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Women and the experience of later-life divorce after long-term marriage : a phenomenological investigation

Janet Pauline Turner

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Janet Pauline Turner entitled "Women and the experience of later-life divorce after long-term marriage : a phenomenological investigation." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

Charles L. Thompson, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Marla Peterson, Priscilla Blanton, Larry DeRidder

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

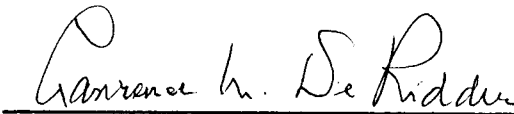
To the Graduate Council:

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We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:







Accepted for the Council:


Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of The Graduate School

WOMEN AND THE EXPERIENCE
OF LATER-LIFE DIVORCE
AFTER LONG-TERM MARRIAGE:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Janet Pauline Turner
May 1997

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This dissertation is dedicated to my mother,

Mary Jo Lawrence

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I welcome this opportunity to express my deepest appreciation and gratitude to the people who have helped me achieve the completion of this project. Their involvement and interest in my endeavors has enriched my life in countless ways.

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this study was to describe the thematic structure of the later-life divorce experience for women.

Six women described their experiences of later-life divorce through phenomenological interviews. These interviews were audio-taped, then transcribed verbatim. The transcribed interviews were interpreted by the researcher and research group members. This interpretation involved a process of moving back and forth within and between parts of each transcript, then relating separate transcripts to one another to identify common themes. Meaning units were extracted from each transcribed interview and divided into groups representing common elements. These meaning units were examined within and across all transcripts.

From the thematic analysis used in this study, five major themes with corresponding sub-themes emerged: Divorce as a Threat (Expectations, Awareness, Avoidance, Delay); Divorce as an Inevitability (Point of No Return, Declaration, Detachment); Divorce as a Barrier (Age, Alienation, Redefinition); Divorce as a Vehicle (Redefinition, Reorganization, Equilibration); and Divorce as a Discovery (Freedom, Learning, Prescriptions). In each interview, the themes emerged from the ground of Time.

The results of this study were discussed in relation to existing literature. This was followed by an overview of existential issues related to Time, limitations of the study, implications for counseling, and the power of resiliency.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Research on women and divorce encompasses a broad array of literature. The focus has been primarily on individuals under the age of thirty-five and on relatively short marriages [i.e., ten years or less in duration] (Hagestad & Smyer, 1982; Lloyd & Zick, 1986). Although there is a growing body of literature on the investigation of mid-life and later-life divorce, current trends of divorce as well as increased life expectancy indicate a need for continued study in this area.

Changing divorce rates have been analyzed extensively (England & Kunz, 1975; Glick & Norton, 1979; Michael, 1978). Approximately 47.5% of first marriages end in divorce (Walters, Carter, Papp, & Silverstein, 1988). Among these first marriages, Cain (1988) reported that more than 50,000 persons over the age of sixty end their thirty to forty year marriages and this trend yields rising numbers of divorce among older persons. Although there was some stabilization of divorce rates in the United States through the 1980's, recent increases in divorce among mid-life and later-life couples have been observed (Lloyd et al, 1986; Ulenberg, Cooney, & Boyd, 1990; Walters et al, 1988; Weingarten, 1988).

According to the American Association of Retired Persons (1990, p. 3), the number of older divorced persons has increased more than twice as fast as the older population as a whole since 1980 (1.9 times for men and 2.9 times for

women). More recently, Hammond and Muller (1992), suggested that there has been an increase in the proportion of older divorced persons over the last fifteen years, with the proportion of divorced women greater than that of divorced men.

Since the turn of the century, American people are living longer, with women forming the vast majority of the older population. Despite a high probability of divorce, marriage is still very popular. Although a majority of people who divorce will marry again, some researchers find that with increasing age, "divorced and widowed women are much less likely to remarry than their male counterparts" (Bernard & Meade, 1993, p. 4). Older women are, indeed, survivors. Yet there are few available studies which provide a rich understanding of the experience of later-life divorce following long-term marriage.

Cain (1988) calls for further descriptive research of the social phenomenon of older women and later-life divorce. Others have stated that "qualitative approaches that enable the subjective experience of older women to be heard have the potential to advance our understanding" (Bernard et al, 1993, pp. 188 & 189). Only a few studies were found in a literature search specifically addressing women and later-life divorce following long-term marriage (Cain, 1988; Deckert & Langelier, 1978; Farnsworth, 1987; Galloway, 1993; Highsmith, 1992; Sandin, 1989; Weingarten, 1988). Through this phenomenological investigation I will address not why one divorces but what it is to experience divorce: the process, the context, and the impact on the lives of older women.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Divorce trends are indicative of future increases in divorce rates among later-life couples in long-term marriages (Lloyd et al, 1986; Smyer & Hofland, 1982; Uhlenberg & Myers, 1981). However, research on what older women experience in later-life divorce is sparse (Arnold & McKenry, 1986; Cain, 1988; Chiriboga, 1982; DeShane & Brown-Wilson, 1981; Gander, 1991; Lloyd et al, 1986; Uhlenberg et al, 1990). Therefore, the current study will be directed toward filling that void.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The Review of Literature section (Chapter 2) will include a discussion of older women and divorce and the existential phenomenological tradition. Chapter 3 contains a description of the research methods employed. Chapter 4 includes the descriptions of later-life divorce from the perspective of the women who were participants in this study. The final chapter is a discussion of the results, limitations of the study, implications for the field of counseling, and issues about resiliency.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature about divorce is extensive and diverse. Yet, little research is specifically designed to investigate older women and divorce. This chapter is designed to provide an integrated and representative review of research on divorce and women, including discussions of health, economic, and social support issues. This chapter will conclude with a discussion of the philosophical framework of this study, which is set within the context of phenomenological tradition.

DIVORCE AND OLDER WOMEN

The divorce experience has been defined as a grief process through which a person undergoes changes in status and role definitions; the loss of partnership; transformations in lifestyle; and in some situations, economic hardships (Simos, 1979; Weiss, 1984). Divorce is a disruptive process for any individual regardless of age or gender. Many people who experience divorce report a variety of feelings, including depression, anger, increased anxiety, abandonment, betrayal, and a diminished self-esteem (Hetherington, Stanley-Hagan, & Anderson, 1989; Wallerstein, 1986).

Certainly, no two people experience divorce in exactly the same way. Those persons who have ever divorced do not fall into a homogenous group.

There are probably significant individual differences in coping skills and resources, as well as levels of vulnerability and exposure to stress (Wallerstein, 1986). However, when examining the process of divorce, women and men often have different adjustments and reactions toward divorce. Older women experiencing negative effects from divorce have been particularly noted (Weingarten, 1988; Weitzman, 1985). Furthermore, some researchers have suggested that difficulties resulting from divorce may vary in duration, frequency, and intensity for mid-life and later-life women (Rubin, 1979; Wallerstein, 1986). Although there are distinguishing structures and patterns that constitute gender (Curtis & MacCorquodale, 1990) such as "female" and "male," it is the "microsociological" factors of gender which are uniquely experienced as either liberating or limiting for women (Hall, 1992; Oliner, 1989).

Today, being an older woman divorced after a long-term marriage presents different challenges than those of men and younger women. Sexism and ageism may permeate resource areas impacting adjustment and adaptation to divorce. Consider the following: According to the Special Committee on Aging (1990), older women, particularly those over age 65, generally report better health than men of the same age. However, because women usually live longer than men, they may experience increasing and longer periods of health problems (Matteson & McConnell, 1988), as well as more illnesses and problems commonly associated with aging. Studies of older women, particularly health-related research, is sparse even though these women represent the majority among the elderly (Rodin & Ickovics, 1990; Schank & Lough, 1989). Vertinsky (1988) suggested that because

women's health has historically been defined largely in reproductive terms by the medical field, older women's health needs may be negatively impacted resulting from erroneous perceptions. Matteson and McConnell (1988) noted various influences on the health and health care of older women, including the lack of research on the aging process of women and the lower economic status of many older women. These influences result in less normative data for older women advancing in age. The treatment of some health conditions which disproportionately affect women of any age, may be influenced by the older age of a woman. According to Muller (1990), older women are less likely to receive appropriate health care for breast cancer.

Economic issues may be influenced by age as well. Social Security benefits and pensions among many of today's older women are often much less than the benefits received by older men. This is most apparent for the older women who were homemakers throughout the marriage. Many of the women who worked outside the home during their marriages were employed for only short periods during the marriage (i.e., during the early years of the marriage). The result is minimal Social Security benefits. An older woman seeking employment with little or no previous work history also faces many challenges in securing income and health benefits not provided through a divorce settlement. For those older women who rely on Medicare and Medicaid, services and treatment offered by health care providers may be more limited and restricted as compared to persons covered by private health insurance. Older women of the future may not have to face these forms of discrimination. Awareness of issues of ageism and

sexism is growing, and changes in the social structure of our society may improve the condition of later-life divorce.

The impact of divorce on an individual can be perceived as both a negative and positive experience (Buehler & Langenbrunner, 1987), creating effects ranging from devastation to a sense of relief (Albrecht, 1980; Chiriboga & Catron, 1991; Goode, 1956; Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Spanier & Thompson, 1983; Weiss, 1975). Although the divorce process may produce negative feelings, hardships, unwanted change, and other undesirable effects, those very factors may serve as an impetus for self-challenge and positive growth.

There has been agreement among researchers that divorce following long-term marriage is a neglected area of research. However, there is no universal agreement on what constitutes a long-term marriage (Sporakowski & Axelson, 1989). What is clear is that longer marriages followed by later-life divorce will yield some differences when contrasted with brief marriages followed by divorce as a young adult. Some researchers have suggested that divorce is generally more difficult the longer a person has been married (Chiriboga, 1982; Wallerstein, 1986). Changes in social and family structures are dramatic (DeShane et al, 1981), opportunities for sexual relationships decrease, finances may be reduced or severed, and there may be more to relearn (Price & McKenry, 1988). Within the context of the negative and positive outcomes of divorce, the following summaries of literature are not intended to be exhaustive. Rather the review represents literature addressing significant issues specifically related to older women and later-life divorce. Certainly the literature on women and divorce can be organized

into numerous categories. However, for the purposes of this chapter and pragmatic concerns, the following review is presented in a narrower nomenclature under health, economic, and social support issues.

Health Issues

Aging is an inevitability among all people. Every individual will experience biological changes through the aging process which will be accompanied by other transitional or adjustment challenges throughout the life span. Resources available to older people (health care, economic, social support), individual abilities to utilize resources, physical and psychological health, and social as well as personal perceptions of growing older will impact the quality of aging. As mentioned previously, for older women in our culture, these challenges may be exacerbated by issues of sexism and ageism.

Neither the process of aging nor the process of divorce singularly diminishes or enhances the value and worth of a life. Every individual has a unique experience although some commonalities among individuals may exist. The term "growing old" however, is a perceptual term arising subjectively as a social concept distinct from "aging" and "our feeling about it may only be slightly related to the biological processes of aging" (Doress-Worters & Siegal, 1994, p. 4). The woman's perceptions of self and her world are influenced by individual cultural contexts (Intons-Peterson, 1988). How an older woman perceives the aging process and other life experiences (i.e., divorce) and how society perceives these same things may affect the older woman's physical and mental health.

Porcino (1985) writes that a "double standard of aging forms the basis for the stereotypical view of today's older woman as dependent, passive, incompetent, and unattractive" (p. 116). These negative attitudes have been perpetuated by media presentation of younger women being the beholders of youth, vitality, and sexual attractiveness. Consequently, "changes in physical attractiveness (whether real or viewed as such by society) affect the mental health of older women" (Porcino, 1985, p. 116).

Cain (1988) writes that "divorce among the elderly is a hidden social phenomenon that is expected to increase at an accelerated rate . . . [yet it is] eclipsed by and undifferentiated from divorce among younger populations" (pp. 563 & 568). Other researchers have found that older women have more difficulties with adjustment to divorce than do younger cohorts. Older women tend to be " . . . more anxious about living alone, suffer more acute loneliness, and exhibit more psychosomatic illnesses than do younger women" (Price & McKenry, 1988, p. 64).

As an interactive process, a single aspect of divorce may be diminished or weakened while another may be strengthened or enhanced. Plummer and Koch-Hattem (1986) found that decreases in income were associated with poor divorce adjustment among men, but not in women. Other researchers suggested that despite having additional stresses or obstacles, women may adjust better to divorce than men (Asher & Bloom, 1983; Bloom & Caldwell, 1981; Chiriboga, 1982; Zeiss, Zeiss, & Johnson, 1980). A woman who lacks abilities, skills, or resources necessary to manage divorce-related stresses may feel hopeless,

anxious, or helpless. Yet some divorced women may discover "an opportunity to realize potentials for personal growth that might have been thwarted in their marriages and to exercise new levels of independence and autonomy" (Brown & Menela, 1978, p. 316). Divorce as a potentially positive growth experience was also noted by others (Bohannon, 1970; Deckert et al, 1978; Kessler, 1975; Krantzler, 1974).

Personal feelings that emerge through the divorce process vary, ranging from negative feelings to feelings of relief (Chiancola, 1978). Although divorce may be viewed as a negative event, the process of divorce may promote feelings of self-confidence and independence especially in older women (Deckert et al, 1978). Some older divorcing women have expressed more acceptance of self (Granvold, Pedler & Schellie, 1979) and have reported a more positive sense of well-being and an improved self-concept (Daniels-Mohring & Berger, 1984). In a cross-sectional study of divorced and widowed women and the influence of self-esteem on well-being, Farnsworth (1987) found that while characteristics of well-being were similar among both groups, the divorced participants experienced more guilt, confusion, and anger. She also concluded that self-perception of personal health was a major indicator of the absence or presence of well-being following both widowhood and divorce.

Divorce has been viewed as an experience that increases the risk for psychological problems (Bloom, Asher, & White, 1978) and can include "a profound sense of loss, an increase in anxiety, and a decrease in self-esteem" (Cain, 1988, p. 565) at any age. According to Berman and Turk (1981), more

mood disturbances are exhibited among divorcing people who have been married for a long time. Cain (1988) stated that distress and reactions to divorce "are intensified by factors particular to divorce among the elderly" (p. 566), including duration of marriage. Older divorcing women and women of long-term marriages have been described as experiencing more unhappiness and stress than younger populations and men (Chiriboga, Roberts, & Stein, 1978). Price et al (1988) stated that "older women may also experience more adjustment problems following divorce because they have experienced a longer period of marital conflict than younger women" (p. 64). Other variables such as who initiated the divorce may also impact adjustment. Some women "left by their spouses feel betrayed and bitter, with a personal sense of guilt they couldn't make their marriage work" (Porcino, 1985, p. 118). This may be particularly prevalent among older women who have been socialized to equate a meaningful life with marriage and children. Following divorce, departure from this ingrained value system may lead to feelings of shame and guilt (Cain, 1988).

Economic Issues

Documented research examining negative financial consequences of divorce for many women is ample (Arendell, 1987; Corcoran, 1979; Devillier & Forsyth, 1988; Duncan & Morgan, 1980; Hopps, 1987; Weiss, 1984; Weitzman, 1985, 1988). Morgan (1989) suggested that the economic status of mid-life women erodes following divorce. Women who lived more traditional and passive roles within the marriage may find themselves without means of adequate survival.

This financial deterioration may be a higher risk for older women due to diminished opportunities to make economic provisions for the future (i.e., retirement); lack of work history and skills (particularly a problem for homemakers); and inabilities in utilizing resources (Morgan, 1989). In a review of divorce literature, Sandin (1989) concluded that when compared to younger women, older women have difficulty relinquishing traditional roles and replacing them with new roles which makes their economic lives precarious.

When compared to men, women suffer a greater loss in income after divorce (Weitzman, 1985; Zeiss et al, 1980) and become more disadvantaged economically following divorce (Doherty, Su & Needle, 1989). Economic difficulties appear to pose the most troublesome hardship of divorce, particularly for middle-class divorced women (Arendell, 1986). Leonard (1987) stated that the impact of economic hardships on older women of divorce is adversely compounded by the rise of no-fault divorce. Attainment of fundamental economic means is a necessity for survival, largely due to an accelerated social change within the structure of society (Hall, 1992; Rosen, 1989). The woman's ability to gain economic independence may be an outcome of her socialization.

Higher education is related to increased socioeconomic status and is expected to increase a family's access to economic and social reward among divorced persons (Blechman & Manning, 1976). The divorced woman's available income and resources, ability to secure employment, abundance or shortage of job and social skills and level of education are likely to influence economic adjustment. Weitzman (1985) concluded that, when compared to men, divorce

has a more detrimental economic affect on women since many divorced women enter the job market lacking job skills and/or the income they are accustomed to is greatly reduced.

Social Support Issues

According to Cain (1988), the most effective coping mechanisms for women adjusting to later-life divorce are "close contact and meaningful involvement with people" (p. 568). Unfortunately for older divorcing women, some long-time friend and couple relationships may be severed or lost, and family ties may be negatively affected (DeShane et al, 1981). Older women are less likely to have the opportunity to remarry, may experience more anxiety about living alone, and may suffer more loneliness (Price et al, 1988). Some older women who held traditional homemaker roles during the marriage may discover maintaining relationships and friendships after divorce is very difficult due to reduced societal involvement or adverse social reactions.

Women who have depended on a working husband to develop and expand a friendship network through contacts at work may well find themselves ill-equipped to develop new friendship circles. Even those who retain membership in some social circle may be shunned as they come to be seen as potential competitors by women in an age category with relatively fewer males over all. (DeShane et al, 1981, p.85)

Stresses of the aging process and individual perception of age expectations can exacerbate the effects of adjustment for older women of divorce. Apprehensions about learning new tasks previously associated with the spousal

or male role, fears of living alone after a long duration of partnership and during a period of expected physical decline (Cain, 1988), are examples of how divorce is especially difficult for older women. These women may confront a new lifestyle and social life characterized by conflicting and changing values while facing a negative societal message that physical aging in women is sexually unattractive (Cleveland, 1979). In light of coping adaptability, resources available to aging women may be limited.

Highsmith (1992) studied five women who divorced after age sixty and discovered some commonalities the participants viewed "as their greatest challenges, both private and public in adjusting to this age" (p. 123). She noted that most participants identified age, learning new roles, fear of being alone and forming a new identity as their greatest challenges. When the participants were asked to identify factors as their greatest strength, family support and social support were among the responses given.

In another study of divorce following long-term marriages, Galloway (1993) interviewed women who had left marriages in which they were "forced out." Marriage force-outs consisted of the existence of a circumstance intolerable to the wife including the husband's marital disinterest, alcoholism, womanizing, emotional or physical abuse, or the husband desiring to end the marriage. Age issues were viewed as detrimental for those women desiring social relationships with men or who needed employment. During the rebuilding process, women friends and similar-age family members were among the most favorable "people" resources. Other helpful resources included paid work, counseling, returning to school,

church/spiritual healing, social or information groups, and Women's Centers. Social involvement, the intrinsic value of work, and learning self-sufficiency were stressed as important by all the participants.

Experiences of later-life divorce vary among older women. They all contain their own unique internal and external constructs of personal reality of self and the world. The commonality of those realities is that human feeling, thought, and behavior is in a constant state of flux, making the process of change an inevitability.

All women do not go down the same path as they make the transition from marriage to life as a single person, and this is as it should be. But they all make choices; they all have alternatives; and they all change, in some way, to some degree. (Halem, 1988, p. 14)

EXISTENTIAL/PHENOMENOLOGICAL TRADITION

The existential phenomenological tradition provides the philosophical framework of this study. In the preface of his book, Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty (1962) asks the reader, "What is phenomenology?" Portions of the phenomenological themes he presented are described below:

. . . a philosophy which puts essences back into existence . . . a study of essences . . . to give a direct description of one's experience as it is . . . a manner or style of thinking . . . Lebenswelt (or life world) . . . knowledge of the world is gained from [one's] own particular point of view . . . world-as-meaning . . . consciousness is an active meaning-giving operation . . . all consciousness is consciousness of something . . . the act of bringing truth into being. (p. vii-xxi)

Although presentation of the connectiveness and complexities between philosophy and research methods is beyond the scope of this paper, a brief discussion of basic existential and phenomenological themes will follow.

The existential phenomenological researcher pursues and embraces the understanding of human issues by shedding presuppositions concerning an experience, thus allowing the essence (or nature), form and structure of that experience to emerge through descriptive methods of inquiry (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). An essence is what is essential to make something a distinctive entity. The essence underlying experience gives it a specific quality (van Manen, 1990). To capture the essential structure or meaning of an experience, one must describe the phenomena in such a way that the implicit structure of experience becomes explicit.

An existential phenomenologist views people, objects, and events holistically as opposed to fragmented or segmented entities. One's experience is of and in the world as interactions with self and environment occur (Colaizzi, 1978; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). The world and the individual have no existence separate from the other (Valle et al, 1989). Heidegger (1962) defined existence as a person-who-is-in-the-world while Polkinghorne (1989) called this perpetual co-existence of encounters, experience. A person and his or her world do not react toward one another, rather each defines the other. As Fischer stated (1970), "man and universe are universally interdependent and co-defining" (p. 84). This total interrelatedness or 'being at one' is a central feature in phenomenology called 'intentionality' (Ihde, 1986).

As a world view, phenomenology is especially sensitive to the unique nature of human experience. The individual human experience is "contextualized" within a person's environment as well as within the temporal perspectives of past, present, and future (Heidegger, 1962; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). This contextualization is referred to by Husserl (cited in Valle et al, 1989) as the "Lebenswelt" or the individual's "life-world."

In order to capture the essence of human experience, the essence must have a vehicle of communication. The portal of this communication is through description. There will be no explanations, hypotheses, or assumptions, for these things connote a knowledge or speculation about the phenomena rather than an understanding of the meaning of the phenomena. Description includes everything related to this experience. Goffman (1986) suggested that personal reflection and expression through language may be the only way an individual's experience takes on meaning. Only through descriptive methods can one hope to capture the essence or structure of the human experience. As Henderson said, "For the existential phenomenologist description is the means, experience the matter, and structure the goal" (1992, p. 71).

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Author van Manen (1990) summarized phenomenological research as "the study of lived experience" (p. 9). Qualitative research methods can illuminate the meaning in lived human experience. To approach understanding of the essence of human experience and unique meaning, phenomenological research methods are appropriate. Most other methodologies assume a priori definition of the experience being studied. The phenomenon under investigation in this study was explored through the use of open-ended dialogic interviews with participants. The interviews were transcribed and a thematic analysis of transcript text was completed.

Outline of the research process

1. The research group
2. Preliminary research
3. Development of the research question
4. Data collection
 - A. Bracketing Process
 - B. Selection of participants
 - C. The Interviews
5. Data analysis

- A. Reviewing protocols for a sense of the whole
 - B. Grouping the meaning units
 - C. Clustering the units of meaning
6. Issues of reliability and validity
- A. Reliability
 - B. Validity

THE RESEARCH GROUP

The research group largely consisted of graduate students from various academic programs including nursing, sociology, health, communications, and counseling educational psychology. Some of the members were current or previous students of qualitative research and ethnography classes taught by Dr. Kathleen de Marrais, the facilitator of most group meetings. At times, non-students (i.e., faculty) joined the group. In a system's perspective, the group was relatively open with non-rigid boundaries allowing for smooth individual entry and departure from the group. The shared common denominator among all members was interest in qualitative research. The number of people present at a given meeting varied, ranging from five to fifteen. Usually the group met once each week during a school term for two to three hours. Occasionally, a few members met outside the designated meeting time allowing for additional assistance with ongoing research and further discussion.

