kids cause we used to go by her work on the way home. And she was saying oh your dad’s done this to me and that sort of started the bashing both ways... you mom did this, your dad did that...which I think was just really poor on both of their parts. I remember they were in court for like seven years battling it out.”(31 year old woman).

Relationships with the resident parent were disappointing and lacking in any sort of substantial nurturing and neither of the co-researchers felt an improvement in parenting from the resident parent post divorce. For some children of divorce, as in the researcher’s experience, the resident parent had been a strong parent prior to divorce, but began pursuing her own interests at the expense of parenting, following the divorce. The resultant outcome was the same. As children of divorce, we were astute at recognizing the degree to which our resident parent was unable to *give* something of themselves to us.

“She worked before she got married as a telephone operator and, ah... My mother... I know I love her, but I know now that because she was raised as a single child and my grandmother sheltered her so much, my mother has no real strength. All my mother had to do was be a mother. But she didn’t. She wasn’t running a business, she wasn’t working. She was on welfare, she had support from her mother and her father and other relatives so all she had to do was be a mother. And she couldn’t.”(40 year old man)

“My dad did come to soccer games and he took us out on bike rides but he didn’t do it a lot. He took us sailing, he did stuff that he wanted to do and wanted us to come along. Like if he needed a crew member for the sailing race and he wanted me to come. We did the family holidays but he was definitely more of the school that children are to be seen and not heard. So he did do things but not a lot. He wasn’t really a hands of guy at all. He wasn’t really into children.”(31 year old woman)

That was especially difficult for M, who was only five at the time of the divorce and had clear recollections of a mother who had provided nurture and parenting to him at one time in his life.

“...when I was young and my mother was there with the wing under me with motherly love...even though she wasn’t able to nurture me in other ways after my dad left...” (40 year old man).

The relationship with our non-resident parents was unreliable and it was obvious they had no idea of the significance they held in our lives, given the chaos and lack of parenting we were experiencing in our resident home life.

“So my father had had this interest in me, but after about a year, year and a half, he lost interest, and he was pretty quick to send me on my way back to Canada. I do remember that he just lost interest and after awhile he just didn't have time for me. He was too involved with his business, because at that time his business was doing really well and he was rich. The really sad thing was, while I was there I didn't do any drugs. He actually got me off them and he didn't even know... But when I got back to Canada at age 16, the next day I was doing drugs again back in with the same crowd.”(40 year old man)

Step-parents and siblings were added to our families with the same absence of information, preparation, and consideration for its impact on us as was the divorce. Fathers remarried younger women, without our presence or initial knowledge of the event. The relationship with the new stepmother ranged from tense, to strained and conflictual and it was made clear to us that the spousal relationship was the more important priority to our fathers. Despite attempts to establish good relationships with stepmothers, it was apparent they were not prepared to be significant adults in our lives.

“I remember, and we're not talking huge amounts of time since my mom left, like within a year or somewhere around there, my dad took me out on the sailboat and told me he loves this woman. And the next thing we knew he said “I got married and she's moving in with her 2 sons from France.” So she moved in and she was fine, but she definitely wasn't warm and fuzzy... and we were just expected to get on with it. She didn't interfere too much, like she wasn't in our face but she didn't go out of her way to make us feel at all welcome in our own house. I remember we thought it would be fun to try to speak to her in French, but she just said “I'll speak to you in English. You can't speak French.” We were very shy and sensitive and we thought we were trying to help her feel welcome, so things like that just crushed me... things like that” (31 year old woman)

The accumulation of these experiences and relationship dynamics resulted in an acknowledged, identified, seeming total loss of parenting for us and we were allowed to drift and raise ourselves.

“So, my dad was an executive and ran a very successful company and he traveled all the time and so we had no supervision, no involvement, and no access back and forth. I mean we sort of saw my mom here and there, but, it’s not like we went to her place or anything. But we were old enough at that time, to do whatever we wanted. But at that time, I was 15 and I think I needed a lot more parental guidance and I sort of felt like I raised myself from that point on.”(31 year old woman)

We yearned for and sought out help and support from formal and informal sources and mentors. The experience was wrought with disappointment at the lack of commitment and insight the mentors unknowingly brought to the situation. As peer mentors, they likely had no idea about the vulnerability that was present in our young souls. Even extended family fell short, for the most part in terms of being present for us through the chaotic and tumultuous time.

“I was really angry for awhile wondering why didn’t someone step in and do something. Why didn’t my aunts or my grandparents pull us out of there. Cause I remember feeling at the time, when I was living with my mother, that I would just die, I was going to expire, because no one could possibly live with that stress... and I just thought, I can’t live like this anymore. And I thought I was just going to die. And I just thought, why isn’t anybody helping me.”(31 year old woman)

The cumulative textural experience was one of rejection and questioning our value, accompanied by the fear that our behaviours somehow caused the abandonment.

“...out of the blue he (Big Brother volunteer) came and I remember I was on the same darn staircase leading down from the exit of my house when he came and was telling me that he was quitting and I remember being shattered and crying...and I remembered a time before when his wife had made some popcorn and somewhere along the lines supposedly I didn’t say thank you to her for the popcorn and that was why she wasn’t happy with me and I think that was the reason he decided to quit...” (40 year old man).

We felt ashamed and experienced feelings of low self worth. For some, our personal experiences of parental divorce became fodder for conversation within a social setting...

“...I remember in school that I didn’t have a father and other kids did and I remember this one kid in school...and somehow we got into some little kid scrap and he started yelling at me in front of all my friends that I didn’t have a father and it was like he was taunting me with it...” (40 year old man).

... and we struggled with the development of positive self esteem as children and well into adulthood.

“I don’t think I ever had a lot of self esteem... I was always shy. But I think deep down inside I wasn’t really shy, but we had been so beaten down by my mother so I became more of a people pleaser. I became really shy and kind of scared to say anything. I was the daughter who was really obedient, always did what I was told cause I didn’t want to get into trouble so I suppressed a lot of things.”(31 year old woman)

Although families were financially comfortable at the time of the physical separation, the male headed household maintained its socioeconomic status while the female headed households did not. In addition, we were kept abreast of the financial implications of our parents’ divorce as well as the ongoing conflict that surrounded the monetary issues.

“My mother used to tell me that seven or eight years passed before we saw him because he believed there was a statute of limitations or something. And there were some legal issues he had left behind in regards to the divorce, child support, and also in regards to other obligations he left behind. For instance I know he had a business that my mother tried to run after he left and I know that if she would have had help, things might have been different.”(40 year old man)

“My dad is Mr. Non-confrontational which is fine. But we really felt like we wanted him to stand up for us, but he just let our mother bully us and he paid her all this money and then complained about her to us.”(31 year old woman)

Contrary to the experience of the researcher, the actual changes to the lives and lifestyle of the co-researchers were minimal. The researcher’s experience was

exacerbated by life altering changes that included vast geographical separation from a parent, as well as a new home, school, and loss of social supports. The co-researchers were simply left by one parent and their life went on as though nothing had occurred.

“Right at the beginning, there weren’t many changes at all. We stayed in the same house and the flow of life didn’t change. The stress of my mother was gone, but at least she played a part in parenting and now that was gone too so we were really left to our own defenses.”(31 year old woman)

They remained in the same home, attended the same school, maintained the same friends, and, subsequent to assistance provided by extended family to the female headed household, managed to experience a similar standard of living.

“If it wasn’t for my grandmother, well my mother was on welfare anyway, but if it wasn’t for my grandmother, we would really have been on welfare. My grandmother really took care of us. She lived in Hamilton about 20 minutes away from us, and we saw her regularly, but financially I know now that’s what kept us going.”(40 year old man)

Despite the minimal changes for the co-researchers, chaos reigned in all of our homes. We attempted to escape the difficulties by moving to live with our non-resident parent, but experienced horrible situations despite our hope that it would improve the situation. We allowed ourselves to be vulnerable, repeatedly, moving between the households, feeling hopeful that the new parent would pick up the torch and begin to parent. However, these trials of living together were met with the loss of interest on the part of the other parent, being returned to home without being provided a choice or rationale for the decision, and ultimately in reinforcing our low sense of self worth.

“For grade 12, I moved in with my mother... but she was very destructive. She had a very destructive personality. And really moody and that sort of thing. And, I think it was hard on my dad when I moved in with her. I’m not sure why. Well, I think he was hurt. And that was a helatious year... just horrible. I really battled with my mother and well... she was just not a healthy person to be around.”(31 year old woman)

“My dad came to Ontario and he offered to take me to Holland and perhaps I could go to school there. So by the age of 14 or 15. I did go there and I spent about a year and a half in Holland working for him and he was too embarrassed in Holland to tell anyone he had a son, from Canada. So he told everybody I was his nephew and at that time I was just too proud to have a father that I didn’t even realize how wrong that was. And I went along with that and even his daughter, who is my half sister, was told and always believed that I was his nephew, not her half brother.” (40 year old man).

As adolescents, the lack of stability and nurturing in our lives manifested itself in behaviours that included having difficulty maintaining attendance at school or conversely being “perfect” outside the home, using drugs or alcohol as a means of escape, and seeking out casual sexual relationships in a search for love and intimacy...

