

A STUDY OF BABY BOOMER DIVORCED WOMEN
AND THEIR DIVORCE EXPERIENCES

By

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ABSTRACT

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This qualitative study explored the experiences of 25 women who experienced a later life divorce (i.e., ages 50 – 64). The current divorce literature contains very little information on the experiences of this group of women (also known as baby boomers) and this study addressed this gap. Participants for the study included women who parented with the man they divorced, and who were at least two years post divorce, with the divorce happening at or beyond age 48. Participants were asked about the divorce itself and the adjustment years post divorce, the challenges they faced, and which resources they utilized that either helped or hindered them during their divorce adjustment process. Each interview was transcribed and then analyzed using a modified grounded theory approach with the goal of developing a theory of divorce adjustment for this group of women. Bronfenbrenner's Human Ecological Theory and the life course perspective were frameworks that informed research questions for the study and interpretation of the findings. Ten of the 25 women reported they had not reached a place of peace (i.e., unresolved) post divorce. A four stage model was developed (i.e., predivorce, early, adapting, and final). A description of each stage is featured--highlighting the events and processes occurring that capture the experiences of the 15 resolved women. Based on these 25 women's narratives, protective and risk factors began to emerge from the data. Potential risk factors to good divorce adjustment include: holding onto feelings of guilt, disappointment leading to failure, fear, anger/resentment, wanting to date/repartner and not being able to, seeing poor adjustment in adult children, negative subjective view of current financial status, and not

maintaining a relationship with former in-laws. Potential protective factors include: reforming connections with former in-laws, maintaining connection with adult children, letting go of adult children's process, attending Divorce Care© classes, seeking individual counseling, repartnering or deciding to remain happily single, forming new social support systems, or being retired. Clinical suggestions are provided, as well as limitations to the study and future directions in research.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Divorce is a stressful life event that many American families endure. It affects the couples experiencing the divorce, their children, and the extended families. Adults who divorce are faced with many potential stressors: painful emotions, interfacing with lawyers and the family court system, financial costs, finding new housing, re-adjusting their social circles and relationships, dating, co-parenting and co-grandparenting, and reorganizing their lives as single adults. The understanding of divorce and how it impacts people is important for family researchers, clinicians, and policy makers.

Statement of the Research Problem

Demographers predict that more than 45% of first-time marriages in the 21st century will eventually end in divorce (Amato, 2010; Cherlin, 2010; Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006). Currently “half of the married population is aged 50 and older” (Brown & Lin, 2012, p. 737). According to Kreider and Ellis (2011) people in the 50 and over category have a very complex history of marriage and divorce in the U.S. population; the baby boomers are a unique group indeed.

Research is plentiful on the topic of divorce, but little exists for older Americans experiencing divorce (Amato, 2010; Sweeney, 2010). Pinsof (2002) noted that during the second half of the 20th century (i.e., baby boomers coming of age) divorce surpassed death as a leading reason for why marriages ended. Bair (2007) refers to this phenomenon as “the social earthquake” (p. xvii).

Wu and Schimmele (2007) looked at marital trends, and they purport that as people are living longer and are healthier in later years, they are less likely to stay married if marital

satisfaction is low. They suggest that people in the 55 and over category seemed to be reaching similar conclusions: they have a lot of life left to live. “Some are opting out of poor marriages to avoid a drawn-out period of marital problems or life dissatisfaction in their old age” (Wu & Schimmele, 2007, p. 43). They also reported that 31% of divorced women and 18% of divorced men experience a “doctor confirmed depression” (2007, p. 44) post-divorce. Not surprisingly they reported that people who belong to a “late-life divorce support group can promote postdivorce coping strategies” (p. 44) that enable them to have a better post divorce adjustment. They also found for “older people, successful postdivorce adjustment involves establishing renewed social identities that confirm their self-worth or usefulness outside of marriage, making social integration a crucial dimension of post marital well-being” (p. 44).

Brown and Lin (2012) evaluated data from the 1990 National Vital Statistics Report and the 2010 American Community Survey, and they reported that divorce rates are increasing for people in the over 50 age category. They also concluded that “[o]ver 600,000 people aged 50 and older got divorced in 2010 but little is known about the predictors and consequences of divorces that occur during middle and later life” (Brown & Lin, 2012, p. 731). They concluded current divorce rates are highest among nonwhites, people with less than a college education, and for those who are currently unemployed.

In a meta-analytic review on postdivorce adjustment (Krumrei, Coit, Martin, Fogo, & Mahoney, 2007), the authors conclude that “43 percent of marriages end in separation or divorce within 15 years” (Krumrei, Coit, Martin, Fogo, & Mahoney, 2007, p. 146) of marriage. From data gathered in 2009, 32.7% of women divorced in the United States were between the ages of 45–64. Of all women divorced in 2009 in the United States, the divorce rate broken down by

race was as follows: Nonhispanic white, 68.2%; Black or African American, 13.1%; Hispanic or Latina, 12.8%; Asian, 3.8%; American Indian, 0.8% (Bureau of the Census, 2011).

Divorce rates in the United States have stabilized over the past 20 years, except among baby-boomers (Amato, 2010; Bair, 2007; Cherlin, 2010; Cooney & Dunne, 2001) and women with low socio-economic status (Kim, 2010). For those 77 million people who were born between the years of 1946 and 1964 (i.e., baby boomers), the reality is that divorce rates are on the rise.

Stevenson and Wolfers (2007) reported on the impact of birth control and abortion for this cohort. Their research found that by 1965, “41 percent of married women under 30” (p. 41) were on the pill. This is the time frame when many in this current study were becoming adults and were marrying. Over time, laws evolved, opening up prescriptions for the pill to unmarried women, and by 1976 three quarters of young, single women had tried the pill. The authors purport that this allowed baby boomer women greater individual choice around reproductive issues; also in 1973 abortion was made legal in this country. Stevenson and Wolfers conclude that the advent of these two important events altered the timing of marriage and births and reduced “the risk of disruption to women’s education or labor market plans” (p. 41). This had a huge impact on the baby boomer cohort. Societal shifts in marriage, cohabitation, and reproduction all occurred in a fairly short time span. The women in this current study were faced with opportunities their mothers and grandmothers might not have had. They could delay marriage, gain a college education, work before or during marriage, and still have access to family life. The macrosystem changes occurring during the 1960s and 1970s had potentially a very large impact on this generation of women.

Most of the recent divorce studies have focused on men and women in early to middle adulthood and the effect on their children. These studies have focused on factors contributing to divorce (e.g. including emotional processes present during and post divorce), resources used through the process, and reorganization of life post divorce. Two key findings emerged from published research relevant to this study. First, the divorce adjustment period tends to stabilize two to three years post divorce. Second, women with children are more likely to struggle (e.g., financially, socially, and emotionally) post divorce than their male counterparts (Gadalla, 2009; Hetherington, 2003; Hilton & Anderson, 2009; Wang & Amato, 2000; Williams & Dunne-Bryant, 2006; Wright & Maxwell, 1991).

Divorce can be difficult for women at any age, but for those women who are in the later midlife stage or early late-life stage of their development (i.e., baby boomers), divorce can have consequences that are different when compared to their younger contemporaries (i.e., born after 1964); they have less time to recoup their financial status, they may have to return to work or enter the employment workforce for the first time, work longer than originally planned, and often do not have adequate retirement savings accrued (Hilton & Anderson, 2009). Along with the financial differences, women in this age category often find it more difficult to repartner after a divorce, thus increasing negative social consequences and the financial burden of supporting a household alone (Duffy, Thomas, & Trayner, 2002; Wang & Amato, 2000). Intergenerationally, baby boomer women often find themselves sandwiched between aging parents and adolescent or young adult children and find themselves stretched in both directions (Fingerman, Pillemer, Silverstein, & Sutor, 2012).

In 2004, 60% of working women aged 21-64 were not contributing to an IRA or 401k retirement plan (The New Strategist Editors, 2008). Divorced baby boomer women often have

less education, fewer employment skills, and shorter work histories than their male counterparts. They have fewer opportunities to repartner, often find themselves taking care of their aging parents, find themselves facing their own health issues, and often suffer more social consequences than men who divorce later in life (Forste & Heaton, 2004; Jansen, Mortelmans, & Snoeckx, 2009; Lorenz, Wickrama, Conger, & Elder Jr, 2006).

While a vast amount of data from research exists on the divorce and post divorce process, there is a gap when considering the experiences of divorced baby boomer women. Baby boomers are one of the largest cohorts in the United States and their presence has impacted and continues to impact the United States in numerous ways (e.g., economically, socially; US Census Bureau, 2006). Baby boomers are a cohort that literally changed the face of this nation. It was the first cohort born after the end of WWII. They experienced life events that many now take for granted (e.g., sexual revolution, the Pill, the Vietnam War, civil rights, women's rights, gay/lesbian rights, change in women's roles, and an explosion in divorce rates). The baby boomer cohort has become grandparents and some have started to retire and are now entering the Medicare system. Baby boomers are by sheer numbers influencing the economic practices of our nation (i.e., 77 million Americans). According to the Immersion Active website (Immersion Active, 2013) AARP predicts that by 2015, 45% of the U.S. population will be 50 years or older and every seven seconds, someone in America turns 50. To give some perspective, this was the breakdown of the population of the United States in 2010: Older Americans (aged 65 and older) 13.1%, Baby Boomers (45–49, 7.3%; 50–54, 7.2%; 55–59, 6.4%; 60–64, 5.5%) 25%, Generation X (34–45) 16%, Millennial (16–33) 24.7 %, iGeneration (under 16) 21.2% (Bureau of the Census, 2010). Baby boomers have increased debt; their stock and 401(k) retirement plans have lost value and retirements are being postponed (The New Strategist Editors, 2008). It is estimated

that 10,000 baby boomers are eligible to retire everyday which has impact on the already overburdened social security system (Laing, Poitier, Ferguson, Carraher, & Ford, 2009). This hard working, taxpaying cohort will begin to draw on the resources they have been promised (e.g., pensions, Medicare, social security).

Their experiences continue to change how aging is viewed in America. In recently published online articles the term ‘the Gray Divorce’ has cropped up when referring to this cohort of people and their divorce experiences (Brown & Lin, 2012). Brown and Lin (2012) talk about the increase in the divorce rate for people more than 50 years of age. “The divorce rate among adults aged 50 and older doubled between 1990 and 2010. Roughly 1 in 4 divorces in 2010 occurred to persons aged 50 and older” (Brown & Lin, 2012, p. 731).

For women in the United States, turning 50 can sometimes be a difficult transition period and for divorced women who are 50 or older, the dual impact can have multiple emotional and social consequences (Clarke Hurd & Griffin, 2007). The last baby boomer is slated to turn 50 in the year 2014. We know very little about this cohort’s personal experience of later-life divorce. The purpose of this study was to begin to examine this unique group of women and to describe their experiences of divorce and adjustment, what they found helpful, what was missing from their journeys, and how they changed as a result of this event.

Studies Addressing this Gap

A review of existing literature on divorced women provided a background for this study. Forty six published research studies focused on divorced women with thirty one studies including women who were in the 50–64 age category in their samples. The common missing element in these published studies: none focused solely on baby boomer women. In addition, only 11 of these studies used qualitative methods leaving a gap in their voices in the literature.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to understand the experiences of 25 divorced women who are currently in the age range of 50–64 years of age. I conducted a modified grounded theory study of a sample of baby boomer women who were married only once, had at least one child with their ex-husband, and were two years or more post divorce. The divorce had to have occurred at the age of 48 years old or later as this was viewed as representing a mid to later life divorce. The overall aim of the study was to develop a theory of divorce adjustment for mid to late life women that focused on resiliency enhancement processes and barriers to successful divorce negotiation. Two broad research questions guided the study.

- 1) How do women divorcing in mid to late life describe their divorce experience?
- 2) What influenced the post divorce adjustment?

Theoretical Perspectives

Two theories guided this study: Life course theory and Bronfenbrenner's Human Ecological Theory (HET). These theories were used to develop the research questions and interpret the data from the participants' interviews. The questions guiding the interview explored the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem of the participants.

In addition, questions were also informed by the life course perspective that includes developmental life span, transitions, the timing of life events, historical time periods in which people live, and linked lives (Caspi & Elder Jr., 1986; Elder Jr., 1994; Hutchison, 2011; Mortimer & Shanahan, 2004). A linked life is an important aspect to look at in this study; these 25 women had experienced linkages in their lives as a result of being in long term marriages. The linkages occurred between them and their ex-husbands, them and their ex in-laws, their ex-husbands and the participants family, and finally the children they had during the marriage.

Hutchison (2011) defined the concept of linked lives and its impact as “the differing patterns of social networks in which persons are embedded that produce differences in life course perspectives” (p. 28). Elder (1994) described the concept of linked lives as central to the Life course perspective and included the idea of “interdependent lives” (1994, p. 6), which describes the connections between friends and family throughout the life course.

Human Ecological Theory (HET). Bronfenbrenner proposed studying people within an embedded system that was made up of five parts or subsystems. The smallest part of the human ecological system is termed the microsystem. This subsystem directly involves and contains the developing human and includes physical settings (e.g., home, workplace) along with relationships, activities, and roles that exist within those contexts. How an individual experiences the microsystem is often subjective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The next larger subsystem is termed the mesosystem that is a system of microsystems. “A mesosystem comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). For example, this could involve the interrelationships between family, work, and social life. The next subsystem that encompasses the mesosystem and the microsystem is termed the exosystem. This subsystem does not directly involve the developing human being but it does impact the smaller microsystem (e.g., a parent’s employer can impact the young child). The largest system that contains all others is the macrosystem. This system is made up of components such as the larger culture, belief systems, and ideologies that occur in the context in which the developing human being exists (e.g., United States is a macrosystemic influence on each American). The chronosystem was later added by Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). This system represents the impact of time on developing human beings (e.g., developmental changes).

HET asserts “that human development is a product of interaction between the growing human organism and his/her environment” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 16). His theory accounts for the interaction of various components within the multiple systems and includes the study of human beings across their life spans (i.e., chronosystem) while simultaneously studying the multiple-layered environments in which they lived. He purported that humans act upon and are influenced by their environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005).

Thus, from a Human Ecological Theory perspective, the way women experience divorce in later midlife and beyond is influenced by one (or more) of Bronfenbrenner’s five systems. Each participant was asked questions about these systems and was encouraged to talk about their lived experiences from each of these perspectives (e.g., roles, relationships, work interacting with family, cultural, impact of the media, and the effects of time). Women were asked to consider their experiences during and after the divorce. This theoretical perspective (i.e., HET) provided an appropriate framework from which to study and understand the women participants.

Life course perspective. This perspective was developed in the mid-twentieth century and came out of the sociology, anthropology, social history, demography, and psychology fields (Hutchison, 2011). The study of human lives needed a theory that examined humans and their relationships within various contexts; life course looks at various aspects of human and family development across the life span. Hutchison (2011) writes, “[y]ou could think of the life course as a path. But note that it is not a straight path; it is a path with both continuities and twists and turns” (p. 10). She also noted that “it is common and sensible to try to understand a person by looking at the way that person has developed throughout different periods of life” (p. 9). She encourages us to look at the relationships between the person, the environment, and time.