The interactive processes of other qualitative researchers within the group served an important function. The study of the individual life-world, the human experience, is multi-perspective. It would follow that interaction with a community of researchers sharing a common interest in qualitative research, would facilitate the research process. This commonality, coupled with the diversity of academic disciplines and individual experiences among group members, fosters a more rigorous exploration of the research topic.

Initially, a topic of interest was presented to the research group. Questions and suggestions were posed by the group enabling me to recognize personal biases, to formulate presuppositions, and to develop the research question and interview questions. This process continued through the final steps of the preliminary research as well as the current study.

During the development of this study, similar interactions occurred with some of the research group members and other qualitative researchers. Throughout this process, the topic of interest became a modified version of the original research question from the preliminary study. The focus remained on older women who divorced following long-term marriages. Involvement with research group members was ongoing throughout the research process.

PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

Preliminary research was conducted prior to the current study, to generate descriptions of the experience of divorce among women in long-term marriages

who had been homemakers. Three women were interviewed. The interview questions were framed for the purpose of eliciting a broad array of experiential data relative to divorce.

As the stories unfolded, various adjustment difficulties of divorce were evident. However, throughout thematic analysis, the meaning aligned to specific experiences was not necessarily negative in the overall descriptions. Most interesting was the emergence of themes associated with issues of freedom, power, and learning, among others. The participant's reflection on their experiences indicated discovery and self-awareness regarding what they learned about themselves and their world around them. Sample statements from the transcripts are provided below.

There's a sort of free feeling in knowing you have some control in your life.

Being alone offers some amount of freedom.

He always had to be in control of everything and everyone. He's not in control of me anymore.

If I only knew then what I know now.

I wish I would have known that before.

At least I finally figured it out. Better late than never, so they say.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Before one conducts phenomenological research, self-examination focusing on the motivation underlying the research interest must occur. After reflecting

upon and imparting explicit, personal preconceptions to the meaning, I became sensitive to potentially influential elements of what I already believed about divorce. Through systematic and formal questioning of presuppositions about the topic of investigation, the researcher discovers personal attitudes, hunches, beliefs, and hypotheses (Colaizzi, 1978). This process, referred to as "bracketing," will be discussed in more depth in the data collection section. Based on the protocols provided by the participants in the preliminary research, a specific passion of interest evolved for the researcher. A formal statement of presuppositions was then developed.

All life events and processes, whether perceived as negative or positive, create opportunities for enhancing personal self-growth and self-awareness. In reflection on divorce following a long-term marriage, I would expect to discover something (about myself and the world around me) that impacted my life in a powerful way. What was discovered or learned would have different meanings for different people. I would expect to see a shift in power following divorce in one or more areas (i.e., change in head of household; change in economic status, etc.). Having "lived the experience" of divorce, some acquisition of knowledge would follow. However, learning with insight, a sense of discovery, and/or self-awareness would be essential for the creation of potential for positive growth.

The research topic was presented to members of a qualitative research group. Members questioned me about my personal experiences with the topic and expectations of what I would discover. Questioned about my reason for pursuing this topic, I expressed my personal interest in women and later-life divorce and the connections to my career endeavors of being a counselor educator and a counselor. Through this dialogue the following research question was developed:

How do older women experience divorce after a long-term marriage?

DATA COLLECTION

Bracketing Process

"In order to understand a given phenomenon, one attempts to suspend or put in abeyance one's preconceptions and presuppositions" [i.e., one's biases] (Valle, King & Halling, 1989, p. 10). Bracketing enables the themes from participant interviews to emerge naturally from the data. Although all biases with which the researcher approaches an investigation cannot be completely eliminated, bracketing reduces the potential for bias contamination. When conducting phenomenological research, the bracketing process is ongoing throughout the study.

The bracketing process was initiated during formulation of the topic of this study and it continued throughout the research process. Bracketing was used in four major ways. As mentioned in the preceding section, I presented a topic of study to the qualitative research group and a research question evolved. Involvement in this initial bracketing process enhanced the understanding that the essence of the phenomenon must be defined by the one who experienced.

In the second phase of bracketing, a fellow qualitative researcher interviewed me about my experiences with divorce. During this interview, I discussed some of the adjustment difficulties I had experienced in my own divorce. My perceptions of the hardships and obstacles, as well as positive outcomes

expressed by divorced friends, family members, and clients, were also discussed. The bracketing interview alerted me to certain presumptions and biases which I did not want to contaminate the unique experiences of the participants.

The third and fourth major phases of the bracketing process are discussed in ***The Interviews*** section of data collection and data analysis processes. Included were researcher journal keeping and collaboration among other qualitative researchers. This continual bracketing process promoted rigor in this study.

Selection of Participants

The primary goal selection of participants for phenomenological research is "to generate a full range of variation in the set of descriptions to be used in analyzing a phenomena . . ." (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 47). Issues of generalizability for findings centers around the specificity of the descriptions. Sampling is geared toward selection of participants who are able to serve the goal or purpose of phenomenological research. Thus, "purposeful sampling" is needed as opposed to probability sampling (Patton, 1990).

Colaizzi (1978) has stated that "experience with the investigated topic and articulateness suffice as criteria for selecting subjects" (p. 58). However, the purpose of the study requires participant criteria be specified. In this study, the participants were:

1. Women who had experienced divorce following a marriage of at least a 20-year duration.

2. Age 50 or older at the time of divorce.
3. Divorced at least 3 years.
4. Not remarried.
5. Able and willing to talk about their experience.

Persons who were recently divorced were not included in the study because it is less likely that they had achieved adjustment to the early stages of transition from marriage to divorce. Remarried women were also not included in this study since the intent was to explore the experience of divorced women.

The number of participants varies among phenomenological studies. Goodrich (1988) stated that in a phenomenological investigation, the number of participants is not a statistical issue. In this study, there was no preconceived number for the sample size. The number of participants is sufficient when rich descriptions are obtained without the data becoming "saturated." When new themes about the phenomena no longer emerge from one interview to the next, saturation occurs (Seidman, 1991). During the data analysis (discussed later in this chapter), the researcher observed the same themes and patterns emerging among the first three participants' interview data. However, the researcher chose to continue with the remaining participants who expressed interest in sharing their stories to ensure and strengthen the findings.

Participants were invited to participate via a networking process, or what is referred to as a "snowball or chain sampling" (Patton, 1990). The process began by asking myself and others: "Who do you know that divorced late in life?" One person thinks of someone, who in turn thinks of another and so on. According to

Patton (1990), by asking several who to talk to, "the snowball gets bigger and bigger as you accumulate new information-rich cases" (p. 176). Aside from simply telling people about the study and search for participants, several community sources were contacted. These community sources included four East Tennessee County Offices on Aging (Knox, Roane, Blount, and Sevier); Displaced Homemakers; and the John T. O'Connor Senior Center. Contacts were made by telephone followed by personal or postal delivery of an information sheet briefly describing the study, and a listing of the participant criteria (Appendix A).

Initial contacts were made via a telephone call to or from a potential participant. I identified myself and explained the purpose of the study as well as specific criteria of participants being sought. If the individual met the established participant criteria and was interested in participating, a packet of information was mailed or delivered in person. The information packet consisted of an information sheet describing the study (Appendix B); two informed consent forms, one copy to be retained by the participant (Appendix C); and a demographic survey (Appendix D). Twelve women responded to the solicitation. Eight of those women met the participant criteria. Among those participants, one dropped out prior to the interview and another dropped out following her interview based on concerns about anonymity and an upcoming legal fight regarding alimony.

All of the participants in this study chose a personal delivery of the information packets which gave us an opportunity to meet. At this initial meeting the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions and address any questions or concerns. I assured each participant of ethical sensitivity and

confidentiality. All participants made up pseudonyms by which their surveys and interviews would be identified. Rapport building begins as early as the researcher's initial contact with the participant (Agar, 1980; Bogdan & Biklen, 1982) and is what Agar (1980) refers to as the "negotiation of entry." A date and time was mutually chosen for the interview. The participants were given a choice of interviewing in my office or in their own homes. The only requirements were that the setting be private, quiet, and comfortable. Five participants were interviewed in their homes, while the other participant chose to be interviewed in my office. The participant demographic data is charted in Table 1.

| Table 1. DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY DATA | | | | | | |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|
| PARTICIPANT | ALICE | CAROL | FAITH | IRENE | REBECCA | SARAH |
| Age | 64 | 60 | 64 | 70 | 61 | 72 |
| Race | W | W | W | W | W | W |
| Years of School | 16 | 16 | 15 | 14 | 12 | 18 |
| Length of marriage | 32 | 32 | 41 | 43 | 33 | 34 |
| Initiator of divorce | Spouse | Spouse | Self | Self | Self | Spouse |
| Age at divorce | 58 | 57 | 60 | 63 | 50 | 55 |
| Number of years since divorce final | 5.5 | 3 | 4 | 7 | 11.5 | 17 |
| Number of children | 3 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Children in the home | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Counseling during marriage or divorce | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |

The Interviews

An open-ended interview is well suited to the study of human experience as it serves as "a basic source of raw data . . . revealing the respondents' depth of emotion, the way they have organized their experiences, and their basic perception" (Patton, 1990, p. 21). The phenomenological interview involves a dialogue between the researcher and the participant. The researcher is able to understand the participant's experience and discover what the experience means throughout the context revealed by the dialogic interview (Seidman, 1991; Patton, 1980). The participants were interviewed in person. The first interview in the current study was designated as the pilot interview which provided a practice opportunity with someone who met the criteria for the study. My experience of the pilot interview and comments and responses offered by the participant provided valuable tools for subsequent interviews. Although the opening interview question and the basic format of the interview session was not altered following the pilot interview, I became much more aware of the need to question carefully and appropriately, while also allowing the participant to tell her own story as it unfolded for her. The pilot interview was included in the analysis process.

Each interview was prefaced with comments similar to the following statement:

As we discussed at our first meeting, I will be asking some questions about your experience with divorce. Your willingness to share your story is greatly appreciated. If at any time you become uncomfortable and wish to stop or end the interview, please feel free to tell me. From

time to time, you may notice me making a note or two. These are notes about something you may say that I want to know more about or need you to clarify later in the interview. If you have no questions and are ready, I will turn on the recorder and begin the interview.

At this point, I identified the pseudonym of the participant and asked the major interview question: "Tell me about your experience of being divorced." Other questions were used to elaborate, clarify, and probe responses. Through dialogue with the participant, meanings and insights emerged which in turn influenced the direction of that dialogue (Mishler, 1986). As recommended by Kvale (1983), the focus of the interviews was maintained on the actual descriptions of the experience with/of divorce while any conjectural or theoretical discussions were avoided. Note-taking was kept at a minimum so no distractions would interfere with the interview process. Rather than interrupt, jotting down a word or thought expressed by the participant enabled me to keep track of any area which called for clarity or more exploration. At the close of each interview, the participant was debriefed to assess reactions and feedback of the process.

The audio-taped interviews were 60 to 90 minutes in length, depending on the depth or amount of reflection expressed by the participant. All recordings were transcribed verbatim by me. Hereafter, the transcripts will be referred to as protocols. After listening to the tapes and reading through the protocols, a copy of the protocol was sent to each participant to check for accuracy. Any errors or omissions were then corrected.

Following each interview, I reviewed any notations and made entries in a personal journal to record my thoughts and feelings related to the dialogue which

occurred. The personal journal is a record of what I was experiencing throughout the study. The journaling kept me "in tune with" my own reflections of the interview and helped maintain an awareness of potential biases.

DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis process is the core of phenomenological research. The essence of the experience must be transformed into descriptions that can be understood by others. The primary goal is to search for and identify clarity and meaning in the structured experience (Polkinghorne, 1989). The researcher must give attention to continually observing the individual parts of the protocol, and referring these parts back to the context of the whole.

Reviewing Protocols for a Sense of the Whole

The first two original protocols were presented to members of the research group to read and discuss. This enabled me to get a fuller grasp on the interviews. Kruger (1979) explained that "the repeated reading of the protocols in this early phase assists the researcher in retaining a sense of the wholeness of the data despite its dissection in the subsequent phases" (p. 128). This increased familiarity with the protocols provided a context from which themes could emerge. Copies of the protocols were given to each research member. The protocols were then read aloud as members of the group made margin notations and underlined or circled content that "stood out" to them. Glaser and Strauss (1976) call this

"memoing." Some potential key categories were discussed as well. The copies of the protocols with member input were then returned to me.

Grouping the Meaning Units

Editing the protocols to organize general meaning units (Giorgi, 1984; Kruger, 1979) was the next stage of analysis. Sentences, phrases and words within the protocol that presented a singular idea or intention were identified and underlined. These were extracted and recorded separately from the protocol. These significant statements (Colaizzi, 1978) were pulled together and apart to represent major meaning categories. All other text not necessary for comprehending the idea or intention was eliminated. This collapsing of the protocol increased the manageability of the data while maintaining the essential features of the participant's statements.

Clustering the Units of Meaning

In order to prepare composite summaries of the protocols, a process of condensing the data was completed. The significant statements were organized, grouped, and shaped around common topics. The procedure used was presented by Hawthorne (1988). The steps are as follows:

1. Identifying topics

The researcher should study the cleared text and mark the beginning and ending of each topic discussion.

2. Gathering related statements

All material relevant to a topic should be moved together. The positions located in the first step provide the frame. The related statements may include specifics about the experience or they may be more general comments related to the story.

3. Arranging statements

General comments should be placed at the beginning of a topic section. Following this should be the description of the specific event. Finally, statements about any resolutions or reflections about the experience should be placed at the end.

4. Editing

The researcher may shorten or combine sentences as long as the meaning is not distorted.

5. Removing additions

Word or statements that had been marked by parentheses or brackets should now be absorbed into the summary with the marks deleted.

Two interview summaries (of the same two original protocols) were presented to the research group to assist in identifying emerging patterns or themes. Thompson, Locander, and Pollio (1989) stated that a research group can assist the researcher by questioning whether interpretation represents the participant's lived experience. Each protocol was viewed in its own whole entity. Then it was related to another protocol to identify common patterns and categories. Following this interpretive group process, the remaining four protocols were reduced on my

own. Participants were asked to comment on the significant statements and summaries to ensure these were true and representative of their personal experiences of later-life divorce. It was through this "feedback" process that the researcher decided to re-examine the extracted significant statements in light of the content from which they appeared in the original protocols.

At separate times during the feedback process, two participants called the researcher's attention to their copies of the original protocols. Many of their descriptions were expressed as stories, and these stories enveloped one or more of the significant statements. There were comments by these participants suggesting that in some instances, a significant statement lost meaning when removed from the context of the story. At this point, the researcher re-examined samples of the original protocols in which significant statements appeared. The researcher realized that, in many instances, these significant statements took on more depth and richness when retained within the context of the participant's story or description.

Another researcher (Parks, 1987) applied a variety of methods to her data and found those methods to be unsatisfactory. She completed her data analysis through the application of a verbatim protocol reduction. Non-essential sections were deleted, and the remaining data was organized into common meaning "chunks." Unlike Park's study, the reduction of the entire protocol was not deemed necessary. Instead, this researcher returned to each protocol and examined the content in which the underlined significant statement appeared. These sections containing the significant statements were then extracted. Because the

participants would shift their focus by returning to a previously described event or story to add detail, these additions were grouped with the related significant statement(s). The grouped extractions, which ranged from a single sentence to entire paragraphs, were separated in "chunks" which represented meaningful units.

All of this reduced data was edited by deleting nonessential words or content. Some phrases (i.e., "you know") and repetitions were retained when it was felt this was necessary to preserve the flavor of the description" (Parks, 1987). Some sentences were shortened or combined as long as the meaning remained intact, while retaining the participants' own words.

Another approach was employed in part as a means of managing the data as analysis began. Ross (1987) listed some common elements of any given experience. In this study, a modified version of the elements referred to were:

1. Immediacy of the experience, such as the thoughts and feeling involved (the "what" and "how").
2. Consequences of the experience which is how the experience changed the person and how the person changed the experience (the "when").
3. Settings of the experience.
4. Cognitive societal appraisals, general belief systems.
5. Attitudes toward the experience.

The meaning units, or "chunks," from each protocol were initially grouped into these elements. Then all the meaning units within one element were further delineated. This procedure was used only to organize and manage the data, and to further identify patterns within and between all protocols. As themes emerged,

they were clustered for each participant, then compared across participants, then collapsed. The process of analysis was circular and recursive. Emerging category systems were referred back and forth between and among all meanings within a protocol and across protocols.

Guidelines considered during the analysis process were described by Hawthorne (1988):

1. Capturing the essence of each participant's experience.
2. Preserving the unity and meaning of the text, yet maximizing its analytical accessibility.
3. Analyzing in a rigorous and respectful fashion, always being careful to ensure fidelity to the experience.
4. Interpreting conservatively.
5. Describing the general structure of the experience.

The structure of the experience of later-life divorce which emerged from this process will be discussed in Chapter 4.

ISSUES OF RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

External and internal threats of reliability and validity are concerns in both quantitative and qualitative research, although potential problems may differ dependent on the type of research methods used. The primary focus of this section is to explore a variety of reliability and validity concerns relative to qualitative research and more specifically phenomenological research. The level of reliability and validity threats may vary, or even not exist. These problems are

determined by the research model and design used, as well as how thoroughly the research is conducted. This section of the text includes a discussion of issues of reliability and outlines how these issues were addressed in this study.

Criteria for validity and reliability for qualitative methodology differ somewhat from quantitative methodology. Polkinghorne (1986) distinguishes between the "additional" or positivistic and the phenomenological approaches to reliability and validity.

The definitions of validity and reliability contain presumptions about the relationships between conceptualization and truth . . . The traditional notions of validity and reliability in research design imply a system of concepts that is stable, context-free, and clearly delineated from one another, yet human existence points toward a conceptual system that changes, is context-dependent, and is organized around prototypical instances. (p. 129)

According to Glaser et al (1976), the primary issues are "credibility, plausibility, and trustworthiness" (p. 233). They proposed the following steps for the qualitative researcher as an aim to credibility. In the final written presentation of research, researchers should: (1) present a theoretical framework; (2) include vivid, pertinent details; (3) describe data collection and analyses; and (4) justify the implications of their research.

Strengths that appear inherent in qualitative research are the attention given to perspectives of those being studied, concrete depiction of details, and portrayal of process in an active mode (Patton, 1980). Bogdan et al (1982) compiled a list of five general features of qualitative research that improve the strength of validity and reliability.

1. Qualitative research with the natural setting as a direct source of data and the researcher is the key instrument.

There is the underlying assumption that human behavior is directly influenced by the setting in which it occurs. Contact is of primary importance.

2. Qualitative research is descriptive.

Rather than organize data numerically to establish some significance to a study, the use of "thick" description (Geertz, 1973) of everything taking place provides valuable information.

3. Qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products.

There is little emphasis on the "ends-means" dichotomy. The qualitative researcher views the study as an ongoing process with new information emerging along the way. Expectations are not central to the researcher's concern.

4. Qualitative researchers tend to analyze their data inductively.

"In a sense, deductive researchers hope to find data to match a theory; inductive researchers hope to find a theory that explains their data" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 4).

5. Meaning is of essential concern to the qualitative approach.

The research continuously analyzes the meaning underlying the data as it emerges and evolves throughout the study.

Reliability

Reliability is generally defined as the extent to which findings can be replicated. Given any circumstance or situation, a moment can never be repeated exactly again. Human behavior is not static and environmental influences vary. In qualitative research, dependability (rather than replication) requires the researcher to describe all areas of the study in explicit detail. Goetz et al (1984) provided the following definitions for external and internal reliability:

External reliability addresses the issues of whether independent researchers would discover the same phenomena or generate the same or similar settings.

Internal reliability refers to the degree to which other researchers, given a set of previously generated constructs, would match them with data in the same way as did the original researcher (p. 126).

Threats of reliability can be reduced in a number of ways. The researcher must remember there are few norms set forth in qualitative research methodology that are shared across disciplines (unlike quantitative research). Qualitative research is rather "bulky" in terms of the quantity of data which can be collected. Therefore, a primary goal for reducing threats of reliability is to describe all areas of the research in explicit detail, including the researcher's theoretical framework, selection of participants, setting, design, methods, concepts/categories used, as well as overall terminology.

Some suggestions for the reduction of internal reliability threats discussed by Goetz et al (1984) will be briefly summarized. The strongest method of reporting description of data is to use verbatim accounts. Data collected by use of video tape recordings, audio tape recordings, photographs, and so on may help

strengthen description. However, regardless of the methods used, descriptions that are concrete, thorough, and clear are best. To insure researcher agreement, suggestions of using multiple researchers or participant research assistants were made. Another way for researchers to "spot check" accuracy for what they are doing, and what is emerging through the data, is to talk with other colleagues. This can begin as early as the stages of the research questions. If the researchers are going to use an interview format, practice interviews are recommended.

In phenomenological research, precision and accuracy are essential. Rigor in methods and design are necessary. An outline highlighting the major strategies used to reduce reliability threats in this study are listed below.

1. All areas of the study are described explicitly.
2. The process and criteria of participant selection is well-defined and specified. Trust and rapport with the participants was established through information and explanations disseminated, and sensitivity to ethics, confidentiality, and privacy.
3. Accurate records of data is imperative. Verbatim accounts from participants were recorded on audio tape. Participants also verified accuracy of data collected and analyzed.
4. Rather than emphasizing an "end-means" dichotomy, this phenomenological study is an ongoing process with new information emerging along the way. Significant statements are referred back to the structural description which identified ". . . whether there is anything contained in the original protocols that isn't accounted for in the clusters of themes, and whether the clusters of themes propose anything which isn't implied in the original protocols" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59).

Validity

Goetz et al (1984) defined validity with the following questions:

Internal validity: Do scientific researchers actually observe or measure what they think they are observing or measuring?

External validity: To what extent are the abstract constructs and postulates generated, refined, or tested by scientific researchers applicable across groups? (p. 221)

Although not absent of threats of validity, qualitative research appears to have some strengths for "controlling" these threats, unlike quantitative experimentation. A researcher grounded in theory actually looks for contradictory data, by exploring and examining negative cases and unusual circumstances. The data is continuously compared and contrasted. The overall theme of protecting qualitative research from threats of validity is summed up eloquently by Borman, LeCompte, and Goetz (1986). The entire passage follows:

Qualitative research is provided a remedy to the validity problem in the careful distinction made between ethic, or researcher imposed, and emic, or subject-generated meanings. Careful qualitative researchers engage in systematic and comprehensive elicitation of participant constructs, cross-checking them with those held by researchers. (p. 50)

Observer effects function in a variety of ways for qualitative researchers, according to Goetz et al (1984). They offered a few questions (all inter-related) for the researcher to address:

1. In what way does my role, and my relationship with participants influence data collected?

The researcher must identify and understand factors which may influence responses including the participant's emotional state, and any underlying purpose for wanting to participate. The researcher must recognize the fact that time and people are not static; there exists a constant state of flux.