“I left school at about grade 8 or 9, and never went back, except for about two months in grade 9... but by then I was involved in drugs, and again, there wasn’t a lot of kids that did that, so I don’t know how I ended up being one of few... I didn’t do well in grade 8 because I skipped school so much. I can remember going to school sometimes once a week on Fridays. They’d have tests and I’d still be in the 90-95% on tests... maybe it just wasn’t challenging.”(40 year old man)

... and our emotional pain manifested itself in health related or psychological problems such as the onset of bulimia that coincided with parental divorce.

“I lived with my dad, and it was just after my mom left that I became bulimic. I remember being 15 and it obviously impacted me and our family didn’t talk. I think that was my release or however I dealt with my stress. My dad was a very nice kind fellow, but, I remember him saying... why can’t everybody just be happy? And later I started missing school but they were really good with me cause I think they kind of knew what was going on so they kind of let me miss classes and I didn’t get into any trouble at school. I think that was the worst I did. I started drinking at parties around then, and skipping classes.”(31 year old woman)

During our late teen and early adult years, we experienced a time of uncertainty and made decisions that were more focused on running away from the pain and struggle associated with our resident home lives than we were on moving towards a particular goal or aspiration.

“So when I was about 18, I went to BCIT. There was a bunch of parties and of course I went to all of them. And it was about 3 weeks into the course and I thought, I just can’t do this. I was too stressed out at home, living with my mom. I just couldn’t focus and I was working part time and all I wanted to do was get out of that house. I knew I wasn’t going to do well at school so I decided to withdraw and I got a full time hostessing job, saved up some money, went to Ikea and got some dishes and started saving up stuff...”(31 year old woman)

Our experiences culminated in desperately low feelings of self worth and self-evaluation about our life situation. We experienced depression and disillusion with our lives, as young adults as we consciously acknowledged the dismal circumstances within which we were living.

“I went out west later, when I was about 19 or 20. I ended up in Banff still doing drugs. And I ended up working as a cook, for maybe a couple of years, skiing and partying. And then I ended up working as a waiter and then a bartender and then a bouncer and then, all of a sudden bang, I broke my leg. So after six months living on UI in Banff, I went back home to live with my mother. But by then, I was like, 22, I had quit doing drugs. I remember that when I broke my leg, that did it... I really quit... all on my own... bang, done. And then all of a sudden, I was really depressed with my life, I wasn’t high anymore, I guess and I knew I needed to do something to change my life.”(40 year old man)

After determining the changes we needed to make, we embarked on active processes to change those aspects that were unsatisfactory to us. However, because of our low self esteem and vulnerability, we were dependent and relied on others to help us rise above our life circumstances.

“I started hanging out with these people I worked with who always had drinks after work... wasn’t the best crowd. Wasn’t horrible, but wasn’t the crowd for me. Then I worked at other restaurants... at one place, one of the head waiters there would always go behind to the till where no one could see me and grope me and everything and that was not good. But that’s where I met my first husband, R, and we moved in together and that’s when I quit where I was working and took the legal secretary course. It was a bit of a turn around for me. I got out of an unhealthy working situation, an unhealthy lifestyle. I had been bulimic all that while and I confessed it to R and I eventually went to counseling and I got over that. After I took the legal secretary course, I got a job with a law firm and things definitely got more positive.”(31 year old woman)

In the midst of attempting to improve our circumstances, our parents broke promises they had made in relation to original commitments to support us, financially, to pursue career or educational goals. We were deeply disillusioned by our parents' lack of commitment to us and were reinforced in our belief that we were not valued by them.

“From the time I was in elementary school, I was always supposed to be the one to go to university. They had put me in private school for a couple of years cause I was supposedly the one who was going to be a doctor or whatever. But after the divorce, well, when the time came for me to go to university, there was no help, no support, nothing whatsoever. So I enrolled in BCIT, but after a few weeks, I just thought, it was too stressful trying to live in that house and work part time, so I quit and got a full time job and moved out.”(31 year old woman)

“My father had always offered, off and on, if there was ever a business opportunity I thought I could do he would provide the finances to do it, but I always thought that was just talk. So after I thought about it, I called him and told him I did want to start my own business, but I wanted to come to Holland and learn how to run a business from him. So my father told me from day one, that he would give me half the business if I worked with him. Not give me, I would earn half the business and so that's also what I was working for. Over time, the work got more difficult, more drudgery, more and more thrown on me, more responsibility. I got more confident that I deserved my share of the business that had been promised. But each time I asked him, I got evasive answers. He started to offer me a little bit more money and to buy me a better car and I started to get suspicious. Then I found some documents from my father's business that said it was owned by two or three people and based on that he couldn't give me half the business. So I gave him a couple of months notice and I went back to Canada. And I never heard from my father for years after that.”(40 year old man)

It was not, however, our final attempt to reach out to be parented. As adults, we have alternately attempted to restore relations between family members, and then withdrawn out of a need to protect ourselves from the hurt we've learned is inherent in the unreliable relationships of our families.

“So, I think, you know what, my father is a nice guy. We're not close at all. We talk to each other once a month and its about the weather, and he tells us how he's basically too busy to come up here. He'll come up here on a business trip and won't even phone or visit, but he tells me, oh I'm going to be up there but I won't have time for you. And I'm like... you don't have 10 minutes just to swing by and say hello? So I don't have a lot of respect for him.” (31 year old woman)

“to this day I know there’s nothing my mother can offer me. The mistake I made is that in the last couple of years before S passed away, I was so desperate for help that I did reach out for her and she wasn’t there at all. And its been a constant disappointment ... I keep putting myself out there for those little bits of success (in my relationship with them) and I just take everything I can out of it cause I need it so bad.” (40 year old man)

So, we continue to feel abandoned by our parents as subsequent to their absence and their ongoing inability to be present for us, throughout the challenges and milestones of our adult lives.

“And when we got we married, we got married in a town that was like five km from where my dad lives and he never even came to the marriage. There was nobody from my family. It was all S’s family. That I remember. I’ll never forget that.”(40 year old man)

The structural experience of divorce that falls towards the dissolution of family end of the continuum, was grounded in a context of pre-divorce family conflict, a conflictual parental separation, and absence of information. It included a lack of support for the children, parental maligning of each other, lack of commitment or sustained interest from a single adult, public exposure of private life, inappropriate sharing of adult information pertaining to finances and sexual conduct, and a lack of parenting or financial support from either parent. These structural findings are consistent with a divorce ritual that is encouraged and condoned by the current legal system and society in general. However, this structural framework creates a textural response that includes fear, loss, abandonment, shame, disappointment, confusion, lack of worthiness, rejection and a sense of being replaced. The emotional responses for those of us who experienced a process of family dissolution, resulted in unhealthy lifestyle choices as adolescents and young adults, and created additional challenges for us in our pursuit of happy and successful lives.

The beliefs we developed about family and marriage were similar to those whose experience was mid-continuum, in as much as we revered family structure and hoped to maintain our marriages and avoid divorce. However, because our early marriages were sometimes embarked on as a means of escape and a need to be cared for, as we matured and healed from the hurt of our parents' divorce, our needs changed. We struggled between the dichotomy of wanting to avoid the "failure" of divorce and knowing at some level that we needed to change our lives again.

"I think because of my parents' divorce, in my first marriage, we both said, we'll never get divorced, no matter what. And I think that's what kept us together as long as it did. Not that we had a great relationship, but we said we would never get divorced, and we're both stubborn people, so, it took a long time to get there... and decide to actually end it..." (31 year old woman)

We struggled with anxiety and depression in our young adult years, and again took inventory at particular points along our lifespan and made the changes necessary to move closer to the lives we wanted.

"I feel like I hit rock bottom after I had B (2nd child). I can't remember where it was, I just didn't want to get up out of bed and that was happening for awhile, and I was never suicidal but I knew I had to do something cause I really didn't want to even get out of bed. So I started...socializing more...and just changing ideas about what was important to me and deciding what, you know. I think... I read a statement in one of the books and it said, happiness is a choice. And that particular statement struck me at a time and that's what I needed to hear. And I decided - I can be happy right now. And I became more confident, out of that... and finally at the end I said, you know what, I'm happy at work, I'm happy with the kids, I'm happy with our house. I'm happy, with all these other things, I said I'm just not happy with you..." (31 year old woman)

Consistent with the co-researchers whose experience is mid-continuum, we too struggle with relaxing too much into our success and achievements. Our worry that we will lose what we have achieved, is grounded in our experience of sudden change as well as our lack of understanding of what normal life and measures of success are.

“I didn’t even know I was successful in business until all of a sudden “bang” and I realized... just a minute, I am successful in business but I kept working thinking... “no I’m not there yet, I’m not there yet” you know I’m still struggling, I just started a business, oh my god, I could go broke tomorrow...” (40 year old man).

We have struggled with control, but at some level are less afraid than those mid-continuum, as though, we have lost so much in our lives, experienced so much hurt, there is very little that can touch us anymore. We are learning to let go and enjoy.