In this current study of divorced women, some examples of relationships in their lives would include biological, psychological and spiritual. The environment might include families, communities, social movements, formal organizations, physical environment, culture, social structures and institutions, dyads, and small groups. Across time, some examples of areas to explore may include: trends, cycles, shifts, and life events.

The life course perspective includes the concepts of “historical and biographical context” (Mortimer & Shanahan, 2004, p. 7) as part of its tenets. Generation can refer to individuals living with the same ancestry and also to people living within the same time frame, who “experience historical events at the same time in their lives” (Mortimer & Shanahan, 2004, p. 25). Due to this duality, the term birth cohort was coined in order to separate the two groups previously referred to as generations. As defined by Hutchison (2011) a cohort “is a group of persons who were born at the same historical time and who experience particular social changes within a given culture in the same sequence and at the same age.” This idea was useful in designing a study that examined the experiences of a particular cohort of women (i.e., baby boomers).

A life event is defined by Hutchison (2011) as a “significant occurrence involving a relatively abrupt change that may produce serious and long-lasting effects” (p. 15). For the purpose of this study several key life events were looked at including, divorce, affair, employment, retirement, moving, living alone, and death.

The life course perspective also includes transitions within the lives of individuals. A transition is defined as occurring after a life event and can include “changes in roles and statuses that represent a distinct departure from prior roles and statuses” (Hutchison, 2011, p. 14).

Transitions can be related to age, role change, and “when new rights, duties, and resources are encountered, and when identities are in flux” (Mortimer & Shanahan, 2004, p. 85).

Wiggs (2010) examined the intersection of life course development, and self-transcendence by looking at crisis points within the lives of individuals that lead to “development of inner knowledge and the development of the self” (p. 220). Self-transcendence is described as the ability to make meaning out of an experience via “broadened perspectives and behavior” (p. 220). The idea of an inward journey as the body ages is seen as a “second half of life” (p. 222) event in the life course, and represents a parallel path of “continued growth through aging” (p. 222). The author also theorized that the ability to do this increased with aging throughout the life course. This idea of self-transcendence fits in nicely with this current study because all participants were in or past the midlife stage of development.

For this study, the transition from divorce to post divorce was a primary focus. Life course researchers take into account the age norm of individuals being studied. These transitions often center on certain ages within various groups throughout the life course. Within human development, transitions and patterns are examined across cultures and historical time frames. This is the framework from which the interview questions were drawn, themes evolved, and data were interpreted.

According to Hutchison (2011) humanistic perspective provides us a background to examine concepts from the life course perspective. “Human behavior can be understood only from the internal frame of reference of the individual; human behavior is driven by a desire for growth and competence” (p. 35). From this perspective the concept of turning points will also be looked at in this study. Hutchison (2011) described a turning point as “a point in the life course that represents a substantial change or discontinuity in direction; it serves as a lasting change and

not just a temporary detour” (p. 18); typically turning points “usually become obvious only as time passes” (p. 18). In this study, it may be easier to determine the turning points in these women’s lives, as all of the data gathered was retrospective. Some turning points or milestones that were explored include shifts in self-esteem, independence, freedom, sexual pleasure, financial, and educational.

Life course researchers do not simply study humans as “unilinear aging” (Mortimer & Shanahan, 2004, p. 478) but instead they look at multidimensions of time (e.g., age, cohort effect, time spent in roles) and the impact on human development. Life course researchers are also interested in studying interrelationships. Hutchison (2011) used a systems perspective to inform the concept of linkages in the life course perspective. She defines a systems perspective as follows: “Human behavior is the outcome of reciprocal interactions of persons operating within organized and integrated social systems” (p. 35).

The life course perspective provides room for researchers to look at the domains involved in human development as a unified whole (e.g., work, partnering, parenting, emotional processes) along with the concept of “linked lives” (Mortimer & Shanahan, 2004, p. 478), which involves the notion that what happens to one partner deeply affects the other.

According to Hutchison (2011), the life course perspective allows us to examine the “interdependence of human lives and the ways in which relationships both support and control an individual’s behavior” (p. 24). She notes that social support is part of that network of interdependence. Hutchison (2011) defines social support as “help rendered by others that benefits an individual” (p. 24). The idea of network support (i.e., being part of a network of individuals or groups) in positive post divorce adjustment is also supported elsewhere in the divorce literature (Hayes & Anderson, 1993; Krumrei, Coit, Martin, Fogo, & Mahoney, 2007).

Studying the links between people has become an important aspect of life course perspective and helped to inform this study.

One final concept that was found useful as a lens for this study was the concept of human agency. This idea coming out of the life course perspective is useful for this study in that it allowed for the exploration of how these participants made choices that impacted the direction of their lives. They “participated in constructing” (Hutchison, 2011, p. 26) their “life course through the exercise of human agency, or the use of personal power to achieve one’s goals” (Hutchison, 2011, p. 26). When examining the lives of baby boomer divorced women, the life course perspective provided a lens through which to view the lives and experiences of these 25 women who enrolled in the study.

Definition of Terms

For clarification, terms referred to throughout this research study are defined here. Baby boomer women: women aged 50–64 years of age; early adulthood: ages 20–39; midlife: ages 40–59 years; late life: ages 60–79; later midlife: age 50–59 years; early later life: 60–64 years; and later life: age 50–64.

Summary and Overview of Dissertation

This study introduced the topic of baby boomer women who experienced a later life divorce. Divorce researchers have studied many aspects of the divorce process and how it impacts divorcing couples and their families. Missing in the divorce literature are studies specifically examining the experiences of baby boomer women who experience a divorce later in their lives. This study sought to fill that gap by interviewing baby boomer women and allowing them to talk about their divorce experiences and lives since the divorce. This study will guide future researchers and clinicians in their work with this cohort. The results from this qualitative

study will highlight factors that enabled this group of women to adjust to their lives post divorce with a focus on what enhanced or prohibited the post divorce adjustment.

CHAPTER 2

A Review of Literature

Themes Related to Divorce and Women

Studies that focused on divorcing women specifically are plentiful. However, no recent studies have explored specifically an important demographic group with a rising rate of divorce: baby boomer women who experienced a later life divorce. Therefore, to provide background, three areas of research are reviewed below: first, pre-divorce issues impacting women; second, divorce, its impact on women, and their post divorce adjustment process with added emphasis on adjustment tasks; third the different life stages of women's development and impact on divorce adjustment. Two additional sections review cultural studies of divorced women and post divorce adjustment through an HET lens.

Pre-divorce

Two studies were found citing violence as predictors of divorce. One longitudinal study found support for the idea that destructive "conflict behaviors predict divorce" (Sanchez & Gager, 2000, p. 708); these behaviors do include domestic violence behaviors. These authors used data collected from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSHF1) 1987-1988 and the follow-survey (NSHF2) 1992-1994; the useable sample was 1,721 with 257 couples within the sample experiencing a divorce or separation. In another longitudinal study conducted in the United States, involving husbands and wives (N = 373 couples), the authors found support for the idea that destructive conflict behaviors can influence the decision to divorce (Birditt, Brown, Orbuch, & McIlvan, 2010).

In a qualitative study of 10 divorced women (mean age = 60 years), Thomas and Ryan (2008) found that infidelity and substance abuse were reasons these women divorced. This

sample was described as white, middle to upper class, and 50% with college degrees; four of the 10 women had remarried at the time of the interview, and three were not mothers.

Many reasons exist for initiating divorce. In a very large international qualitative study using snowball sampling, Bair (2007) interviewed 126 divorced men and 184 divorced women who experienced a later life divorce. In her sample, she reported that women were more often initiators of divorce and their reason they wanted more control and freedom in their lives. She also reported a phenomenon found within longer-term marriages: separate lives. She described this concept in her book as being “divorced while still married” (p. 9). Prior to that, Hetherington (2003) discovered couples living in “disengaged marriages, both members of the couple enjoy their separate lives and are fearful of intimacy” (p. 328). These two studies and their description of separateness within a marriage will become relevant to the results of this current study.

A qualitative study from Finland (Määttä, 2011) examined 74 (i.e., 71 women, 3 men) peoples’ stories of their divorce. The group wrote letters that were then analyzed. Unfortunately, the researcher did not collect demographic data, so ages were not available. The researcher found support for the idea of a contemplation phase of divorce; “contemplating a divorce is the hardest for many in the whole divorce process. They pack and unpack without being sure whether they should stay or leave. The emotional struggle creates a pendulum motion that can last for years” (p. 420).

An interesting study by Guven and colleagues reported that happiness gaps between spouses can lead to a divorce; “a greater happiness difference between spouses reduces the stability of their union” (Guyen, Senik, & Stichnoth, 2012, p. 127). These authors looked at large panel survey data from three countries: Australia, Germany, and Great Britain. The authors

suggested “that people care about the distribution of well-being per se” (p. 111). In this study it would seem marital happiness matters, especially as people age and children leave the home.

What We Know About Post Divorce Adjustment in General

Divorce has been studied for years and these studies have included a range of broad topics: impact of divorce on families, factors contributing to divorce, factors helpful to post divorce adjustment, and impact on people experiencing a divorce.

Aftermath of divorce. A great deal of research has shown that many people who experience a divorce do suffer in the aftermath: emotional fallout, financial struggles, repartnering, co-parenting issues, and recreating lives post divorce. Määttä (2011) reported on the “emotional storm of the first year after divorce” (p. 421). She lists common emotions experienced: guilt, distress, insecurity, hate, grief, embarrassment, relief, and independence.

The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP; Montenegro, 2004) conducted a survey of its members asking about marriage and divorce. The 1,147 participants (i.e., 581 men and 566 women; ages 40 to 79) experienced a divorce during their 40s, 50s, or 60s. About one third of women (35%) and one fifth of men (21%) surveyed reported they experienced depression post divorce. Some emotions participants in the AARP survey reported struggling with post divorce were loneliness or depression (29%), desertion or betrayal (25%), a sense of failure (23%), feeling unloved (22%), feelings of inadequacy (20%), fears of being alone (45%), fear of failing again (31%), fear of being financially destitute (28%), concerns about never finding someone to marry or live with (24%), unresolved anger/bitterness (20%), fears of staying depressed for a long time (16%), and fears related to not seeing their children as much (14%). Women in the study in particular were worried about financial issues. Many participants reported the reason it took so long to end the marriage was concern for the children. Two findings

emerged from the survey: women initiated divorce more often than men and abuse was one of the most cited reasons for seeking divorce (followed by different values and lifestyles, and infidelity). Both the AARP (Montenegro, 2004) survey and Bair (2007) found a large percentage of the women who initiated divorce “sought freedom” (2007, p. 58).

Kalman and Monden (2006) tested “the so-called escape hypothesis” (p. 1197) using two waves of the National Survey of Families and Households (N = 4,526). The authors found limited support for the premise that exiting a bad marriage lead to better post divorce adjustment. They also concluded that women experiencing a divorce were more likely to develop depressive symptoms than men.

In a ten-year longitudinal study, Wallerstein (1986) found support for the idea that persistent anger and loneliness were present in divorced women who had not repartnered or had re-divorced; this was seen as negatively impacting their post divorce adjustment process. She did find support for the idea that initiators of divorce were more likely to have a better post divorce adjustment. For women who were 40 years old or older at the time of the divorce, it was reported they were less likely to be repartnered when compared to women in their 20s and 30s.

In a 25-year qualitative longitudinal study, Wallerstein (2009) found that the relationship between divorced fathers and their adult children is not always indicative of the relationship they had when they were part of the intact family. Sadly, it was often the case that the relationship between the divorced father and his children deteriorated post divorce. Fathers who remarried women who were supportive of the father/child relationship were more likely to maintain a positive post divorce connection with their children. In addition, once these fathers became grandfathers, a portion reconnected with their adult children and their grandchildren.

Helpful to post divorce adjustment. Several factors found in the literature were shown to be helpful to post divorce individuals. These factors include attribution, social support, new relationships, finances, little conflict in co-parenting relationship, forgiveness, letting go of negative affect, resolving bonds formed during the marriage, support from adult children, not having young children, initiator status, good legal representation, active social life post divorce, repartnering, and enhanced spirituality.

An interesting study by Amato and Previti (2003) examined data from a national study of 208 divorced people. They were interested in positive post divorce adjustment and how individuals attributed blame or found fault (i.e., attribution), and how it impacted post divorce adjustment. This study found support for the idea that “individuals tended to attribute the cause of the divorce more often to their former spouses than to themselves” (p. 623). They reported that fault finding did not suggest positive post divorce adjustment but rather the idea that the divorce was unavoidable that offered the strongest predictor in positive post divorce adjustment. For those in the study, blaming the relationship allowed them to hold the belief that the divorce was unavoidable, allowing individuals to not assign blame to themselves personally or even to their ex for the incompatibility. This resulted in fewer regrets post divorce. For individuals who assigned blame (e.g. to self, ex-partner, or external events) and were left to wonder ‘what if’, it was suggest they were less likely to achieve “closure and accept the finality of the divorce” (p. 623).

Määttä (2011) noticed in the letters written, that social support was important to the divorcing participants and a new sense of freedom was documented as well. Her study lends support to the importance of having adequate social support post divorce. A meta analysis (Krumrei, Coit, Martin, Fogo, & Mahoney, 2007) found support for the effectiveness of social

support during and post divorce; women were most likely to find support from family and friends and men from network support and new lovers.

Tschann, Johnston, and Wallerstein (1989) used data from a longitudinal study based on 146 women and 144 men. They found that men with higher socio-economic status and women with better psychological functioning pre-divorce fared better post divorce. It was also found the conflict with the ex-spouse negatively impacted positive divorce adjustment. What was found to be helpful in positive post divorce adjustment was “development of a social life and a new intimate relationship” (p. 1033).

In a study involving data from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), Williams and Dunne-Bryant (2006) reported that for divorced “women without young children, marital dissolution appears to have fewer negative consequences for psychological well-being” (p. 1178). These findings are relevant to the women in this study who had adult children at the time of the divorce.

A unique study (Rye, Folck, Heim, Olszewski, & Traina, 2004) examined the concept of forgiveness as a coping strategy. The authors looked at a religious or spiritual construct as a means of promoting a positive post divorce adjustment in the lives of 50 men and 149 women in several Midwestern cities; 49% reported they were Catholic, 45% reported they were Protestant and 6% reported other. A majority of the respondents reported they believed “that forgiveness is extremely important for emotional healing following divorce” (p. 49). These authors reported that ‘being angry’ was appropriate post divorce; but long-term anger (i.e., resentment and bitterness) could be harmful both physically and mentally to people in a post divorce situation. Many of the participants “believed that forgiveness of one’s ex-spouse is important for emotional healing following a divorce” (p. 32). The authors drew from Wallerstein’s (1986) previous study

that found 40% of divorce women carried anger and bitterness post divorce which is slightly higher than men post divorce (i.e., 30%). The authors were clear that there is a “a distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation” (2004, p. 33). What they do report forgiveness means is “letting go of negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in response to wrongdoing” (p. 33). They also added “responding positively toward the offender” (p. 33) can be helpful, but it is not necessary in order to benefit from letting go. From this study the authors concluded that forgiveness as a coping strategy post-divorce is beneficial in terms of improved mental health, spiritual well being, and tends toward a more successful co-parenting relationship.