Caution should be taken to distinguish between representative data and data reflecting more social desirability. "In the initial stages of research, informants may disassemble, present an ideal self, or tell the researcher what they think the researcher should, or wants to hear" (Goetz et al, 1984, p. 224). Becker (1970) has suggested that response distortions common with participant observation are generally short-lived. His comments are provided in their entirety.

While a participant observer may initially influence the setting, social and organizational constraints usually neutralize this distorting effect. Participants will become more concerned with meeting the demands of their own situation than with paying attention to, pleasing or playing with the researcher. (p. 43)

2. How do I guard against inaccurate responses?

The researcher must select methods of research which will minimize unnecessary (and dangerous) restrictions to information. The researcher must "stay in check" to minimize the risk of eliciting responses the researcher desires or attaching meaning to responses that in reality, are incorrect. Wolcott (1973) suggested that adequate presence in the field (if appropriate for the research design) reduces artificial responses. Response bias is defined as "the relationship between what people do and their recollection of those doings" (Freeman, Romney, & Freeman, 1987, p. 310). These biases can be alleviated through the use of appropriate instruments of data collection.

3. How do I prevent my personal biases from influencing responses from participants and my interpretations of those responses?

Biases are a threat to all researchers regardless of the methodologies used. "Personal discipline assists qualitative researchers in avoiding excessive

subjectivity" (Borman et al, 1986, p. 43). Erickson (1973) suggested that research must build subjective elements of interaction with the research participants (in context) through a "disciplined subjectivity." This process provides "intersubjective understanding."

Researchers must remain aware of their biases and avoid attaching inaccurate interpretation of the data. Collection and ongoing review of data enables the researcher to constantly confront prejudices that can contaminate the research (Bogdon et al, 1982). The purpose of research is to add knowledge, not to pass judgement. External criticism, by seeking critique and feedback from others "outside" the research can provide checks for validity (Borman et al, 1986). Wax (1971) suggested practicing an insider-outsider role as a researcher. Searching for corroborating evidence from other sources strengthens validity, such as review of other studies, triangulation, and negative/discrepant case analyses (Borman et al, 1986). All biases and concern should be recorded and reflected upon by the researcher. Thus, the primary purpose of the researcher should be through choice and implementation of the research design and rigorous reflection and examination of the ongoing process of data collection.

According to Polkinghorne (1989), when the reader of a study finds the description to be accurate and revealing in content, then the study has validity. Thus, the procedures and applications of the study, as well as the final written presentation must be thoroughly and clearly described. An overview highlighting the method used to reduce threats to validity in this study are listed below:

1. One of the criteria in participant selection was that the participant be willing and able to articulate her experience of the phenomena.
2. A pilot interview was conducted. All interviews were open-ended with unbiased questions absent of value-laden content.
3. All interviews were conducted in person, audio taped, and transcribed by me.
4. The process of bracketing was used throughout this study. I kept a personal journal to record my experiences during the study.
5. Input and feedback from the research group, as well as other qualitative researchers, was an important strength in the study from as early as the selection of a topic.
6. The thematic analysis process was circular and recursive. Parts of protocols were compared to a whole protocol, then across protocols.
7. Multiple sources of data were available for the researcher to review and examine: audio tapes, original protocols, significant statements, summaries, and "chunks," or meaning units.

In closing, Kruger (1979) stated:

The criterion for validity is not whether another researcher would use exactly the same words or arrive at an identical description of the data. Rather validity is indicated by whether such differences in wording may be intersubjectively understood to reflect an identical meaning or indicate similar essential themes to those which emerged from the data as explicated by the original researcher. (p. 131)

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this investigation was to describe the experience of later-life divorce following long-term marriage. Five major themes emerged through analysis of the interview data: Divorce As A Threat, Divorce As An Inevitability, Divorce As A Barrier, Divorce As A Vehicle, and Divorce As A Discovery. The thematic structure of later-life divorce for the participants in this study is formed by these five themes.

Each of these five themes are comprised of sub-themes. Although these themes and sub-themes represent distinct aspects of the experience, they are all interconnected and are interacting reciprocally. Secondly, all themes share a common bond. They are all related via a shared nucleus, which has been named the Existential Core.

From a Gestalt perspective, the themes emerged against the ground time, forming a figure/ground relationship. The Existential Core is perpetually connected to all themes. As a thematic aspect becomes figural, emerging "away" from the ground, the Core extends with this aspect. A diagram representing this thematic structure is provided as Figure 1.

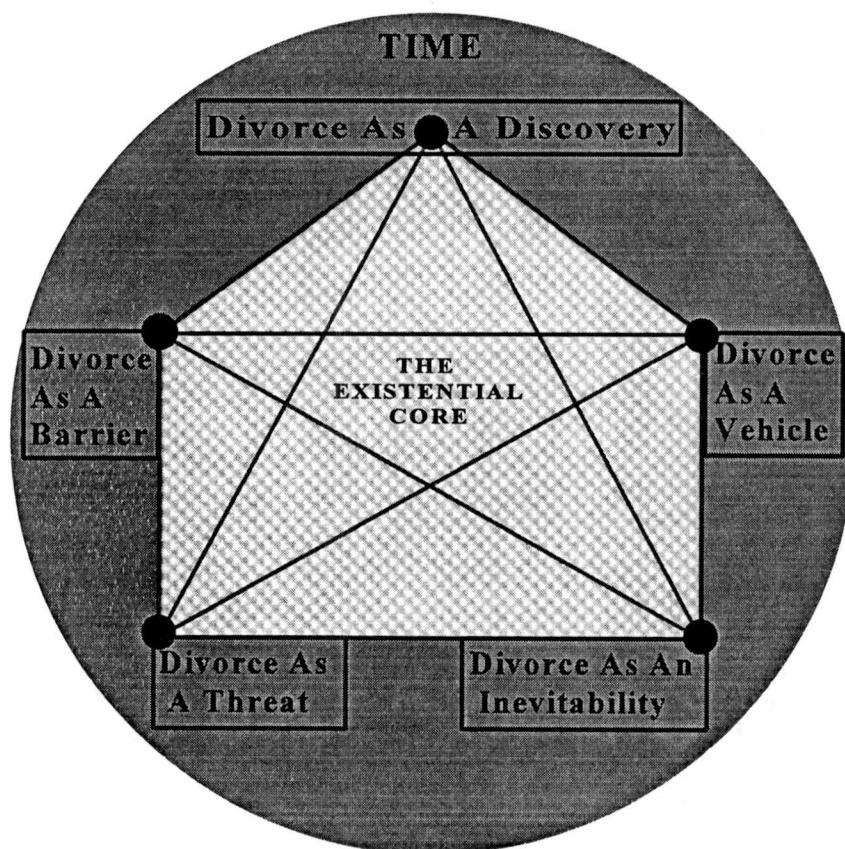


FIGURE I

THEMATIC STRUCTURE OF LATER-LIFE DIVORCE

In the following sections, there will be a description of the existential ground of time upon which themes emerged, and a brief discussion of the Existential Core. This will be followed by descriptions of each theme and corresponding content areas. Various excerpts from protocols will be included to illustrate and illuminate the themes.

TIME: THE EXISTENTIAL GROUND FOR THE EXPERIENCE

The participants' experiences of later-life divorce were set against the ground of time. This ground of time appeared in all of the protocols.

When referring to time, the meaning became more than simple discussions of past, present and future. Time represented the essential context within which stories and dialogue unfolded for the participants. Each participant expressed awareness of the experience of time, through the descriptions of their experiences of being divorced. Whether through self-construction of time-lines marking significant life events, recording actual dates or periods of time, defining time through chronological age, contrasting past with present time, conducting a life-review, or a combination of these presentations, time had unique meaning to each participant. The experience of later-life divorce became figural within the context of time.

All participants expressed an awareness of the impact of time, particularly in polarities imposed by time, including continuity and change, and restrictions and opportunities. However, there were perceptual and conceptual differences among

participants in what, when, and/or how time was imposed. Also, there were sometimes differences in the perception of time, as being viewed as negative or positive. For participants in this study, time was manifested as a ground for the experience of later-life divorce in the following ways:

1. Time is restrictive.
2. Time is permissive.
3. Time passes, marking changes in feelings and behaviors.
4. Time passes, making changes in perceptions.

The issue of age was salient throughout the ground of time but it was not perceived as a negative element except by those participants who realized limitations, when time was restrictive.

Participants described experiences in the context of time imposing restrictiveness. This was most salient when talking in terms of the duration of the marriage, expectations of marriage, the divorce process, and specific issues related to life expectancy (i.e., economic). Examples of this element of time as a ground are presented in the following excerpts.

After you've been married for over forty years, you don't see yourself ten or twenty years down the road living as a single person The divorce settlement was awful — it left me with next to nothing. I was sixty-three and had only worked a short time after the children were grown, so the social security will be minimal. I'm working now, and will as long as my health holds up, but I don't know that I can develop much of a retirement security now I'm a young seventy and feeling strong.
(Irene)

. . . If I divorced, then I would be throwing away twenty years of my life.
(Faith)

Time as permissive connotes choices and opportunities. Consider the following description by one participant:

Even though I have less money to live on now, it's not divided among things that I don't want to spend for . . . I'm a good money manager. I'm able to do more with less than I would have imagined . . . I have more time. There aren't as many clothes to wash; not as many meals to cook; none at all if I don't want to . . . Time and freedom to use however I want.
(Carol)

As time passes, some things change, while others remain the same. Feelings, behaviors and situations in life continue to evolve, and are reflected by participants over the context of time. Participants expressed these changes as a contrast of then and now. Consider the following illustration.

Don't ask me to explain this, but I think it took the divorce and time to get back down to my normal weight. I had been over-weight for probably the last eighteen or nineteen years of our marriage. That was always an issue with him, me being fat. And I remember finding comfort in cooking and eating — it made me feel better. Now look at me. I didn't go on any exotic diet . . . I just changed somehow.
(Irene)

Participants described changes as well as continuity in their perceptions about themselves and their world, over time. As time passed, transformations occurred and the world looked very different, as though illuminated by a new light.

For a long time, it appeared you had done everything on a couple's basis, that's been my life for so long, that I guess you don't realize there's another one (life as a single person) out there. I've learned that I can be self-sufficient, that I am an individual, that I am a person, and that I do not, in order to exist, have to have a mate .

(Rebecca)

THE EXISTENTIAL CORE

Through the continuous reading, focusing, sifting, mulling over, and refocusing through the protocols, it was clear each participant had very unique stories to tell as they described their experiences of later-life divorce. Within these stories were discussions of feelings, thoughts, and behaviors often based in memory or perception of the past. Initially, there was a sense that a pattern was emerging relative to perceived feelings, thoughts, behaviors, and impacts of aging. Continuously, this potential pattern was explored only to lead to a vague and oversimplified common experience for these participants:

The marriage became damaged or failed. Efforts were made to hold the marriage together, but divorce occurred anyway. Everyone felt bad but later felt better. Some conditions or situations improved, while others worsened.

The realization occurred that these reflections were not emerging as a theme in their own right; rather, they provided the condition(s) under which later-life divorce was experienced.

Participants brought the very essence of who they are, into the dialogue content. The obvious components of this essence were those things which are expressed through language (i.e., feelings, behaviors). Most of the participants

described other components of this essence which made later-life divorce figural, including specific life events and discussion of their own parents and upbringing. The essence or entity of an individual is not merely a frame of reference; rather, the Core is the totality of who we are to ourselves, one another, and the world around us. This Core is in a constant state of flux, forever evolving. Because the conditions and components of the Core are variable among and between participants, as well as across protocols, these components are collapsed into one structure, or, as called in this study, the Existential Core.

As a theme emerged within the interview data, core components emerged with the theme, while remaining connected to the other themes. To "know" the Existential Core was not possible for the researcher, although some components were readily expressed and identifiable. Some of these identified components, which were present for all participants were feeling words (i.e., "depressed"), behavioral responses (i.e., "talked less to others"), physiological responses (i.e., "it made me sick to my stomach"), and cognitions of feeling (i.e., "left on my own"). The reader will see components which appear in many excerpts included in the thematic descriptions, illuminating the presence of the Existential Core.

THE THEMES

The five major themes and their content areas will be presented in the following sections. Actual excerpts from the interviews will be used to illustrate the structure of later-life divorce. The reader will note that the themes are

interrelated and interactive. Therefore, some statements or portions of excerpts may appear under more than one theme or sub-theme. Although there may appear to be a sequential and uniform pattern in the presentation of the themes, the actual interviews shifted focus from one theme to another. The descriptions of the experience, provided by the participants, are presented as comprehensively as is practical and possible to allow the reader the opportunity to grasp the richness of the data in context. (Refer to Appendix E, an outline of the themes and sub-themes.)

Divorce As A Threat

This theme implies later-life divorce as becoming imminent. The sub-themes of this theme are: Expectations, Awareness, Avoidance and Delay. The participants expressed an awareness of the potential for divorce, and perceived repercussions should divorce occur. The threat of divorce was conflicted with the expectations these women had about marriage and the direction of their lives. As the participant's awareness of threat heightened, efforts were made to alleviate or eliminate the threat. Avoidance of the threat was manifested, further exacerbating the anxiety and frustration for many participants. This avoidance was often compounded by a delay or postponement of the threat.

Expectations

When a person marries, she paints a picture in her mind of what the marriage will "look like." Strokes of dreams, hopes and plans are painted in the picture. Often, the woman may frame this picture in a structure consisting of values or beliefs which were embraced by her parents and encouraged by the cultural or social constructs during the earlier years in her life. The participants in this study described expectations for commitment.

To me, the marriage vows are very sacred and it's 'til death do us part . . . When I took my vows, I was very serious about it . . . There'd been no divorces in our family or anything. I felt like I was a little ol' black sheep. I guess with my upbringing and background, I really felt like divorce was one of those things that you just didn't go through.
(Rebecca)

My whole adult life had been spent with him. I mean, by the end, it was forty-three years. I was raised and grew up in a time when people stayed married, thick or thin. Divorce just wasn't something people saw as an option. Sure, I had thought about divorce after some rough times, but I just hung in there — Commitment was involved.
(Irene)

After thirty-two years of being married, I was pretty well used to the idea that that was it. It was going to be what my parents had had and what his parents had had — it was just gonna be a lifetime marriage. (Sarah)

Some participants revealed dissatisfaction, or unwelcome change in the marriage, while still holding on to what was expected in a marriage.

I had known all my married life that I wasn't ecstatically happy, but I felt this was a steady rock. There wasn't any questions in my mind that we would live out our lives together. For good or ill, we were gonna be together.
(Alice)

When I married him, I thought we were going to be a team. And for a while we were. Perhaps, well pretty much for one year and then less and less after that . . . He was abandoning us. That wasn't the proper thing to do.
(Carol)

Awareness

All participants described events and moments when awareness became salient. Perceptions of changes in the partner were mentioned frequently, as well as perceptions of self. Participants described their own feeling of rejection, isolation, hopelessness, unhappiness and depression. As the threat of divorce became more imminent, many participants expressed disbelief, shock and surprise.

Faith commented on the two sides or "faces" of her husband — how he related to her contrasted with how he related to others:

Several years ago, I kept noticing that the person I knew as my husband was a different person when we were in public. The person that other persons knew seemed to be so different. When he was at home, he was very closed in. There was not the open communication that I saw in other persons, other places. So I began to be very acutely aware . . . He was installing all this computerization at work. It was a fantastic thing that he was doing. And I said, "That sounds wonderful. Why aren't you sharing that with me?" "Well, you don't need to know." I was told not to come to his company. He didn't want me or the children around. So, his life was his life, and to be with the family was different. When he came home, he was with the family but not a

part of the family . . . This was part of his Jekyll and Hyde . . .
 . (He) was not the person that I knew. When I would come home
from a workshop, then he would have nothing to do with me . . .
I had been away for a week or two weeks or a night or three
nights. Prior to that, he had even accused me of having a
relationship with various persons in the church or in the square
dance group or wherever we might be. I thought, well, that's just
another part of his jealousy coming forward. I was in experiential
theology workshops, which really opened my eyes to a lot of
things. I also was in a T-group workshop, and in that T-group, I
became acutely aware that, for all practical purposes, our
marriage was gone. It's just, there was no marriage there . . . I
guess awareness was more of an acceptance that I really didn't
have a marriage. We had a living together arrangement, not a
marriage.

(Faith)

Two participants described their perceptions of their marriages (recalling
no discontentment at the time), as awareness began to emerge. They cited
changes in their partners as well.

This divorce happened after thirty-two years of marriage. During
most of those years, I was a pretty content person and secure in
my position in life with my husband. The last three or four years,
he began to withdraw . . . He began giving me the silent
treatment, seemed to really withdraw, and be miserably unhappy.
Of course, that made me miserably unhappy, too. This went on
for some time, with some discussions from time to time, pretty
emotional, about what was wrong.

(Alice)

After thirty-two years of marriage, I was used to the idea that that
was it . . . I thought it had gone very well indeed. But he began
having these things about being his own person and maybe he
was too dependent. And he was in therapy a good deal with
depression. So it was all from his side. I had never had any
dissatisfaction with the marriage, and when he began saying
things like this, I really couldn't believe it was true.

(Sarah)

One participant recognized that marital conflict was present, but the potential for divorce never occurred to her. She cited her awareness of the "loss of any meaningful communication" as being salient in the threat of divorce.

Although there were different problems we had during the marriage, divorce was never something I considered or thought of seriously. But I remember when I became aware that divorce might actually turn out being a real possibility. He seemed to have really put a distance between us. Maybe I had, too. But despite all my efforts to try to open him up, there was a complete loss of any meaningful communication. Everything seemed superficial . . . It wasn't just the affairs, or choosing the golf pals over spending time with me . . . He was just no longer there. Emotionally absent, really . . . I felt isolated and hopeless. I was living with a stranger.
(Irene)

For another participant, awareness of a threat to her marriage arose following two incidents involving interactions with her partner.

He had become very hateful. A month or two prior to this episode, he had said something to me about well, why don't you get a divorce. Where in the world that remark came from I don't know. One night I was sittin' on the couch in the den, and I happened to look up and he was sittin' over there in his chair. I said, "Well, what are you lookin' at me like that for," and he says, "I'm tryin' to make up my mind whether I love you or not." I said, "What in the world do you mean after all these years." I felt this tremendous pain . . . He didn't have the courage and the nerve to say anything. I had been a little suspicious, but then I didn't really know that anything was goin' on. Then, that night, I come in . . . and this young girl's car was there in the driveway. I saw her hand him a note . . . I called him upstairs, I asked him what (the girl) had written on that note. And his reply to me was that her husband had run her off. Then he said, "we've been having an affair." I was just dumbfounded. I'll never forget his reaction to

that. His remark to me was that I wasn't the only GD person that it'd ever happened to.
(Rebecca)

Unlike the other participants, Carol did not recall any clues which would suggest her marriage was in jeopardy. She disclosed that the marriage had not been ideal for some time, yet no threat of divorce was realized until her husband spoke to her of divorce. She was surprised and shocked.

It was an unexpected divorce — it was a complete surprise to me. The marriage for some years had not been really close and happy particularly. But that's the way a lot of marriages are. It wasn't bad. We never argued or anything like that. I simply did not expect this sort of thing at all. When he told me he was going to move out, I couldn't believe it. It was such a shock. I said, "Well, do you mean you are moving to (city) to stay as long as your mother lives, to take care of her? Do you mean you're moving there for a while or do you mean you're moving permanently? I need to know what you're talking about." He said, "Well, I think I want to go permanently." By then, I was beginning to get the message. I said, "Are you saying that you don't want to be married anymore?" And he said, "Yes, I am." So, after I sort of recovered from that, I said, "Well, what do you mean to do?" He said he was going to file for divorce.
(Carol)

Avoidance

A threat generally connotes something formidable, aversive, and territorially violating. Threat also represents a potential or probability that someone or something will be lost or destroyed. Other persons facing something threatening may figuratively and literally move away from the source of the threat. This movement away from threat may be manifested physically, by purposefully removing the target of the threat, out of harm's way.

Emotional/psychological withdrawal, or the denial that the threat exists is another example of the manifestation of avoidance.

When faced with a threat to person, possession, or personal space, a common response is to shield and protect from the threat. One might gather arms and fight back no matter what the cost, because of the high value placed upon the object or person. The saliency of marriage to personal identity was evident in the participants' descriptions.

All the participants described situations relative to the sub-theme of avoidance. Although avoidance was revealed at different times and in different situations among participants, the common denominator for when avoidance emerged was during the periods of time when the value and/or benefits of the marriage outweighed the value and/or benefits of divorce. Five of the participants assumed the position characteristic of shield/protect, and stand up/fight.

I was not at all involved in killing it. Up 'til the end, I still thought that the marriage was very worthwhile. Ahead of time, I just devoted my every effort. I was willing to try to change, to try to be what he wanted . . . I attempted to figure out what it was that he would have liked better and to try to be like that . . .

(Sarah)

It was not a happy time at all. I was trying very hard to be somebody else, this somebody that he wanted. That didn't work, of course, because I don't think I was the one who had changed anyway. I think he was the one who changed.

(Alice)

I'm no quitter. I wasn't going to simply throw in the towel after all those years, and everything we had been through. Not to mention we had these two great kids together. I set my mind to the task because I was determined to hang on. I'm not sure if I tried to change him or myself, but I did not give up.
(Irene)

I felt like if I divorced, then I would be throwing away twenty years of my life. After the eighteen months of counseling, I was still determined to make it work. I hung in there . . . I still felt there was some hope for the marriage . . .
(Faith)

In the beginning, I never even thought about it (actually divorcing). Somehow, I thought you could put the pieces together and be a forgiving soul.
(Rebecca)

Three of the participants described efforts designed to salvage their marriages. In each story, attempts were made to seek counseling for themselves as well as their husbands. These women all followed through with counseling, but without any cooperation from their spouses.

I really became aware that I needed some professional help. So one of the leaders suggested that I find a marriage counselor . . . I informed my husband of this. He chose not to go with me. For approximately eighteen months, I went weekly for marital counseling and he would never go . . . He would not accept it — "There's nothing wrong with our marriage." So I went all this time and he still denied that there was anything wrong with the marriage.
(Faith)

I tried living with him for a year after that (discovery of his affair), and tried to get him to go for counseling and talk to a minister. He wouldn't.
(Rebecca)

He used to say, "You just think you can call the cops," as though you don't even have to work on anything. Actually, he didn't want to work on anything and that was pretty well documented by the fact that he never wanted us to get into therapy or counseling. He was in therapy. But he never did want us to (be) in (counseling). He said that it's not the marriage that has the problem — he has the problem and he wants to work on it.
(Sarah)

In order to minimize the threat of divorce, some participants found themselves ignoring the possibility of divorce and re-framing or re-defining evident sources of threat. One participant described two events in which avoidance was perpetuated by denial.