“There was a time when I just couldn’t sit back and relax and enjoy things. Everything was work. I was always busy, I could never sit still. I think I really didn’t feel like I deserved good things in my life. I was way more uptight and way more controlling and I just didn’t enjoy life as much. I think, because my life was so chaotic, I really became a bit of a control freak and really tried to control all of it. Sometimes you get caught up in trying to control every little aspect of life, but I finally thought, you just have to let go. Sometimes you can’t control every aspect of life. And now its way different, and I enjoy life a lot more.” (31 year old woman)

Connected with feelings of worthiness, self esteem, and the illusion that our childhood behaviours caused the rejection we experienced from parents and other significant adults, we often take on an *over-responsible* role for the maintenance of relationships with parents, co-workers, and friends. Despite our conscious recognition that we are worthy of care and respect, there remains within us, a thread of continued belief that if we are not *good enough* rejection will occur again.

“So I may go through my entire life continuing to try (to be successful in relationships) and never get there. But I wont stop trying even if there’s reasons why you do perhaps. Usually it comes from the other person where they’ve given up and you can’t do it alone. Sometimes you have to talk to the other person and convince them, get them to see that we were doing this wrong. And we need to change it and we can get where we want to be. I tend to do that with people. I tend to be the one that takes charge and tries to rationalize what a problem is and how to fix it and get over it and carry on. I do that a lot in all my relationships. Maybe I used to think that was because I was doing things wrong and I had to do that. And if I look at it now ...realistically, it’s not me... it’s two people combined and sometimes its the other person ...and so yah, ...that would be a strong trait that I have that I didn’t even recognize.” (40 year old man).

The relationship with our parents continues to be tense and lacking in connection. We seem to alternate between attempt to restore our family, and walk away. At times we seek approval from them, as though to prove our worthiness to them will restore a parent child relationship that nurtures and supports us. But as we cycle through the attempts and acceptance of subsequent rejections, we become less apt to continue to pursue those relationships and have moved on to others who fill those “family” places in our lives.

“...I lived there for about six months and continued working but my father had me working 14 hours a day, five days a week and 12 hours on Saturday, six hours on Sunday. It was crazy and the type of work I was doing would have taken 4 people to do that in the same amount of hours...I wanted to prove to my father that I was a hard worker...” (40 year old man).

Finally, some of us have decided that continued contact with our family is not conducive to successful living and have completely cut ourselves off from some or all family relationships. These decisions are rarely based in anger, but rather an effort to avoid the hurt and disappointment experienced with each rejection or dismissal. We have determined that it is healthier to move ahead, focus on new relationships that are more consistent with our beliefs and lifestyle and contribute to our happiness and feelings of positive self worth.

“So, basically my relationship with my family is just not good. There’s nothing there. It really troubled me before, but I think it sort of came to a point where I just don’t have enough time in my life. I’m a busy girl and I just want to be around as many positive people as I can. And you know what, I just don’t wish them ill in any way. Its just you go your way and I’ll go mine and I hope they’re happy.” (31 year old woman)

This has never occurred as an easy decision for us, and rarely is as conclusive as we make it sound. It seems that because hurt resides in us, we have accepted that, to move forward, we must differentiate from relationships that continue to cause us pain. We have learned we are not our parents, and can choose to be who we want to be.

“When I think about my parents, well really I don’t have any respect for them. I mean I always felt like they taught me more what not to do as opposed to what to do so I’ve looked to other people who have come through life and I’ve picked out the qualities that I like. I definitely didn’t get a lot from them.”(31 year old woman)

Our success has been hard won, and we are tentative about declaring it.

“I think its been a long process and for me I think the biggest success is if you’re happy in life cause what’s the point if you’re not having fun and you’re not enjoying life so that’s number one.” (31 year old woman)

We are less confident in our success and happiness than co-researchers whose experience was more reorganizational or mid-continuum. We sense that it is perhaps more fragile than the success experienced by other co-researchers and recognize ourselves as in process, rather than at a certain pinnacle of achievement.

“I’m happy with where I am even though there are negative things in my life...I’m happy with where I am now. So in knowing that, things like that don’t bother me anymore. Whereas when I wasn’t happy, or I did have those doubts, things like that would really bother me. Because even two, three months ago when I saw that report card, it really didn’t, I read it and I kind of laughed, whereas, if I’d seen that a year or two prior, I’d have gone through the roof. So sure there are things in life that I feel I’m not a 100% there, or I’m not 100% happy with, but overall I’m happy with where I am now. So that gives you a great sense of feeling, that if somebody criticizes you, or if somebody is trying to judge you, and they don’t, you just, you’re above it. Cause you know where you are and you know where perhaps, they are, and that.” (40 year old man)

Despite our ability to do many things well, our definition of success is closely tied to our ability to parent and the resultant success or happiness of our children. We are absolutely committed to protecting our children from the hurt we experienced.

“I think I was successful at work. I think I worked really hard. I’ve always been a hard worker and I was really well respected. And that sort of thing. And I really enjoyed it, actually ... but I think the other thing is with the children... giving them what I didn’t have... being there for them... and not keeping that cycle going. To me they’re my big success. And I love being involved with them and I love seeing them smile and being happy and doing things with them cause I just think that kids are supposed to be smiling and they’re supposed to be laughing and having fun and they do.” (31 year old)

We have determined that success is equated with happiness.

“So I guess my outlook is, give it all you’ve got, enjoy life and be happy and you work hard and so, I don’t see any aspect of my life that isn’t successful, except exercise (laughter) which I just don’t do consistently, but I’m not too troubled by it so whatever. So I just think... life as a whole... I have a successful life.” (31 year old woman)

But our measures are also intertwined with our relationship with our same gender parent, our need for approval, and the ability to measure up to or surpass the success they achieved in their life.

“...I needed something to help me change my life and thought my father could help me to do that and I did want to learn about business and learn to be responsible. And I wanted to not work at minimum wage jobs ...and in my mind I wanted nothing more but to learn how to become a responsible adult. And it mattered to me to make money to become perhaps rich or do as well as my father could do...I wanted to learn something that would make me successful in life. I hadn’t gotten anywhere in life so far, so I wasn’t at all happy with where I was and I had to find a way to change it...” (40 year old man).

Our definitions of success and resilience are inherently linked in as much as we cannot discuss one without the other. We cannot conceive of success without resilience with is indicative of our worldview – the conceptualization that life does not exist without pain or challenge. It is inconceivable to us that there are people who enjoy success without effort or hardship.

“And is success and resilience the same thing...I guess that is what I’m struggling with is that I think you need to be resilient to become successful. The two are tied that way. I believe that no matter what, unless you win the lottery and money is the success part, or you are given opportunities or something that is basically handed to you...then you need to have resilience. And even people who go on to be professionals...doctors and lawyers and whatever, they needed to have resilience to get to where they’ve gotten and even once they’re there. ...My god, to be in a profession like that, obviously, you need to have resilience. So yes...I firmly believe that without being resilient, without being adaptable, you cannot become successful. In business I know it for sure, and I guess that goes to relationships too. And because I’m just learning now more about relationships and how to become successful in them, I may have just realized that...I may have always known it but now it makes more sense.” (40 year old man)

As children who were required to stand alone and take responsibility for our lives at an early age, we believe we acquired a set of life skills through the experience of our parents' divorce, that contribute to the success we enjoy as adults. We developed an ability to assess our life situation and develop goals to make the changes we desired.

“Perhaps it's goals. And people that achieve anything need to have goals. And they go so far as to say you can't achieve anything now especially in business cause there's so many business plans and all of that ...these motivational speakers will tell you how to do well in business and will touch a little bit on life when they're speaking...they always say you need goals and they go so far as to say without goals and without writing them down you'll never get them. I've never written my goals down. Never. But I've I have in most cases very clear goals in my own mind of what I want in business and now in relationships and in a lot of cases I will turn them into little goals which means that you have formulated a plan on how to get there.” (40 year old man)

We developed a conscious determination to be successful...

“Because if I look at my life I know when I was younger I was shiftless and I quit school and I just did things for fun and I didn't care how much money I made and it was just fun. And then there came a point in my life where I thought, no I want to change and ...so that was in me.” (40 year old man)

...and patterns of living and being in relationship to protect ourselves from those things we know we are vulnerable to.

“I think its being successful if you can get through all that and have healthy relationships and but I think its also made me, well I'm, I just don't have time, or I don't respect people who want to be negative, or I think I'm really black and white about things and I think that's come from the divorce and the whole process there... I'm sort of all the way or none at all so I definitely have black and white sides to me and its one way or the other and I really value true friendships. I don't like BS and phoniness and things like that.” (31 year old woman)

We take personal responsibility for our response to our parents' divorce and have defined it as an experience that can diminish us or make us stronger. We have chosen to allow it to teach us to be strong and have become incredibly tough in our ability to recover, regardless of the life challenges we are presented with.

“Maybe, its all in the way people deal with. If you dwell on it and it bothers you your whole entire life, you’re not going to be able to be successful because you’re going to be so wrapped up in what went on, and why it happened. You know, it happened and there’s nothing you can do about it. You’re better off to get on with your life, as it is now, than you are to dwell on something you had no control over. And that’s what I did, you know, it happened. There was no sense crying over it. It was done. My philosophy is, let’s just get on with life. And if there’s one thing that defines success for me... it’s getting over it.” (31 year old woman)

After lengthy discussions, we realized that we held strong similar beliefs about the interaction of adversity within a person’s life in terms of the effect it has on developing resiliency. We identified our implicit assumptions that without the experience of adversity, people are not challenged to develop skills and personal philosophies, strength and character, to assist them through hardships in adulthood.