Rohde-Brown and Rudestam (2011) interviewed 91 participants who experienced separation or divorce in the past 30 months. Several scales were administered: Fisher Divorce Adjustment scale, Enright Forgiveness Inventory, Self Forgiveness scale, Spielberger’s State-Trait Anger Inventory (STAXI-2). The STAXI-2 measures “the intensity of anger as an emotional state (State Anger) and the disposition to experience angry feelings as a personality trait (Trait Anger)” (p. 113). The authors found correlation for higher levels of depression with lower levels of forgiveness towards self and towards ex-spouse. The authors concluded the capacity to self forgive positively impacts divorce adjustment; withholding forgiveness from self or ex was found to negatively impact post divorce adjustment. This study found support for the idea that depression negatively impacts the ability to offer forgiveness to self or others post divorce.

These authors conclude that having the ability to regulate affect is necessary in order to offer forgiveness to self or others. After the 18-month mark, anger was found to be inversely correlated with forgiveness. Those who scored high on the trait-anger portion of the STAXI-2 were less likely to forgive themselves post separation. State anger was related to a person’s

ability to offer forgiveness toward an ex-spouse and this too negatively impacted forgiveness post divorce. The authors suggested that early intervention in promoting self forgiveness would be helpful for this population.

McDaniel and Coleman (2003) examined how midlife women (who were also mothers) transitioned from marriage to divorce, using a five-case study design. The premise for this study was that divorce is a process, not just a single legal event. The author's concluded that for women divorcing in midlife, better adjustment ensues when women can successfully end the bonds (e.g., emotional, psychological, and social connections) that were created during the marriage. Since longer term marriages often mean a greater number of "social and psychological bonds" (p. 126), the dissolving of the bonds can be more painful and time consuming. This study maintains that processing of severed bonds is important during post divorce adjustment, and for people who are co-parenting after a divorce, it is important that some connection between couples be maintained for the benefit of the children.

In the case where the children are adults, Wright and Maxwell (1991) found that divorced mothers were more likely than divorced fathers to see their adult children as potential sources of support post divorce. This makes the divorced baby boomer population unique among all other divorced people: adult children.

Madden-Derdich and Arditti (1999) conducted a quantitative study of 219 divorced mothers (mean age = 36 yrs). The authors suggested that helping professionals (e.g., therapists, ministers) need to recognize the importance of the emotional connection (including painful injuries to this connection) between ex-spouses who co-parent. Helping professionals should encourage and help clients respect and nurture that connection with their ex-partner. The authors suggested that professionals should promote some form of positive attachment between former

spouses. This co-parenting connection assists with the couple's post-divorce adjustment and is healthier for the child(ren) involved. They also suggest that society at large needs to reevaluate its beliefs about divorced couples: the belief that divorced couples must be antagonistic towards each other.

Another factor connected to an easier post divorce adjustment period is initiator status in the divorce. Studies show that the partner who initiates the divorce often has an easier and shorter post divorce adjustment period (Amato, 2010). Amato and Previti (2003) note that women are more likely to initiate divorce which suggests that women who initiate may have an easier post divorce adjustment.

Sakraida (2008) conducted a quantitative study of 154 divorced women (e.g., 34-54 years). Participants self selected into three divorce decider groups: initiator, noninitiator, and mutual decider. In this sample, the participants in the initiator group experienced a more positive post divorce adjustment, while noninitiators continued to experience distress with poorer post divorce adjustment. The women who fell into the mutual decider group expressed more optimism during and after the divorce, which helped positively influence divorce adjustment. Based on this study, decider status does appear to have effects on women who divorce.

In a qualitative study by Sakraida (2005) 24 midlife women who experienced a divorce were interviewed. The participants were drawn from a previous larger study based on 154 interviews. All participants recognized the grief and loss process they encountered during their post divorce adjustment with seven of the participants reporting taking anti-depressant medications (initiator status for this sub group was not reported). Five participants reported being involved in a support group (mostly from the noninitiator group), and eight participants reported seeking mental health counseling (initiator status for this sub group was not reported). The eight

initiators reported “self-focused growth, optimism and both social support losses and opportunities” (p. 225) post divorce. The eight noninitiators reported ruminating thoughts, feeling vulnerable, and feeling left. No profile was established for the eight mutual deciders. All participants talked about an increase in health promoting behaviors (e.g., better eating and increased physical activity) and a desire to start dating post divorce. The author reported that most of the participants experienced the pain of social stigma; she summarized the participants reports by noting “ageist attitudes that accent youth and fail to regard midlife sagacity” (Sakraida, 2005, p. 84) that contributed to the pain experienced in the post divorce process. This recognition of the macrosystems’ influence on the divorce adjustment process lends itself well to Bronfenbrenner’s HET theory. The author proposed a divorce transition model that can be summarized as transition process plus healthy lifestyle equals a healthy transition. She suggested that for women in midlife, it is important that they take care of their bodies/health in order to promote the optimum positive post divorce adjustment period.

Thabes (1997) studied 272 divorced women, ranging in ages from 25–83 (mean age = 50.32 years); the participants were five years post-divorce and had not remarried. Within the sample the author found that positive adjustment post divorce is influenced by several factors: good legal representation during the divorce, active social life, higher income, being a more mature age, a new romantic partner, and absence of young children at the time of the divorce.

Wang and Amato (2000) report in a 17-year longitudinal study (n = 208) that for people who are employed at the time of the divorce, stressors like “large declines in per capita income, losing friends, or moving” (p. 655) had little impact on post divorce adjustment. What did appear to aid in a positive post divorce adjustment is having “income, dating someone steadily, remarriage, having favorable attitudes toward marital dissolution prior to divorce, and being the

partner who initiated the divorce” (p. 655). They also report that “older individuals showed some evidence of poorer adjustment than did younger individuals” (p. 655).

Steiner, Suarez, Sells, and Wykes (2011) looked at 133 divorced American women and their post divorce adjustment; they employed the Fisher Divorce Adjustment scale and the Spiritual Well-Being scale. They reported that 38% of variance can be accounted for by examining “initiator status, spousal infidelity and spiritual well-being” (Steiner, Suarez, Sells, & Wykes, 2011, p. 33). The authors also indicated that for this group of women, spiritual well-being was the largest predictor for good post divorce adjustment. When they looked at the existential well-being subscale, the authors found it was a stronger predictor of positive post divorce adjustment “than the religious well-being subscale” (2011, p. 43). They propose that, for this group of women, those “who can find meaning and have a renewed vision through their divorces adjust better than those who cannot” (2011, p. 43). The authors suggested there are several factors that influence post divorce adjustment: resolving connections (e.g. human and spiritual), repartnering, financial status, and good legal representation.

Not helpful to post divorce adjustment. Some studies reported several factors that inhibited positive post divorce adjustment. These factors include, continued aggression, unresolved spiritual issues, depression, low self esteem, feelings of being a failure, holding onto anger, and not repartnering.

Kalman and Monden (2006) found evidence that a continuation of aggression post divorce (for people leaving marriages where aggression was present) did impact the divorce adjustment negatively, especially for women with children. Krumrei, Mahoney, and Pargament (2009) conducted a quantitative study of 100 adults (55 females) ranging from 19–75, and examined the use of spirituality in adjustment post divorce. This aligns with the life course

perspective and the interplay between psychological and spiritual processes (Hutchison, 2011) and forgiveness enhancing spirituality (Rye, Folck, Heim, Olszewski, & Traina, 2004). They found that people who struggled with spiritual issues post divorce (e.g., moral guilt, feeling abandoned by God) often experienced an increase in psychological symptoms. They suggest that professionals recognize the importance of spirituality and that helping clients process spiritual disconnection that occurred as a result of the divorce can promote positive post divorce adjustment.

Thabes (1997) studied 272 divorced women, ranging in age from 25–83 (mean age = 50.32 years); the participants were five years post-divorce and had not remarried. Twenty-six of the participants were found to still be struggling with depression five years post divorce. The author noted that for these 26 women abuse (physical, verbal, emotional), infidelity, lack of forgiveness, lack of social support, little social activity, lower income, and not being repartnered were factors that negatively impacted their post divorce adjustment.

Thomas and Ryan (2008) reported six of ten divorced women in their study expressed feelings of personal failure as a result of the divorce. They concluded social support was important in the women's divorce adjustment while gaining employment was linked with increasing the women's self esteem post divorce. These authors found that women who exercised their bodies and/or destroyed mementos that "are reminders of the conflict" (p. 221) were helped in reducing their anger. Overall, these authors purport that divorce did "provide an opportunity for personal growth" (p. 222).

Post divorce. In an unusual study, Schneller and Arditti (2004) interviewed 21 divorced men and women (ages 21–63, mean age = 43.4); with the goal of determining how divorce has the potential to affect intimacy in future relationships, including future choices in dating and

repartnering. The participants reported they experienced personal growth during their post divorce adjustment period and that led the participants to look at potential intimate relationships differently than they had in the past. Three areas that the participants hoped would be different in their new romantic relationship included egalitarianism, more expressive communication, and improved ways to resolve disagreements and conflicts. The post divorce period is seen as a time in a person's life when changes are made and people may even begin to see their world differently. While research done in this area is important, long-term research (i.e., followup) is rare.

Adjustment task: Redefining identity. Several studies examined identity in post divorce women (Baum, Rahav, & Sharon, 2005; Bisagni & Eckenrode, 1995; DeGarmo & Kitson, 1996; Gregson & Ceynar, 2009; Hayes & Anderson, 1993; Määttä, 2011; Mahay & Lewin, 2007; Rahav & Baum, 2002). In a unique study, DeGarmo and Kitson (1996) employed a longitudinal design and compared women who were widows ($n = 173$) and women who were divorced ($n = 156$) and the impact of both events on their identity disruption and identity relevance. The authors operationalized identity disruption and identity relevance by employing a measure comprised of items that measured the “confusion over identity, an interruption in and a change in identity” (p. 987) and the “importance of the married identity or the continued centrality and attachment to the relationship with the former spouse” (p. 988). A sample question measuring identity disruption included, “women lose status when they become widowed (divorced)” (p. 987). A sample question measuring identity relevance included, “I feel empty inside, like an important part of me is missing” (p. 988). Both groups had similar median ages (i.e., widows: 45.8, divorcees: 44.2). Two interviews were conducted 18 months apart. Widowhood was

initially more distressing to women experiencing it, but over the 18-month period no significant differences were noted on identity disruption between the two groups of women.

Määttä (2011) concluded that many of those in her study that went through the painful emotions, found adequate support, and began the moving on process post divorce, found a new sense of identity that made it easier for them to adjust; but she also noted, “not all divorcees had enough strength or courage for renewal” (p. 427). Within the sample the theme of loneliness did emerge. “The women who suffered from loneliness the most were those who had concentrated on living in a family and with their husbands; when left without a stable family life, they experienced being left without love, appreciation, and self-respect” (p. 428). She also pointed out that “divorce can prove deceptive. Although being easy in judicial sense, mentally it is a long process” (p. 429).

A recent study based on couples that divorced between 1972 and 1998 in the Netherlands (Mulder & Wagner, 2010) reported on who stayed and who moved out of the family home. They reported that the person who was more fully employed or older was more likely to remain in the family home post divorce. They also found support for the idea that women are more likely to remain in the family home post divorce if the couple have children who live outside both parents’ homes.

Another study in Denmark (Gram-Hanssen & Bech-Danielsen, 2008) was based on 42,000 divorce Danish couples in 2002. These authors reported “Results show that for some the matrimonial home had played a large role in forming their identity, and for those people it was difficult to dissolve or leave the home” (p. 521). They also found for some “the new home was very important as the basis of forming a new identity and a new everyday life” (p. 521).

Apparently housing in Denmark can be pricier than in some places in America, so nonpermanent

or temporary housing is often the option for those in divorce situations. These authors did report a finding that seems pertinent to this current study they recognized for some, temporary housing provided those in a state of crisis a place to live while they were waiting for the divorce to finalize and for their finances to stabilize. They saw this as an appropriate metaphor for the divorcing person. Many participants saw moving into temporary housing as a necessary first step in their divorce adjustment process which was “the most critical and unstable part of the dissolution of the marriage” (p. 521). As they moved through their divorce adjustment process many “found a housing situation that gave them a feeling of home and security in everyday life” (p. 521) which allowed them to progress through their adjustment process. Some in the study who were forced to move to public housing reported it negatively impacted their divorce adjustment process.

Mahay and Lewin (2007) performed multinomial regressions on data from the General Social Survey, looking at the intersection between age and marriage/remarriage. The authors reported that single men and women (e.g., 55–69 years old) have less desire to marry than their younger counterparts; they “do not feel that the expected gains from marriage outweigh the costs” (p. 720). This research is highly relevant to this current study.

In a qualitative study, Gregson and Ceynar (2009) interviewed 31 women ranging in ages from 28–66 years (mean age = 47). The authors sought to understand the participants’ experiences of formulating post divorce identities. The participants reported “their need to feel and look different from their married selves” (p. 569). For these women, identity shifts seemed to be a natural occurrence in the post divorce process. The participants discussed changing their appearance, their surroundings, and the objects gained from their marriage (e.g., photos, jewelry). Some participants discussed keeping certain objects because of their children’s wishes.

The authors concluded that these identity shifts were seen as crucial to the women's post divorce adjustment and provided an avenue to move on in their lives.

In a landmark quantitative study, Hayes and Anderson (1993) examined the experiences of 338 divorced women between the ages of 40–75; the youngest of this group are baby boomers. These authors found that most of the participants regained a positive self identity within five years of the divorce, and along with that a new sense of freedom; sadly, many of them had not achieved economic security post-divorce. The study also suggested that social support through friends is a protective factor against the stress of post divorce adjustment and being employed also contributed positively to women's post divorce adjustment processes. This study was and continues to be unique within the divorce literature because it brought attention to women older than 40 who experienced a divorce.

Two studies based on the same sample ($n = 70$) of divorced mothers living in Israel were published three years apart. The sample included women ranging in ages from 23–56 (mean age = 39.2 years) who were at least two years post divorce. Rahav and Baum (2002) studied the women's changes in self identities and Baum, Rahav, and Sharon (2005) studied the changes in the women's self concept post divorce. Both studies indicate positive changes in self identity and self concept of the participants. Rahav and Baum (2002) found that socio-economic factors were highly correlated with positive changes in self identities. Baum, Rahav and Sharon (2005) reported that 75% of participants experienced a positive change in self concept (e.g., self esteem, feeling more competent) and were satisfied with their post divorce changes.