(I) kept thinking this would blow over because people on the outside, the children, everybody else, still thought we had a good marriage. It would be good for a while and then it would be very, very painful because he wanted so badly to involve me in killing it. But I just couldn't do it because I didn't see it that way. When he first said, "I just want to move out in an apartment near the university and let's live separately, for a while, anyway," I said, "Well, instead, we've planned a vacation this summer, why don't I leave early and take the kids. When it's time for your vacation, you can bring (the other daughter) and come on up." In other words, what my offer was, well, if I'm getting on your nerves, I'll get out temporarily and maybe that will help. So he accepted that, no strings To me, it was a sort of horror to think of trying to explain to the children and maybe to myself, maybe to friends — I don't know. It just sounded sort of horrible because it would be a virtual separation, a virtual divorce, because he was not saying maybe if we get apart a while, we'll feel different. He wasn't saying that at all. I was the only one who thought that.
(Sarah)

Sarah told another story which further illustrated avoidance. She described her wishful thinking, or creation of a fantasy in relation to her therapist and his possible intervention to help the marriage.

I did go to a therapist during the last year of it. I still think that I thought maybe he (the therapist) would tell me what to do and put it all back together because he was working in the same clinic with my husband's therapist. So I thought, well, the two of them (our therapists) will get this. Even though they didn't want us to be together or work together . . . I thought maybe they would change it somehow.

(Sarah)

Alice described a form of denial surfacing from her avoidance of the threat of divorce.

He put our house on the market without telling me. That was bad. I was pretty angry about that. Because the real estate lady calls me and wanted to know if she can bring somebody to see the house. We had said something about it, but he hadn't told me he had actually talked with someone and put it on the market. She brought the people out and they looked at the house. I called him on the phone and raised hell. "Well, Alice, you knew this was going to happen." I did, but still I was in denial and that was a pretty high-handed thing to do, I thought. I hadn't even thought about that for a while.

(Alice)

Irene used semantics to disguise herself from the threat of divorce.

Plagued by her husband's affairs during the marriage, she assigned another name to his infidelity.

No, there was not going to be a divorce for me. This wasn't the first affair he had had but somewhere in my head, I convinced myself it would be the last. This time, I was gonna give it a name and call it a "phase." Maybe I was playing a martyr role, I don't know. I think, like I said before, there was a real possibility of divorce. I guess I was in denial or I was just trying to avoid something that was inevitable and beyond my control.

(Irene)

Delay

The sub-theme of Delay refers to a postponement, or alteration of the impact and response to the threat of divorce. After the threat of divorce permeated awareness, participants described a continuation or prolonging of certain conditions of the marriage, as well as a sense of struggle or unrest associated with a perceived anticipation of divorce potential. Actual movement toward divorce may have already begun, yet individual circumstances within the marriage, and participant responses to these circumstances changed the level of speed toward the final separation and divorce; the duration of time from initial awareness to actual separation or divorce; and the perception of the level of threat of divorce. These delays were marked by time passing, from a month, to sometimes years before the final separation and actual legal divorce occurred.

For some participants, delay served as a means for avoidance. There was often a sense of responsibility to repair and correct marital discord, whether it was out of perceived obligation or not. This sense was sometimes coupled with the perception that delay set aside the divorce threat. Despite the impact of delay as an opportunity for change, some participants perceived the divorce threat continuously, and sensed that divorce was inevitable.

After the divorce became imminent, there you might think, "Well, they separated." But for almost eight months, we still lived together. I had already moved into another bedroom before we decided on divorce. But even after I filed, we were still in the same house. To me, it was a period of extended stress and tension. And at times, even though I knew in my mind we were

getting a divorce, I felt as though we are still married, so anything could change. It wasn't as though I was in some denial or expecting a miracle or anything like that. Or maybe I was. It (the divorce) wouldn't be real, yet. What's the saying? It isn't over until it's over.

(Irene)

I became acutely aware that for all practical purposes, our marriage was gone . . . (later), when I would come home from a workshop, he would have nothing to do with me . . . After eighteen months of counseling, still nothing . . . Eighteen years before, I moved out. I had already moved out two different times . . . I was still determined to make it work . . . So we added another twenty years.

(Faith)

I said, "Well, what do you mean to do?" He said he was going to file for divorce. I said, "Well, if you're going to do this awful thing, it would be a kindness if you would get it over with. I cannot stand to drag this out. I can't take it." . . . That month when he was here, after he told me he was leaving but stayed another month, I didn't ask, but my daughter asked him, "Why are you staying?" . . . I mean he was here. The idea of a divorce was frightening but it hadn't happened. Anything could have changed . . . I was his wife — it was my obligation to the last day.

(Carol)

. . . I wrestled with it a long time . . . In the beginning, I thought of everybody except myself . . . I had suspicions over a few things . . . He says, "Well, we've been having an affair." . . . He began to be brutal after that . . . I went to talk to an attorney three times . . . I tried living with him for a year after that.

(Rebecca)

I had never had any dissatisfaction with the marriage and when he began saying things like this . . . "No, I don't think there's anything left of the relationship and I think we should get a divorce" . . . I made proposals that we work on it and they were rejected . . . It would be good for a while and then it would be very, very painful . . . So there were maybe more than five

years . . . The separation didn't actually take place until about seven years after that.
(Sarah)

Two participants described their experiences of their spouses remaining in the home as particularly stressful and difficult. There was an awareness that divorce was imminent, which conflicted with the spouses remaining in the home with the participants for a period of time.

Finally, he declared he was moving out, and then didn't do it for several months, which was a very stressful time . . . I think probably the worst was that he stayed on. We slept in the same bed, without touching, for months while he was building a house.
(Alice)

The hardest part about dealing with the divorce prospect initially, was that (he) continued to live with me for over a month after he announced he was gonna leave. I continued to cook for him; clean for him; we even slept in the same bed. It was difficult to get through that period of time knowing he was leaving. We never talked during that time. It was like an armed camp.
(Carol)

Divorce As An Inevitability

The theme of Divorce As An Inevitability, refers to the recognition that divorce is unavoidable. The three sub-themes are: Point of No Return, Declaration, and Detachment.

For these participants, the journey of marriage became forward-moving toward and beyond divorce, without interruption. There were perceptions that the threat of divorce could no longer be evaded. The participants experienced

an awareness of the thoughts: divorce is here; it's here to stay; and there is no going back.

Point of No Return

This sub-theme concerns the realization that divorce had become the only available option. The participants described cognitions about the marriage coming to a halt, or leading to closure. These cognitions were sometimes sparked by a particular event or series of events. For some of the participants, the recognition was manifested suddenly, while others experienced a gradual realization.

One day it just hit me — we were getting a divorce. This marriage is over. It wasn't that I wanted a divorce, I mean, he started this thing by straying and having no respect for me. But I had done everything I could think of. I didn't know if the marriage was worth the suffering. He had come in after having one of his nights out and something clicked for me. It was like, shit or get off the pot. In some ways, I felt a relief.
(Irene)

After the separation, I came back about a week later to get some other things. He came home very upset because I had loaded up some of my things. Then I came back another time. At that time, I didn't have a key that would work. He had changed the locks. I didn't have a key. So, I asked him about that. Well, the lock broke. Well, the lock that was in the back door at that time, which was the entrance that we used, is now on the door into the carport storage room. The key still fit. That left me with the message that "You're not to come back here. You're out. What's left is mine" . . . When the breaking point came — I guess I had all the accusations that I was willing to take — that I knew he would not believe me whatever I said. And there was no point in my

continuing in a relationship that should have some depth, should have some meaning to it.

(Faith)

After over a year of enduring an affair and physical abuse, Rebecca realized the marriage was over.

I didn't trust him. All my faith and trust had been completely broken. To me, if there's going to be a marriage, there's got to be that fidelity in there. I had always been true and faithful to him. You can't live like that and you wonder, well who else and what else, and then about your sexual diseases and all . . . I told him repeatedly that if he didn't straighten up, I was gonna get me a divorce. And that once I made up my mind, there'd be no backin' down . . . At that point in time, he wasn't gonna give her up, she was the most important thing to him, I wasn't important . . . I just kept on prayin' and a cryin', but finally figured out there wasn't no alternative. I finally got it through my head and I felt I had a biblical grounds for divorce. I could not continue to live in the circumstances I was livin' in . . . I knew that I'd gone the last mile. Different things would happen, and I'd get more convinced . . . It convinced me that I had given it my last shot, and that there was no pickin' up the pieces. There was no puttin' it back together . . . Finally one day, I just made up my mind. There wasn't nothin' for me to do except to end it, to keep my sanity . . . I think I felt relief that I had made up my mind, and that this was it.

(Rebecca)

Two participants described incidents that occurred after the divorce, illustrating their realization that the marriage was really over.

I phoned him, said what had happened, and would he mind coming and taking me home, which he did. But he said, "Sarah, we are divorced. Why don't you next time call some other friend." And I was like, what — oh my God. It didn't seem like a very big deal and I may have said that. And he said, "I know but I just think you don't really realize that we're divorced." . . . I thought, well, I'll be damned. There was one other situation when I called

on him like that and then over the phone, around the same time, I said, "How was your visit with (our daughter)?" And he said, "And another thing, if you want to know how the visit with (our daughter) was, why don't you ask (her)." So you know it was a real curtain down — it was a real slammed door and it seemed so cruel. But at the same time, he probably had a point, that since it had been difficult for me to imagine that he really wanted to leave, he probably had to set that kind of limits, that harsh. But I got it after that. I didn't bother him anymore and had a real pride about it . . .

(Sarah)

One of the really awful things was the day of the divorce hearing. I didn't go. After it was over (he) came back by here to leave me his house keys, and instead of just turning the key in the door and coming into the house he had lived in for all these years, he came to the front door and knocked to be allowed to come in. It just broke my heart. Just to think here he is standing with the key in his hand and he knocks on the door, it just killed me. But I didn't cry when he left. When he left, he said, "Take care of yourself." Toughening up means that. I have to take care of myself and that's what I'm trying to do.

(Carol)

Rebecca described further confirmation of her recognition that the marriage was over.

After they served the papers on him, he cried and begged and he was really going to turn over a new leaf. And I said, "Well, I told you. Once I went and made up my mind, that was it." But he went through all that cryin' and don't do this, I'll give her up, I hate her. And I said, "Well, it's too late now." I'd already been there — I'd lived in that condition for a year, and as far as I was concerned, it was his turn, by the time I got to that point. Once it was thrown, the ball was thrown in his court. He didn't want it 'cause I reckon he had gone along this other time having his cake and icing and eating it too, because of the fact that I had tried for that whole year after I found out (about the affair), I reckon he thought I'd just continue to go on.

(Rebecca)

Declaration

This sub-theme concerns descriptions about disclosing to others the announcement that the marriage was dissolving. Perceptions of what others thought about this information was also described. Some participants shared stories about telling friends and the reactions that followed.

None of our friends knew any of this was going on. So, about a month before it actually happened, I selected a few people, one at a time, to tell this story to, because I needed to let somebody know. I told the children and I told a few of our really close friends. For the most part they were pretty shocked, I think. They pretended to be if they weren't. Several people said, "Well, I didn't know, I thought you were the ideal couple." They hadn't seen signs of any conflict . . . I think that (telling someone) really helped me. I hadn't wanted to do it at all, but I saw the inevitability of the whole thing. I wanted to be the one who told them. Even then, he didn't act as if anything was wrong. We were supposed to go to his former employer's birthday party or something. He was surprised that I didn't want to do, and didn't go, and (he) went alone to this party. I was amazed that he was surprised. Once I had told people, I didn't want to be seen with him.

(Alice)

There was a party given by a friend of ours and I thought, "Well, I really don't think I should go. Everyone would be asking about (him)." But I did go, and sure enough, everyone asked and I just flat-out told them we were divorcing. My God, you should have seen the jaws drop. Talk about a shocker. Looking back on it now, it sounds kinda funny.

(Irene)

Other participants described experiences of telling their children about the divorce.

So then, when he just could not get me to share in putting an end to it, he just said, "I'm leaving," and I said, "Well, I think we should tell the children together." We did that — it was the most ghastly thing I'd ever want to go through. (He) led off and said, "I'm sure you've been noticing that your mother and I are not getting along very well together and we thought it would be better" et cetera. I'm sitting there supposedly sharing in this. Yet all the time I'm thinking "That isn't really true at all! If he would just get sensible, he would see everything could be okay again." Then he phoned our daughters and they just burst into sobs. Then they called me and I said, "I'm sure it's not gonna be the end of the world — it feels like it to me too, but I'm sure that somehow we'll make it okay." . . . He really did not like the idea of smashing the family and was very, very fond of the children. I kept hoping that he could preserve the relationship with them in spite of leaving the marriage. And in the end, he did — he did achieve that even though he gave them a terrible jolt when he walked out.
(Sarah)

They didn't like it at all that he was abandoning us. My son shook (husband's) hand when he left — that was it . . . So, they don't have much use for him. That saddens me to think that my children, as far as they're concerned, would probably never see him or talk to him again.
(Carol)

Several participants commented on the deceptions, relative to the health of the marriage, which were present in the context of declaring the divorce.

What amazes me is how no one really knew what was going on. I mean, here I was, my marriage was falling apart and I was facing a divorce. People still saw us as a couple. Even my friend . . . who knew we had some problems, thought whatever was wrong would be resolved. This was like some unintentional, unwanted secret.
(Irene)

Particularly around anyone else, he and I both acted in public as if everything was okay. It was just amazing. We'd go to some place and be with our friends and we told the same ol' jokes and

talked, not very much to each other, you know. We would talk to someone, but as soon as we'd get in the car to leave, this deadly silence fell on us again. None of our friends knew that any of this was going on. So, I should have had an Academy Award, really.
(Alice)

. . . and thinking, if I said anything about this, no one else would really know what I'm experiencing at home. They wouldn't believe what I was experiencing. Therefore, I didn't say anything. I kept very quiet.
(Faith)

Nobody on the outside would have ever detected the slightest difference . . . People on the outside, the children, and everybody else, still thought we had a good marriage.
(Sarah)

Detachment

Detachment as a sub-theme refers to a complete split or breaking apart of the bond between participants and their spouses. When this process begins, and when it ends, is unclear. The detachment process generally happens over a long period of time.

The participants reflected a loss of mutuality with their partners, but did not cast blame or justification for the end result of their marriages. What emerged were perceptions of self-prescribed analyses, or philosophies about what represented the spouse's contribution toward perpetuating the split. These descriptions were particularly salient in the context of divorce as an inevitability. Some participants developed their analyses during the time of the marriage, while others generated them since the end of the marriage.

To elucidate the concept of detachment, an excerpt from Irene's protocol is presented.

Now, I don't want to stereotype, and I don't care what the experts say, but there is something like a mid-life crisis that goes on with men. Both a husband and a wife change as they grow older, but hey, you don't see me out there trying to make myself feel younger or feel better by messin' around with another man. I didn't lie, cheat and betray anyone. I stayed with it, and tried to salvage what I could for a long time. I think he sees the error in his ways since then. It was so childish and self-serving . . . I am not blaming him. We both had responsibility for the successes and failures of our marriage . . . But his mid-life crisis or whatever you want to call it split us in two pieces. There was no longer any mutual respect. We became completely separate.

(Irene)

Other participants described their perceptual analyses as to what contributed to the detachment from their spouses.

I think he had delayed but terminal case mid-life crisis and suddenly began to see this older woman he was living with as a reminder that he was getting older. This is my analysis of what happened.

(Alice)

Some of 'um just want to have their cake and icing and eat it too, and you're just supposed to accept it . . . In books I've read since then, they (spouses) get so wrapped up in this situation they can't focus beyond. Down there at that grass over yonder is real green to um, apparently.

(Rebecca)

At that time he was right at forty. A lot of men become dissatisfied at home it seems about that age . . . The depression apparently became more real for him about age forty

. . . Since the divorce, he has begun to talk about what it meant to become forty and how that depressed him.

(Faith)

(He) was getting older and had become impotent the last few years. I never in any way reproached him for that. It was just something that happens. You can still be loving. That's no big deal. But he wasn't interested in that. If (he) couldn't have the real thing, he didn't want any part of it . . . I said, "I feel like, that as long as you were able to engage in sex, you had some use for me. When that became no longer possible, then you had no more use for me. So I feel used." He had no comment. I don't think there was another woman involved. There was certainly no sign of it. I think it was just a matter he had reached the age of sixty and just wasn't entirely satisfied with the way his life had turned out. He just thought in the back of his mind, "I used to really be happy growing up in (city). I'll just go back there and I'll be happy like that again." I think, because he thought he would be more satisfied, a child again, that he left.

(Carol)

. . . He began having these things about being his own person, and maybe he was too dependent. He was in therapy a good deal . . . He had more of a problem than I did because he was not happy with himself . . . He wanted so badly to involve me in killing it . . . When he could not get me to share in putting an end to it, he just said, "I'm leaving."

(Sarah)

Descriptions of emotional reactions and behavioral changes were most salient as this sub-theme emerged. The following participant statements demonstrate the unique and diverse experiences of sensing divorce as an inevitability.

From the moment when he left, when he took the clothes out of the closet, and I just lay on the bed sobbing, I thought "Well, I'm not just gonna pretend anymore. If I feel this way I'm just gonna

sob.” So I just sobbed and he had to take the clothes while I was lying there sobbing.
(Sarah)

During those months that my husband and I were not getting along at all, my self-esteem was pretty poor. I was frightened, gray and sad . . . I'd get the bible out and I'd read it and I'd search. To a certain extent I felt like maybe I was committing a sin if I got a divorce. I wrestled with I'm going to, and no, it'll work out. I tried to weigh the pros and cons and I was so miserable . . . Here you are at this age . . . There was no hope, half your life's done gone and then it's gonna end like this. I thought of the affect it would have on my son, and his wife and little girl . . . At one time I feared being by myself and I reckon it's because I lived with someone for so long.
(Rebecca)

But I had had that rejection from daddy, and mother died. Then (he) didn't want me. I had no insurance, no job, and no employers seemed to want me. So I was pretty far down, I really was, I felt totally useless in this world.
(Carol)

People did not see that I was hurting as much as I was . . . And that's why I hurt so for so many years because I thought no one would believe what I (had) to go through . . .
(Faith)

I ate a lot. My weight was always an issue. I was variously from ten to fifty pounds overweight. He always hated that. So I think maybe this was one area I thought I could control. So, I ate a lot. Sneaky eating. Other than that I was pretty much paralyzed. I didn't feel there was anything I could do, so I cried a lot.
(Alice)

At first it was that I was so depressed — well, that's a natural thing. I considered my response to this very appropriate for all I went through. I thought a little depression at first was very normal. So, I didn't worry about that but I got quiet because of that. You don't want to sit around and cry all the time around

other people so I didn't talk much. I got to feeling because of the low self-esteem, that what I had to say really wasn't worthwhile anyway — nobody really wanted to hear what I had to say. I talked less and less except to one very dear friend.

(Carol)

I was angry at her, I was angry at him. Stuff starts fallin' out of the closet. I found out that she wasn't the only one — that there was others. I mean, how naive was I? I was angry at both of them. Then I was also angry with myself for not bein', observant or (being) so naive. Because my mind began to flash back on different things that had happened, and I thought, gosh, that was a good sign . . . I thought, I'm not perfect, but you've got a nice wife, and I worked all my life and I tried to keep a nice, clean new house. You have a very nice son and daughter-in-law, and granddaughter. And then I was angry at the fact I was a divorcee and that was one of those things I didn't want to be.

(Rebecca)

. . . Angry didn't seem to work for me. I'd dissolve into tears. That upset me because I ought to be able to get mad and throw things. But instead I would dissolve. I never had any respect much for people that dissolved in tears. And I didn't like being that kind of person . . . (To dissolve in tears means) weakness. I don't think I'm a weak person. So that was disturbing to me that I could do that sort of thing.

(Alice)

Divorce As A Barrier

This theme concerns the impact divorce has on restructuring one's life and moving ahead, during and following the divorce. In this study, the term barrier connotes qualities which are negative, only in the sense that they may impede adjustment to divorce. But the very nature of experiences which impede adjustment may be the impetus for positive change and opportunity for

growth. The sub-themes within this theme are: Age, Alienation, and Redefinition.

Most of the participant descriptions were about a past experience of barriers, and were perceived as currently non-existent due to the passing of time, and to changes in self-interpretation of the experiences. There were perceptions of obstacles to self as well as obstacles to peers (i.e., others who have experienced later-life divorce). These obstacles were self-imposed or perceived as beyond the participant's realm of control. In terms of time, the experiences of barriers were generally perceived to be transitory, whether they were fleeting or of longer duration. The only exception to this was the impact of aging and self-sufficiency.

Age

Throughout the interview data, there were references by all participants about their ages. These references generally occurred in the construction of time-lines of life-events, and as a chronological record of what was presented as a partial life review. For five of the participants, it was in the context of an obstacle, that age was most salient.

Four participants described fears and concerns related to their abilities to take care of themselves in the future.

I have always seen myself as independent, able to take care of myself. The divorce didn't really change that . . . But when you divorce at this age, some things sort of stand out as a dread. I thought my husband and I would be together to take care of one another . . . Whether I am married or not, there may come a

time when I get too sick, or may be too feeble, to take care of myself. I hate the thought of being totally dependent on someone and becoming a burden, especially to my children . . . I just cannot picture myself in a nursing home. That's not my style.
(Irene)

I certainly would dread being dependent on anyone. This is the only thing that kind of haunts me somewhere off in the future; that I would have to be dependent . . . Things like having to go to a nursing home or having to live with my children. I'm not sure I could, but I would hate having to.
(Alice)

At one time, I feared being by myself and I reckon it's because I lived with someone for so long. Basically, I think I've gone past that, of living and being by myself. I do worry about, I mean, as you get older and being by yourself, I hope I can stay self-sufficient to where I won't become a burden to my child.
(Rebecca)

I know my children will take care of me, but they have their own things they need to spend their money on. I don't want them to have to support me. It might come to where I have to accept that and if I do, I hope I can do it graciously.
(Carol)

Another participant expressed a different perception of aging and potential changes in being self-sufficient.

An older couple has to face that one of them is very likely going to get sick and you're gonna be the caregiver or the caregivee. And I'm not real good with either one of those. I'm pretty good at taking care of myself. I think even in a nursing home, I'll have other people in wheel chairs organized for races or something . . . (some activities are) gonna be a little hard when I'm in this wheelchair, but at least I'll try to go crashing down the nursing home corridors.
(Sarah)

Carol talked about her struggles with deteriorating health, which has been aggravated further by diabetes.

Oh, to see clearly would be wonderful. My eyes, I think, are beginning to turn around a little bit and if they continue to get better, then that's just heaven. But I have been sort of trying to adjust my thinking to becoming totally blind and that was a fear. That's not related to the divorce exactly. I guess it is in a way, because if you had a husband then that would be some support in blindness.

(Carol)

As two participants reflected on difficulties with experiencing later-life divorce, they described their perceptions of adjustment differences between themselves and younger divorcing women.