“Yeah, if life throws a whole bunch (of adversity) at them and they’ve had a very sheltered and catered to childhood I think there’s a very good probability that they’ll have a lot more trouble later in life coping and dealing with it and some of those things in life...it could crush them ...and I’ve seen it in lots of people who’ve had to deal with deaths or bankruptcies or divorces where it has ruined them” (40 year old man)

However, we recognized that adversity alone does not create resilience, but rather the experience of it in a supported environment. Thus, we acknowledged our belief that for us, genetics was a contributing factor to development of our resilience because of the harshness of the experience and the lack of support. We believe an inner strength existed pre-divorce that was triggered by hardship that caused us to fight rather than give in to the challenges...

“As for the things that I think have created the resiliency in me...I think genetics, number one, because I believe that people are born with a certain amount of character, a lot of character and a lot of that, I know it with a certainty, so that it’s that. I think that might be the biggest thing...So genetics and I think my childhood because obviously I was subjected to a lot of adversity growing up and obviously that would do one of two things... that would either make someone weak because they can’t deal with it or it would cause them to become stronger so they can deal with it and I do believe that’s part of it.”(40 year old man)

“As far as resiliency, I think its in you, but I don’t think I would be the person I am today if I didn’t go through the things I did, but I think I was stubborn and could take a lot and that sort of thing from early on and was independent from early on, so I don’t know if that’s just something that was genetically in me or if it was something... I guess it became more so over time cause I guess you didn’t have a choice. You just had to survive those things.” (31 year old woman)

Consistent with our need to parent very consciously and ensure our children have the “right” upbringing that both encourages strength but protects from harm, we developed very clear ideas about parenting, our children’s experiences of hardship, and our roles in ensuring they grow up strong and resilient, but not hurt or damaged. We feel successful as parents if we can accomplish both.

“as much as I think what I went through made me what I am, and even though I really like who I am, and part of that is because I went through the hardships, I still wouldn’t want my kids to go through those hardships even though they may make them more well balanced or well rounded or... your instinct is to protect them and give to them. But I think you have to let them feel a little bit of hurt and that sort of thing cause that’s what its about. You do learn things from hardships and being hurt but I think as parents our role is to be there to support them through it and not be the ones causing them the hardship and grief. There’s a lot of hardship in life already so the difference is where its coming from and having the support to get through it” (31 year old woman)

Despite our sense of having been abandoned and left to struggle on our own, we learned to reconcile the events of our past and develop a coherent explanation of the inappropriate and unreliable actions of our parents, in a manner that helped us to forgive them and regain hope for future relationships. We came to understand the, sometimes, harsh realities of our parents’ upbringings and their motivations for neglecting us or engaging in outrageous or violent behaviours. Some of us actively engaged in conversations and confrontations in an attempt to restore relationships. The outcome was momentary connection within the relationship, but long term freedom to differentiate from the hurtful relationship and develop an identity separate and apart from the parent.

“In that conversation my dad got very upset. I mean we argued and I said fine, you want to kick me out of the truck, I’ll walk back. I don’t care. Let me out in the middle of the highway cause I’m not gonna back down. This is how you treated me, you know. And he cried and he got upset and he was walking around and I went up to him and I tried to calm him down. And I said, you know I really love you and none of that matters. If anything I thank you for it because you know what – all of that bad stuff – I learned from it and became stronger. And I told him that and he calmed down and he recognized it was true. It was a hard lesson and it made me tougher for what came later in life. Even with my mother, we’ve had a conversation recently that was very positive but if I look at the overall... I’ve made lots of compromises with them both and I’ve allowed a lot of things to go and forgiven and all of that to get to a point where its okay.” (40 year old man).

“Even though I’ve gotten angry or frustrated with the kids, I’ve never done anything inappropriate as a parent, whereas she (my mom) ... didn’t handle it properly. Sometimes, I think maybe she was just really stressed, being a single mom while my dad was away. I don’t think she had the coping skills and maybe all these other problems and that’s why she acted the way she did. I think maybe she couldn’t help herself...so, I have more sympathy now...um ...and feel more sorry for her than I used to ...before I just hated her.”(31 year old woman)

Hope has been the strength that allows us to go on when we experience challenges and hardships as adults. The presence of hope was most aptly described by a widower in discussing his conscious pursuit of and rationale for seeking to become involved in another permanent relationship despite the grief subsequent to his first wife’s death following a difficult battle with cancer.

“I’ve lived every minute of every day with my children’s grief. I know what I’m doing and you can be assured that any decision I make will be based on their (his children’s) feelings also, but I’m not going to hide my head in the sand. And I do want to have a relationship with someone else and I do want to have support and I do want my children to have a mother in their life. I want my children to have a mother and I want to have a woman in my life to support me and so I can support her. That works for me. What (name of wife) and I had worked for me. I don’t believe that I would be who I am today without (name of wife). I know that with certainty.” (40 year old man).

Others of us maintain hope, but have created parameters or boundaries within relationships that we determine are necessary for maintenance of our successful lives.

“With N (second husband), I analyzed and analyzed and did checklists of this book and talked with friends at length about what I liked about him, what I didn’t like about him... and you know, it was a serious relationship from the beginning and pretty intense and everything happened pretty fast. But I knew going in, we had the right stuff for what was important to me and to him for a relationship and marriage. I remember telling him, I’m independent and you either take me the way I am or leave it. And I could say that because I was much stronger than I ever had been in my other relationships.” (31 year old woman)

We have utilized two cognitive strategies to reconcile our past experiences: conscious or unconscious management of memories and redefining meaning of our experience. Management of memories is the phrase utilized by the researcher to describe the phenomenon of selective memory relative to the structural aspects of divorce and contributes to the reconciliation of our past experience. For example, if we forget past events, such as abuse or neglect, the structural event becomes non- existent and therefore, we have no textural response or life span implication.

“I have this ability to forget bad things...I still do. Bad things fade away and I remember the good. I guess somehow in my childhood I was taught that because there are bad things in my childhood that I don’t really remember. And my sister moved here seven, eight months ago and over the last few months she’s told me things that I really don’t remember... at all. There’s no recollection. And even now, I don’t remember what she’s told me. I have no reason to want to remember them. I have no reason to hear what she says and put it in my mind. There’s no space in my head for that crap. It doesn’t do me any good.” (40 year old man).

Secondly, we engaged in a process of redefining the meanings we had originally attached to our negative structural experiences of divorce and ultimately redefined them as positive contributions to the development of our success. The result was an altered textural response – one of gratitude for the relationship skills, independent natures, work ethic, and resiliency – the wisdom acquired through our struggles with parental divorce.

For example, reconciliation of experiences of rejection allowed us to accept that, as adults, we are not solely responsible for the success of their relationships. We realized that we had not been rejected for doing something wrong, but rather because of life circumstances.

“...I was made to feel bad or guilty because I didn’t say thank you to his wife for some popcorn and for the longest time I believed that and I look back now I say well of course that wasn’t it. I can recognize to this day that she was never really happy with the fact that he was bonding with a boy that wasn’t his son especially when they were going to have their own child. And that’s why they cut it off, not because I didn’t say thank you for some popcorn...” (40 year old man).

We recognized that, as adults, we have the power to cognitively reframe our experiences rather than feel sorry for ourselves or use our past as an excuse for being unhappy, or unsuccessful in our lives.

“It’s like I told my father and I’ve told myself...that the things that have happened between he and I that were negative I only learned from them so if I take that further and look at my childhood when those things occurred, I must have learned from them without knowing it. So, I don’t take anything for granted. Because nothing ever has really been given to me. I can’t think of anything that’s been given to me in life without a struggle.” (40 year old man)

Recognition of our ability to persevere in spite of textural experiences of abandonment, lack of worthiness, disappointment, fear, stigmatization, and rejection seems to have contributed to altered positive self images as adults and reinforced awareness of our resilience as a strength.

“...But it probably did (break my spirit)...it probably did at those times and then you regroup and you fight back. I know that over the years with my wife dying, that broke my spirit. I know that now because it’s so recent ... ah, what happens is that I think each time that happened, you slowly get over it and you get stronger. You do, either that or it does break your spirit, and if it does break your spirit for a period of time then you need to get over it and move on and get stronger and learn from it and take everything that’s good out of it and get rid of all the shit...(laugh)...and move on and be stronger...” (40 year old man)

Finally, our gratitude for the lives we enjoy is immense given the struggles we have endured. It is as though, in knowing how truly difficult life can be, we appreciate everything that comes to us, and feel gratitude for the challenges we experienced as children in terms of how it contributed to who we became as adults. We believe there is very little that could mar our success and nothing that could diminish our resilience.