The divorce literature also included studies on the improved life satisfaction and the psychology of women post divorce. This category differs from the previous category (i.e., how a

woman creates a new identity post divorce) in that it allows researchers to understand how women feel about their lives post divorce.

Adjustment Task: Personal adjustment. An Australian study conducted by Stewart (2005) sampled 245 divorced women. The purpose of the quantitative study was to examine the women's intrapsychic mechanisms (e.g., sense of coherence, control, depression, grief) and how they may serve as mediators with demographic and contextual variables. The participant's ages ranged between 25–64 year of age ($m = 43$ years). The author found that Australian women who were either separated longer than five years and/or whose living standards had improved experienced greater life satisfaction than their counterparts. Life satisfaction can be thought of as the way a woman views herself in the world and within that experience how happy or satisfied she is. Another category I identified within the divorce literature is that of psychological well-being, this can be described as the way the divorced woman sees or experiences herself on the inside.

Several studies examined the psychological impact of divorce on women (Baum, 2007; Chang, 2003; Kalmun & Monden, 2006; Parra, Arkowitz, Hannah, & Vasquez, 1995). From contributors to the life course perspective, an older but relevant study (Caspi & Elder Jr., 1986) is included. The authors found that older citizens' "ability to cope with new situations and events is partly shaped by having had to cope with similar events in the past" (p. 25). They suggest that for people in the later stage of human development, those who have endured stressful life course events may be better poised to endure later life stressful events, simply because they had developed skills along the way. This concept of resilience formation may prove to be important when examining the 25 women who participated in this current study.

Chang (2003) examined the experiences of 73 divorced Korean immigrant women living in the United States; the participants ranged in age from 28-59 ($m=42.3$). She found in her qualitative study that a majority of the participants cited concrete reasons (e.g., abuse) for divorce versus nonKorean women who often cite more abstract reasons. In the AARP (Montenegro, 2004) survey, abuse was cited by 34% of the respondents as the reason for divorce; this is supported elsewhere in the peer reviewed divorce literature (Amato & Previti, 2003). Two studies concluded that a participant's health status and reasons for divorce were positively correlated with the participant's psychological well-being post-divorce (Chang, 2003; Sakraida, 2005).

Adjustment task: Financial. In a unique study, van Eeden-Moorefield, Pasley, Dolan, and Engel (2007) studied divorced women's financial security after they remarried. This study looked at 298 women who had repartnered, making it a nontypical divorce study; it examined how divorce impacts a woman's choices in her next partner and her management of finances in the new relationship. This study included women across the lifespan (no median age was reported) and found that for women in second marriages, financial involvement was greatly increased.

A longitudinal study which used data from the National Survey of Families and Households, Hilton and Anderson (2009) compared 459 married and 180 divorced women over a 10 year period. The study concluded that a midlife divorce has a more lasting impact on economic well being than either life satisfaction or happiness. Divorced women fared less well than their married counterparts in the area of wealth accumulation. This is an important consideration when taking baby boomer women into account.

In a 10-year follow-up study of 252 women, ages 35–59 (mean age = 47), who divorced, Duffy, Thomas, and Trayner (2002) sent out a questionnaire to inquire as to how the women were doing (38% of original sample participated in this follow-up study). They assert that divorce has a long-term effect on women who experience it. Women who reported their lives had improved post divorce indicated that they had higher levels of self esteem and more control over their lives. In this sample, income was a predictor of post divorce adjustment and older women in the sample reported feeling less financially secure than their younger counterparts; this was confirmed in other studies of midlife divorce (Amato, 2000; Hilton & Anderson, 2009). For those who had not repartnered in the 10 years since their divorce, many women reported they struggled with loneliness. In this sample, it would seem that the post divorce adjustment period is impacted negatively by financial struggles and subjective feelings of loneliness.

Divorce is particularly difficult for women's finances. Using data from the Survey of Labor and Income Dynamics (1998–2005), Gadalla (2009) compared men's and women's incomes after a divorce. The author reported that women's incomes reached 85% of the men's four years after the marital disruption. The first three years of the post-divorce adjustment were the hardest on women's incomes. Sheets and Braver (1996) used secondary data analysis based on 372 couples to conclude that men were more satisfied than women with the financial terms of divorce.

Within the category of post divorce adjustment, finance is often one of the first categories that people focus on. For divorced women, regaining financial footing takes longer than it does for divorced men and women who divorce later in life do not have as much time to rebuild their financial capital as their younger counterparts.

An interesting and unique qualitative study was conducted by Rettig (2007). The author examined the experiences of 10 women divorced from wealthy men (mean wealth = \$3–10 million); the participants ranged from 34–64 years of age ($m=47.5$). This study stood out among the others because of the high socio-economic status of the participants. The author describes the participants suffering injustices via the legal system, tax fraud (committed by the ex-husband), bankruptcy, and loss of custody of the children. She further describes the impact of sustained legal action on the participants (the husbands went to court more often). It would seem from the narratives of the participants that wealthy husbands often used their power to disrupt the lives of their divorcing partners, which in the end impeded post divorce adjustment. The finding of this research study also supports HET's exosystem and macrosystem perspective.

Many of the research studies indicated that divorced women traditionally do less well economically than divorced men, and divorced mothers of younger children tend to do less well financially than women with older children. Divorced women with higher education and greater economic independence often have a more positive post divorce adjustment than their counterparts (Hilton & Anderson, 2009).

Differences across cultures. A separate section has been devoted to research studies focusing on women from diverse cultural backgrounds. It is important to examine groups who are culturally diverse; this contributes to the literature by highlighting issues that may have been overlooked in the dominant culture research. I found published research looking at divorced Korean and Latina women (living in the U.S.), African American women, Israeli women (living in Israel), and Muslim women (living in Israel). Including studies on diverse cultures is important as they allow for an understanding of the wider lens of divorce and its impact on all

members of a society, which lends itself well to Bronfenbrenner's Human Ecological Theory with emphasis on the macrosystem.

Using three separate cultural categories, Parra, Arkowitz, Hannah, and Vasquez (1995) examined the coping strategies of 141 divorced women in the age range of 19–61 ($m=33.4$) who identified as Anglo, Chicana, or Mexicana. These women cited their husbands' infidelity and families as major contributors to the divorce. Among the Anglo women the most prominent reason cited for divorce was their husband's alcoholism; substance abuse is supported elsewhere in the divorce literature as a predictor of divorce (Amato & Previti, 2003; Collins, Ellickson, & Klein, 2007). The authors also reported that Mexican women were more likely to contest the divorce than their counterparts; the authors believe this to be a cultural difference, in that divorce is more stigmatizing in Mexico than in the United States. Chicana women were found to suffer the most distress on several measures when compared to Mexican or Anglo women post-divorce.

Lee and Bell-Scott (2009) highlight the struggles of five abused Korean immigrant women in the United States who experienced a divorce. The author reported that all participants moved to a position of positive post divorce adjustment. From a macro perspective, it was pointed out that this group of women needed community services delivered during the divorce process. These services included acknowledging the shame that Korean women face when divorcing their spouses, and having services delivered in their own language. The authors concluded that this group of women suffered doubly: at the hands of their families (e.g., shame of divorce) and then again as a result of larger organizations that do not sufficiently understand their language and culture (e.g., macrosystem). Despite these issues, the participants were able to endure the process and successfully navigate their way to a place that allowed them to start a new life post divorce.

In Molina and Abel's (2010) qualitative study, the authors provided an in-depth understanding of the lives of 24 divorced Latina women (24–55 years old) who survived interpersonal violence in their marriages. These women were struggling with mental health issues, immigration issues, repartnering, raising their children, and dealing with being a divorced woman within their culture. The authors point out the need for increased services in the areas of domestic violence, immigration, bilingual legal services, and increased social services. Many women in the sample reported feeling empowered as a result of leaving their abusive relationships and moving on with their lives.

In several studies, Molina (2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2005) highlighted the experiences of African American women who go through a divorce. She pointed out the necessity for clinicians to recognize the importance of self-esteem issues in this population and the intense feelings that African American women face post divorce. These women also have practical needs that social service providers can assist them with (e.g., child care, money, legal fees, child support, and housing). When violence is present, service delivery providers need to ensure that legal protection is in place early on in the divorce process keeping in mind that working women need to take time off from work to attend legal proceedings. Molina also points out that many African American women work outside the home and have done so for most of their lives. In contrast to women in the dominant culture who may need as much help finding employment (or education/skills training), it becomes necessary that service delivery providers recognize this fact and acknowledge occupational functioning and how divorce can impact it in the lives of African American women.

Using secondary data analysis, Varner and Mandara (2009) examined 443 African American mothers (40 years of age or older at last interview) who either entered or exited their

marriages during a 12 year period; the authors then compared the participants depressive symptoms with their continuously married counterparts. The authors report that the participants experiencing a divorce were less likely to have adequate financial resources and they were more likely to experience an increase in depressive symptoms.

Eldar-Avidan and Haj-Yahia (2000) conducted a qualitative study of 15 Israeli women who experienced a divorce, who had experienced domestic violence within their marriages. The authors reported that all but one participant was happy with their decision to divorce. The researchers report that participants struggled financially and socially, and the support they received from family, friends, and social services was beneficial. The authors pointed out that increased social services support post-divorce is necessary for women (especially mothers) leaving abusive relationships and seeking divorce.

Looking quantitatively at universal variables related to divorce adjustment across cultures, Cohen and Savaya (2003) studied 165 Muslim men and 147 Muslim women living in Israel who experienced a divorce. Factors that were correlated with positive divorce adjustment include being male, education, employment, satisfaction with the legal proceedings, fewer stressful events around the divorce, and improved living conditions after the divorce.

Divorce adjustment and HET. The studies reviewed above on divorce and women suggest that divorce impacts several areas in women's lives. Considering these areas from a HET perspective, five areas were identified as most pertinent. First, the microsystem that includes ending bonds formed during the marriage, promoting co-parenting bonds, financial stress and stability, incorporating health improvement behaviors and the need/desire for repartnering. Second, the mesosystem that involves ending bonds between families and social systems (e.g., friends and neighbors). Third, the exosystem that includes financial structures and social justice

(e.g., banks, employers, lawyers, and agencies), domestic violence services and occupational functioning (e.g., recognize the impact of divorce on work performance). Fourth, the macrosystem includes societal beliefs about divorced individuals (e.g., ex-partners should be antagonistic towards each other), and access of resources by nonnative speaking people.

The fifth and final HET system is the chronosystem. Evident in the literature is the recognition that many women are past the most painful part of the divorce adjustment period two to three years after the ending of the marriage (Hetherington, 2003). This is an important finding for this study and was a consideration for limiting participation in the current study to those who have been divorced a minimum of two years. Another factor that would fit into the chronosystem category is the age of the participants; in the current study, they are all 50–64 years of age. This speaks directly to the human development perspective of the chronosystem and places this group of women in a unique category.

Different Life Stages of Women's Development and Divorce Adjustment

Women's development and their relationships are interwoven; divorce at any stage in women's development can impact the development and disrupt the relational aspect of women's lives. Women define themselves and are often defined by those they love, take care of, and are in relationship with (Gilligan, 1982; McGoldrick, Anderson, & Walsh, 1989; Vandewater & Stewart, 2006). As women age they experience themselves and their relationships differently. In the early years of a woman's development, she is busy getting an education, starting her career, and forming a primary relationship with a partner. As she moves through early adulthood, most women begin having children thus expanding their definition of self to include the role of motherhood. As families age women often refocus on their careers, social relationships, retirement, and preparing to become a grandparent. All of these stages in women's lives include

forming new relationships, rebuilding identities, and incorporating new experiences into their lives.

Early adulthood (20-39). Women in their career-building and family-building year's best fit into this age category. In this category, women will enter the workforce and/or college. Thirty-four percent of women between the ages of 25–39 are college graduates (Bureau of the Census, 2008). At this phase in their development many women will marry and begin having children. In 2006, 75% of births in the United States were to women in the 20–34 age category (US Census Bureau, 2009).

Many women struggle with the idea of having a career and a family and they often have many tough choices to make (Baker, 2010). From a biological perspective, “[t]he changes that happen in the mommy brain are the most profound and permanent of a woman’s life” (Brizendine, 2006, p. 115). Fairly recently (2009) it was noted that in the United States the number of young, never married adults exceeded the number of married, young adults (Tucker, 2011). As women approach 40, they tend to experience a developmental shift within themselves and within their relationships.

Midlife (40–59). In this current baby boomer divorced women study, 15 of the 25 participants fell into this developmental category (i.e., 60%). Researchers are reporting that for midlife women, it is the quality not quantity of relationships that influence women’s emotional well-being (Vandewater & Stewart, 2006). For researchers, this stage of women’s development is turning out to be different than previously thought.

Two researchers (Clarke Hurd & Griffin, 2007) interviewed 44 women ages 50–70, looking for different ways women identify with their physical appearance; and the potential impact on idea of beauty and their ideals of femininity. They used the life course perspective and

asked women about the messages they received from their mothers while growing up and through the years. The authors were interested in how these women ‘do gender’ and what influences families and society had on them during their formative years, and how things changed as they grew older. An interesting observation was made about this group of women: “An older woman’s body image is the product of the negotiation and construction of meanings across the life course through interactions with significant others” (p. 716).

One interesting study (Shallcross, Ford, Floerke, & Mauss, 2013) looked at the impact of acceptance and reduction of negative affect in aging populations. The authors found support for the idea of acceptance being able to impact anxiety and anger (not sadness) as people age. This is important because it is a skill that is believed to be more easily achievable as adults enter into their older years. These authors believe acceptance is a pathway that explains “the inverse relationship between age and negative affect” (p. 745).

In the United States during the past century, women’s life spans have increased by about 25 years (Brizendine, 2006). For women ages 45–54 it turns out that they experience the greatest peak in income (US Census Bureau, 2008), and according to Strauch (2010) the “midlife crisis...has turned out to be a myth” (p. 56). Her findings suggest that midlife women are busy recreating themselves and having new experiences.

Findings from researchers indicate that as adults enter and go through midlife they experience greater emotional regulation, experience increased self-esteem, greater confidence and assertiveness, and the interest and ability to try new and interesting things (Helson, Jones, & Kwan, 2002; Mroczek & Avron III, 2005). This is an intriguing idea: just as women are accessing and acquiring more of themselves (e.g., increases in confidence, esteem, and

adventure), it may developmentally and emotionally prove to be the optimal time to weather a divorce and create a whole new life.

In her review of research articles focusing on self-transcendence in later-midlife women, Wiggs (2010) reported that “[m]idlife is a multifaceted life stage” (p. 219). She questioned the current societal view that midlife women are on the decline. Instead she reported that researchers are verifying what Gilligan (1982) theorized about women’s development “being grounded in relationship and caring rather than logic and justice” (Wiggs, 2010, p. 221). She reported that self-transcendence (i.e., the inward journey) is a normal part of the life course and should be encouraged in women as they enter mid-life. Perhaps Dag Hammarskjöld was right: “The longest journey is the journey inwards.”