Maybe the younger girls don't feel that way. But I think some of us that's more of my age, we do. 'Cause you just didn't think about it, because you were taking a very serious step. It's supposed to last . . . I don't know if it's because of the duration of time in there or what. I mean, the ones I've run into, seems like the young ones cope with it better than some of us older ones do. It seems like they manage to, well it's just an experience and they go on with it . . . The ones I've known that are younger, they just seem to me to pick up the pieces a little bit better, get back out there in the world and get involved and carry on, better. I don't know if it's the times or if it's a difference in the age that they seem to bounce back. I wanted to withdraw, more or less hide.

(Rebecca)

I think that women today are a whole lot better prepared for the eventuality of being alone. Women are a lot more self-assured and cope better than women my age 'cause we were raised to believe this was our role in life; to stay home, raise a family and live out our life in that manner. Women today know they can handle it. Most of them are not marrying as early, of course I didn't marry all that early. I just think they're better equipped to handle things.

(Alice)

Some of the participants expressed concerns about the impact of later-life divorce on economic adjustment of their peers (others experiencing later-life divorce).

I wondered about those poor women, that was not fortunate enough to have a job. I had a job at the time (my divorce) happened to me, and a fairly nice job. I thought, what about that little woman that stayed at home and took care of the kids and was the housewife and didn't have no monthly income. What's it like for her to try to cope with being out there in this world?
(Rebecca)

Most of the women that I have known who have gotten divorces have had different sorts of problems than I've had; financial problems basically. I haven't had to worry about that.
(Alice)

Among the participants, only one mentioned an economic issue as a hindrance for herself. For Carol, "money was tight" at times, but she perceived herself managing money well, and took great pride in that fact. However, her concern was related to affordable insurance. Due to deteriorating health, and potential job loss, acquiring medical coverage presented a barrier.

I see myself sort of enduring some sort of job if I can keep one until I'm sixty-five 'cause that's the soonest I can get Medicare. I could get a little bit of Social Security at sixty-two. Not much 'cause there were too many years I didn't work at all when my children were growing up. So, I'd get the minimum where it is, two hundred or whatever the minimum Social Security is, but I wouldn't have any insurance 'till sixty-five. If I have to buy it privately, I don't know how I could. I wouldn't be able to put food on the table. The cheapest you can find is like three hundred fifty-nine a month, and I only get eight hundred.
(Carol)

Despite her own difficulty economically, Carol, like other participants, perceived herself to be faring far better than her peers.

I don't have a lot of money . . . (But) I'm a good money manager . . . I've had a far easier time than many divorced women. I had no real unpleasantness at all except that month he was here. It was just silence. It was just like this very silent place.
(Carol)

Alienation

For these participants, alienation refers to a sense of withdrawal or separateness from others. Whether or not the separation was perceived as negative depended on the situations and interpretations of events by the participant.

There were several stories from participants describing situations in which there was a perceived separateness between self and others, due to lack of a spouse.

After you've been with someone for so long, for so many years, you become very accustomed to functioning as a couple. At first it was uncomfortable to be some places by myself — it was probably uncomfortable for others, too. There was a party at friends of both of ours. Although I was apprehensive at first about attending, I just decided, so what. When I was there, it seemed like everyone asked where he was — I guess we were supposed to be joined at the hip. They were so surprised . . . Thinking about it now, I think some were uncomfortable. I believe many social situations are geared toward couples.
(Irene)

Some (friends), I guess we don't see at all anymore, because it is a couple's world. I know that we did that, if somebody died or somebody was divorced, we sort of left those people out because they didn't fit anymore. I understand that. I don't like it, but I understand it.

(Alice)

I remembered there was an open house some friends were having about five days after he left . . . And at first I thought, "Well, I can't go to that." (Then) I thought, "Why can't you go to that? People will want to know where he is." Well, what the hell. So I went by myself and you know, that was the pattern from then on.

(Sarah)

Friends are mostly married and you do feel like a third wheel after a while.

(Carol)

Most all the people I know are still married couples, which makes me kind of a fifth wheel in social activities. But I haven't felt too uncomfortable with that. There are some things good about it. I don't flirt with anybody's husband, so that keeps me welcome in the groups.

(Alice)

For a long time, it appeared you had done everything on a couple's basis — that's been my life for so long . . . I guess you live one way or in one mode, and you don't realize there's another one out there . . . Everything's geared for couples. Single people at my age basically don't fit in . . . So you are a threat to a couple's world . . . Maybe as couples, we don't reach out to those that's out there by themselves, be it through being divorced or even that party that's been widowed.

(Rebecca)

Three participants described their perceptions of distinctions between being divorced and being widowed.

Divorce is a lot harder than widowhood I think, because it's just never over. That person's still around, it's a constant reminder.
(Alice)

(My friend) went through her divorce. She decided that we might just sign up for square dancin'; and so we go down. There, they talked to us and somehow in conversation, they found out we're divorced and it was like pouring cold water. One of the ladies that found out was (talking with) a widow, and oh, they were so nice to her. I reckon a poor little widow woman wasn't a threat. Which I felt sorry for widow women, don't get me wrong there. But they was loanin' out those men to them . . . So you are a threat to a couple's world.
(Rebecca)

Being divorced and being widowed have similarities but they are distinct from each other. I think divorce has some particular, unique disadvantages. With divorce, there seems to be an unspoken message out there like you must have failed, you couldn't hang on to your man, like something must be wrong with you. You're to blame, you're at fault, you failed. Widows are seen as victims. And I know I am generalizing, but they seem to be sympathized with more. Widows aren't alone by choice and aren't to blame for being without a husband. Well, I guess that wouldn't be true if you are a widow because you killed your husband.
(Irene)

Another form of alienation, described by two participants, involved a sense of being stigmatized or labeled by the external world.

I felt that (to) divorce, we become a branded individual You've heard all these sayings, like all the men think you're just a loose, different sort of person. I've heard um say, "Well, she's just a divorcee." Well what is just a divorcee? Some of us have that name and we don't want it. We do not fall into that loose category that some of um manage to get into, and fall into. To me, the divorcee was just not a good word — you're just branded.
(Rebecca)

With divorce, there seems to be an unspoken message out there like you must have failed, you couldn't hang on to your man, like something must be wrong with you. You're to blame; you're at fault, you failed . . . I never felt paranoid about it, but I can remember when we separated and subsequently divorced, and it just felt like I stood out as the "divorced one," you know, branded with a big D on my forehead. I think what made that feeling worse was the fact that I was married for a long time. I think a lot of people find that unusual.

(Irene)

Rebecca described another story which further illuminates a feeling of discrimination.

Then you go out to get credit or to get things straightened out, and they even wanted to deal with you differently . . . I know with some of the accounts I went to change, you're just a nobody . . . At one point in time, out there on the credit market, they even wanted to look at you differently — that you were a divorced person; you probably couldn't handle your own financial affairs. A lot of them (divorced women) sure do and they do fairly well. But they (others) wanted to brand you. I don't have no problem with it now. I've gone across the bridge now — I don't let it bother me that I fall in that category.

(Rebecca)

A sense of support by family and friends was realized by all participants. But there were some situations upon which alienation was cast. Faith shared a story describing her alienation from some family members, prior to the finalization of the divorce.

My whole family disowned me . . . He had to have surgery, (and) my aunt was at the hospital when he had his surgery and she had treated me awful. My brother would come to visit him and would not call me. I was appointed Executor for my grandfather's estate. After I had done all the work up to this point

where it was to sell the timber, done all the research on selling timber, then suddenly a younger brother and my other cousins turned against me and had me dismissed as Executor. In fact, (they) bought me out because they didn't want me involved in anything. My children turned against me. So, the loneliness of it.
(Faith)

Two participants described changes in some of their friendships.

I miss some of the friends that I thought were ours. I think we've kind of divided up our friends. A few of them we still have contact with, but not on the whole. I don't know that they've taken sides but it's just sort of happened that some people he sees more than I see and vice versa.
(Alice)

Friends have been good, but (even) friends don't want to hear it after a while . . . So you really can't talk about it and you need to some . . . They're very kind and seem to go out of their way to include you, for a little while. But then, you're supposed to get over it.
(Carol)

There were also statements by these women which reflected alienation from opportunities to experience relationships with men.

I'm sixty now. There's very little likelihood that I would ever have the opportunity to marry again. But even should that occur, I would not want to. I have no desire whatever to be married again. A part of that is the fact that I have learned that "I love you" doesn't necessarily mean I really do. It means "I want you" for one reason or another.
(Carol)

There isn't much opportunity to find gentlemen friends at this age. But that hasn't been a real loss for me. I've managed okay.
(Alice)

Redefinition

Redefinition, within the theme of Divorce As A Barrier, refers to the participants' recognition of changes in their lives, and the start of re-evaluation of "who" they are to themselves and to others. Divorce is expressed as a loss by the participants. This sub-theme represents the evolving awareness of alterations in the participant's roles, identity, attitudes and self-knowledge. Since their divorces, participants were challenged by this awareness. They questioned, possibly for the first time, who they were "now."

For some participants, divorce was perceived as analogous to death, but with different features of limitations.

Divorce is like a death. There is grief even when it was for the best. There are losses in both. Certainly they are different, I mean, the person is still here, still alive. I'm not wishing anyone dead or anything, but with the divorce, the person is still here. That is sometimes a reminder of something you failed at, or couldn't fix . . . So, I'm not married. I'm not a widow. Am I single, or am I a divorcee? What is a divorcee? . . .
(Irene)

Basically, I guess it was like a death. I mean, something had ended. It was like a death, yet the party was still there. It's something that died but then (there he is) walkin' around I reckon.
(Rebecca)

Divorce is a living death, you see the person.
(Faith)

One participant reflected her feelings of rejection and how this rejection impacted her identity.

I had had rejection from daddy, and mother died. Then (my husband) didn't want me. I had no insurance, no job, and no employers seemed to want me . . . I mean, what was my role? I mean, I am still a mother, but where's my place?
(Carol)

Others questioned themselves about the changes they were undergoing, and how these changes impacted their roles and identities.

My roles were designed by that marriage. It was part of who I was as a person. I was married all of my adult life at that point. I didn't know anything else. I mean, I had a life, but it was like having to tear down the walls of a house and rebuild. But where do you start? What is my foundation for my house?
(Irene)

I didn't want it to change. I wasn't ready to be left on my own at this advanced age. Because he'd say, "You've always done such and such," which, like you won't discuss things. I never thought he wanted me to discuss things. If this were always true, why didn't he leave me earlier on, when I had a better chance of making a life for myself? That hurt a lot and it scared me. I didn't know if I could handle it or not. That was my identity. I was his wife and I didn't know whether I could be anyone else or not.
(Alice)

The one thing that people are shocked at is they say, "Forty years and you divorced?" And I look back and I should have divorced at twenty. I was concerned for the children instead of thinking about myself. I wonder what I would have done.
(Faith)

When a woman has experienced infidelity by her partner in a relationship, there is often damage to her ability and willingness to trust. Although the caution to not trust may only be directed toward the unfaithful partner, this caution may carry over into other relationships. This generalized lack of trust may become a barrier to the development of healthy relationships.

Then, too, my trust has been destroyed. I know that. I mean, I have trouble trusting people. That part of me is very much affected. I'm sure that if he came through the door and he told me he was late and had a flat tire, I'd look at him and tell him I wanted to see the flat tire — he'd have to prove it to me. So you can't build a relationship on that. He'd have to be an awful patient, kind somebody to deal with me. I have difficulty in dealing with anyone and trusting them. Now that I can't explain other than that part of me seemed to have been simply destroyed. Trust period.
(Rebecca)

After spending a long period of time in a marriage, partners often look to one another for support and care. Even in simple situations, requiring assistance or attention, partners come to depend on one another. When there is a split between those partners, there is difficulty and sometimes resistance in relinquishing that dependence.

When you marry somebody, at least with me, you give your whole self to them; you put your entire dependence in (him) . . . Being able to depend on (him) . . . If I needed (him) to come get me when I locked my keys in the car, he'd come. I couldn't depend on him now.
(Carol)

For some women who divorce, there are circumstances beyond the realm of their control, which interrupt or hinder their ability to move on with their lives. These situations may be permanent or temporary. The following excerpts illustrate this.

It's the circumstance of our divorce. We almost have a trilogy because of the care and the concern for our son who has the severe brain damage . . . He lives with his father . . . I see signs of Alzheimer's in (ex-spouse) and this is another part of staying friends with him. I feel a sense of responsibility . . . I am concerned for his welfare, primarily because it affects our son's welfare. So at this point, divorce is frustrating.
(Faith)

In the beginning, I was angry at him and her both. She lived on the other end of the street . . . About the time I'd have a peaceful thought, here she'd go by in her vehicle. It was like a constant reminder.
(Rebecca)

Divorce As A Vehicle

The theme of Divorce As A Vehicle refers to the situation or circumstances which made it necessary for these women to move from being a married person to a single or divorced person. Because of a divorce, the participants were forced to re-examine who they were and how they "fit" in the world around them. They searched for a new understanding of their roles in life, as well as a new meaning of personal existence. The sub-themes within this theme are: Redefinition, Reorganization, and Equilibration.

Redefinition

The reader will note that Redefinition was also a sub-theme of Divorce As A Barrier. Redefinition under the theme of Divorce as a Vehicle refers to the process of evaluating and examining one's life and her external world. The participants described divorce as a beginning, with a sense of recovery. These processes occur throughout life. There is a certain interaction between and within these themes and sub-themes, but in this section the focus is on movement and "getting somewhere," or coming to terms with divorce and redirecting the path of one's life. It is the interpretation of the redefinition that determines whether or not a barrier is present. The use of Redefinition as a sub-theme of Divorce As A Vehicle connotes the development of new ways of understanding and perceiving the marriage, as well as the divorce.

Because of the conditions and situations presented by later-life divorce, some participants expressed an awareness of evaluating their marriages and the roles they led within the marriage.

I did not have the tools for recognizing depression. I thought this a way of anger, a way of getting back at me . . . I wonder if I had recognized depression back then and sought help for him or had insisted that he seek help . . . Yet I went to the marital counseling and he wouldn't go. There's nothing I can do for him. He has to want to do it himself.
(Faith)

If he should come back, right now, and knock on the door, and say, "Carol, I've made a terrible mistake. Could we talk about it and try again," I would talk . . . I could not just welcome him with open arms and say, "Come on in and we'll get married and start again." I couldn't do that because I couldn't depend on him

now. When you marry somebody, at least with me, you give your whole self to them . . . See, I took my wedding ring off as soon as I could get it off. It had grown on. I thought I'd never get it off. But when I could get the ring off, I took them down to the pawn shop and pawned them. I didn't ever want them again because they meant nothing. I used to think that meant "I love you," see, but that didn't mean anything to me . . .

(Carol)

There were just big differences that came to seem important to him. They weren't to me, but they came to seem important to him. I couldn't accept it earlier . . . I think we were divorced eighteen years before he died. So since I've lived through so many years and found I was surviving fine, I could come around to saying, some husbands in this predicament would have gotten a little more help. The wife would have said, "I still love you, I still think we belong together. But I can see that if you feel this way then that's the way I am — I can't really change. So let's just agree to disagree and we'll make an agreement." I just never could do that. I was like whatever, not Lee at Gettysburg — Lee did accept defeat, but I never did . . . He (ex-spouse) literally had to just walk out. And so I was never any help in saying, "I understand that you could feel this way." But after he did walk out, we were able to handle things in a very civilized way.

(Sarah)

Maybe I relied too much on him, and tryin' to please him and tryin' to make him happy. I do know that I did not think of myself. When I said maybe I had been naive, there was things that went on under my nose that I brushed aside.

(Rebecca)

From a current perspective, two participants had made statements about whether or not they would have married their spouses.

I wouldn't want to marry him as he is. Because his habits are not my values. I have a different set of values from his. Upper-most, one of my values is, if you can't afford it, you don't buy it. Being out of debt is something really important to me, and it's not to him.

(Faith)

(He) was kind and gentle, good and generous, a good worker. But that thing (his being a non-Christian) was lacking. Because of it we drew further apart. I'm sure that's most of the reason . . . I'm not saying I'm not lonely — I am. I would enjoy knowing some man to go out and eat with occasionally. But marriage, no thanks. Somebody gave me a greeting card that had a picture on the front — a woman looking down at a little hamster cage. There's a wheel in it and a little man runnin' round and round. You open up the inside and she says, "Sure they're fun for a while, but you get tired of cleaning up after them." That sums it up for me.

(Carol)

I used to wonder about how I might have done something different in our marriage — something that would have changed his mind to be with everyone but me. It's become more clear to me over time, that the problems we had started a long time ago, before the children were even born . . . So, I'm not saying I regret the marriage, but if I had to consider marriage with him again, absolutely not.

(Irene)

There are conditions within some marriages which are upsetting and disturbing, that a woman closes the door to any contact with her spouse following the divorce.

I finally worked my way through the anger and decided that here I was, I was angry at somebody that didn't probably even realize I was angry. I wasn't hurtin' anybody but myself by being angry. He'd gone his way and four or five months after the divorce he was remarried again . . . I did not communicate with him — my feeling is I don't have another word to say. He didn't try to work at it at that time, and I've got nothin' further to say to the man. I really don't. I hope I never have to be in, near, or around him.

(Rebecca)

Although divorce may be conflictual with the initial expectations of the relationship, one may realize a new interpretation which is not viewed as a threat or barrier.

It's a lot different than what I expected my life to be at this point. It's not necessarily better or worse, actually. My husband was five years older than I, and I figured there'd come a time that I would have to be taking care of a grumpy old man, and now that doesn't seem to be very likely. So, that's kind of a different thing. Now my concern is how I'm going to take care of me. Life is calmer and as I say, I'm pretty self-indulgent — I do just what I want to do.

(Alice)

One of the challenges Sarah faced in restructuring her role within a family, was finding a balance between having separateness from her ex-spouse, and including him in her family.

Perhaps six years ago, my brother and sister were here for Christmas and my brother said, "I brought my guitar down and I'd love for us all to sing some Christmas carols." He said, "You know (he) always used to love to sing. Would you care — how would you feel about inviting him and (his third wife) over for this singing party?" And I said, "Well, I'm not gonna invite him. If you want to invite him, and you'll have plenty of wine around, I will certainly treat him decent." And so it was. We had a good time. From then on, each Christmas we would get together and go out to dinner or something. Because there were always the children for the buffer, it was easy to do.

(Sarah)

Through the experience of divorce, one of the participants severed all ties with her ex-spouse. Others had little contact with their ex-spouses, and

when communication was required, these participants find the experience shallow and superficial.

Sarah, however, had experiences which enabled her to reach levels of understanding about her marriage that may be rare for others. In restructuring parts of her life, there were opportunities available through continued communication with her ex-spouse which provided a new way of perceiving their marital relationship with one another, and brought her a sense of closure. In the following excerpt, Sarah had maintained a rapport with the ex-spouse, who was dying of cancer. With all parties in agreement, Sarah sat with him while his third wife was at the Wellness Community.

Particularly the first time (we met), I drug up some old stuff (asking questions about events within the marriage) . . . Then he went off into a long introspection of saying "I don't know why I did that. But I do know that I did not know how to be a husband and you'll just have to forgive me. I think I've learned better since then." . . . What it did was to restore the whole sense that it had been a good marriage . . . It just gave me back the whole experience as being good — that he, too, really felt that . . . It just gave it back to me, as a happy part of my life.
(Sarah)

For another participant, coming to terms with divorce was marked by an experience which validated her belief that her marriage had meaning.

. . . Even after we were married for a long time, he sent me a card every single day, sometimes two. I kept them all . . . these cards with all these sweet things on them. About a month ago I got them out and said, "I am going to burn those. There's no sense in keeping those 'cause not a thing in there is valid. Doesn't mean a thing to see 'I love you so much.'" So I got 'um out to burn them. I figured I'd sit here and cry. I didn't cry a bit in

this world. I opened 'em up, read every card, I smiled. I remembered the good times, the happy times. I was so glad I could do that. And this is the reason I was glad I didn't burn them in the end. If I were mad about them and burned them, that's all gone. If I were able to just put it out of my mind, our whole life together, it's gone forget it, then thirty years of my life would not exist. It's like there's nothing if (he's) not there. He was thirty years of my life. And you don't want to have a blank back there. It's like these people with amnesia, there's nothing there . . . I'm glad that I can remember the good times. I didn't know that until I opened those up. We did so many things that I never could have done. I'm not sorry I met him.
(Carol)

Through self-examination and re-evaluation of her marriage, Carol further concluded that despite the difficulties of some obstacles, she continued to move forward with no real sense of loss.

What I have lost is, it's not really my failure exactly — I don't feel guilty for the cause of the divorce. I was the best wife I knew how to be . . . But, to some extent, I have failed in the most important thing I ever did . . . But what I have not lost is everything else. That's (the marriage) all I've lost. I've slowly come to that realization. I still have my home. I have my car. I have two wonderful children and a wonderful grandchild, all my friends, my church. I have a job. I don't have lots of money, but I have enough. Of course, I have my church, and the Lord has been good — I'll tell the world.
(Carol)

As these women evolved through the process of later-life divorce, they noted other life events which occurred, marking movement toward the restructuring of being-in-the-world. A review of these events represented a life in progress. The following description from Alice illustrates this point.

That last year was one of really mixed blessings. I went through a divorce, had a new grandchild, built a house, moved, and got a job, all in 1988 — a real landmark year in my life. Since then, I've adjusted pretty well, I think. I have a lot of activities that I do. They're kind of single, female type activities. There isn't much opportunity to find gentleman friends at this age. But that hasn't been a real loss for me. I've managed okay.
(Alice)

Reorganization

The sub-theme of Reorganization refers to the process of integrating self with others and the environment. For all of these participants, the change of marital status impacted their experiences of being-in-the-world. For most of them, there were alterations in their relationships with friends and family; their perceptions of social support; their involvement with work and other activities; and their interpretations of how they perceived themselves over time in the external world.

Although there may have been transitions of over-coming obstacles, all the participants realized a sense of moving forward toward a sense of completeness. Those very components of later-life divorce which created perceptions of fragmentation within the self and within the environment served as a means to create a new sense of wholeness. What became focal to these participants was an awareness of connectedness between self and others.

One participant reflected on change in her relationships with her children indicating a sense of support from others.

I have two wonderful children and a wonderful grandchild . . .
There's been a lot of good come out of this. I think I've grown

closer to my daughter. She still lives here, thank goodness. That's a great blessing. I'm closer to my son, too.
(Carol)

Another participant maintains meaningful relationships with her children, but she also has a unique situation which has offered advantages of an extended family.

I have a family of refugees that I took into my home. The church had gotten into that, and (their) apartment kinda fell through. So I said, "Well, they can move in my upstairs if you think they would want to." It was (initially thought) that it would be temporary. It has worked so well, that I just hope they never leave . . . It's never lonely. I don't come home to a dark house and yet I can go in my room and close the door and I'm alone.
(Sarah)

These women described their connectedness through relationships with friends. Some of these friendships were continued over the course of the marriage, while other friendships were formed since the divorce.