“Maybe I tell myself that to feel better about all of the crap that’s happened. It’s easy for me to be at a point in life when things aren’t that great and say, geez my life is good. Cause I know even at points when S (wife) had cancer, we would think our life was great ...because we had an awareness of how really crappy it could be. Because I realize it can always be so much worse, I mean my life has been so much worse...I mean in the last 15 years I thought life was great. It really, really, really, was. There were times when I would feel like I was just on top of the world. I had everything I wanted even though I’m just *middle class* you know... So it’s a relative thing, it’s what your expectations are...too that when you grow up the way I did, any success is really appreciated.” (40 year old man)

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to give voice to resilient adult children of divorce, to increase the understanding of the phenomenon of resilience within this population, and to give validation to the co-researchers' role in creating, through a reflexive process of creation of meaning, the successful lives they now enjoy. In this chapter, the researcher will attempt to contribute to the conversation about children and divorce by integrating the essence of the co-researchers' experience of parental divorce with the meanings they identified in relation to their experience and development of resilience/success. The essence of their experience will be located within prior findings and themes identified in the literature review and understood through the conceptual context. Conclusions drawn from this integration will be utilized to enhance the credibility of the findings of this study, challenge prior research, recommend potential social work implications and interventions, and suggest focus for future research inquiries.

Review of the literature provided a sketch of current divorce ritual. This sketch included a description of the experience of divorce from the perspective of different familial roles, as well as insight into the process, financial, and relational aspects of divorce. As well, information was provided regarding measures of success and typical outcomes for children of divorce. The findings of this study both supported and challenged the literature through examining divorce from a perspective of location along a continuum of reorganization and dissolution of family. This paradigm challenged the belief that divorce is inherently bad, and indicated the presence of both *good* and *bad* divorces as well as various pathways to achieving success as an adult child of divorce.

Analysis of Experience of Reorganization

Despite the momentary experience of shock, the experience of reorganization was characterized by a process whereby parents provided adequate information throughout the transition of divorce, allowed for decision-making opportunities, and engaged in reliable and supportive parenting. Their life long experience epitomized a relatively smooth transition from being a family unit within one household to reorganizing into a family system that encompassed different households and new membership. The co-researchers who were involved in regular contact with their non-residential parents did not feel the restriction of inflexibility of access, but rather indicated that the access was organic in nature. The concept of providing children with choice of residence and the presence of flexible access is non-existent within the literature.

Within this experience, resident and non-resident parents remained engaged in meaningful, though not always traditional, relationships with their children. They created defined roles for themselves within the evolving family structure that focused on the needs of the children rather than their own. Foreign to both the researcher's experience, and the literature review, was the parents' ability to engage in both the relational and financial aspects of the children's lives and the way in which the co-researchers were protected from any conflict that occurred as a result of negotiating provision for their needs. Their adolescent and adult years are unremarkable in terms of influence from their parents' divorce. Thus, it would seem that the co-researchers who experienced the reorganization of family, developed into self-defined successful adults without lifespan implications or variance from the process of people who are raised in intact families.

Aside from a brief mention in the literature about this kind of divorce experience and subsequent parenting relationships contributing to less anxiety, an increased sense of empowerment on behalf of the children, and overall improved outcomes, (Lansky et al., 1996), very little reference is made to the presence of reorganizational divorces.

The meaning attached to their experience of divorce is one of a positive life event within an otherwise unremarkable upbringing. They perceive the divorce as having influenced their life positively by permitting their parents to be happy in their own lives, thereby better able to contribute to them as children. They maintain a positive self-identity that does not include being *children of divorce* at a conscious level and have wholly internalized the messages they received through their parents nurture and respect of their needs, as worthy and valuable human beings.

Despite the absence of reference within the literature to this type of experience, as a resilient adult child of divorce, the juxtaposition of their experience and mine resonates within me as both possible and true. Their story is resplendent with the "if onlys" of my experience and as such, I understand the difference it would have made for my life if my parents had been able to engage in a reorganizational divorce. Examined from both family systems and socialist feminist perspective, an understanding begins to develop as to why some families were better able to engage in this type of process.

The family systems constructs of equilibrium, differentiation, anxiety, and cut-off are relevant to the process of divorce (Kerr & Bowen, 1988) in as much as they describe and explain a family's recovery from chaotic life events. A description and explanation of the process of reorganization through a family systems lens would be that the members were able to restore equilibrium following divorce, thus reducing the anxiety experienced

within its system, and thereby avoiding the response of cut-off by some of its members. Their ability to restore equilibrium was likely connected to their pre-divorce differentiation and subsequent ability to “re-negotiate relationship boundaries after a divorce... establish new rules for parenting together in their new family structure... and define the former partner as a co-parent but not as a spouse... (to reduce the) boundary conflicts that former spouses encounter after divorce that manifest themselves over child-related concerns” (Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 1999, p. 589). Inform this explanation with a socialist feminist perspective and it allows for another layer of understanding.

If we understand that family is defined by patriarchy, then we can acknowledge that a major challenge of divorce is to transcend the societal definitions of successful family life as well as traditional roles and responsibilities of mother and fatherhood. These definitions permeate parents’ and children’s conceptualization of family to the degree that identities as mother and father as well as children’s perceptions of parenting received are grounded in patriarchy.

In specific application to the stories shared, it appears that the members of these families were likely functioning as interdependent individuals prior to the divorce. Their pre-divorce identities as individuals allowed them to re-negotiate new, non-traditional roles without feeling threatened or significantly anxious, albeit hurt, by the changes occurring. This was possible through the transcendence of traditional family structure – the ability to accept that many potential configurations of family and roles exist to ensure that children’s sense of self worth is nurtured and needs are met. Their ability to transcend patriarchal definitions of family, restore equilibrium through non-traditional restructuring of the family system, and reduce anxiety within its membership ensured that

all members remained engaged in relationship and allowed the children to enjoy the benefits inherent in family life.

From a risk and resilience perspective, the presence of risk factors was virtually non-existent while the presence of buffers was almost palpable (Saleebey, 1997).

Thus, the co-researchers whose experience of divorce was located at the reorganizational end of the continuum became self-defined successful adults through their family's ability to transcend patriarchal definitions of family and restore equilibrium within the system, and their reflexive attachment of positive meanings to the experience. Their own definitions and examples of the success they enjoy, as well as their consciously developed paradigms of relationship, are reflective of their non-traditional perspective of the world. Resiliency is absent from their conceptualization of success unless asked to speak to it directly. Even then, they struggle to identify specific contributing factors to success and cannot identify how resilience contributed to their successful lives. Success simply came naturally, as it should for all children.

Thus, the contribution of the findings that are drawn from the experience of reorganization is the ability to challenge the claim made within the literature that divorce is inherently harmful. It draws attention to the oppressive nature of prior research, and the contribution of knowledge from a clinical population as being detrimental to the conceptualization of divorce. As well, it acknowledges that a reorganizational experience exists within the realm of possibilities for children of divorce. Finally, it should cause us to question current divorce ritual, laws, and legal practices that focus on financial, but neglect the relational components, and challenge us to consider how to contribute to the development of family policy and divorce ritual that supports a process of reorganization.

Analysis of Experience of Mid-Continuum

Consistent with findings in the literature review, (Cohen & Dattner, 1995), the experience of mid-continuum divorce was a chaotic process that disrupted the life journey and culminated in emotions, some of which created residual, or lifespan implications in the adult years. For researcher and co-researchers alike, the onset of the mid-continuum experience was characterized by the initial shock of learning of our parents' divorce, the attempts by one or more parents to provide us with information about the logistics of the pending changes, and the physical separation of family members subsequent to our changes in residence. Although parents attempted to provide support and nurture in the early stages of the divorce, their own emotions and needs often rendered them unable. For those whose experience continued at the mid-continuum location, the life long experience epitomized a difficult transition from being a family unit within one household to a group of individuals struggling to recreate the semblance of a family system residing in different households.

Within this experience, the resident parent was instrumental in contributing to the co-researchers' upbringing and nurturing as children, although their relationships became somewhat non-traditional and more peer like. Contrary to findings in the literature review, the phenomenon of disengagement of a parent was not limited to fathers (Finnie, 1996; Kruk, 1993). Rather, in this study, the non-resident parents partially disengaged from being in relationship with the co-researchers through unpredictable visitation schedules and lack of contribution to provision of financial support. As well, ongoing conflict and animosity between their parents created loyalty conflicts and made it difficult for the co-researchers to spend time with the non-resident parent.

Their adolescent and adult years are remarkable in that they engaged in a relatively liberal lifestyle which was condoned by their resident parents, but developed traditional goals for adulthood which included careers established early in life and relationship paradigms that expressed adamance to avoid divorce at all costs. Some lifespan implications that continue into adulthood are: a sense of foreboding that success will be suddenly taken away, a need to control in response to this fear, a lack of trust in relationships, and an ongoing desire to prove competence to their parents. Thus, success was goal oriented and achieved by overcoming challenges related to the parental divorce.

The experience of mid-continuum is congruent with the findings in the literature review which identifies the role of parents' emotions interfering with ability to parent post divorce (Cohen & Dattner, 1995), the emotional and financial disengagement of a non-resident parent who cannot redefine a meaningful role within their child's life (Kruk, 1993), and the presence of ongoing conflict between their parents (Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998). However, it challenges findings that suggest these co-researchers lack confidence in establishing families of their own as adults, that the assumption of parental type responsibilities is detrimental to a child's development, or that a lack of supervision or engagement in a liberal lifestyle renders them more vulnerable to the peer pressure of the teen years (Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998). It also calls into question the findings that long term economic hardship, reduced parental support, and exposure to parental conflict results in poor outcomes for children (Gahler, 1998; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 1999; Pagelow, 1990; Wallerstein et. al, 2000), as that was the experience for these co-researchers to some degree.