Transitioning from parenting a child living in the home to an adult child exiting the home is a part of the journey of midlife for many women. For parents in midlife, the idea of the empty nest syndrome is deeply in question (Mitchell & Lovegreen, 2009). For parents who found themselves involved in various roles, and felt accomplished in several areas of their lives, the event of a child leaving the parental home seemed to take on less significance (Fingerman, Chen, Hay, Cichy, & Lefkowitz, 2006).

Strauch (2010) reported that people in midlife often experience an increase in well-being, with most women reporting the onset of menopause was experienced as a relief. On average a woman between the ages of 51–52 is most likely to have entered menopause; as the ovaries stop producing hormones women find their levels of estrogen and oxytocin drop. These new levels impact emotions and how women interact with their environments (Brizendine, 2006).

Menopause is a 20th century phenomenon. In the late 19th and early 20th century “the average age of death for women in the United States was forty-nine—two years before the

typical women ends her menstrual cycle” (Brizendine, 2006, p. 155). In the United States, today’s woman can expect to live 25 years past the onset of menopause. This time of life is a recent phenomenon and one many researchers have yet to completely understand; this is highly relevant to this current baby boomer study. A connection between longer, healthier life spans and the increase in divorce rates is supported in the divorce literature (Wu & Schimmele, 2007).

According to Brizendine (2006) the term postmenopausal zest (PMZ) coined by Margaret Mead described a time in a woman’s life when she is no longer “concerned with birth control, PMS, painful cramps, or other monthly gynecological inconveniences” (p. 142). Many women in the PMZ phase of life, experience life from a different perspective; they can make different choices, live life for themselves, and can look for different adventures. At this stage of life many women find themselves going back to school, work, or moving towards new types of accomplishments; all of these areas contribute to a woman’s sense of well-being. This phase of their lives can be focused primarily on them (Brizendine, 2006). This midlife stage offers women opportunities to reinvent themselves.

For women in this phase of their development it would seem that new adventures are a natural part of the developmental process, these may include: going back to school, starting a new career, finding a new partner, becoming grandmothers, and rediscovering one’s self. Current data on later midlife women who have a college education (i.e., bachelor’s degree) can be broken down by age: 20.2% age 45-49, 19.4% age 50-54, 18.3% age 55-59, and 16% age 60-64. Current data on women who have earned Master’s degrees: between the ages of 50-54, 8.1% ; women between the ages of 55-59, 9.4%; women between the ages of 60-64, 11.1% (Russell, 2012).

In 2008, women aged 55–64 experienced a 6.4% increase in labor force participation, the highest rate across all age groups (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). As women enter into the later stage of their development, it would appear that this current stage of their lives could be conceived as a jumping off point for the stage that will ultimately characterize their existence.

Late life (60-79). Ten of the participants in this current study were in this stage of their development at the time of the interview. As women continue to age, cognition can become impaired (e.g., dementia). Older adults are at greater risk for cognitive impairment which can ultimately affect their independence (Yu, Ryan, Schaie, Willis, & Kolanowski, 2009). Research also supports the idea that the more control a person has in later years (i.e., 65 plus) the more of a protective factor it is for overall physical and emotional health benefits (Infurna, Gerstorf, & Zarit, 2011).

Women in the late life stage of development often find themselves caring for their elderly parents (either in their homes or visiting them in extended care facilities); and in some cases their children and grandchildren are often moving in with them due to divorce and/or financial crisis (Wassel, 2006). For women in the later life stage of development, caring for others can negatively impact their own health and psychological well-being (Goodman, Tan, Ernandes, & Silverstein, 2008). This is important, because recent research found a correlation between later life depression and an increase in mortality (Hamer, Bates, & Mishra, 2011).

Liechty and Yarnal (2010) looked at aging women and their body image and the impact on their identities through a life course perspective. A qualitative approach was used to study 13 women (e.g., five were divorced), ages 60–69, and their thoughts and views on themselves, the aging process, and how they viewed themselves. The authors reported the participants tended to deemphasize personal appearance while physical health and internal attributes were prioritized.

They also found women's attitudes had changed towards their aging bodies, which allowed them to accept the aging process. As time passed these women experienced shifts in their body image and self perception, their "attitudes and values, fluctuated and changed in their later years" (p. 1214). This research is important in light of the current study in that it highlights how aging women shift in their values and self perceptions, and the potential impact on their identity post divorce.

Women define themselves by their relationships and it is in those relationships that women spend most of their time. Many are grandmothers, with grandchildren ranging in ages from infant to young adult. For women in this stage of their development it comes down to the next generation, the legacy and how they manage that (Hebblethwaite & Norris, 2011; King & Wynne, 2004; Waite, 2009).

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This qualitative study explored how baby boomer women experienced a later life divorce. Retrospective data was gathered through in-depth interviews with 25 women, who were asked to reflect on their divorce and post divorce experiences. In this chapter, a rationale for using modified grounded theory is given; then a description of the participants, sampling, and data collection procedures are described.

Rationale for Modified Grounded Theory Methods

A modified grounded theory was used as the guiding methodology for this study because so little is known about baby boomer women's experiences of the divorce process. A main goal of the study was to develop a theory of divorce adjustment inductively from the data using the Glaser and Strauss (1967) and La Rossa (2005) grounded theory method. Inductive analysis allows the divorce adjustment theory to emerge from the data. Throughout this study's data collection and analytic process I developed and formed ideas, themes, and concepts from the data; and these ideas were further refined through comparison across data and themes.

Researcher's Perspective and Credibility

"Analysts, as well as research participants, bring to the investigation biases, beliefs, and assumptions. This is not necessarily a negative happening[...]" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 80). The researcher's goal is to recognize when bias enters into the analytic process, and this self awareness is one that requires researchers, engaging in modified grounded theory process, to be aware of their own beliefs and assumptions. Corbin and Strauss (2008) purport that it is important for researchers to recognize their personal biases and experiences and use them in a way to augment the research process.

In order to address my personal biases, I kept an audio journal of my “responses and feelings” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 81) which allowed me to question my stance and how it may have influenced my data collection and analytic processes during the data evaluation phase. It also reminded me of the interview and provided some perspective on my thoughts and experience of the interview after it was over.

My objective was to discover and learn from the participant’s perspective what it was like to have lived their experiences. I did not want to accept things at face value, as my goal as a researcher was to question everything and assume nothing (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This process of self awareness and self reflection, before and after the interviews, helped me as a researcher to be aware of my personal beliefs and utilize them to enhance the analytic process. Some personal biases that I brought to this research included: believing that women suffered as a result of the divorce (e.g., financially, emotionally, relationally); assuming the women who struggled the most during the marriage would have an easier post divorce adjustment; assuming that women who had careers and were financially stable post divorce would be in the resolved category of post divorce adjustment.

Coding

“Coding is not a precise science; it’s primarily an interpretive act” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 4). I used three approaches to coding. First I conducted open coding (i.e., initial coding), a process during data analysis where I identified themes from the interview (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Saldaña, 2009). Saldaña (2009) describes open coding as a “First Cycle method” (p. 42) that occurs in “the beginning stages of data analysis that fracture or split the data into individually coded segments” (p. 42). During the open coding phase of data analysis the goal is “to remain open to all possible theoretical directions indicated by your reading of the data” (Charmaz, 2006,

p. 46). The next two phases of data analysis involve axial and selective coding methods.

Axial coding and selective coding are considered “Second Cycle methods” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 42). These are latter stage coding methods for data analysis that “constantly compare, reorganize, or focus the codes into categories” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 42). Once the open coding was completed, I moved to axial coding. This process allowed me to organize the codes into categories that provided a framework for analysis (Saldaña, 2009). I looked for similarities within the data that allowed me to place them in various categories or themes; these categories were modified throughout the analytic process (Saldaña, 2009). Charmaz (2006) describes coding as the process where researchers label sections of data “that depict what each segment is about. Coding distills data, sorts them, and gives us a handle for making comparisons with other segments of data” (p. 3).

Finally, I used selective coding which allowed me the ability to further identify and refine categories and to see relationships within the data. Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe selective coding as a “process of integrating and refining the theory” (p. 143). Through this process Corbin and Strauss (2008) talk about the researcher “moving from description to conceptualization” (p. 266). This allows the researcher to have a “core category that offers one plausible explanation” (p. 266) and “see how other categories can be linked to it” (p. 266). This process examines relationships, filling in, refining and developing categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Selective coding is a more directed abstract process, a story building process that allowed me to connect categories within the data. From this process, I arrived at a grounded theory of post-divorce adjustment (Creswell, 2007).

Recruitment

Recruiting was done via word of mouth, flyers in public venues (Appendix A), a radio ad

in Genesee County, an ad with NASW ‘The Bridges’ magazine, Craig’s list, and Facebook. I offered each participant a \$50 gift card to sit down for a 60- to 120-minute recorded interview; prior to the first interview I contacted each prospective participant by phone to conduct a pre-screening interview. This was done to determine if she fit the predetermined criteria (i.e., divorced at or after the age of 48, current age 50–64, parented with ex-husband, two years post divorce). Once I determined that she fit the criteria, I sent a demographic questionnaire and the consent form to her mailing address (see Appendices B, D). I also informed the prospective participant that the interview would be audio-taped, but only I and my chair would have access to the recorded information. All participants agreed to be audio-taped.

Once the participant agreed to be interviewed we chose a place for the interview to occur, frequently the participant’s home. On several occasions the interview took place in my office and on two occasions we met in a local restaurant. On every occasion where the meeting occurred outside the participant’s home, the researcher offered the participant gas money, although none accepted the offer. At the meeting time, the researcher and participant first reviewed the purpose of the study, the consent form, and I asked if she had any questions or concerns. Each participant reported that she was comfortable with the parameters and none declined to participate.

Participants

The sample included 25 divorced women who all met the age criteria of belonging to the baby boomer cohort (i.e. ages 50–64) and were divorced at or beyond the age of 48 years. All participants were divorced at least two years; this length of time was chosen because it is a reasonable minimum estimate of time that most people need to go through the post divorce adjustment process (Hetherington, 2003). Participants all parented with the man they divorced (e.g., biological or adopted child). This criterion was chosen as the literature is clear that women

with children who divorce often have a different experience than those who do not have children (Hetherington, 2003; Hilton & Anderson, 2009; Wang & Amato, 2000).

Structure of the Interview

The interview took place in one of the following locations: my office located in Grand Blanc, MI: the participant's home; or a local restaurant. Of the 25 interviews, four took place in my office, 19 took place in the participant's home, and two took place in a local restaurant. All locations were chosen by the participants and were private; the time length for the interview was 60–90 minutes.

I began the process by reviewing the purpose of the study with the participant, looking over the consent form (appendix D), asking her if she had any questions and addressing them to the best of her satisfaction. I reminded her about the length of interview. I also reminded her that payment would be made at the end of the completed interview. I reviewed the demographic form to make sure it was completed. I was then able to describe the process the interview would follow and I addressed any questions or apprehension expressed by the participant. The most common question was, "Is this confidential?", I assured them it was and no names would be used in the final write up, and that identifying features would be masked in order to maintain confidentiality. I also explained to each participant that she would have control over whether or not the interview continued should she start to feel distress (i.e., that she could have a break or stop the interview at any point in time). None stopped the process, although one participant started to cry and I paused the audio recorder allowing the participant to get a glass of water. Every participant declined my offer for a list of therapists in the area.

The semi-structured interview protocol included nine open-ended questions with related prompts (see Appendix C). This design allowed participants to give a retrospective narrative on

their experiences. This interview method is consistent with the grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and allowed me flexibility to follow the lead of the participants.

Data Management and Analysis

The researcher made use of the constant comparison process throughout data collection and analysis comparing different types of data to other data and categories that emerged (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Each type of data was used in the comparative process (e.g., questionnaire, memos, field notes, and interview data). Six of the semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim by myself and a paid transcriber completed the remainder (i.e., 19 interviews). Participants were assigned a pseudonym in order to protect confidentiality. The digital recordings were deleted after transcription and the transcripts are and will continue to be stored in a locked file cabinet after the conclusion of the study.

After each interview, field notes were audio recorded. The notes included my general impressions, observations, and possible interpretations. The credibility of the data was enhanced through these field notes that were used as an additional source of information during data analysis. The audio notes reminded me of my experience during the interview process and allowed me to more fully incorporate use of self into the research process.

Two types of data were collected and analyzed in this study. From the demographic questionnaires descriptive data were collected. These data provided me mostly demographic information on the participants including dates of marriage, divorce, age of participant, ages of children and grandchildren, employment, education, salary, and health issues. The second type of data collected were the interview data. This contained the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of the participants about their marriages, and a rich narrative about their parenting, their divorce, and

the adjustment process. This rich set of data provided the bulk of the information used in the study results and conclusion.

Data analysis began by coding each interview using NVivo 9 software (QSR, 2010). The data were initially coded using open coding line-by-line (or in some cases a grouping of lines was used) to form the initial descriptors that depicted the participants' lived experiences. Themes began to emerge; the major themes included events and processes: divorce, therapy, starting over, dating, building new social support, emotional reactions, and identity changes. From this point axial coding was utilized to further condense the coding into larger themes and categories. Saldana (2009) writes that "axial coding is used to constantly compare, reorganize, or 'focus' the codes into categories, prioritize them to develop 'axis' categories around which others revolve and synthesize them to formulate a central or core category that becomes the foundation for explication of a grounded theory" (p. 42).

Once axial coding was completed I began to employ selective coding. This is the third and final phase of the coding process in this study. Selective coding takes the main category and begins to look for and discover relationships between it and other categories; this process allowed me to refine and develop themes and categories and show interrelationships (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During and after this process a story of baby boomer women's post divorce adjustment process emerged.

This structure provided me the elements needed to begin to understand the divorce adjustment process of this group of women. The process was flexible enough to allow the semi-structured interview to change as needed to accommodate the needs of the participants.

Participant Demographics

This section will describe the demographics of the 25 participants. It is my hope that the

reader will gain a deeper understanding of each participant and have a snapshot into the lives of each. All of the women were married only once prior to the divorce, parented at least one child with the ex-husband, was at or beyond the age of 48 at the time of the divorce, was between the ages of 50–64 at the time of the interview, and was at least two years post divorce.

Within the descriptions, pertinent information is included to introduce the reader to the sample. Also included are two subjective characteristics I provide about each participant in relation to her economic security and her health. The literature suggests that two factors are important to women who have adjusted post divorce: good health and economic security (Sakraida, 2005; Thabes, 1997). All ages listed, for the participants and their children, were at the time of the interview. Some additional details were added to highlight some interesting variations in the sample (e.g., P23's husband came out to her that he was gay, P13 currently lives platonically with a man). A summary table is also provided after this section to allow the reader to see the relevant attributes of the sample.

Two questions on the demographic sheet (see Appendix B) asked participants to rate themselves on their economic security and physical health. For the question “current economic security,” five possible responses were provided for the participants to circle: very insecure, insecure, neutral, secure, and very secure. Of note, only P9 and P15 circled ‘very insecure;’ P13, P16, P18, P20, and P22 circled ‘insecure’ on the demographic sheet. Under the question about current health concerns, only two participants (i.e., P12, P13) circled ‘fair’ when asked about their subjective experience. All of the remaining 23 participants answered either good or excellent; no one circled poor.