The one friend that I have that has stood by me in all of this, now is in St. Louis, (but) we still have a lot of conversations.
(Faith)

. . . (The marriage) — that's all I've lost. I have all my friends.
(Carol)

My very best friends now are people in my Sunday school class. Most of them are couples, but there are a few of us widows and divorce widows in the bunch. We're each others' best friends, and we see a lot of each other . . . Fortunately, I had this built-in support system for me during that time, because these were people I had known, this class formed some forty years ago, a young married group in our church, and we're still all together.

We still think we're the young couples' class at church. I had those people there for me during this time. He didn't have them because he didn't go back (to this church) with me. These are my friends, that have given me some of my present identity.

(Alice)

I don't know what I would have done without some of my friends, old and new. There were friends we both shared during our marriage, but some of them went right out the door with my husband. But I don't see that as a loss. One of my best friends has stood by me throughout all of this. I was always able to talk to her and she always listened . . . I have made new friends at work and at the church I go to . . .

(Irene)

My friend and I had this experience after she went through her divorce . . . We'd laugh about, we'd just get a sign to wear around our neck, one that says, "I'm a divorcee," and put on your back. "Now here I am world. What are you gonna do with me."

(Rebecca)

I was in a wonderful church for doing this (including others). (They are) very accepting and very willing to take you along. If they're going to the movies, "Well, why don't you come along" kind of thing . . . The therapist said, "You're gonna be alright. You've got loads of friends and you've got a job you like."

(Sarah)

Some participants described a sense of support through their spiritual beliefs, as well as a greater understanding of how these spiritual beliefs guided their perceptions of their world.

The Lord's taken care of it up to now and I'm not worrying about it. I'm really not. I have told many people, and I'll tell everybody that will listen, when it's all taken away and there's nothing left to depend on but the Lord, he's there. That's good to know. That's

not the way I would have chosen to learn it, but I know it and it's good to know. I really don't worry about it (the divorce) now.
(Carol)

I'd get the bible out and I'd read and I'd search . . . I kept on prayin' and cryin' . . . I finally got it through my head that I had a biblical grounds for divorce . . . With God's help, I'm a survivor. We just have to look to God and ask him to guide us and help us each day, and we can make it.
(Rebecca)

It's been a real strength and support to me knowing I always will have God to turn to. When I felt at times alone and detached from everything, I really had to dig inside myself to find meaning to what was happening in my life . . . Because our spirit is within us, part of the very core of who we are. And to be near God, you have to go inside yourself.
(Irene)

Sarah reflected about the nature of her spiritual beliefs and how they related to her connectedness within herself, and with the world around her. She described her experience of spiritual values, and how they are born from within the self. Excerpts from Sarah's interview illuminate the meaning of spirituality for her as well as others.

I really believe in that church and that group. Now higher power, well . . . I believe in spiritual values . . . I don't disbelieve in a higher power, but it's not a big deal with me. I would never say to you, "well God pulled me through after the divorce." I don't think in terms of, "I found I could reach down inside myself and find some sense of shared support, and something that I could call God that I shared with other people" . . . I don't reject that the world got here and it was none of my doing. There is great power out there, but to me it's so impersonal that it doesn't seem exactly like something that would take care of me . . . Then there is a strength to it that is more than just the one puny self. There was a story about a general in the Civil War . . . He went with his

men into a southern prison camp, and it was awful . . . He died there . . . Somehow, when I read that, I had a sense that the man really believed in God — that there was something that made it seem important to him to not go where he was allowed to go separately into an officer's prison, but to go with his men into these really horrible conditions where there was a lot of sickness that could take your life . . . There was something there that he had to respond to . . . There's a story about a social worker in the VA after the Vietnam War who would not quit trying to make the connection between Agent Orange and the men's subsequent illness and disabilities. But then her superiors kept telling her, knock it off. We don't want to hear that. That's not what you're here to do . . . That kind of strength and belief in the right that she had to pursue. I get real goose bumpy over that. So, that's why I say that I think I believe in spiritual values but maybe not in something higher or beyond.

(Sarah)

For many participants, involvement in work and other activities were reflected as meaningful, and as a way of moving forward. These involvements were described as a positive means of connecting with others and feeling productive or worthwhile.

I'm back at work, so I'm meeting a lot of younger people. I feel like maybe I'm a little more "with it" than when I was an old married lady . . . I have a job that I like and they seem to like me there. They don't want me to leave. These are things that have helped me to have more respect for myself. I was pretty low there for a while.

(Alice)

The jobs that I got, I got at the last minute without any (real) effort on my part . . . I have a job (now) . . . I don't have lots of money, but I have enough.

(Carol)

I'm working longer than anybody's supposed to. I'm now seventy-two. And I really love the people I work with. I can't see that I'd be happier any other way.

(Sarah)

What would I do without my work? I enjoy what I do and I'm good at it. If I had to change jobs right now, no problem. I am marketable. My age hasn't really been a problem for me I'm a young seventy and feeling strong I won't retire, but if I become sick or incapacitated when I'm older, that might retire me. But I'll still be able to find something I like to do.

(Irene)

Activities were described as a renewal or continuation. Some interests which were perceived as having been buried by the marriage were unearthed. Activities which involved body movement were particularly noted as a means of achieving or maintaining a sense of well-being.

I've taken up some activities, like I was a hiker before I met my husband and gave that up, because that wasn't an interest of his. I thought it was more important that we be together. So I took up hiking again I met a lot of people that way. We had a tennis court at our house on the lake, and we had both played tennis together and separately. So I kept that up. I enjoy playing tennis a couple of times a week, sometimes three. That isn't particularly different, but it's getting more important with me, I guess. I enjoy my tennis. If there is stress, I think that's been one of the relievers. I sure enjoy tennis and the people I play with.

(Alice)

. . . . I love reading, if it's the most active thing I can do at the moment. That is, if I'm in a hospital bed, for God's sake give me a book. I don't want to just lie there. But if I can play tennis, go to Guatemala, or something, that is always my choice. I think a lot of my salvation is in muscular movement.

(Sarah)

One participant described dating again and how that served as a means of moving forward.

And before too long, like maybe six months, I was dating somebody, another divorced person in the church. In the end, I didn't want to marry him, and luckily he didn't want to marry me. But we went along together, had a good time, and that I know was very healing, because of this feeling of rejection. It was just great that he wanted me . . . I have found that (divorce) is not the end of affection.

(Sarah)

She also reflected on how the content of a movie she watched related to her relationship with her spouse. Her story illustrates how the sense of connection with others' experiences is validating, and how perceiving this connection can lead to new understanding.

Long after the divorce, I phoned him one time and said, "I saw again on television last night the movie The Way We Were." I was absolutely struck by how much similarity there was. Barbra Streisand says, "So you don't like agitating types or whatever. I'll just quit doing that and I just won't be like that anymore." And of course, he (Robert Redford) makes a classic speech about how "you're good at what you do and you're good being you and you're just gonna have to keep on doing that. The fact that that doesn't fit with me is tough, but there's nothing we can do about it." I said to him (ex-spouse), "That was what I realized. I would not accept, when you were trying to tell me some of the same things" . . . It was very comforting, to see people saying these things that had been our predicament."

(Sarah)

Equilibration

The sub-theme Equilibration connotes bringing something into balance, or maintaining equilibrium. It represents recognition of movement toward balance. These participants described various experiences which highlighted a sense of disequilibrium between themselves and spouses, and between themselves and others in their worlds. Among these women, there was a growing awareness and recognition of imbalance within their marriages and after their divorce. The evolving understanding of this imbalance was a means of bringing balance between their experiences of "then" and "now."

This sub-theme is especially connected to the theme of Divorce As A Discovery. It was the growing awareness of balance between self and world that led to an evolved understanding of imbalance within self and outside self, as well as the subsequent result of having discovered or brought into balance who these women were to themselves.

All the participants reflected on differences between themselves and their spouses within the marriage. Lack of mutuality was also salient for these women. The differences included the values and level of significance placed by one or both marital partners on the marriage. The following descriptions capture this sense of disequilibrium.

There was a difference in how we valued one another . . .
When looking back, I was always at the end of the totem pole . . .
. There was no balance in how we treated each other or the
marriage.
(Irene)

I had always been very devoted . . . I reckon I loved him with all my mind, heart and soul. Maybe I did too much. All I know is that I've never been through such pain as I went through at that time. Hurt and pain . . . He did not appreciate me.
(Rebecca)

I have a different understanding of love than he does . . . His idea was his welfare. He just didn't have my interests at heart . . . For years he had not celebrated my birthday, or valentine's day, which was the same day . . . The year I built the deck, he bought the porch furniture; didn't consult me, had not consulted me . . . No consideration . . . I was not important to him . . . To me, his attitude was, I was a possession.
(Faith)

. . . There were big difference that came to seem important to him. They weren't to me, but they came to seem important to him . . . I could come around to saying, some husbands in this predicament would have gotten a little more help. The wife would have said, "I still love you. I still think we belong together, but I can see that if you feel this way, then that's the way I am. I can't really change. So let's agree to disagree."
(Sarah)

I was trying hard to be somebody else, this somebody that he wanted. That didn't work. I don't think I was the one who had changed . . . He was the one who had changed.
(Alice)

For some of these women, economic concerns were described as a source of imbalance. The roles each marital partner held within the marriage were recognized as unequal or out-of-balance. These participants noted the lack of reciprocity between themselves and their spouses concerning issues of power and control: who made the money, who managed the money, and who controlled how the money was spent.

We never argued about money or anything else. That's probably part of the problem. We should have argued some over the years. Nevertheless, my husband liked to gamble. I hate the very thought of gambling . . . His view was, he was earning the money, and if he wanted to spend the money for what he could . . . Even though I have less money to live on now, it's not divided among things that I don't want to spend for. It's all my decision now.

(Carol)

. . . When anything was purchased for the home, he went out and made the purchase, never consulting me — if it was a major purchase or if it were a minor purchase. If I wanted to purchase something for the home, a new bedspread or something, there was never enough money for that. But whatever he wanted to purchase, funds were available. I would be quite discouraged when I saw the credit cards get so very, very high, knowing that was not any of my charges. So when they would begin to get too high and the scale was tipping over too far, then he would let me handle the finances. At that time I could handle the finances, be the treasurer, get things back up onto an even keel, get us out of debt, then he would insist that he take over the books again, only to repeat the cycle, which became very frustrating to me.

(Faith)

I think a lot of it was the fact that I had always worked and the way he had things he had, I maintained . . . in order for him to do the other things that he was doin', in turn he'd turn the money back into that. I was paying all the living expenses . . . That's how he brought in the things that he was in (used his money for his own endeavors).

(Rebecca)

One participant described the differences between her perception of her ex-spouse's generosity of sharing funds during the marriage and after the divorce.

. . . I receive quarterly checks from him which are very nice. He was very generous in the divorce agreement. He really wanted out and agreed to just about anything. He's been much more generous than he was during our marriage. I always felt, maybe a perception on my part, too, that I shouldn't spend very much money, it was his money, and so I was a very frugal person. I'd always not spend on thing I didn't need to . . . I always felt like I had to account for what I spent, and I don't have to do that anymore.

(Alice)

Some participants described experiences which captured the issue of control and choice in other areas within the marital relationship.

I was never a really very self-assured person, and living with, I still say he's a control freak, made me feel even less capable. If I ever expressed an opinion that was contrary to what he held, and he held lots of opinions, his favorite expression was, "Oh, hell, Alice, how could you possible think anything like that?" So, after many years, you just quit expressing opinions or even trying to have any. It was that way in dealing with the children. He told me how to vote. I didn't always do it; but he told me how . . . He decided we should move there, and I didn't want to do that. But, we moved there. Almost anything that happened in the way of how we entertained, or who we entertained, or where we went on trips, was decided by him . . . I don't know that it was okay, but I went along with it. Mostly it was okay. I'm a pretty compliant person, I guess. I always admired this man who was strong and capable and well-positioned in life. I trusted him. And I believed he was probably right on a lot of things.

(Alice)

(I) could bring out things the way I wanted them and not some color or somethin' that somebody else wanted. I've been able to express myself more, even in the clothes that I wear . . . He would make remarks about things I had on, and there wasn't anything wrong with them.

(Rebecca)

It seems to me now, that (he) must have thought his opinion was more important than mine. I remember we were discussing something about buying this property out on the lake, and I was trying to weigh the pros and cons of how we could split this land up into individual tracts, and sell a few. He said something like, "You don't know what you're talking about. Let me handle this," and "You ought to be grateful I have made this happen, or been able to buy this for you." What did he think? I wasn't contributing to this? I didn't have a part in this? And I probably just gave in and kept quiet. I would never be bulldozed like that now.
(Irene)

Two participants made statements about perceived losses for themselves or their marital partners.

He's lost it all. Now, this house is not fancy, but it's large, it's comfortable, and it's paid for. He's lost a good place. He's living in a tiny apartment in (city), all alone, in a city he hasn't lived in for nearly fifty years. All alone, no money. He's lost his children, his grandchild. Now, you tell me what's worth that? Nothing is . . . I've lost nothing except, I feel bad to think I failed at my marriage. But in most ways I'm better off now . . .
(Carol)

In the divorce, he wanted everything. I pretty much gave him everything, because there wasn't anything that was called love; the possessions that he wanted were temporal. There was a lot of hurt because of that, because the things that he took were things that my family had provided for me. I said, "Take it. If that's more important to you than I am, then that's what you should have" . . . I really am grateful that I'm out of the marriage. I think it's very beneficial to me because what I do, what I have, is mine.
(Faith)

Some of the women described the equilibrium or disequilibrium between themselves and other women. For Rebecca, there was an imbalance of

advantages and disadvantages of the impact of divorce between herself and other women who experience later-life divorce.

. . . And I wondered about those poor women, that was not fortunate enough to have a job, which I had a job at the time mine happened to me . . . What about that little woman that stayed at home and took care of the kids and was the housewife and hadn't, I mean, didn't have no monthly income, you know — what's it like for her to try and cope with being out there in this world?

(Rebecca)

She also perceived a balance, or an opportunity or bringing-into-balance, related to common experiences between herself and other women.

I don't know why some of us are so naive, but we are. They (spouses) can be very cruel and verbally abusive to you and (there are) put downs that they can dish out your way. I've noticed that when I come in contact with these other people (later-life divorced women). They say he did so-and-so. You're gonna believe it because there's some similarity there, and something that happened to you that will be almost identical . . . Somebody that's never been through it, they don't believe the things that you're tellin' 'um. The only person that understands you is someone that's been there.

(Rebecca)

Descriptions of women's experience in relation to the balance or imbalance between the "divorced" self as connected to the world, and other women as connected to the world, were also present. Participants noted differences between themselves and a "couple's world," as well as differences between themselves and widowed women. (Excerpts of interviews describing this issue of balance were presented under the sub-theme Alienation).

Often the saliency of equilibrium issues was perceived in the context of a participant's upbringing. Familial, social, spiritual and biological influences impacted the balance between expectations of the marital partner and/or the marriage, and the outcome of the marriage. The following descriptions illustrate this impact.

We were raised to believe that this was our role in life — to stay home, raise a family, and live out our life in that manner . . . My parents were very frugal people and I've never known how to be frivolous with my money.

(Alice)

I waited for (him) to do things, like get the porch railing back up. His idea of working around the house was pick up the phone and call somebody to do it. I grew up in a home where my daddy and brothers did everything.

(Carol)

She just kind of taught us . . . She is just an ideal to me of how people ought to get along together. My father was not easy to live with but mother managed quite well. They had that fiftieth anniversary, and did okay. I admire that even more now that I have had this difficulty.

(Carol)

The other eighteen years, I just felt like I am not going to end my life as your parents are, where they do nothing but sit and argue back and forth. I refuse to argue.

(Faith)

My parents didn't exactly serve as the marital couple of the year, either. I remember how hard mother worked to provide for me and my two brothers. My father, as I recall, was only home to get more money, eat and have terrible fights with mother, real knock-down drag-outs . . . Everyone around knew my father was a philanderer . . . My mother just stuck with him . . . I

remember a time before she died when I asked her how she put up with all of that. She said, "honey, this is called marriage. There is give and take on both sides. I gave, he took. What he gave me was his absence. I could do anything."

(Irene)

There'd been no divorces in our family, and when I took my vows, I was very serious about it . . . I'd get the bible out and I'd read it and I'd search, I guess to a certain extent I felt like maybe I was committing a sin if I got a divorce . . . I finally got it through my head that there was divorces, and I felt I had a biblical grounds for divorce.

(Rebecca)

. . . I thought that was an odd thing . . . He would want to take me for a moonlight ride at night, yet he would never take me for a weekend; it was just an hour at night. I would keep saying, I need some time . . . I said, "I need to know that I'm important to you" . . . I guess it reverts to the idea that goes back to the time my father was unfaithful to mother and the agony that mother went through, and the agony I saw him (father) have to go through because of (their) religion. He had to stand up in front of the church and apologize . . . I didn't want anything like that to ever have to happen.

(Faith)

Sarah described how family patterns impacted how she perceived herself in the world.

. . . My children grew up thinking that when they got out of college they would go off and make their fortunes, and that's what they're doing; not fortunes, but they're making their livings in other places. That was by choice. It's a pattern in our family to feel that coming back home even to the same hometown is a regression. We just don't do it that way. We always came up, you and your parents got you through college and then you looked and saw where did they want a librarian, or where did they want a social worker . . . And you went there, and then you got together with your parents at vacation and maybe twice a year would be good . . . I did so little out of duty. I think duty was just not

much stressed in my family. They tried to fix it up so you would have a good time doing the right thing, I think that's it . . . My father and mother were supportive of my doing what I wanted to do . . . We compromised . . . They would want me to do . . . I think my parents were ahead of their day. I think they just happened to be very liberated people themselves without a lot of those patterns. So they encouraged me to do that. So, I can just hardly tell you any time that I felt I couldn't do what I wanted.
(Sarah)

Rebecca recognized disequilibrium between her expectations of a marital relationship, and the lived experience of her relationship.

They have to want the marriage to work, in my opinion and they have to be willing to do their part . . . After a situation like (mine), it would take both of them working at the marriage and learning to deal with the one that was hurting so bad, too. You can't be so selfish throughout the whole thing. I don't know how anybody could just ignore stuff like that. When anybody's been hurt, there's the wounds to heal. I think in any relationship both parties have to work at tryin' to put it back together, tryin' to do somethin' to warrant it, and not be so cold and cruel.
(Rebecca)

Divorce As A Discovery

This theme implies that there was a self-exploration and processing of later-life divorce, from which participants obtained or achieved knowledge and vision. Discovery was an understanding or awakening experienced by participants, which encompassed reflections of independence and autonomy, disentanglement from marriage, and an evolved sense of self being-in-the-world. These understandings or awakenings are experienced by participants as new or for the first time; or as a renewal which confirms what one already knew or had been buried.

The sub-themes are: Freedom, Learning, and Prescriptions. Although inextricably and reciprocally connected, these sub-themes emerged distinctly from each other.

Freedom

The sub-theme Freedom connotes achieving or maintaining liberation, independence and autonomy. Freedom implies absence of restraint and absence of constraint of choice. All participants described one or more aspect of freedom. Many captured the essence of their perceived sense of freedom by contrasting descriptions within the marriage and outside the marriage. For some women, these perceptions represented something new and surprising, while others perceived a confirmation of freedom already known.

The element of Time was salient in some women's descriptions of freedom, including the impact of changes in perceived duration and changes in how time was spent.

When I look back, I went through all this pleasin', you got the meals on the table at a certain time; you kept his books and helped him, and I worked all the time. And I reckon the fact that some of that stuff's been lifted . . . I don't know what time it is right now. It don't make no difference and I'm not worryin' about it . . . It (time) wasn't during the marriage because you went to work, and you come in and done all these other chores. I was keeping two sets of books and startin' on my third set. I mean, there wasn't time to do anything. You're supposed to have these meals on the table at a certain time.
(Rebecca)

I have time. There aren't as many clothes to wash, not as many meals to cook; none at all if I don't want to. If I could still see to drive it would offer me freedom.

(Carol)

I can spend my time absolutely as I want to. I can spend vacations where I want to . . . I don't have to sell somebody else on the idea.

(Sarah)

Since I've been divorced, I feel like I have more time for me. Time still passes much too quickly for my liking, but I try to use my time wisely and productively. When I was married, "old mother time" used to be an enemy to me. It always seemed like there was never enough time for anything, and there was certainly no time for me. I was using up time for everybody else.

(Irene)

After two participants mentioned the word freedom in their interviews, they were asked to describe or define what that meant to them.

You asked me what freedom means. It means, that quite amazing liberty to set up the relationships and activities that you really like and just a minimum of obligations . . . It seems to mean the ability to be an individual.

(Sarah)

It's gaining — it's not rediscovering my freedom because I didn't have the freedom in the marriage. I think my concept of marriage would be that you would share each other but there would be times that you would be free . . . Marriage is not always being together and yet that was sort of the concept (for us). How were we together when he was asleep and I was doing the essential things?

(Faith)

Alice discovered she altered her connection to others in the world, commanding more respect for herself.

I think I'm much better. I have a lot more self-confidence than I did have. I like me better, and I think that other people do too. I was kind of a doormat . . . When you let people walk on you. Isn't that what doormats are for? That I didn't stand up for myself. You know, I'd argue sometimes, but I was the one that gave in mostly. Maybe not so graciously . . . I'm a more take-charge person now.

(Alice)

Some participants described changes in opportunities and capabilities to make choices for themselves. These perceptions varied somewhat among these women, but the commonality for them was a sense of enhanced or altered self-expression and autonomy.

I live with colors that I like better now. He used to choose furnishings and paintings and things that were sort of unisex things of you know, you use gold and avocado green. Now I can use pink and blue. It's suitable and I like it. I don't have to ask anybody else's opinion about that. I think pretty much my whole life is like that. I never bought anything or did anything without considering what he would feel about it and what he thought, and I'd ask his opinion. Now I don't ask anybody's opinion.

(Alice)

I feel like I've been able to express myself, even in the clothes that I wear . . . Since then, people have made remarks about how much better that I looked. I didn't have to worry about did he like this dress or did he like that suit or what. I could do it my way. It didn't make any difference as long as I was happy.

(Rebecca)

I don't have to answer to anybody now, and I like that.

(Carol)

I discovered that he sure was surprised that I could make it on my own. And he said that. In fact, he told me when I was moved out, "You don't have a job. You can't pay your bills." I had a job within three days. He doesn't support me financially. It means that I'm free to do the things that I want to do without feeling guilty.
(Faith)

Freedom was salient in several women's description of financial and economic issues, within and outside their marriages. Rebecca described her liberation from the financial strain of her spouse's spending.

I don't have the financial strain that I had when I lived with him because he was a big-time spender . . . I've been able to do more things for myself and have a few things for the house I never had before. Because I wasn't havin' to dish out for this over here . . . But the fact that I had not had a job for that many years, that I could manage to keep goin' on, instead of spending money for things that he had done, I could do things for the house and even for myself that I hadn't been able to do before.
(Rebecca)

Before her divorce, Alice found she was uncomfortable with spending money. There was a sense of not feeling entitled to need, or to spend. She contrasted this perspective with her current perception.