The meaning attached to their experience of parental divorce is one of loss of family and belief that the life challenges that result from parental divorce would have been non-existent or at least reduced if parents had remained married. These co-researchers still grieve, at some level, the loss of family as expressed in their frustration with continued attempts to engage as a family, and the loss of childhood vulnerability expressed as a lack of trust within their adult relationships. They continue to feel tension within the relationship with their non-resident parent, and have never truly gained a sense of being valued by them.

Examination from a family systems and socialist feminist lens assists in understanding the dynamics that contributed to the mid-continuum process and the development of resilience and success within these co-researchers. Utilizing the family systems constructs of equilibrium, differentiation, anxiety, and cut-off, the divorce experience for these families can be understood as a source of disequilibria (Kerr & Bowen, 1988), which caused an increase in anxiety for the members of the system.

Differentiation, defined as the ability to “be in emotional contact with others yet still autonomous in one’s emotional functioning” (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, p. 145) was not apparent in parent child interactions that were characterized by inadequate support and guidance around logistics of the divorce, inappropriate sharing of information, and decision making that did not include consideration of the children’s needs. Thus, it is possible to speculate that the pre and post divorce functioning of these families was highly emotional but lacking in autonomy, and perhaps not as differentiated as the families’ whose experience of divorce was reorganizational. The absence of differentiation could have exacerbated anxiety within the membership.

The theme of the mid-continuum experience appears to be one of unresolved anxiety that continues to emanate amongst the familial relationships throughout the lifespan of its members. The source of the anxiety is complex and could be connected to patriarchal definitions of family. Patriarchy defines the family as an economic unit, which includes definitions of traditional parenting roles that designate mothers as caregivers and fathers as breadwinners (Tong, 1989). Thus, families who are entrenched in the traditional roles, which is then exacerbated by absence of differentiation, and hold patriarchal definitions of a successful family, struggle to redefine themselves as parents in non-traditional roles and experience shame subsequent to “failing” at marriage. Thus, anxiety may be increased within the divorce process as a direct result of attempting to recreate a family structure that is incongruent with patriarchal, or traditional definitions of family and challenges power relationships within the reconfiguration.

Within the researcher’s experience is that of being a parent divorced from her children’s father. Our divorce process falls within the mid-continuum experience and as such, allows for insight into the dynamics and relationship issues that arise. Congruent with the personal experience of the researcher, anxiety was exacerbated by the patriarchal illusion of the necessity to maintain traditional roles to ensure meaningful relationships with and contributions to the lives of our children. We were entrenched in patriarchal values and thus, I assumed that I would retain the children in my care and their father fought against his loss of control and my expectation that he would continue to provide financially despite significantly reduced contact with his children. Had we been able to discern an alternative way of being a family that transcended the traditional expectations we held of each other, we might have been able to reduce the experience of anxiety.

However, our inability to differentiate and engage as interdependent individuals, to transcend patriarchal definitions of family and roles, and to ultimately re-establish equilibrium within our system emulates the experience described by the mid-continuum co-researchers. Congruent with their experience, it resulted in our inability to establish non-traditional relationships as co-parents, in the partial emotional and financial disengagement of the children's father in response to his anxiety, and in feelings of shame relative to our inability to divorce successfully. Thus, in specific application to the stories shared of the mid-continuum experience, it appears that members of these families were neither able to restore equilibrium nor reduce anxiety as a result of limited autonomy between the members and inability to redefine traditional ideals of family.

From a risk and resilience perspective, the risks inherent in the mid-continuum experience were relative to the ongoing conflict between the parents, the reduction in financial resources, the numerous changes that occurred subsequent to the divorce, and a general reduction in parenting received. External assets that were identified included their school and community, but most significantly, the support and nurture of their resident parent. Internal assets such as social competence, problem solving, autonomy, sense of purpose, and a sense of control over one's destiny (Howard & Dryden, 1999) seemed to have developed within the co-researchers through the reflexive process of attaching meaning to their experience of divorce.

For example, the co-researchers attributed the development of their success to life skills they learned through the assumption of additional responsibility subsequent to the reduction in parenting available to them. These life skills include an ethic of hard work, the ability to be self sufficient, and resilience in the face of adversity.

Thus, the co-researchers whose experience of divorce was located mid-continuum became self-defined successful adults through their resident parents' ability to buffer the residual presence of anxiety within their family interactions, and their reflexive attachment of meaning that embraced the development of life skills subsequent to the divorce experience. Their definitions of success exemplify the degree to which they have maintained traditional beliefs about family and its membership roles and are inherently linked to the co-researchers' desire and ability to establish and maintain traditional families and parental roles. Resiliency and success are intertwined and presented as interdependent phenomena. Resilience is conceptualized as a life skill that was acquired through the experience of adverse situations, that contributes to a present day experience of success. Co-researchers are relatively secure in their experience of success and feel empowered to maintain it, aside from the *irrational* concern that *the other shoe will drop*.

Thus, the contribution of these findings is the triangulation of the data with some of the literature review and the researcher's experience. To some degree, it also provides support to challenge the myth that divorce is inherently harmful and draws attention to sweeping generalizations that abound within prior reported findings. It suggests that the presence of a single supportive and nurturing parent can be a significant buffer in the presence of risk factors created by divorce and supports the researcher's premise that the reflexive process of creation of meaning contributes to the development of resilience. It suggests that the patriarchal construction of family undermines the ability to differentiate and reorganize. Finally, the findings imply the need for a more thorough examination of the effects of different kinds of divorce experiences and the degree to which risk factors contribute to negative outcomes or development of resilience.

Analysis of Experience of Family Dissolution

Congruent with Wallerstein and Lewis' (1998) descriptions of the divorce experience, those whose experience of parental divorce is located towards the family dissolution end of the continuum began with chaos and never regained any semblance of family functioning. Our life long experience is epitomized by the emotional and financial abandonment of our parents, the maligning of our same gender parent which undermines our identities and sense of self worth, and the dissolution of our families despite our efforts to re-establish some form of connection or relationship amongst our family members. Within our stories is the suggestion that other dynamics, such as alcohol abuse or mental illness, contributed to our parents' inability to parent us. Thus, it was as though our parents' marriage was the thread that maintained the structure in our lives in the face of other adverse family dynamics, and when it ended, all semblance of parenting, nurture, and family function ended with it. Our experience is consistent with the literature review, with the exception that, we define ourselves as resilient adults and believe we have experienced successful outcomes.

Within our experience, our resident parent was emotionally unable to recreate a nurturing family system in the absence of the non-resident parent. Our parents sought to recreate lives of their own, which included remarriage and the creation of new family units of which we were not a part. It was made clear to us that the new marriages and families were more important to our parents than were our needs. Assistance from mentors or extended family was inappropriate or non-existent, and the cumulative experience was one of feeling rejected and questioning our value, accompanied by the fear that our behaviours had somehow caused the abandonment that was part of our lives.

We felt shame and suffered from low self-esteem, well into adulthood. We were party to financial conflicts, interparental maligning, and were engaged as pawns within their conflict. We remained hopeful, that at some point one of our parents would assume the responsibility for parenting us, and as such we moved between their two households in an attempt to reduce the chaos in our lives and receive parenting. In our adolescent years especially, we engaged in unhealthy behaviours in attempts to assuage our pain. Our energies were spent on escaping the situations we were trapped in rather than focusing on achieving a particular goal or aspiration. As young adults, we experienced depression and acknowledged that our lives were not as we wanted them to be and took action to change our circumstances. Parents broke promises to contribute financially to establishing ourselves in careers or providing education. However, despite all of the disappointments, we sought, throughout the years, to be parented. Finally, in our later adult years, we accepted that our parents were not capable of nurturing and we have either disengaged from them completely, or only engage at a surface level. Our entire experience is congruent with Wallerstein and Lewis' (1998) findings regarding the structural and textural experience of divorce. However, in terms of theirs' and others' prior research findings, our self-defined success is nothing short of remarkable.

The meaning we attach to our experience of divorce is one of parental abandonment and total loss of family. We perceive the divorce as having destroyed the thread that maintained a family structure that provided a degree of security and nurture. Our experience includes a loss of respect for our same gender parent and fear that we are like them. Thus, our goals and measures of success are grounded in our need to create a family for our children and engage with them differently than our parents did with us.

Analysis from a family systems perspective allows for some understanding of our families' dynamics. Utilizing the constructs of equilibrium, differentiation, anxiety, and cut-off, it appears that our families' experience of equilibrium and differentiation were quite different than other families. In retrospect, it seems as though chaos was the natural state of equilibrium for our families. In addition, our patterns of differentiation seemed to have been autonomous but lacking in emotional connection. Disengagement of parents is congruent with the family systems construct of *cut-off*, which is defined as the breaking away from family relationships in an effort to reduce the experience of anxiety (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Given that emotional cut-off seemed to exist pre-divorce, the event of divorce seemed to condone the physical disengagement of our families' members as well, and because, as children, we were dependent on the family system for nurture, we were left in a sort of limbo awaiting the return of parenting.