Participant 1. P1 is 58 years old, resides in Michigan, and self describes as White, European ancestry, and a Baptist Christian. She has two adult children, a daughter who lives an

hour away and a son who currently resides with her: she is not a grandmother. She was married for 22 years and divorced in 2008; both initiated the divorce. She reported her ex-husband struggled with severe mental illness, probably PTSD from the Vietnam War and she could not live with him any longer. The divorce took two months to complete. She is a retired skilled trades person from General Motors and currently works full time as a nurse providing in home health care. She has some college and is licensed as an LPN. She earns between \$50,001 and \$70,000 per year, and circled 'secure' on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. She reported she is struggling with her weight management and cholesterol, and circled 'good' in that category. She is currently not repartnered and is not open to dating.

Participant 2. P2 is 64 years old, resides in Michigan, and self describes as White, born again Christian. She has three children: two sons and a daughter (adopted). She is a grandmother to 11 grandchildren. She was married for 31.5 years and divorced in 1997; both initiated the divorce. He fell in love with his affair partner, and she reported he had started drinking alcohol again. The divorce took nine months to complete. She is employed part time providing in-home health care, has a high school diploma, and earns less than \$10,000 per year, and circled 'very secure' on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. Next to the question she wrote in, "The Lord Jesus Christ has met every need." She denied any health concerns and circled 'good' in that category. She is currently not repartnered and is not open to dating.

Participant 3. P3 is 64 years old, resides in Michigan, and self describes as Black, Full Gospel Christian. She had four children: her oldest son who was murdered in 2000, three adult children survive: two sons and a daughter. She is grandmother to 14 grandchildren. She was married for 18 years and divorced in 2000; she initiated the divorce. She reports her ex used

illicit substances and had multiple affairs. The divorce took 12 months to complete. She is a retired autoworker, has a high school diploma, earns between \$10,001 and \$30,000 per year, and circled 'secure' on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. She denies any current health concerns and circled 'good' in that category, although 12 years ago she did suffer a heart attack. She is currently not repartnered but reported she is open to dating.

Participant 4. P4 is 56 years old, resides in northern Michigan, and self describes as White, French Canadian, and denies any religious affiliation. She has two adult daughters and is a grandmother of four. Her daughters both live in the southern half of Michigan and she sees them periodically. She was married for 30 years and divorced in 2004; she initiated the divorce. She fell in love with her affair partner and left her marriage. The divorce took 12 months to complete. She is employed 24 hours per week, she has a mental health professional degree, earns between \$30,001 and \$50,000 per year, and circled 'secure' on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. She reported she is an "extremely good saver." She denies any health concerns and circled 'good' in that category. She is currently repartnered and they live an hour apart. She has lived with him on and off and she reported she just "can't seem to make it work."

Participant 5. P5 is 62 years old, resides in Michigan, and self describes as White, Lutheran. She has two children: a married son and a daughter, and is not a grandmother yet but reports she is looking forward to it someday. She also is a step mom to two adult stepdaughters. She was married for 27 years and has been divorced for 15 years; her ex-husband initiated the divorce, he fell in love with his affair partner. He has an advanced degree and worked within the public school system. The divorce took three months to complete. She is a retired elementary schoolteacher (2005), has a bachelor's degree + 30 credits, earns between \$30,001 and \$50,000

per year, and circled 'secure' on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. She denied any health concerns and circled 'good' in that category; she reported she had polio as an infant. She is currently remarried and is very happy.

Participant 6. P6 is 59 years old, resides in Michigan, and self describes as Caucasian, a Christian who attends Nazarene Church. She has three children adult sons, she is not a grandmother. She was married for 30 years and divorced in 2006; she initiated the divorce. She described her husband as an angry narcissist, prone to temper tantrums, and who had several affairs. She really struggled for many years about divorcing him because she was very afraid of his reaction. The divorce took nine months to complete, and she reported it was "so much easier" than she expected. She is employed and reported she earns between \$10,000 and \$30,000 per year, and circled 'neutral' on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. She denied any health concerns and circled 'good' in that category. She is currently not repartnered and is not interested in dating.

Participant 7. P7 is 61 years old, resides in Michigan, and self described as Caucasian. She has one adult daughter, and is a grandmother of two. She was married for 26 years and divorced in 2000; she initiated the divorce. The divorce took 18 months to complete. She reported that her husband became addicted to cocaine and other drugs, became very unstable, abusive, and financially irresponsible. She is retired. She reported she earns between \$30,001 and \$50,000 per year, and circled 'neutral' on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. She reported some health concerns (e.g., diabetes) and circled 'good' in that category. She is currently repartnered and they live in separate homes.

Participant 8. P8 is 60 years old, resides in Michigan, and self described as Caucasian, German American, with no religious affiliation. She has three adult sons and is not a

grandmother. She was married for 22.5 years and divorced in 2006; she initiated the divorce. She reported her ex had multiple affairs. The divorce took 18 months to complete. She is employed part time, as a consultant in the business sector. She has a master's degree in Education, earns between \$50,001 and \$70,000 per year, and circled 'secure' on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. She denied any health concerns and circled 'excellent' in that category. She is currently not repartnered and is not dating. She also reported that she is deeply involved with yoga, spirituality, and homeopathic healing.

Participant 9. P9 is 60 years old, resides in Michigan, and self described as White, German/English descent, Christian. She had four children, but only two are living. She has an adult son and an adult, and she is not a grandmother. One child died at birth and one shortly before the divorce. She was married for 33 years and divorced in 2003; she initiated the divorce six years after her son's death. She cites she had several affairs and was unhappy in her marriage: she felt unimportant to her ex and she reported that her ex was obsessed with money. The divorce took eight months to complete. She has several rental homes that she has invested in and manages them; she is also employed full time as an office manager and advocate at a local nonprofit agency. She has a bachelor's degree, earns between \$30,001 and \$50,000 per year, and circled 'very insecure' on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. She reported in the past she did have melanoma but it is no longer a worry for her; she did not cite any other health concerns and circled 'good' in that category. She is currently repartnered; they do live together although she indicated that she would like to end the relationship but hasn't figured out how to do that just yet.

Participant 10. P10 is 59 years old, resides in Michigan, and self described as Caucasian, with no religious affiliation. She has two children, an adult son and an adult daughter: she is not

a grandmother. She was married for 32 years and divorced in 2008; her ex-husband initiated the divorce and left her for his affair partner. The divorce took four months to complete. She is a retired schoolteacher, has a master's degree in education, earns between \$30,001 and \$50,000 per year, and circled 'neutral' on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. She also reported she is currently unemployed; after her divorce she got a part-time job at a local bookstore but she was laid off. She reported she struggles with rheumatoid arthritis and circled 'neutral' in that category. She is currently not repartnered but she is dating.

Participant 11. P is 60 years old and resides in Montana, the only participant who did not live in the state of Michigan. She self describes as White, Dutch/Irish descent, raised Catholic and currently not practicing any organized religion. She describes herself as a very spiritual person. She has three children, two adult sons and an adult daughter: she is not a grandmother. She was married for 19 years and divorced in 2001; her ex-husband initiated the divorce. They lived together prior to the marriage and had a child at the time of the marriage. He had an affair and left her for his affair partner. The divorce took 18 months to complete. She is employed full time as a health care professional, has a master's degree and is + two years' post grad, earns between \$30,001 and \$50,000 per year, and circled 'secure' on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. She denied any health concerns and circled 'excellent' in that category. She is currently not repartnered and is dating.

Participant 12. P12 is 54 years old, resides in Michigan, and self described as Caucasian, Pentecostal. She has two children, a 33-year-old daughter and a 25-year-old son; her son cannot live independently due to some developmental issues and currently lives with his father. She is grandmother to three grandchildren. She was married for 31 years and divorced in 2009; she initiated the divorce. She reported her ex was controlling and she was no longer in love with him.

The divorce took eight months to complete. She is employed full time as a manager in a financial services firm, she has a bachelor's degree, earns between \$50,001 and \$70,000 per year, and circled 'neutral' on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. She reported she has some stomach issues related to stress, and circled 'fair' in that category. She is currently not repartnered but is open to dating. She does have a male friend (i.e., platonic) that she spends time with, and reports that he is not open to dating her.

Participant 13. P13 is 53 years old, resides in Michigan, and self described as White, Irish/English, Lutheran. She has two adult daughters, she is not a grandmother. She was married for 27 years and divorced in 2010; she initiated the divorce. She cites the reason as "falling out of love" and wanting a better life and to do more things. The divorce took three months to complete. She is employed full time in the media field; she has some technical school, earns between \$10,001 and \$30,000 per year, and circled 'insecure' on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. She reported she is overweight and has water retention and circled 'fair' in that category. She is currently not repartnered, but has invited a man to live with her. She would like them to start dating, but reported for now they are just friends. She also reported he pays her rent and this helps offset her living expenses, they also attend events and functions together. This represents a unique case within this study, in that a man lives with her but they have a platonic relationship.

Participant 14. *It was determined that this participant should be excluded from the study, due to the length of time it took for her divorce to occur (i.e., 19 years).* P14 is 60 years old, resides in Michigan, and self describes as White, and affiliated with a nondenominational church she describes as "Holiness." She has two adult children, a son and a daughter who currently resides with her: she is not a grandmother. She was married for 36 years and divorced

in 2003; her ex-husband initiated the divorce. She reports he was severely mentally ill and very unstable; she reports living with him “was really dangerous.” The divorce took 19 years to complete. She is currently unemployed, worked in manufacturing, and has some college. She earns less than \$10,000 per year, and circled ‘very secure’ on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. She denies any health concerns and circled ‘good’ in that category. She is currently not repartnered and has no plans to date. This case was unique in that she fled the marriage in 1984 taking her children with her; she reported her husband had severe mental illness and was very abusive. In 2003 her son contacted his father and participant’s ex-husband initiated divorce proceedings. She is also heavily involved in a religion that she called holy and nondenominational; when this researcher tried to clarify she was not willing to further define her religious beliefs and practices.

Participant 15. P15 is 53 years old, resides in Michigan, and self describes as Hispanic, with no religious affiliation. She has two children, an adult son and a 17-year-old daughter: both reside with their father. She is not a grandmother. She was married for 19 years and divorced in 2009; she initiated the divorce. She reported her ex would no longer be sexual with her and he was obsessed with electronic devices. The divorce took 12 months to complete. She is currently unemployed looking for work, and working part time when she can. She has a Masters degree, earns between \$10,001 and \$30,000 per year, and circled ‘very insecure’ on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. She denied any health concerns and circled ‘excellent’ in that category. She also reported that she is depressed and is receiving treatment from a psychiatrist. She is currently not repartnered and is open to dating.

Participant 16. P16 is 50 years old, resides in Michigan, and self described as Asian. She has two adult sons: both are college students. She is not a grandmother. She was married for 26

years and divorced in 2010; her ex-husband initiated the divorce. He had an affair and decided to end the marriage. The divorce took six months to complete. She is employed part time as a program assistant, has three years of college, earns between \$30,001 and \$50,000 per year, and circled 'insecure' on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. She reports she suffers pain from an injury (e.g., fall down the stairs at home) that fractured her spine. She is able to walk but reports she is still in pain and cannot afford physical therapy: she circled 'good' in that category labeled health. She is currently not repartnered and is not open to dating.

Participant 17. P17 is 64 years old, resides in Michigan, and self describes as White, American, Jewish. She has three children an adult married daughter, and her twin adult sons. One son is severely disabled and lives in a group home: she is not a grandmother. Every week she picks up her son and brings him home for dinner and a visit: she owns a van that allows her to transport him. She was married for 35 years and divorced in 2008; both she and her ex-husband initiated the divorce. She cited he had multiple affairs. The divorce took one month to complete. She is a retired schoolteacher and has a BA +30, earns between \$50,001 and \$70,000 per year, and circled 'secure' on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. She is a breast cancer survivor (in the past five years) and circled 'good' in that category. She is currently not repartnered and is not open to dating.

Participant 18. P18 is 60 years old, resides in Michigan, and self describes as White, Norwegian and Polish, Catholic. She has two children, an adult daughter and an adult son: she is not a grandmother. She was married for 23 years and divorced in 2001; she initiated the divorce. The divorce took 18 months to complete. She reports her husband had multiple affairs, accrued a great deal of debt during the marriage, lost his business and filed for bankruptcy. She lost her

home (e.g., due to bankruptcy) and had to start from the ground floor when she divorced. She works part time as a substitute teacher and is looking for full time work. She has a master's degree, earns between \$10,000 and \$30,000 per year, and circled 'insecure' on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. She denied any health concerns and circled 'good' in that category. She is currently not repartnered but dates occasionally.

Participant 19. P19 is 56 years old, resides in Michigan, and self describes as White, Czechoslovakian, German and English, Catholic. She has three children, 2 adult daughters and an adult son. She is a step mom to a 10-year-old boy: she is one of two remarried participants. She is the only one with a minor age stepchild. She is not a grandmother. She was married for 23 years and divorced in 2004; she initiated the divorce. She reported her ex-husband was a severe alcoholic and very abusive towards her. The divorce took 10 months to complete. She is employed full time as a speech therapist in a local school district, has a master's degree, earns more than \$70,000 per year, and circled 'secure' on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. She denied any health concerns and circled 'excellent' in that category. She does report she thinks she is going through menopause. She is currently remarried and is 'very happy'.

Participant 20. P20 is 55 years old, resides in Michigan, and self describes as White, German and Polish descent, Catholic. She had four children including one son who died at the age of 28, during the time she was divorcing. She has three remaining adult sons, she is not a grandmother. She was married for 29.5 years and divorced in 2006; she initiated the divorce. The divorce took four months to complete. She reported her husband drank a great deal of alcohol and had been an alcoholic for most of their marriage. She works full time as a secretary in a local public school district (year round) has some college but no degree, earns between \$30,001 and

\$50,000 per year, and circled 'insecure' on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. She reported she has some vision problems but other than that, she is healthy and circled 'good' in that category. She is currently repartnered but they live in separate homes.

Participant 21. P21 is 50 years old, resides in Michigan, and self described as African American, Baptist. She has four children: two adult sons and two adult daughters: she is a grandmother. She was married for 19 years and divorced in 2010; she initiated the divorce. She cites her ex's affairs and lack of monetary contribution as reasons for the divorce. The divorce took three months to complete. She is unemployed and used to work as a nursing assistant; she currently is on Social Security Disability. A few years ago she was in a severe automobile accident and could no longer work in her field. She has a high school diploma, earns between \$10,001 and \$30,000 per year, and circled 'neutral' on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. She denies any health concerns and circled 'excellent' in that category. She is currently open to dating but is not repartnered.