I always felt like I had to account for what I spent, and I don't have to do that anymore. If I want to go on a trip and spend how ever much I want to, I can, or if I want any clothes I want to. So, I kind of enjoy that. It takes some getting used to, because my parents were very frugal people. I always felt that (spouse thought), and this was a perception on my part too, that I shouldn't spend very much money. It was his money, and so I was a very frugal person . . . I've never known how to be frivolous with my money. So, it's kind of fun.
(Alice)

Two participants found that, even though there was disparity in the amount of money in and out of their marriages, having "less" meant having "more."

His view was, he was earning the money, and if he wanted to spend the money, he could . . . Even though I have less money to live on now, it's not divided among things that I don't want to spend for. It's all my decision now.

(Carol)

My divorce settlement was awful . . . It was such a bad joke. All those years of giving myself, my energy and my commitment to the marriage . . . It was as though I had little worth for my time. We've been divorced for a while and still I feel my blood boil . . . The irony here is, I make my own money, have less than I did when I married, but I'm not really lacking in financial comfort. I manage my money, and save. I pay my bills on time; have money set aside for an emergency . . . I haven't lost a thing.

(Irene)

All the participants described a new or renewed sense of freedom through activities in their lives. Freedom involved the absence of spousal control or restraint of choosing activities, as well as an evolving sense of increased spontaneity among the participants. The following reflections capture the changes experienced.

If you decide that you're tired and you want to sit down and prop your feet up and read a book, or if you want to turn that TV on, whatever type program it is, there's not somebody else dominating the TV . . . Nobody's hollerin' "What time supper's gonna be ready?" or "Haven't you got dinner ready yet?" If you want to cook, you cook. If you want to go out to eat, you go out to eat . . . You've got the freedom to do whatever.

(Rebecca)

I took up hiking again . . . I was a hiker before I met my husband and gave that up because that wasn't an interest of his. I thought it was more important that we be together. I'm really pretty self-indulgent now. If I want to sit and read all morning long, I do. I didn't used to do that sort of thing. Or, at least, if I did it I felt guilty doing it. Now I don't feel guilty. I do whatever I darn well please. And I don't plan things too well in advance . . . I do last minute things — somebody calls and says, "You want to have lunch today?" and I say, "Sure."

(Alice)

I could sit down and play the piano to my heart's content. I didn't have to listen to the "gangster" television . . . I could go to a seminar and come home and feel good about who I was and not be accused. I can go to the grocery store and purchase what I want and not have to have an argument about how much you spent for groceries . . . I could do laundry without feeling he should be helping sometimes with some of the housework and some of the laundry.

(Faith)

I wasn't very active in the community when I was married. But since then, I am active in my church, go to different events like craft fairs and women's health programs, take classes at UT, have a good job . . . I do a lot of walking . . . Being involved with other people is liberating to me. I think I stifled myself when I was married.

(Irene)

. . . (My marriage) that's all I've lost. I have two wonderful children and a wonderful grandchild; all my friends; my church. I have a job.

(Carol)

Fun is quite important to me . . . I really like to have a good time in some kind of way . . . I'm just so utterly free to do that in any way, and not to look ahead to be here looked after or looking after.

(Sarah)

Learning

For participants in this study, the sub-theme of learning refers to the acquisition of knowledge or understanding of self in relation to the world, in the context of marriage and divorce. This knowledge or understanding was perceived as "new" to the lived experience, or as renewed confirmation or validation of views already held. For some participants, there was a sense of accomplishment, mastery, enhanced autonomy, creativity and strength expressed.

Carol expressed a sense of accomplishment with an underlying hint of surprise, when she described her ability to manage money effectively.

I think things have just worked so well. I'll tell you what I've done. This is not even possible. Now I told you the income I have . . . This is ludicrous, but, and I didn't always have that. I started out with enough money to pay the bills at the end of the month, and in two years time I finished paying for the house. I finished paying for the car. I put new carpeting in the front of the house; put in new kitchen linoleum; bought a new TV and VCR, a new refrigerator and a new dryer two weeks ago; put up a porch rail out front; painted the inside of the house; and saved two thousand in IRA. Now, is that possible?
(Carol)

Two participants expressed a new strength that emerged from the experience of later-life divorce. Perceptions of enhanced autonomy were particularly salient in these descriptions.

I have learned that I am a survivor; that maybe I am a stronger person that I thought I was; and that I do not need a mate to survive in this ol' world — that with God's help, I'm a survivor. To me, we just have to look to God and ask him to guide us and help

us each day and we can make it . . . I've learned that I can be self-sufficient; that I am an individual; that I am a person . . .
(Rebecca)

. . . I never questioned that I could make it on my own. But I've learned through this whole experience that I don't have to rely on someone else for my happiness. I learned that I am stronger than I ever imagined. Being divorced has ending up validating my worth to myself and others . . . I learned that divorce was an end to the marriage, not me.
(Irene)

Alice realized a new understanding of relating to the world without a partner. She also described a sense of accomplishment and self-sufficiency.

I never would have gone any place at night alone, or gone to a party without an escort. I do those things now. I don't think another thing about it. It might be more fun with an escort, but it doesn't bother me to show up some place by myself. I've managed to keep this house going. I could use somebody that would change the washer hoses and things like that. But I manage . . . You can hire those things done, too. You don't have to have a man around. I think I've managed pretty well.
(Alice)

One participant described a new understanding of the importance of activity in her life.

What I did learn, for me, activity is enormously important.
(Sarah)

Through her experience of later-life divorce, Carol discovered a confirmation of her spiritual beliefs. She also realized a sense of "I wish I knew then what I know now," in relation to that confirmation.

I've certainly learned to depend on God. I always said I believed those things, but I didn't know that they were the truth — how God helps, and holds you up when there's nothing else. I know it now . . . I'm smarter now than I was. I would know more about choosing somebody I wanted to marry — maybe. Nobody knows what they're doing when they're getting married. They really don't . . . If I were twenty years old again, fixin' to get married, I hope I would be smart enough not to even consider marrying someone who is not a Christian believer. I would not even consider it. Because you have no foundation to build together. You think you do because you love each other, but there's no real basis. I know that now.
(Carol)

Another participant described how she began to “know” herself and take charge of her life, following her divorce.

I've begun to learn who I was. He was very difficult — there was one way to do anything, and that was his way. And I began to realize that there was other ways to do things. I didn't have to be careful about what I was saying — I wasn't gonna get snapped at . . . I said, “You know, I found out I don't have to walk around now like I'm tryin' to keep from crushin' fresh eggs on the carpet.” I found out I could just be myself, and do things my way . . . I decided to paint and redecorate the house.
(Rebecca)

Faith reflected on her evolving understanding of her continued motivation and efforts to learn throughout her marriage and divorce.

These were opportunities of growth for me . . . I feel perhaps I just outgrew him . . . Because I'm still motivated to learn. I'm registered for seminary this summer. I'm still motivated to attend workshops.
(Faith)

Carol learned empathic understanding through her difficulties with later-life divorce.

I've learned since then, that everybody has troubles. If they haven't yet, they will. There's crises in everybody's life at one time or another. I have friends who have much worse things than my divorce . . . I've learned to pay more attention to other people's troubles. I was always sorry when I heard of people having problems but it never really touched me and now it does. I'm closer to my son, too.
(Carol)

Prescriptions

Initially, this sub-theme was interpreted as an expression of learning, thus not distinct in its own right. But as interviews were reviewed over and over again, this sub-theme emerged connected, but separate, from the sub-theme of Learning.

In this study, the sub-theme Prescriptions refers to expressed guidelines and suggestions, related to understanding marriage and later-life divorce, as well as understanding self. Participants described events, thoughts, and/or beliefs in relation to marriage and divorce. Through the experience of later-life divorce, these participants realized a self-understanding of "what" worked for them in moving through and beyond divorce. At times, the reflections of the participants appeared to imply a sense of guidance for self or others, as the participants realized their knowledge and understanding of the difficulties and potential dangers of divorce.

Some participants described a "recipe" of a healthy marriage, which emphasized ingredients of communication and mutuality.

One person does not make all the decisions That it's shared, that you have communication, you have conversation. That one person is not the only one to receive the attention. Because the expression was made to me, "I don't like it when you're with so and so because I should be getting all of that attention." I can't be everything to even one person, let alone to everybody. So at that point, marriage did not have meaning. I repeatedly said to him, "I'm not your possession, I'm your wife." To me, his attitude was (that) I was a possession. Not that I could be bought or sold but that I was to be grasped, and held, and smothered I could not have any part of sharing life with other persons.
(Faith)

Carol stressed the importance of communication in terms of "hashing out" disagreements instead of setting them aside.

When we were first starting dating, my husband worked on the train in Germany. He was gone four nights at a time. So I was alone a lot. That is a bad start to a marriage, because when he would come home, and any little disagreement would come up, both of us thought the same thing. We thought, "You're gonna be gone in one more day. Surely you can get along for one day." So we would never hash it out and get it. We'd just sort of be pleasant and polite. And that's bad. It would have been much better to get everything from the very beginning settled.
(Carol)

Irene described the need for a balance of unity and separateness between married people.

I think for two individual people to have a successful marriage, they must search and find ways of being there for each other, while at the same time being separate. This idea of joining

together and becoming one is dangerous to a relationship. You might look to the wife or husband to be everything. What a disappointment when you find out that's not true. It's a balance of being separate, while sharing your lives.
(Irene)

One participant expressed contrasting experiences between women raised with traditional roles and younger women. She went on to describe "suggestions" for women divorcing in later life, based on her own experiences.

. . . . I think one thing is that you for sure ought to have a lawyer and get things set down exactly the way they're going to be; have good divorce agreement beforehand, and if possible, a big settlement, and then be totally disconnected from that person I think a woman going through a divorce needs to get that sort of thing settled and then she needs to find herself a new identity, you just have to. You're not the same person anymore. You have to establish your own interests and activities and find some new people in your life. I think you need to do that.
(Alice)

Duration of marital conflict and the power of time passing were expressed by one participant as important elements impacting recovery of divorce.

The longer the situation (marital conflict), the longer it takes to work your way out of it. Those things (like) certain holidays and certain dates, for a while, they just come to mind And they cause you to sink in despair or become a little lower and depressed to some extent. As time goes on, it helps everything. It's like healin' from injury or surgery.
(Rebecca)

Faith described her experience to illustrate her conviction that divorce is a unique experience to each person.

I'm not obliged to take care of him, but because of the trilogy again . . . That's what made the divorce so hard to go through because certain things in that divorce had to be provisioned for the son. So in that sense, I think my divorce is unique and each divorce is unique, because of the other circumstances. There's no set pattern for divorces.

(Faith)

The shared and common experience of later-life divorce was expressed by another participant.

If you have an experience of running into someone, or a friend (who is going through a divorce), it surfaces and you just hurt all over again. You know how badly they're hurting. There's a difference in each one of them. I've got another friend that a situation happened to her not long after mine. She'd call me with the things that happened, and there's a lot of similarity in some of them, I mean the things that they do. And then now each one of us responds. There's some with more violence than others. All of 'um's not as (difficult or easy) as some of the others.

(Rebecca)

Sarah reflected on her personal experience of working through the divorce process. For herself, she prescribed diving right in and not sinking.

. . . When he left . . . From that instant, I was like, I'm not gonna drown. I remembered there was an open house some friends were having about five days (later) . . . At first I thought, "Well, you can't go to that." Then, "Why can't you go to that?" So I went by myself and that was the pattern from then on . . .

(Sarah)

She also described how spiritual values were an important connection between self and world.

It's a feeling when you tie into connection to other people, love of other people . . . (That you have) some hope, some faith, that I'm going to survive, and that some good things are gonna survive. There is a strength to it . . .
(Sarah)

Carol discovered a deeper understanding of the concept of love, and described the meaning love has to her.

I have a different understanding of love than what he does . . . I was taught what love is and the longer I've lived, I find I agree with what I was taught. Loving somebody, whether it mean your spouse, or your child, or your parent, or anybody — if you love that person you put their welfare above your own. You want to make sacrifices for that person. Every parent that's worth a dime goes to the store to buy a new dress and comes home with something for the child, instead. We prefer to buy for our children because we love them . . . If you love somebody, you have that willingness and desire to sacrifice for them. It might not ever come to that, but you want to. When you're first dating somebody and you're first in love, and you want to do things for them — that is the beginning of it, and if you truly love that person, it deepens, and you want to sacrifice for them. I mean, I would gladly give my life for my children, if I could save them. Instantly, with no regrets at all, because I love them. This is true, the desire to sacrifice, this is true from Jesus Christ on down . . . Now, of course, young people, when they get married, don't realize all these things.
(Carol)

Another participant described her perception of love and mutuality as necessary components of a healthy relationship, capturing a shared experience among all participants.

No one can really define love. It means so many different things to different people . . . When you love somebody, I think you have to accept them for who they are, without judgment. There needs to be comfort in the loved one having his own life separate from yours. It means a mutual respect . . . Then there is also

loving yourself. The same things apply. I don't think you can really love someone in a healthy way unless you love yourself first.
(Irene)

SUMMARY DEFINITIONS OF THEMES

The participants defined the meaning and structure of later-life divorce through their own personal accounts of their experiences. However, this section was designed to provide the reader with a summation of the themes and sub-themes by definitions(s). Included as a definition are any content areas expressed by one or more participants.

Divorce As a Threat

Divorce imminent. Awareness of potential for divorce and perceived repercussions grew. Threat conflicted with expectations of marriage and direction of life. Awareness of threat heightened. Efforts made to alleviate/eliminate threat. Avoidance of threat manifested. Avoidance compounded by delay/postponement.

Expectations — Expectation of life-long commitment.
 Personal values and beliefs.
 Familial, social, cultural constructs.

Awareness — Perceptual changes in self, partner, and marriage.
 Events/moments of heightened awareness of divorce threat.

Avoidance — Movement away from threat.
 Psychological/emotional withdrawal.
 Denial.
 Efforts to salvage marriage.
 Saliency of marriage to identity.

Delay — Postponement/alteration of impact and response to threat of divorce.
Continuation/prolonging of specific conditions of the marriage.
Movement toward divorce marked by time passing.

Divorce As an Inevitability

Recognition that divorce was unavoidable. Journey of marriage moved forward and beyond divorce. No evasion of threat of divorce.

Point of No Return — Divorce the only "option".
Cognitions of marriage closure sparked by event(s).

Declaration — Disclosed to others announcement of divorce: friends and family.
"Deceptions/Charades".

Detachment — Disintegration or split/breaking apart from spouse and marriage.
Loss of mutuality.
Self-prescribed analyses about spouse's contribution to the split.
Emotional and behavioral responses particularly salient.

Divorce As a Barrier

May impede one's adjustment but can also be potential impetus for positive change and growth. Obstacles to self/others — self-imposed or no locus of control. A sense of loss.

Age — Construction of time-lines of life events.
Chronological record as partial life review.
Fear/concern of becoming burden in the future.
Different views of age corresponding to self-sufficiency.
Distinctions between self and younger divorcing women.
Concern of economic adjustment difficulties for peers.
Acquisition of medical coverage.

Alienation — Sense of withdrawal or separateness from others.
Couple's world/fifth wheel.
Distinctions between divorced and widowed women.
Stigma/discrimination.
Changes in relationships.

- Redefinition — Loss.
Recognition of changes with awareness of alterations in
roles, identity, attitudes and self-knowledge.
Divorce as a death.
Difficulty relinquishing dependence on spouse.

Divorce As a Vehicle

Re-examination of self in connection to world. Search for understanding
of changing roles and identities and new meaning of personal existence.

- Redefinition — Recovery.
Movement forward — coming to terms.
Redirection of life path.
Re-evaluation of self, spouse, and marriage.

- Reorganization — Integration of self, others, and environment.
Movement from fragmentation toward wholeness.
Connectedness — friends, family, spiritual support,
activities, work.

- Equilibration — Bringing into balance or maintaining equilibrium.
Recognition/reflection of disequilibrium within marriage.
Lack of mutuality.
Economic control.
Constraint of choice.
Loss versus gain.
Shared experiences with other women.
Familial, social, spiritual, and biological influences.

Divorce As a Discovery

Self-exploration led to knowledge and vision. A new/renewed
understanding or awakening — independence and autonomy, disentanglement
from marriage, evolved sense of self.

- Freedom — Achieving or maintaining liberation.
Absence of restraint and constraint of choice.
Quality and quantity of actual time.
Enhanced/altered self-expression.
Financial, activities, control, spontaneity.

Learning —

Sense of accomplishment/mastery.
Enhanced autonomy, creativity, and inner strength.
Self-sufficiency.
Confirmation of spiritual beliefs.
Empathy.

Prescriptions —

Guidelines and suggestions about marriage and divorce.
Autonomy, interdependence, meaningful communication,
and mutuality.
Time is healing.
Divorce is a unique and shared experience.
Lessons on spiritual values and love.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The primary goal of this study was to describe the thematic structure of the experience of women and later-life divorce, following long-term marriage. Five major themes, with corresponding sub-themes, emerged from the participants' descriptions against the ground of time.

Divorce as a Threat (Expectations, Awareness, Avoidance, Delay)

Divorce as an Inevitability (Point of No Return, Declaration, Detachment)

Divorce as a Barrier (Age, Alienation, Redefinition)

Divorce as a Vehicle (Redefinition, Reorganization, Equilibration)

Divorce as a Discovery (Freedom, Learning, Prescriptions)

The thematic analysis was found to be complete, as there were no additional categories needed to describe the experience of later-life divorce.

Included in this chapter is a discussion of the methods used, integration of the results with related literature, existential issues regarding the concept of time, limitations of the study, implications for counseling, and the power of resiliency.

METHOD

All participants expressed willingness and interest in sharing their experiences of later-life divorce. The dialogue between the researcher and the participants unfolded over the duration of the interviews. Like the researcher, none of them knew what themes would emerge, nor did they know where the dialogue would lead. The participants recounted their experiences in story or narrative form.

Each participant spoke of her experience of divorce in relation to her marriage. This relationship was inextricably connected. All the participants used time as a marker to describe their experiences. Although the content and flow of the interviews was not uniform, each participant recounted her story as a partial life history or life review.

All the participants expressed a concern for other women divorcing later in life, during the course of the interview. One participant expressed the hope that more research would be conducted to explore later-life divorce, particularly in the area of depression and the "mid-life crisis." Some of the participants would make remarks during the interview, indicating the compatibility of the research method with their abilities to articulate their thoughts. One said, "This is the first time I've pulled together all these thoughts." Two other participants said, "I haven't ever talked about the whole (story)." One woman said, "Talking about all this has been therapeutic, in a way," while another commented, "You're such a good listener. I've really enjoyed this." Thus, the phenomenological method was

advantageous for compiling data about later-life divorce, as well as providing benefit to the participants. The following section is a discussion of the results in light of existing literature in the area of women and later-life divorce.

THEMES AND RELATED LITERATURE

The themes expressed by the participants of this study were not revealed in a uniform or sequential fashion. Secondly, the order of presentation of the themes is for the benefit of the reader, and is not intended to imply distinct stages. All of these themes are connected, while remaining distinct from each other. However, the researcher does suggest that there is a movement of the lived experience of later-life divorce, from a beginning or initial impact or phase (i.e., Divorce as a Threat), to a secondary impact (i.e., Divorce as a Barrier), and toward and beyond a tertiary phase (i.e., Divorce as a Vehicle and Divorce as a Discovery). Therefore, later-life divorce was expressed as an evolving process, and the speed and direction of this movement was unique for each participant.

Although it was not the purpose of the study to identify diversity between the participants, the researcher found it would be useful to identify any major differences in order to fully understand the implied meaning of each woman's experience. Recognizing the uniqueness of each participant's experience of later-life divorce, the interview protocols were re-examined (after completion of thematic analysis) to search for any differences among the participants' experiences (i.e., reactions) that were salient for the researcher.

One of the salient differences identified centered around three of the participants' expressions of a sense of relief at marital separation. Although all participants perceived relief when sensing a forward movement at some point during the divorce process, half of the women did not realize relief until long after the marital separation. Three participants (Faith, Irene and Rebecca) expressed relief as more immediate, at the "moment" of separation. There were a number of variables individually or in combination which may have influenced this difference. Faith, Irene and Rebecca were all initiators of divorce (as contrasted to spouse-initiated, characteristics of Alice, Carol and Sarah). Each of them experienced some marital discord, and still remained in the marriage for a minimum of one year. These three women expressed some form of dissatisfaction with the marriage, while Alice, Carol and Sarah did not. Faith described release from her marriage of "no meaning" and "no communication," of "mental abuse," and of false accusations of sexual infidelity. Irene removed herself from the marriage after years of enduring her spouse's infidelity. Rebecca escaped a long marriage troubled by her spouse's infidelity and physical and emotional abuse. Cain (1988) stated that divorce can include a profound sense of loss, an increase in anxiety, and a decrease in self-esteem. These feelings were experienced by Faith, Irene and Rebecca during the marriage, not the divorce.

Carol expressed recurring loneliness, although her support system of friends, church and an adult daughter in the home remained consistent. Some

of the variables which were salient in her situation were: the limitations imposed by chronic health problems and diminished eyesight (i.e., involvement with others; driving a car); suddenness of divorce; and a duration of only three years since the divorce.

The third and final difference that "stood out" to the researcher was an over-all "best" adjustment among the participants. Sarah admitted to having difficulty "letting go" and giving up the marriage, but she also expressed continuity in her attitudes and values within the marriage and throughout the divorce process. This continuity further extended her sense of self, independence and self-sufficiency. Many of these characteristics she attributed to her upbringing. Other variable(s) which may have "set her apart" from the others in terms of reactions and adjustment to divorce were: the greater duration of time since the divorce (seventeen years), level of education (master's degree), her personal values and beliefs, her positive interpretation of life events, and the opportunity to reach understanding with her ex-spouse, or to come full circle (before he died). Sarah perceived her marriage and divorce to be meaningful.

Divorce As A Threat

This theme marks a "beginning" to the experiencing, or the initial impact of divorce. As the threat of divorce became figural, participants expressed a conflict between their expectations of marriage and the possibility of divorce.

Based on the traditional value system shared by these participants, a growing awareness of the threat of divorce often resulted in a resistance to the threat.

Reflections related to the participants' expectations about marriage suggested an embracing of certain social and cultural constructs, as well as traditional values and beliefs. As the awareness of the threat of divorce became more imminent, these women described an expression of disbelief. Participants reported feelings of rejection, isolation, hopelessness, unhappiness and depression. As resistance to the threat of divorce grew, participants expressed a sense of denial. Delay represented a postponement of the threat, that generally resulted in perpetuating denial. Difficulties which resulted from exposure to conditions or situations related to "delay" were expressed by participants as generally focused on continuation of marital discord and the continued presence of the spouse. Depression and denial responses corresponded to different theories of stages of divorce, including Herman's (1974) model, based on Kubler-Ross's stages of grief. "Loss of meaningful communication" was also reported by participants, which was noted by Robinson (1990) to be salient in enduring marriages.