Within our families, it appears that because of the addiction or mental health problems that seem to have been an aspect of our families' functioning prior to divorce, traditional roles (Tong, 1989) within the family had already eroded. It is possible that the prior erosion caused anxiety, which contributed to the pre-divorce emotional cut-off. It also appears that following the divorce, parents were possibly motivated to establish equilibrium in their lives through the pursuit and establishment of traditional families through remarriage. As children who were not included in the new family unit, we felt as though our parent was ashamed of the failed marriage, of which we were a part. I now wonder if their behaviour was an effort to reduce the anxiety they experienced as a result of their socially defined *failure at marriage* and a subsequent attempt to achieve success through membership and opportunity to parent within a traditional family system.

Examination of the financial disengagement experienced from a socialist feminist perspective also contributes to enhanced understanding of our experience. Studies indicate that women and thus children maintain their economic security through access to the income of the male parent of the family (Lochhead & Scott, 2000). Economic power is re-established through the orders and agreements determined at the time of the separation/divorce (Arditti, 1997). However, as is demonstrated in our experience, relying on the integrity of the male parent is not always a reliable method of ensuring that financial needs are met.

Consistent with the literature review, and patriarchal ideology, fathers were relied upon for financial support for pursuit of post secondary education or other career training (Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998). Of interest is that given the lifestyle our fathers were living, it seemed that they were financially able to contribute, but chose not to because of their responsibilities to their newly established second families. Within the literature, this phenomenon is described as a father's propensity or desire to move on once the initial family has been dismantled (Finnie, 1996).

To descend to a deeper level of analysis, the meanings attached to the financial dynamics are immense and complicated. Layer upon layer of creation of financial dependence on male family members, of expectation of financial support between genders and generations, and of emotional significance inherent in provision of money for nurture, convolute the correlations between actual experience of economic disadvantage and the relational implication of perceived withholding of financial support. The objective withholding of financial support was not as traumatic to us as the sense of being replaced by our fathers' new families and in his eyes, unworthy of his assistance.

From a risk and resiliency perspective, the experience of family dissolution is resplendent with risk factors and devoid of buffers. For example, exacerbation of conflict between divorcing parents, the involvement of children in the parental conflict, and the lack of financial opportunities could be perceived as risk factors that would diminish our ability to experience successful adult lives (Howard & Dryden, 1999). In addition, a lack of connection with school, inappropriate or non-existent support from mentors, and the seeming total loss of parenting all indicate an absence of buffering factors to protect us from the risks. However, the co-researchers identified their belief in the presence of a genetic predisposition to having internal resources that ultimately contributed to the development of resilience and success.

As young adults we each reached a time of depression in our lives and determined that we needed to make major changes if we were to achieve our goals of being decent human beings and strong parenting influences for our children. Our ability to draw on our inner strength was connected to the presence of one or more individuals in our life who communicated to us that we were worthy, in some way, of being successful (Saleebey, 1997). These people were spouses, friends, and teachers. Some of the changes we needed to make contradicted paradigms we had created previously as part of our determination to be successful where our parents had not been. For example, in terms of early marriages, we recognized that perhaps we had married out of a need to be nurtured and identified that those relationships were no longer conducive to being healthy individuals. We accepted our mistakes and moved on, recognizing that the old paradigms were not useful to us anymore and that we required new goals and aspirations that were focused on a striving towards something rather than escaping our past.

The process of overcoming our depressive state and striving to be successful included engagement in the cognitive reframing of our experiences. Out of this cognitive reframing evolved processes that have been clustered and referred to as *Sources of Human Strength* (McCullough & Snyder, 2000). Through assessment of our past, we developed gratitude for our hardships, forgiveness for our parents, and hope for our futures. As such, we were able to recognize that we were not our parents, nor did we need to follow their path, but could determine our own goals and had the ability to achieve them.

Thus, the theme of the dissolution experience appears to be one of disengagement. Our familial relationships had disengaged from one another pre-divorce, and continue to be so disengaged. However, it seems that our success as resilient adult children of divorce is inherently tied to our ability to differentiate ourselves from our parents' experience and ultimately disengage from the hurtful relationships we have had with them, throughout our lives.

Conceptualization of success is defined within our society from a capitalist patriarchal paradigm. Worth of an individual is generally determined through measures of achievement and productivity. Reference to behavioural, psychological, and social measures of adjustment (Cooney & Kurtz, 1996) are located within a society defined by patriarchy and imposed on individuals regardless of their particular conceptualization of the world. Although we remain tied to a need to be parents to our children and break the cycle of neglect, our definitions of success incorporate our struggle to transcend the patriarchal definitions that have caused us shame and loss of self worth. We have developed alternate ways of conceptualizing our worlds and defining our success.

Ultimately, we struggle against patriarchal definitions and consciously seek to transcend this imposition of outcome measures and focus instead on setting goals that encapsulate what we feel was lost to us as children of divorce. Happiness is a significant construct and measure. Rather than identifying level of education as a measure of success, we utilize the degree of satisfaction gained through our employment. The use of sustained relationships or absence of divorce within our adult life, as a construct to measure relational success, has been redefined so that our standard is the degree to which we are able to discern between healthy and unhealthy relationships and our ability to engage in relationships that provide us with the emotional sustenance we desire. The measure of socioeconomic status was completely refuted and replaced with a measure of happiness and contentment. However, our absolute measure of success is the degree to which we feel we have overcome our parents' legacy and are contributing to our children's lives in supportive and nurturing ways.

Our description of contributing factors exemplifies the degree to which we recognize the interrelationship between resilience and success. We hold inherent, the belief that resilience is necessary to be successful because of the challenges that are a natural part of life. There is agreement amongst all of the co-researchers that resilience is generally developed through the experience of hardship in combination with the presence of parental support. However, our experience introduces the possibility that resilience and subsequently, success, are also attainable through accessing sources of human strength. Our recognition of our accomplishments is perhaps the single most contributing factor to our resilience and subsequent ability to rise above whatever hardship life offers. This is the essence of empowerment from a strengths perspective (Saleebey, 1997).

Thus, the contribution of these findings is the triangulation with prior research and researcher's experience, which enhances credibility for the entire study. Ultimately, it challenges findings that assume children are passive recipients of parental divorce and exemplifies the degree to which children can participate in creation of meanings that enhance their opportunities to develop resilience and enjoy successful adult lives. It describes a process of empowerment of individuals that encompasses communicating to them that they have value and worth and helping them to recognize and draw from the inherent strengths they possess. Finally it creates hope for all children of divorce through challenging myths of probably negative outcomes and illuminating the possibility of successful outcomes for children whose experience is most challenging and essentially, devoid of parental support.

Implications for Social Work Practice

The use of the continuum of experience of divorce combined with insights derived from the analysis suggest a variety of social work interventions designed to assist families to move their experience of divorce towards the reorganizational end of the continuum and individuals to create meanings that will contribute to the development of resilience, and ultimately, successful lives. The researcher has developed several recommendations that are applicable at any time along an individual's life span or within the life process of a family's experience of divorce. The analysis suggests that intervention from a socialist feminist therapeutic stance would be most effective at intervening at macro and micro levels of practice.

Based on "a commitment to identifying and challenging social relations based on gender oppression with the intention of transforming them into social relations promoting equality" (Dominelli & McLeod, 1989, p. 112), feminist practitioners focus on deconstructing underlying components of a particular social problem utilizing strategies of empowerment, connecting personal to political, and consciousness raising (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986; Dominelli & McLeod, 1989; Mullaly, 1997; Payne, 1997; Ristock, 1993; Wright, 1997).

Empowerment is a critical component of assisting families to engage in divorces more consistent with the reorganizational experience in that it encourages autonomy and enhances ability to represent one's self in a situation of change (Ellis & Wright, 1998). Empowerment is defined by Mullaly (1997) as "a process through which people reduce their powerlessness and alienation and gain greater control over all aspects of their lives and social environment" (p 167). To facilitate a process of empowerment, a practitioner

can teach skills, teach vocabulary to enhance articulation of needs, facilitate access to public forums, and alter language and encourage its use to reflect a new situational reality and personal identity (Dominelli & McLeod, 1989; Mullaly, 1997; Ristock, 1993).

Connecting the personal to the political is an aspect of empowerment (Dominelli & McLeod, 1989; Mullaly, 1997). The practice could occur with individuals and at societal levels, sometimes simultaneously. The overall goal is to identify that the personal experience of family is politically determined (Bryson, 1993; Mullaly, 1997). The practitioner's role would focus on examining the personal experiences of family members, providing education about social policies that perpetuate the experience, developing skills to participate in social action, and increasing the level of understanding about the oppressive nature of society (Mullaly, 1997). The focus of this strategy would be to empower families to change laws, legal practices, and family policies that continue to reinforce divorce ritual that contributes to an experience of family dissolution.

In terms of addressing the private/public dichotomy experienced by men and women, feminism provides an organizing framework (Polansky, 1986) to analyze how men and women develop and experience their identities and familial roles. It also enhances understanding of how the process of divorce publicly transforms the identities of men and women, utilizes language that labels and shames, creates isolation, powerlessness, and alienation, and fails to provide validation of experience, emotional support, or a cooperative process for redefining parental roles. The focus of this strategy would be to assist family members to transcend patriarchal definitions and identities and engage in a creative process that met their needs as a family involved in a change process.