Participant 22. P22 is 55 years old, resides in Michigan, and self described as Caucasian, Christian. She has two adult sons and an adult daughter. She is not a grandmother. She was married for 30 years and divorced in 2005; her ex-husband initiated the divorce. She reported her ex was emotionally abusive and controlling; she did not ask for the divorce. The divorce took two and one half years to complete. She reported during the interview that her husband withheld money from her, did not always pay his share of the bills or the alimony, and continually took her to court. She is a full-time graduate student. She did not work for many years; she wanted to stay at home and raise her children. She earns between \$30,001 and \$50,000 per year, and circled 'insecure' on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. She reported she has several health concerns and circled 'good' in that category. When I asked her to describe

her marriage she replied;

I guess because all those years I never really saw it as an abusive situation. I didn't have words to put to it. I always thought it was me. I always thought I had do it this way or that way and like I was trying to morph into somebody I wasn't that would make that person happy and nothing I did ever made him happy and that he was always angry at me.

She is dating someone on a steady basis (e.g., she calls him her partner); she denied any sexual activity with him. She reported that he has "a lot of debt."

Participant 23. P23 is 64 years old, resides in Michigan and self described as Caucasian, Lutheran. She has an adult married son (with 2 minor children) and she has an adult daughter, who currently lives with her and is attending college. She reported she loves being a grandmother. She was married for 34 years and divorced in 2004; her ex-husband initiated the divorce, after he came out to her that he was gay. This makes her a unique case within this research study. She also reported he was a "severe drinker" during the later part of their marriage: since he came out and has repartnered she reports his drinking has ceased. Her ex-husbands relationship with his son was severely strained when he told him that he was gay and is divorcing his mom: they have since reconciled. The divorce took four months to complete. She is a retired schoolteacher, has a BS +30, earns between \$50,001 and \$70,000 per year, and circled 'neutral' on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. She denied any health concerns and circled 'good' in that category. She is not interested in dating or repartnering.

Participant 24. P24 is 55 years old, resides in Michigan, and self described as White with no religious affiliation. She has one adult son and is not a grandmother. She was married for

30 years and was divorced in 2009; she initiated the divorce. She cites her ex as being emotionally abusive and controlling. The divorce took six months to complete. She is employed full time, works as a technician. She is a high school graduate with some college, earns between \$30,001 and \$50,000 per year, and circled 'neutral' on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. She denied any health concerns and circled 'excellent' in that category. She reported she is currently repartnered and lives with him; he pays half of the expenses and she believes "that is more than fair."

Participant 25. P25 is 51 years old. She resides in Michigan, self describes as Hispanic, Catholic, and has two sons who are nine and 12 years of age. This makes her unique within the sample (e.g., two minor children). She was married for 11 years and was divorced in 2009; both initiated the divorce. She cited her ex was emotionally cruel, abusive and controlling. The divorce took six months to complete. She is trying to operate a home based marketing business; she has been looking for full time employment for several years. She was given a severance package when her job in a major corporation was eliminated. This was difficult for her as she was used to having financial independence. She has an MBA and earns less than \$10,000 per year. She circled 'neutral' on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. She denies any health concerns and circled 'excellent' in that category. She reported she is not currently repartnered and is dating.

Participant 26. P26 is 56 years old; she resides in Michigan, self described as Caucasian, of east european descent, Orthodox, and has a 33-year-old son. She is not a grandmother. She was married for 24 years and divorced in 2003; she initiated the divorce. She reported that her ex had severe pain, was depressed and was hooked on prescription pain medications. She also reported her ex was controlling, manipulative and abusive towards her.

The divorce took four months to complete. She moved from a southwestern state to Michigan to start a new job right after the divorce was completed. She is employed full time in a school setting, has an MA +20 credits, earns more than \$70,000 per year and circled ‘very secure’ on the demographic sheet under the question - current economic security. She also denied any current health concerns and circled ‘excellent’ on the demographic sheet under the ‘any current health concerns’ section. She is repartnered, but does not live with him.

Demographic data summary. These 25 women lived in long-term marriages and parented children. Seven are grandmothers, and all of them divorced at the age of 48 years or later. They currently are at least two years past the time of their divorce. They represent women who have had some difficult experiences in their lives (e.g., divorce, death, mental illness, abuse, substance abuse, and infidelity). What they also represent are women who have survived.

The following table (1) represents demographic data of the 25 participants. The first column is the order the participants were interviewed; the second column was the age at the time of the interview. The third column represents the number of years the participant was divorced; the fourth column is the number of children the participant reported she had (P3, P9, and P20 had sons who died). The fifth column indicates who filed for the divorce (both means husband and wife each wanted the divorce). The sixth column is a self-report answer indicating how the participant viewed her financial status (very secure, secure, neutral, insecure, and very insecure). The seventh column indicated if the ex-husband was abusive (e.g., emotional, physical, verbal) during the marriage. The eighth column indicated if the ex-husband abused drugs and alcohol. The ninth column reports if an affair occurred during the marriage (e.g., husband or wife). The tenth column represents the participants’ self report on her view of her physical health at the time of the interview.

Table 1 List of Participants

#	Age	Yr Div	# Kids	Initiator	Financial Secure	Abuse	Substance Abuse	Infidelity	Health
1	58	4	2	Both	Secure	No	No	No	Good
2	64	14	3	Both	Very Secure	No	No	He	Good
3	64	12	4	She	Secure	Yes	Yes	He	Good
4	56	8	2	She	Secure	No	No	She	Good
5	62	15	2	He	Secure	No	No	He	Good
6	59	6	3	She	Neutral	No	No	He	Good
7	61	12	1	She	Neutral	No	Yes	No	Good
8	60	6	3	She	Secure	No	No	He	Exc.
9	60	9	4	She	Very Insecure	No	No	She	Good
10	59	3	2	He	Neutral	No	No	He	Neut.
11	60	11	4	He	Secure	No	No	He	Exc.

Table 1 (cont'd)

12	54	3	2	She	Neutral	No	No	No	Fair
13	53	2	2	She	Insecure	No	Yes	No	Fair

14					Excluded				
15	53	3	2	She	Very Insecure	No	No	She	Exc.
16	50	2	2	He	Insecure	No	No	He	Good
17	64	4	3	Both	Secure	No	No	He	Good
18	60	11	2	She	Insecure	No	No	He	Good
19	56	8	3	She	Secure	Yes	Yes	She	Exc.
20	55	6	4	She	Insecure	Yes	Yes	No	Good
21	50	3	4	She	Neutral	No	No	He	Exc.
22	55	7	3	He	Insecure	Yes	No	No	Good
23	64	8	2	He	Neutral	No	Yes	He (Gay)	Good
24	55	3	1	She	Neutral	No	Yes	No	Exc.
25	51	3	2	Both	Neutral	Yes	No	No	Exc.
26	56	9	1	She	Secure	No	Yes	No	Exc.

CHAPTER 4 Results

Stages of Divorce Adjustment: Pre-divorce

After analyzing the data with the aid of NVivo 9 software (QSR, 2010), themes and relationships began to emerge from the data. What became apparent to this researcher are the stages each of the women went through on their divorce journeys. This inspired a stage theory of divorce adjustment for this current study: the pre-divorce stage, the early stage, the adapting stage, and the final stage of the post divorce adjustment. Women's stories of their lives, their marriages, their children, their divorces, and post divorce adjustment began to take shape.

In all 25 interviews the women also talked about their marriages and their ex-husbands. This was not the intent of the researcher, but it was a phenomenon that was encountered. The researcher did not stop this from occurring, so in many instances rich data were also uncovered during the interview that covered retrospective accounts of the participants' long term marriages; these have been included in the pre-divorce stage section. It is the hope of the researcher that by looking at the narratives of the women's marriages, some data will emerge that helps enrich the theory of divorce adjustment.

Starting this section with the participant's descriptions of themselves (i.e., identity) and of their marriages makes sense, as it parallels their own journeys. Each and every one of them began her divorce story by telling about her marriage and how it broke apart. At first this was a bit jarring; I was not interested in the marriage. However, the participants wanted to tell the story of their marriages first and so this chapter begins with the stories of the participant's marriages. Many of the 25 women began their narratives with a sigh, and then as if an internal switch was flipped, out came many reasons why they were no longer married. Several themes emerged from the descriptions of their marriages; these themes will be discussed below.

The State of the Marriage: Pre-divorce

The times and culture during which these women were raised. The women in this study described themselves as women typical of this age group. They were raised to be faithful, stoic, trusting, hard working, and to stay married no matter what. Within the macrosystem during their formative years, movies and the public narrative spoke about intact families, stay-at-home moms, husbands as breadwinners, and divorce as a negative event to be avoided. Many understood what was expected from them as a wife and mother. Many were raised to have faith in a higher power, their husbands, and the vows of their marriage. These women represent a group of people who understood the core values their families passed down to them from preceding generations. P10 is a retired schoolteacher; she described herself from a generational perspective.

I think it's kind of maybe how my generation has always been. We've kind of forged new paths: every generation does that. I graduated from high school in 1970 and so I was in college in the early 70's and all the feminist movement was starting... 'I'm going to have a job and I am going to college.' My parents have always been extremely unhappy with my liberal points of view. My generation was all about change.

She believed that things have changed generationally for her cohort.

Today there are more ways to stay healthy. It's that we're staying more active, looking younger, and pushing back on those old stereotypes and I think divorce for sure is different now than it was then. I don't feel there is as much stigma as there used to be. She was in high school in the 1960's entered college in the early 1970's and was a teacher her entire adult life. She described herself as a traditionalist and a feminist all rolled into one.

This proved to be a recurring theme for most of the women in this study: the duality of

traditionalism and the rise of independence and feminism. Her parents' generation consisted of two cohorts: one was called the G.I. generation (e.g., born 1901-1924) or 'the Greatest Generation' based on a book by journalist Tom Brokaw; and the other was called the silent generation (born 1925 – 1945). The silent generation was too young to fight in World War II (WWII) but probably fought in the Korean War. These two cohorts fought in popular wars, wars that were supported by those back home. Their children (i.e., baby boomers) fought in the very unpopular Vietnam War, and the culture did not always support its armed forces overseas. These two generations that birthed the baby boomers endured the Great Depression, World War II, and the Korean War. After WWII men and women started families: thus baby boomers erupted onto the American scene. The middle class started to grow; people in this country were moving to suburbs, going to college on the G.I. bill, America was becoming a super power and people were having lots of babies. Baby boomers are one of the largest cohorts to move through American history.

This cohort of baby boomer women was the first to have experienced: feminism, no-fault divorce, birth control, legal abortions, desegregation, and emerging recognition of gay rights, changing divorce laws, and the rise in divorce rates. The entire generation could be viewed as trail blazing; baby boomers defined themselves and their culture in ways that shaped the face of a nation. It would make sense that their divorce adjustment process may prove to be somewhat unique as well.

P11 was raised near the East Coast but now resides in Montana. She is the only participant who did not live in Michigan. She talked about her values concerning marriage and family. "I just couldn't divorce, with my Catholic upbringing and all; I thought, 'I'm in this and this is what you do.' So, when this thing happened with the other women, I thought whatever."

P12 described her upbringing and its impact on her life. “I lived kind of a sheltered life growing up...There was so much emotional garbage going on in my head that I truly had no self worth, and no confidence in myself.” She divorced her husband despite protestations from her mother and her church community. She saw it as a courageous thing to do; despite her early influences, she was able to choose her own path. She believed she needed to leave to save herself and her sanity.

P13 talked about her values growing up. “In my generation you stick it out; unless it is physical abuse or something, you just stick it out.” She talked about struggling for years in her unhappy marriage, always fighting with the upbringing in her head, which told her to stay married, no matter what. At one point she talked herself into staying “I remember clearly saying to myself, ‘Forget it. These are the cards you have been dealt, just deal with it. Go through the motions and do it. Stay in the marriage.’” She reported she suffered in silence for a long time, “but I wasn’t a complainer, so a lot of people didn’t know how unhappy I was.”

P16 identified culturally as East Indian Asian Sikh. She spoke about the cultural influences in her life. “I come from a culture that is more negative than positive. They don’t look at the positive side of things.” When I asked her how that influenced her adjustment, she just shrugged. She didn’t seem to think it mattered. She was raised to support her husband and trust in him. “I supported him 150% with his career and with everything I trusted him 150%. I was raised differently; where I come from, family is first. Family is everything.” She had left her family to marry him. She met him when she was in college on the East Coast. She married him against her father’s wishes. She reported, “I gave up everything to be with him.”

P17 reports she was a schoolteacher right out of college in the 1970’s. Her husband was just entering law school. “I put him through law school and my parents loaned him money to get

his law practice started.” She believed in him and trusted him and put everything into him and her three children. “When I married, I got married for life. I was a bride who got married for life, vows were vows, and I was stupid.” P18 was raised to trust. “Call me naïve, but I was trusting. I believed there were ups and downs in marriage.” P19 also trusted: “I mean I am an intelligent person, but I trusted him.”

P2 was raised to be strong. “I was never one to show a lot of emotion, I was always a strong person...not a lot of confrontation.” P22 reported she “was a stay-at-home mom. I just devoted my life to my kids and I loved those years. I loved my kids and I put everything into those kids.” She reported that added value and meaning to her life. She reported she had “never dated anybody except my husband. That’s the only person I ever kissed. I never knew anybody that was divorced. I cannot tell you how sheltered I was.” P3 was raised to be sturdy and faithful, “I figure you know, you’re supposed to stay with the husband to make things work for you and the family.”

P4 was 18 when she got pregnant; she had ambivalence early on in adult life. “But I wanted to get married anyway, I guess. But I didn’t. So it was one of those where I thought marriage wasn’t a great idea but I did it anyway.” She seemed to struggle with finding her path and happiness even early in life.

P7 spoke about life with her husband while they were married. “I never quite felt, when I was married to him, I never felt like I had the right to be a really strong, assertive, professional woman.” She talked about making sure he got his needs met, “I felt the need to make sure that he was okay...he wasn’t going to get upset, he wasn’t going to get mad...because I didn’t want the consequences. I was raised to respect marriage.”

P8 described her upbringing. “My thought was that when you make a decision to marry

someone, try to stay in that marriage and work it out. That was how I was raised. You just don't walk away from something that's a commitment." She went on to talk about family values she held. "I've got these kids and I had an idea of how I wanted my kids raised...I was a professional, as soon as that first baby was born I knew I was supposed to be at home raising my children." According to her upbringing and her personal values, marriage and child rearing were meant to be lifelong commitments. P9 married at the age of 18. "I was never the housekeeper my husband wanted me to be...when you are raising kids it got messy. So, it was always that I felt I never measured up." She continued on about her values "I had always been my parent's daughter. I went from them to him and he raised me; my beliefs were his beliefs."

P24 grew up in a home with an alcoholic mother; she reported this impacted her identity pre-divorce. "I always feel like I am not showing that I am a good enough person to everybody, I think...It's just like neither of them had time for us as children so we're always trying to gain security."