Divorce As An Inevitability

When divorce was perceived as increasing in probability, the feelings described under Divorce As A Threat were exacerbated. With the growing awareness that divorce was unavoidable, some participants expressed a sense

reaching an impasse, or moving toward a point of no return. Some participants used such phrases as "the breaking point," "going the last mile," or "a slammed door." At times there were efforts made to change or alter themselves or situations related to the marriage. The concept of "bargaining" in Herman's (1974) study was evident as some of the participants attempted to salvage their marriages.

As participants began sharing the "announcement" or declaration of divorce, some of these women expressed feelings of confusion, shame and guilt. This may be related to experiencing a departure from a traditionally ingrained value system (Cain, 1988). Some participants commented on the deceptions or a sense of charade about what they perceived others to believe about their marital situation. There was a sense of "no one really knows."

Detachment refers to the "breaking apart" of the couple. Participants reflected a loss of mutuality with their spouses. According to Robinson (1990), "mutuality" is a quality that helps facilitate intimacy within a marriage. Several women commented on their perceptions of the spousal contribution to the breakup of the union (i.e., "mid-life crisis"). Diminished self-esteem, depression, hurt, rejection, paralysis and loss were described as outcomes of this "breaking apart." These feelings are consistent with other women who experience divorce as cited by other researchers (Hetherington, Stanley-Hagen and Anderson, 1989; Wallerstein, 1986).

Divorce As A Barrier

The participants in this study experienced obstacles to beginning the restructuring of their lives after later-life divorce, and their ability to move forward during and following divorce.

Age was most salient in participant descriptions of fears and concerns related to their abilities to take care of themselves in the future. Four of the participants expressed a sense of dread over the possibility of losing their independence and becoming a burden to someone, particularly their children. Achieving and maintaining self-sufficiency was described as desirable by all participants (also refer to Divorce as a Vehicle and Divorce as a Discovery). This finding parallels Galloway's (1993) study, in which all the participants stressed the importance of self-sufficiency.

The participants that commented on health and age, did not perceive age as a barrier in itself. References were made in the context of being able to secure and maintain affordable medical insurance, prior to the eligibility for Medicare and Medicaid. One participant expressed concern about her difficulties managing a chronic illness and potential deterioration of health, but age was not perceived as an obstacle. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, age and future health were perceived as a potential obstacle.

Some of the participants in this study perceived differences between women divorced later-in-life and younger divorced women. They cited differences in the adjustment to, and the impact of, divorce. This finding is

supported by similar results of other researchers (Cain, 1988; and Price et al, 1988). Chiriboga et al (1983) suggested that women who divorce in later-life following a longer term marriage have been described as experiencing more unhappiness and stress than younger populations, while Cain (1988) stated that distress and reactions to divorce are intensified by duration of marriage. The perceptions of the participants in the current study echoed those findings.

Only one participant expressed concerns about financial matters. She commented on the expectations of receiving minimum Social Security benefits in relation to her ability to pay her medical insurance. Most of the participants expressed concern for other women divorcing later-in-life and their abilities to meet financial needs.

Alienation refers to a sense of withdrawal or separateness from others, which becomes a hindrance within self or between self and others. All the participants described ways they felt disconnected from their world due to no longer having a spouse. They sensed a lack of "being-in-the-world." The participants referred to "couple's world," being "geared toward couples," and feeling like a "third wheel" or "fifth wheel." Weiss (1975) also referred to this feeling of being a "third wheel" in a couple-oriented society.

Several participants described their perceptions of stigma and discrimination within the world as a "divorced" woman. There were some reflections of perceived differences in how the world responds toward those who

are divorced, and those who are widowed. Widows were perceived to receive sympathy from others, while divorced women were perceived to be shunned.

Two participants perceived opportunities for future intimate relationships with men to be lacking. Other researchers have documented the changes in social structures following divorce (DeShane et al, 1981), as well as the decreased opportunities for sexual relationships with the opposite sex (Price et al, 1988).

Through the divorce experience, participants discovered changes occurring, which required them to re-evaluate who they were in-the-world. Struggles with adjustment to divorce were experienced as these women were faced with a lack of clarity of self-image, changing roles, and sometimes a distorted sense of power. Some of the participants described their divorces as analogous to death, requiring a period of mourning. Kessler (1975) referred to a stage of mourning involved in adjustment to divorce.

For these participants, redefinition of roles made adjustment difficult at times, which Raschke (1977) documents in his findings. According to Weiss (1975), adjustment is a developmental process often taking from two to five years. Restructuring of many facets of being-in-the-world can exacerbate the level of difficulty during this developmental process, including relationships with others and personal identity (Raschke & Barringer, 1977).

Divorce As A Vehicle

After these participants had realized changes in who they were in-the-world, there came a period when they knew their marriages were over and they experienced a new awareness about their marriages and their divorces. Their journey led them to and beyond a period of recovery as they continued to process redefinition. According to Kessler (1975), this period of recovery involves moving ahead and focusing forward. Some people experience a sense of relief and begin focusing on personal growth. Through self-examination, all of the participants started "making sense" of their marriages and divorces.

Reorganization of these women's lives involved an understanding of how they were to re-connect with themselves and the rest of the world. The participants reflected their progress through descriptions of new or renewed relationships with family and friends, spiritual support or growth of spiritual values, and involvement in paid work and other activities, which echoed Galloway's (1993) findings. These experiences of the strength provided by family and social support were similar to the findings reported by Highsmith (1992).

The participants in this study developed a new sense of self in light of the present as well as the past. There seemed to be a deeper understanding of the past marriage, and how it contained inequity or imbalance between self and spouse. This new understanding was often coupled with the sense of enhancement of autonomy. This "bringing" into balance, or equilibration of the self in the past marriage and the current self, was described by all the

participants. Topics of disequilibrium versus equilibrium included: spouse/self value of the marriage; value of self issues; power and control issues within the marriage; perceived gain and losses; choices in decisions; balance of self and other women; and balance between upbringing and expectations of marriage/divorce. The most salient imbalances described power and control issues within the marriage. These included economic/financial issues (i.e., who decided how money was spent), and absence or presence of choice (i.e., who made decisions).

Divorce As A Discovery

Despite the obstacles and difficulties divorce brought to the participants in this study, women in this current investigation discovered they had opportunities or ways of creating opportunities for personal growth. This finding supports other research that described divorce as a potential growth experience (Bohannon, 1970; Deckert et al, 1978; Kessler, 1975; Krantzler, 1974).

All the participants described perceptions of freedom since the divorce. Some of the participants realized this sense of freedom "now," in contrast to the lack of freedom perceived about the marriage. Although there were some differences among these women about what role freedom played in their lives (inside and outside marriage), they all described the impact of freedom as increasing or confirming feelings of independence and self-confidence. These findings support those of Deckert et al (1978), who suggested that the process

of divorce may promote self-confidence and independence, particularly for older women. Some of the types of freedom described by the participants as liberating since the marriage were: ownership of time, ability and opportunity to make choices, self-expression, diminished financial strain (due to power/control imbalance of finances during the marriage), self-management of finances, and new/renewed work, activities and involvements.

For many of the participants in this study, this sense of competence was achieved through getting through the divorce process. Learning or re-learning also proved to be a precipitator for a sense of competence, accomplishment and strength. Some women described an enhanced autonomy, as they realized their abilities and positive perceptions of inner qualities.

The process of later-life divorce for the participants in this study served as a source of education, or lesson in survival. Some participant descriptions of "lessons learned" reflected personal guidelines or prescriptions about marriage and divorce.

Prescriptions about marriage included perceived characteristics necessary for a "good" marriage: mutuality, meaningful communication, autonomy and interdependence. These characteristics were reported in another study. In Robinson's (1990) study about marital strengths in enduring marriages, she cited communication and autonomy (among others) as salient. She also referred to mutuality and interdependence as qualities which facilitate intimacy. Guiding "principles" described by participants in relation to later-life divorce included: the

longer the marriage, the more difficult it is to move ahead; divorce is unique to each person but it is a shared experience; strength is gained through connection to self, others and spiritual values; and time helps heal.

EXISTENTIAL ISSUES OF TIME

In this study, all participants were aware of their experience of time. Participants shared their stories about later-life divorce, using time as a marker for events (i.e., marriage), to establish verbal time-lines of those events.

According to Heidegger (1962), everyday being is cast upon the ground of temporality. As a participant described her experience, her awareness of her being-in-the-present was expressed in the illumination of her own past and future. Through their experiences of later-life divorce, the participants were aware of expectations of future events (i.e., concern of health), as well as events that had passed (i.e., death of a parent).

The participants in this study expressed awareness of both changes and continuity over time. Perceived change and continuity were revealed through the conditions and situations of a given experience. At times, a participant perceived herself and others as changing, yet maintaining continuity in time, or in existential terms, "becoming-in-time." (Dapkus, 1985)

Throughout the interviews, the participants expressed an awareness of both perceptually negative and positive elements imposed by later-life divorce. This awareness included perceptions of limitations, losses and vulnerabilities, as

well as opportunities, gains and strengths. Dapkus (1985) refers to this as "doing-in-time."

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

There are limitations of this study recognized by the author. Included are specific characteristics of the participants involved in the study.

All the participants were caucasian. Since minority women were not represented in the study, there would be no control for the findings which might otherwise be influenced by cultural and ethnic differences related to availability, assessibility, and utilization of social support resources such as counseling.

Counseling as a resource was used by five of the participants in this study. This characteristic may have influenced the participants' ability and/or willingness to articulate her experience of divorce. The one participant who did not report any prior counseling, did provide a rich description of her experience of later-life divorce. However, there is concern about differences in the level of depth and detail of personal accounts, when comparing those women with counseling experience and those without. The women with prior counseling may have been more accustomed to the disclosure of personal and sometimes painful issues. Also, the individuals with a counseling background may have been more willing to participate in a study such as the current investigation.

Five of the participants had received a college education. The participant's level of education may have affected adjustment to divorce,

particularly in the area of financial stability and employment. Those with a higher education may have had better or improved opportunities for entry/re-entry into employment. In this study, Rebecca had attained a high school education and experienced no negative impact financially through the process of divorce. However, she was employed throughout the marriage.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING

The women in this study experienced later-life divorce following marriages exceeding thirty-two years duration. The divorce process was perceived as ongoing and evolving, and was described in the context of self being in the marriage and outside the marriage over time. The author suggests that there are factors particular to older women which may magnify their reactions and distress to divorce. There are also resources of support and strength which, when capitalized upon, can serve as agents of a positive growth experience. This section of the study is directed toward enlightening and informing counselors about divorce in later-life.

One of the keys to how women experience later-life divorce is through their language and perceptions of the process. The central point is self-interpretation. While one woman may perceive a transition as a limitation or an obstacle, another may perceive the same transition as an opportunity or an "open door." Coupled with the individual self-interpretation is the knowledge and understanding of the woman's perception of herself and her perception of being-

in-the-world. To understand the woman's experience, the counselor must be involved with the client and assess her needs and expectations. Equally important, an initial assessment with a client should include information which offers insight into the "where, what, when and how" of later-life divorce.

In the assessment process of counseling women experiencing later-life divorce, the counselor looks for cues or pieces of information about the client's level of susceptibility to distress vulnerability. The following list of questions and topics is not intended to be exhaustive of all potential cues. Rather, it serves as a general reference guide for an initial assessment. It is preferred that this information unfold during the counseling interview, but some introduction of these questions (in a "restated" form) may be necessary.

I. EXPLORATION OF MARITAL HISTORY

- A. Length of Marriage — It cannot be assumed that a woman who divorces late in life has been in a marriage of long duration. When it is discovered the individual has been married for most of her adult life, this serves as a cue for vulnerability.
- B. Marital Discord
 - 1. What is the source of dissatisfaction, and do both marital partners share this dissatisfaction?
 - 2. Separated or still living together — either of these may leave the woman particularly vulnerable, depending on the conditions of the experience.
 - 3. Are there any elements of potential danger (i.e., domestic violence)?
 - 4. How long has there been discord?

C. Divorce

1. Has someone filed for divorce? Who?
2. What are the values and beliefs about marriage and divorce?

II. EXPLORATION OF SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- A. Family — Friends — Others
- B. Financial — Employment — Public Assistance — Housing —Other Resources
- C. Health — Medical Insurance — Other Resources
- D. Activities/Involvement (i.e., church)

Challenges of aging are faced by some of these women. Included are: inadequate income, chronic health problems, caregiving responsibilities, and loss of family or friends. Another suggestion is to explore the woman's coping skills and self-concept in relation to the threat of divorce. It is essential to obtain her perceptions of the conditions in which she lives and how she relates to them. Encouragement for involvement with others may be helpful.

The woman's perception of aging may unfold during an interview, and perceived limitations and strengths may be identified. From there, the focus is to maximize opportunities for personal growth and build on strengths. Suggested models to integrate with other counseling methods are discussed in the following two paragraphs.

As cited in O'Leary (1996, p. 81), Medley (1976) stated that there are five factors which contribute to effective personal growth in older adults: interest in

activity, flexibility or willingness to change, sense of accomplishment, sense of independence, and satisfaction in interpersonal relationships. O'Leary (1996) presented a model of the main goals for personal growth work, stating that this form of counseling emerged from humanistic tradition. The "heart" of this approach is the autonomy of the individual.

Robert Butler (1963) formulated the concept or process of the Life Review. This process involves reminiscences about the past which offer an older adult the chance to reflect on both successes and failures of the past. The women in this study expressed their experiences in story form similar to life-review or life-history. This process may be helpful for some people working through divorce, but the tendency to focus in the past may restrict or halt a woman's movement toward divorce recovery. The counselor's role would be to assist the client with bringing reflections of the past into the "here and now." The primary focus would be on how the past impacts the present and propels one to move forward.

Counselors who work with those women divorcing later in life should be aware of individual differences, as well as commonalities among women (i.e., themes of this study). Also, a counselor self-examination should occur to evaluate potential biases or stereotypes held about aging.

THE POWER OF RESILIENCY

The participants in this study provided rich and "thick" descriptions of the experience of later-life divorce. Some experienced pain and difficulty in their

marriages as well as through the divorce process. Regardless of the perceived satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the marriage, all the participants expressed the pressures and pain of divorce imposed particularly by the long duration of the marriage and the values and beliefs about marriage. Each participant evolved through the experience in her own unique way, and shared her own personal story. Yet, when this researcher "steps back" and takes another look at these stories, there is an even larger, more expansive feature to the meaning underlying the results of this study --- the power of resiliency.

In light of the current study, the word "resiliency" connotes overcoming the "bad" and soaring forward with the "good." The author is not implying that the participants found the experience of later-life divorce to be easy and swift. Rather, there was a great sense of awakening, or becoming. For some of the participants, it was as though the self was lost or buried in the marriage. Through the process of divorce, the self was unearthed or reborn. Resiliency refers not simply to an action of bouncing back, but to the action of moving forward and beyond. The author was most impressed by the courage and ability to realign with the world after having spent all or most of the adult years in a marriage which is now over, and by the potential of growing empowerment for each of these women. These impressions lead to questions that challenge the author and reader:

What compels or motivates older women to be forward-moving and resilient after a long term marriage is dissolved by divorce?

How do the barriers of adversity serve as vehicles for personal growth and empowerment?

How is experiencing something threatening or risk-provoking a catalyst for change and growth?

Although the concept of "time passing" may be attributed to eventual healing, recovery, and continued growth, how does one "grab hold" and make this healing and growth happen sooner?

The author is not certain how to answer these questions at the time of this writing. However, some factors which may contribute to or encourage resiliency as related to later-life divorce will be presented. These are characteristics observed among the participants of this study: exploration and exercise of creativity and spontaneity; development and maintenance of a sense of humor; positive self-interpretation; and connectedness and bonding with others, particularly other women.

The current study confirms that the process of later-life divorce, as disruptive and painful as it may be, may also be the impetus for positive personal growth and enrichment of life. Age is not the barrier to life satisfaction. For those women who choose to perceive their "older age" as a plus, and embrace the connectedness of self and others in the world, the potential for empowerment will increase. This author believes there is a need for people to share their lives with one another — to join together in the darkest as well as the brightest times in life. Lucille Wolf (1984) captured the essence of this thought, which is illuminated in the following passage:

[We need] to tell our stories, to give some order and affirmation to our lives. Helping each other overcome all that hinders us, helping

each other describe how we can cope . . . and offering each other some of our own solutions — this is what we are all about, this is the therapy we have to offer each other . . . We each have our own unique odyssey to tell, and we each have a need to find our own “singing voice” again — or perhaps for the first time . . . It takes repeated acts of faith and perceptive eyes and ears to tune in on our glimmerings and a joining of youth and age to overcome our fears and draw out our tales. (pp. 227-228)

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

ATTENTION: SEEKING PARTICIPANTS

Dissertation research in progress

Subject: Reflections of older women divorced from long-term (20 or more years) marriages.

Researcher: Janet (Jan) Turner, M.S.
(Ph.D. Candidate, The University of Tennessee)

Participation involves completing a brief demographic survey, a 60-90 minute audio-tape recorded interview, and a brief follow-up interview to review transcripts. All participant responses will be held in confidence. No written report will contain any identifying information.

Criteria: Jan is seeking participants who:

1. Are women who have experienced divorce from a marriage of at least a 20-year duration.
2. Were age 50 or older at the time of the divorce.
3. Have been divorced at least three years.
4. Have never remarried.
5. Are willing and able to talk about their experiences.

Please call Jan at 584-8859 (H). Note: If leaving a message on the answering machine, leave your 1st name, phone number and the best times to reach you. No one can retrieve messages from the answering machine but the researcher.

APPENDIX B

INFORMATION SHEET

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study which explores women's experiences with divorce from long-term marriages.

As we discussed in our initial telephone contact on _____, I am requesting that your response to a series of written questions in the attached survey. Following my receipt of this survey, I will be contacting you to schedule an audio-tape interview which will cover questions pertaining to your personal experiences with divorce. There are no anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study. It is hoped that you will benefit from the process of reflecting and responding to the research questions and also from knowledge gained from the findings of this project. If the process of this participation is unpleasant and you desire further consultation with a helping professional or support group, referrals will be provided.

Your responses will be held in confidence by the researcher by the use of a pseudonym instead of your name. In order to insure this, please make up a name (pseudonym) of your choice. All surveys, tapes, and related information will be maintained in locked files in my office. Participation in this study is voluntary, and you may refuse to answer questions and/or withdraw from participation at any time.

It is intended that the data and results of this study will be presented as my dissertation research. Final reports will be available to all participants.

Please sign the informed consent forms. Complete the demographic survey and assign your own pseudonym. Retain the information sheet and one informed consent form. Feel free to contact me at any time if you have further questions.

Janet P. Turner (Jan)
108 Claxton Education Building
College of Education
University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN 37996
(615) 637-3861 (W)
(615) 584-8859 (H)

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

I understand that I am participating in a study about women's experiences of divorce following a long-term marriage. I understand my participation involves completing a survey, a 60-90 minute audio-tape recorded interview, and a brief follow-up interview to review the transcripts. I give permission to the researcher, her advisors, and research team to review my responses to the survey and the transcription of my tape recorded interview with the understanding that my identity will remain anonymous. The actual tape-recording will only be reviewed by the researcher and her advisors in the College of Education.

I further understand that no written report will contain information which will identify me or my personal concerns. All of my responses will be held in confidence, with a pseudonym used instead of my name. I have the option of completing the interview in my own home or in a private office on the University of Tennessee campus.

I understand there are no anticipated risks to me by participating in the study and the researcher has made every effort to protect me from any unpleasantness in the process. The benefits to me are in the process of reflecting and responding to the research questions and in the knowledge gained from the project findings. I also understand that I can refuse to answer questions and/or withdraw my participation at any time without penalty.

I have read the above and understand it to be truthful representation of this project. I have had my questions answered to my satisfaction and have retained a copy of the information sheet, informed consent form, and the referral list. I understand that if I have further questions, I may contact the researcher. Therefore, I consent to participation in the project as stated herein.

Date

Printed Name

Signature

For any further questions, contact
Jan Turner
584-8859 or 637-3861

APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

The following questions are designed to provide some basic information.
Please circle the most appropriate response or fill in the blank.

- A. What is your age? _____
- B. What is your race/ethnic background? _____
- C. How many years of school have you completed? _____
- D. Are you attending school at this time?
1. No
 2. Yes If you answered yes, where are you attending and what are you working on? _____

- E. What is your level of religious/spiritual involvement?
1. None; No belief in a higher power
 2. Belief in higher power but no church involvement
 3. Belief in higher power; some church involvement
 4. Belief in higher power; regular church involvement
- F. What month and year were you married? _____/_____
What month and year were you divorced? _____/_____
Who initiated the divorce process (by requesting separation and/or filing for divorce)? _____
- G. During the marriage, were you employed outside the home?
1. No
 2. Yes If you answered yes, explain when and how long you were employed.

- H. Are you employed now?
1. No
 - a. Student
 - b. Retired
 - c. Other (specify) _____
 2. Yes
 - a. Full-time
 - b. Part-time
- If employed, what is your occupation? _____

I. What is your estimated annual gross income? _____

What are your sources of income? _____

J. Do you have any children?

1. No

2. Yes If yes, how many? _____

What are their ages? _____

Number of children living with you now _____

K. Do you have any serious health problems? If yes, please explain.

L. Have you ever seen a therapist, counselor or other helping professional for emotional difficulties? _____

Are you involved with any support or self-help groups (Please specify if the answer is yes)? _____

M. At this time, what is the greatest source of stress in your life?

What is the most helpful thing you do to reduce this stress?

REMINDER: All information you provide will remain confidential.

APPENDIX E

OUTLINE OF THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

1. Divorce As A Threat
 - A. Expectations
 - B. Awareness
 - C. Avoidance
 - D. Delay
2. Divorce As An Inevitability
 - A. Point of No Return
 - B. Declaration
 - C. Detachment
3. Divorce As A Barrier
 - A. Age
 - B. Alienation
 - C. Redefinition
4. Divorce As A Vehicle
 - A. Redefinition
 - B. Reorganization
 - C. Equilibration
5. Divorce As A Discovery
 - A. Freedom
 - B. Learning
 - C. Prescriptions

VITA

Janet Pauline Turner was born in Memphis, Tennessee, on September 17, 1957. In 1966, her family moved to Springfield, Missouri, where she later graduated from Glendale High School in 1975. She received a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology from Southwest Missouri State University in May 1980.

After relocating to Tennessee, she worked as a counselor for the Tennessee Department of Human Services from September 1981 to August 1986, in Davidson and Knox counties. She received a Master of Science degree in counseling from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in December 1987.

In the fall of 1988, she began her doctoral studies in the Department of Education and Counseling Psychology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Since that time, she has conducted tutorials each term on counseling theories and techniques for graduate students. The author has worked part-time as a counselor for the University of Tennessee Educational Talent Search from August 1986 to August 1987, and the Office of Readmissions and Withdrawals from August 1987 to January 1991, as a consultant and team coordinator for the TRW-KOYO Project from July 1989 to January 1991, and as a counselor for the Knoxville Center for Reproductive Health (KCRH) from August 1987 to June 1991. She served as Director of Counseling for KCRH from June 1991 to January 1995. The author received the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Education, with a major in Counselor Education and Supervision, in May 1997.