Consciousness raising is a strategy utilized to increase insight within oppressed populations (Pohl & Boyd, 1993). Through consciousness raising, individuals gain an understanding of the social structures that contribute to oppression (Dominelli & McLeod, 1989). The social worker's role is, through the use of empathy, to develop a mutual relationship with family members for the purpose of mutual learning and developing insight (Chafetz, 1997). The practitioner utilizes critical questioning and dialogue to exchange knowledge and increase insight about political implications of their circumstance (Mullaly, 1997). The focus of this strategy would be to enhance an understanding of the dynamics of divorce with a view to better understanding the positions and needs of the other members of the family, thereby enhancing differentiation, reducing anxiety, and increasing cooperation between members.

Within feminist practice, the values of process, collectivization, normalization, and reframing inform the strategies used (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986). For example, the value of process informs the strategies in effect saying that outcome is secondary to the opportunity of each person sharing their personal experience, feeling valued by the exchange, and in consensus with any decisions being made.

Collectivization acknowledges that power increases when groups of similar disadvantage join together, recognizes the multiplicity of circumstance, and incorporates respect for differences (Bryson, 1993; Dominelli & McLeod, 1989). Normalization challenges the private nature of families' experiences to reduce isolation through the sharing of similarities of experience (Pohl & Boyd, 1993). Reframing provides family members with an opportunity to redefine their experience from a strengths perspective, utilizing empowering language to define their circumstance and identity.

Combined, these theories, strategies and values contribute to the development of differentiation between individuals involved in relationship, a strong sense of self worth, insight into underlying patriarchal definitions inherent in the divorce process, and skills to potentially challenge oppressive social structures. Also, these strategies and values are conducive to a mediation style of micro level intervention, to the macro practice of social action, and to the ongoing personal and professional development of the practitioner. Applied to the findings of this study, intervention could occur pre-divorce, during the initial stages of the change process, or throughout a family's or individual's life span.

From a personal perspective, I think, that acknowledging the emotional component of divorce and assisting families with healing and grieving must be part of the practitioner's role, despite the timing of the intervention along a family's life span. The recognition that divorce is the undoing of sacred vows and the impact that has on the children must be voiced. I believe this acknowledging of the past intimacy is critical to a person's ability to renegotiate the new relationship from intimate partners to co-parents. Also, I believe reverence for the marriage is communicated to the children this way and thereby reinforces that the union that created them had significance.

Through personal and professional experience, I have come to believe that people who feel deeply hurt by another individual are less able to differentiate from them, engage in fair decision making with them, or trust them again. Thus, in order for the process of divorce to move towards the reorganizational end of the continuum, people must be supported to engage in forgiveness to free them from their hurt and anger, and allow them to move forward into new lives.

The strategies of feminist practice and the assessment framework provided by family systems theory can be utilized to facilitate healing of these emotional therapeutic needs as well. Through assessing the family processes, and locating a family's experience along the divorce continuum, a social worker is provided guidance about what aspects of functioning to address to attempt to move the experience towards the reorganizational end of the continuum. Feminist practice strategies can be used to raise consciousness and develop empathy between divorcing spouses, enhance differentiation through increased understanding, and reduce anxiety and potential for cut-off.

For example, within a co-ed collective, a wife who is angry at her husband's resistance to paying child support, may hear the concerns of another man who is a participant within the group, with whom she is not angry. Conversely, a man may develop an understanding of the women's financial vulnerability because he can hear a fellow participant – a woman who is not his wife – discuss her fears.

Finally, it is important for practitioners to acknowledge that success is never an unattainable goal for children of divorce, to utilize these findings to assess the point of intervention, and determine the most suitable strategies for developing resilience.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Development of Resilience in Adult Children of Divorce

Despite the wide spectrum of experience shared between co-researchers, we determined that there was a continuum of experiences that ranged from reorganizational to family dissolution. The classifications were initially based in the experience of the parent child relationship but as themes emerged, it was found that they clustered around this organizing concept.

My own experience of divorce illuminated the degree to which the classifications were not pure. In knowing the minute details of my experience, I was able to identify how the definition of the experience ebbed and flowed between the mid-continuum and family dissolution designation. However, the lack of purity of classification did not interfere with the overall benefit of being able to examine the meanings we created out of our experiences and the subsequent development of resilience and success in relation to the themes within our experience of parental divorce.

In summary, the experience of reorganization was characterized by a smooth transition between a family system that functioned to meet the needs of its members within one household to a newly structured family system functioning within separate households. The co-researchers attributed their success to their parents' freedom to become authentic individuals as a result of the divorce and thus contribute more to their development and sense of self worth. The contribution of these findings is the identification of the existence of a positive divorce process that both challenges current divorce research and provides us with an ideal model to aspire to re-create.

The experience of mid-continuum was characterized by a relatively chaotic onset that caused parents to be unable, because of their own emotions, to initially respond to the needs of their children. The theme within this experience was determined to be anxiety in that the family continued, throughout the children's growing up, and continue to this day, to struggle with re-establishing cooperative parenting relationships and redefining roles and boundaries. The anxiety between non-resident parents continues although families within this experience continue to engage in family activities and maintain family relationships. These co-researchers attribute their success to the presence and support of their resident parent as well as the life skills they developed subsequent to the hardships and challenges initiated by the divorce. Their definitions of success are grounded in traditional measures and they speak openly of striving for the "white picket fenced home in the suburbs cause they never had it". There is an inference of striving to create what they feel was lost to their childhoods.

The experience of family dissolution was characterized by the loss of family and the dissolution of the structure that had provided some semblance of nurture and support. The theme identified for this experience was disengagement as it seemed to permeate the experiences of relationship throughout our lives, including our own disengagement from our families in an effort to remove ourselves from hurtful relationships. Our conceptualization of success is inherently linked to our efforts to transcend patriarchal definitions that have shamed and oppressed us, to our drive to be different that our parents, and to our ability to experience gratitude for our hardships, to forgive our parents for their inability to nurture us, and ultimately remain hopeful for our futures. The recognition of our strength in surviving our experience is the basis of our resilience.

Implications for social work practice focused on assisting families to move their process of divorce towards the reorganizational end of the continuum and individuals to create meanings from their experience that contributed to the development of resilience. Family systems theory was utilized to enhance understanding of the process occurring within the family in response to the emotional process of divorce. The need to assess and intervene in the family processes to increase healthy differentiation, decrease anxiety, contribute to re-establishing equilibrium and reducing the prevalence of the disengagement of parents was determined to contribute to a reorganizational process. Also, the use of a socialist feminist therapeutic stance was recommended to facilitate these goals, to deconstruct the patriarchal ideologies inherent in divorce, contribute to the reduction of shame and development of non-traditional roles, and encourage families to engage in social action to change current divorce ritual.

Recommendations for Future Research

Despite a wealth of research available on divorce and the individuals who experience it, much research remains to be done. In keeping with the vein of the current study, additional interviews could be completed to broaden the understanding of the breadth of variety of structural and textural experiences. Findings could be tested on a larger scale to determine the generalizability. As well, duplication with non-resilient adult children of divorce or other populations, such as children who remained in intact but conflictual homes, may allow for the emergence of theory regarding the development of resilience in situations of parental divorce.

It is also necessary to note that other family members were not interviewed to corroborate the perceptions provided by the co-researchers. There was no opportunity,

nor was it valid within the context of a phenomenological inquiry. However, it would be interesting to interview parents and/or siblings to determine the degree to which experiences were similar. Also, it would be interesting to examine the degree to which concrete experiences, such as socioeconomic implications, were experienced by the co-researchers congruently with the actual economic circumstance. Finally, in terms of interviewing family members, insight would be gained into understanding the process and meanings attached to divorce by the parents whose divorce was reorganizational.

It is also important to note that these findings are located in a context of the 1970's. Findings may differ in cohorts who experienced divorce in the 1980's or 1990's given that divorce ritual does continue to evolve. Interviewing younger individuals or cohorts may broaden and deepen the understanding of the experience of divorce within the context of time and history. It would broaden the knowledge as well if variables such as age and length of time since divorce revealed relevant themes.

Findings from the experience of mid-continuum suggest a need to explore in greater depth the diverse kinds of divorce experiences and the degree to which risk factors experienced within those processes contribute to negative outcomes or the development of resilience. Of special interest to the researcher, because it is her own experience, is further exploration of the dynamics that contribute to resilience within the population of co-researchers whose experience of divorce was located towards the dissolution end of the continuum. Additional research should be done to attempt to develop and enhance an understanding of how individuals from this divorce experience come to acknowledge themselves as having strength subsequent to the hardships of divorce, and thus develop resilience and a persona of thriving and surviving.

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APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Project: Phenomenological Study: Resilience in Adult Children of Parental Divorce

Date of Interview:

Time of Interview:

Place:

Interviewer:

Co-Researcher:

(briefly describe the project; invite questions or concerns prior to commencing)

QUESTIONS:

1. Tell me about your parents' divorce.
2. What feelings did you experience in relation to the divorce?
3. Tell me about the changes that occurred in your life as a result of the divorce.
4. How do you define success? Resilience?
5. In what ways are you successful? Resilient?
6. What do you think contributed to your success/resilience?
7. Do you want to comment on anything else that you think is important? Anything you think of as a residual effect of your parents' divorce?

(thank the co-researcher for participating in the interview and inquire about whether or not they want to participate in the focus group. Assure that confidentiality will be respected and ask if they would like information pertaining to findings of the research)