These women tell a story of the woman they were before they married and how they grew and matured within their marriages. Six women from the unresolved group talked about themselves pre-divorce; part of the identities in P2 and P7 were avoiding consequences and negative emotions, P4 spoke about ambivalence as part of her identity (i.e., not sure what she really wanted), P12 spoke of coming into the marriage having little self confidence and carrying around "emotional garbage," P16's pre-divorce identity including giving up everything to support her partner, P24 grew up in an unstable home and she reported this led to sense of never feeling sure about herself. Perhaps these beliefs (about self in relationships) had a negative impact on their post divorce identity.

Seventeen women were 18–25 years of age when they married. They spoke of being

trusting, naïve, faithful, and willing to stick it out even when times got tough. They were raised with a sort of stubbornness, a never-give-up attitude. These are factors that may be an effect of their generation or cohort (Hutchison, 2011); and these factors may have influenced their post divorce adjustment.

Separate lives. One theme that stood out in the data: participants' marriages being characterized as two people leading separate lives. This separateness existed well before the actual divorce and was characteristic of many of their relationships. The separateness manifested in several ways (e.g., disconnections, lack of sexual intimacy, lack of communication, and loneliness). Hetherington (2003) noted this phenomenon first and Bair (2007) reported on this in her book; she came up with the phrase "divorced while still married" (p. 9). This portrayed the state of many marriages of those she interviewed who experienced a later life divorce; the participants had not found a way to legally or financially divorce so instead they created separateness in their relationship to cope.

When I asked P1 how others treated her post divorce, especially at church, she reported that her ex-husband never went to church with her. She stated: "As a matter of fact there were people in that church that thought I was single, I've been in that church for like 20 years; they thought I was single. [Ex] may have been there twice the entire time." P1 also spoke about how she coped with the separateness for many years, "I would kid myself at times and say you know, maybe once the kids are gone we could bump along and sort of ignore each other and still be together." Until it came to the point in her marriage where she felt she had to leave to save herself.

P13 talked about her unhappiness in her marriage by saying, "I didn't feel like we really had a good friendship even." She spoke about this being one of the main reasons that she and her

husband had drifted into separateness. P7 described her process retrospectively “There just wasn’t a time we said...okay, well, let’s live separate lives. You live your life and I’ll have mine... I’m just going to be happy despite you and you know that didn’t work.”

P8 described the separate lives she and her husband had been living. She now sees that as a positive in her post divorce adjustment, “I was able to take care of everything that came my way and was essentially functioning as a single parent by then, and he would come home on the weekends.” She also viewed communication challenges as a root cause of their separateness within the marriage: “Through the whole marriage I believed there really wasn’t much communication.”

A physical separateness existed within P11’s marriage, “I have these three kids and you’re just going to go live in your hole in the meantime.” She explained during the interview that her husband chose to live in his art studio, with very little family contact. “I just kind of didn’t really think about it, until about six months later he contacted me and he said, ‘don’t you want to talk about this?’” At this point she knew the end of the marriage was near.

P26 described her separateness in the marriage from an emotional perspective “It was either you know he wouldn’t talk to me or emotional detachment.” This detachment theme carried over; P15 described one painful scene in her marriage “I once was crying in the kitchen and he walked by and said ‘why are you crying?’ I said, ‘you know why I am crying’ and he just turned and left.” She further explained that this was incredibly painful for her to know that her partner did not even care enough to comfort her. She told of another conversation she had with her partner “‘I have a house, light, shelter, food, but I am so unhappy. I don’t feel any love from you.’ He would not say anything.” The emotional disconnection that often preceded divorces extended into some of the bedrooms.

P10 described the separateness in the sexual area of her marriage, [h]e blamed it on the fact that we weren't having sex anymore and I took that blame because I knew I didn't want to have sex with him. I didn't have any attraction to him anymore and I didn't have any sex drive at all; or so I thought, and I can't blame him for that because that is my fault.

P11 talked about her lack of sexual activity during her marriage "I couldn't use hormones [birth control] and so it wasn't until 1997 when I got an IUD, and then it was okay but we weren't having sex anymore" (this was four years before the divorce was final). Her husband at that time started to complain about their lack of sexual activity, but her thoughts followed a different tract "I thought, how can you complain about something you didn't participate in. I felt bad and kind of guilty; but I had time to think about it and I thought that's not going to become the issue." For P11, the lack of sexual activity was a symptom, not the reason for the separateness within the marriage.

P12 talked about the lack of sexual activity in her marriage "My husband was hooked on porn. It got to the point where we didn't sleep together anymore; porn was more important than I was. It was right there in the house and he didn't need me." The sadness in her voice during the interview was poignant.

The avoidance of anything that even smacked of sexuality was very evident in P15's husband "He would watch television and there would be a love scene and he would immediately change the channel." She talked about her ex-husband's withdrawal, "like five years before the divorce, five years when he stopped intimacy and doing things; he was by his self." For P19 the lack of sex was described as "we hadn't had sex in five years before the divorce, and it was real infrequent before that." She was married to a man who struggled with alcoholism.

Other participants included in their narratives similar stories of lack of sex, lack of desire and an overall lack of intimacy within the marital relationship; that may have either contributed to or resulted from the separate lives they had been leading. For P11 it was a simple realization “[b]ecause I just didn’t think about sex very much.” During the course of the interviews, several women talked about realizations that had occurred to them. P8 described her decision to stop being sexual with her husband.

I had stopped having sex with him around 1999, when he asked me why...I told him that I felt like a whore because I didn’t feel there was any intimate connection between the two of us and he was an absolute stranger to me...That really got to him when I stopped having sex with him.

P15 who self-described as a very passionate, hot-blooded Puerto Rican woman talked about how she always enjoyed sexual activity; during the interview she spoke of her experience of separateness in her marriage.

In the end, I guess he had a sexual problem. It was called impotence. So the last five years we never had a sexual relationship. No kind of explanation, no seduction, no understanding. He did not tell me he was sorry, no hugs or kisses, no showing me love. This was spoken very softly, and while listening to her narrative it was apparent that this was still a painful memory.

P25 spoke of early morning discoveries “I would find him at three in the morning looking at porn, so there was really no intimacy between us.” P5 described her decision that stopped sexual activity; she was firm in her decision with her husband once he moved out. “I never let him stay the night, which was part of the chase. There would be no more sex at this point.” She felt she had to cut him off sexually until he decided to return to the marriage with a full

commitment. Later in the interview she did talk about the last time she was sexual with her ex-husband. He had invited her to go out of town with him to Toronto on a trip he had won.

‘I know what the deal is now and I will sleep on the floor if you want...it’s kind of a weird way to celebrate an anniversary but can we go anyway and just remember the good times?’ And I went with him (laughs) and so the sex didn’t totally stop, because I did my best and I did it with tears streaming down my cheeks.

Continuing with the theme of separate lives, P1 described her relationship from the perspective of physical separateness. “When I left, I took my bedroom suite; he had his own bedroom suite. We had not slept in the same bedroom in years.” P6 recalled the beginning of the end for her and her husband. “It was years earlier, probably three or four, he was mad over something and got mad and moved my stuff into the guest room and I just stayed there. We were kinda living separate lives.” The separateness for 14 of the 25 participants (e.g., P1, P3, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10, P11, P12, P13, P15, P19, P25, and P26) interviewed involved emotional, sexual, and physical separateness.

Affairs. Infidelity is cited as one of the top reasons why people seek divorce (Allen & Atkins, 2012; Amato, 2010; Amato & Previti, 2003; Bair, 2007; Montenegro, 2004). It is talked about in the public press (macrosystem) and it is expressed in clinical settings (microsystem) throughout the nation. Allen and Atkins (2012) reported that for more than half of couples where infidelity (e.g., sexual) is present, either separation or divorce occurs. The authors suggest that when sexual infidelity is present, divorce is four times more likely. From a life course perspective infidelity could be seen as a turning point within the relationship (Hutchison, 2011). It can be viewed as an injury to the relationship and to the person who was cheated on. In this sample of 25 women, 16 affairs were reported (12 men and 4 women initiated the affair).

Husband. Of the 25 participants interviewed, 12 reported their husbands cheated on them; several reported they were married to serial cheaters. Their responses fell across a range, but each of them spoke about their pain in learning their partners were cheating on them. P2 recalled her experience. “That was one of the hardest things for me. I just never thought I would deal with an affair.” P2 and her ex-husband did seek counseling, stayed together for a while, and tried to work through it; but in the end he made the decision to leave his wife for his affair partner, whom he eventually married. P2 reported her children have never reconciled with their father in the past 14 years.

P5 remembered when her husband told her about his affair. It seemed strange to her that he would even admit it, but she now realizes he was turning to her for comfort when his affair partner ended the relationship.

And then we sat in the garage...he told me that there had been somebody else and she had ended it and that he didn’t know what he was going to do now. And I said, ‘well, I bet I’m the lucky one, who gets you now?’

She reported that she still loved him and had wanted to work on the relationship, but after that it was “really never the same between us.”

P6 is a mental health professional. She talked about a string of affairs that her husband had been participating in and she remembered it felt like “he was living such a single life,” and she never felt right about that. She was sure to point out that, “I’ve never sat down with my kids and said ‘your dad cheated on me.’ I’m kind of careful about that.” For her, it was important that their sons viewed their dad in a positive light.

P3’s experience with her ex-husband’s affairs ranged over a long period of time. She reported her husband was always “running around with other women.” She would confront him;

he would stop and then begin again. She talked about his final affair before she divorced him. “He kept running around, he was messing around with this other lady. She got pregnant and had a baby by him and everything.” For her, that represented the breaking point: she filed for divorce and kicked him out of the house.

P8 described one of her husband’s affairs

[W]ithin that time he had, while he was in Mexico, I was under suspicion that he was having an affair with someone in Mexico. I just had that feeling again intuitively and so I asked him about it and he denied it. I found out when the marriage was absolutely over. She had stayed married to him for financial reasons, but reported that his cheating was very painful for her.

P10 found out her husband had an affair and that he had developed feelings for his affair partner: this was hard for her to hear.

[H]e met somebody, an old friend. I knew we were...but there wasn’t any intimacy there, not a connection...I guess the meanest thing he said to me was ‘I am not giving her up,’ like don’t even try to talk me out of it because it’s not an option.

For her, the affair was almost secondary; it was her partner’s refusal to even consider staying with her and trying to work it out that caused the deepest pain. Somehow, that refusal seemed to amplify her pain.

P11 remembered being blindsided in a therapy session “So we saw that woman [therapist] and the first meeting she asked, ‘Have you had a sexual relationship with someone else’ and he said, ‘Yes’, and I was like, ‘You’re kidding me.’” For her, finding out about the affair was horrible, but for it to be blurted out within a therapy session was somewhat of a double blow.

The after effects of finding out about infidelity had a huge impact on the participants. P16 remembered this about that time in her marriage “He actually felt terrible, and he wrote me many emails stating how sorry he was. I was depressed and in bed for two weeks after I found out about his cheating.”

Participant 17 was unique: she found out about the affairs years before the divorce “I originally found out in 1993. He had been seeing a woman who was a friend of mine. They had been dating for about two years.” She was wounded by the affair and by her friend who participated in it with her husband-- a double wound. She then went on to describe several more affairs her husband had before she divorced him.

About a month later I came home one Friday afternoon. He was standing in the garage crying. He had been up north for the second time with his girlfriend who works with him.

He decided he didn’t want the divorce and wanted to work on the marriage. He asked me if we could do counseling together.

She described the main reason for not asking for a divorce sooner as one of convenience; she had a growing son who was wheelchair bound. She could no longer lift him. She reported she stayed with her husband because of her son.

P18 reported her husband had tried to conceal his infidelity. “My ex was hiding it, and he would convince me that it was over with the woman and come back home to me.” She described this as almost a rollercoaster ride; she loved him and agreed to take him back time and time again. Once she remembered that “his girlfriend would get volatile and when he came back home he had scratches on his arms.” She remembered thinking that she was “living a crazy life,” but she found herself staying in the marriage. One especially memorable Christmas stood out for her.

He told me that he was ‘done with the other woman,’ he had broken it off with her. Not

soon after that, the mistress smashed a rock right through the front window of our home and it took down the Christmas tree. He called the police, and I ran to the bedroom upstairs and locked the door and I barricaded myself in trying to keep it shut. When the police arrived they put her [mistress] in handcuffs.

She reported she “initiated the divorce because of the number of times my ex was unfaithful.” Sometimes when she looks back over her marriage, she wonders why she put up with it for so long.

P21 remembered when she and her husband lived in Chicago, “he was cheating with the people around the place we lived at and I caught him. I caught him a lot with other women. You know, I have caught him with numerous women.”

Wife. Four women in the study reported they had affairs during their marriages. P9 reported, “I had several affairs, that was before my son got sick.” She reported that she had been deeply unhappy in her marriage and was trying to find happiness. Once her son became ill she tried to reconcile with her husband. Her son eventually died. It was then she thought about divorcing.

P4 described her infidelity in a unique way, “I let myself get kinda involved with somebody else.” Once she realized she had developed emotional feelings for her affair partner, it was then she decided that, “I would rather leave my husband than break off the relationship I had with the other guy.” She then talked about her affair partner as being the “impetus for the divorce.” She still wonders to this day if she would be married to her husband had she not fallen in love with her current partner.

During the interview, P25 lowered her voice and confessed

One thing that happened before I got divorced, and this is very confidential and he

probably knows, is that I had an affair. This is probably what caused me to want to get out, to get divorced, or feel stronger that I could leave him. Mostly because I fell in love with someone else, I realized that someone treated me so much better.

Her affair gave her strength to make some changes in her life.

P15 spoke of the time when she was in her therapist's office.

I began to see he was not having sex with me and went to the therapist and I said in front of the therapist, he has his own sexual life and his own private sexual life. I don't know what turns him on and what turns him off; but from now on I am going to be responsible for my sexual life. I began to have a lover.

After that admission she spoke about "those weeks, when I was with myself doing nothing, I would just go out and he [husband] knew" After she filed for a divorce she reported, "It was a mistake because the guy dumped me." She seemed to still have some sadness around that.

Quality of the marriage. Several participants described the type of marriage they had been living in. Three types emerged from the data: normal, difficult, and one-sided.

Normal marriage. P4 had a very unique perspective on her marriage and her ex-husband. "He wasn't a bad guy, he wasn't abusive, and he didn't have any huge vices or anything." She was able to clearly lay the blame for the marriage not working upon her own shoulders. She remarked that she thought "it was the whole dissatisfaction with my life, kind of thing in general." She had found love with another man and decided to end her marriage. She holds no ill will towards her ex-husband and her reflections echo that. "It was kind of weird. It wasn't a bad marriage, and he was a nice guy. We had a lot of friends and shared interests. There was no reason to divorce." She still struggles with her reason for leaving.

P4 moved two hours away for her new job. P4 is unique among the interviewees in that

she could not justify her reason to end the marriage, even though she had been in the incubation period (i.e., contemplating divorce) since she was 30. She talked about the ambiguousness of her feelings. “It was kind of weird--it wasn’t a bad marriage” and she attributed it to “the whole dissatisfaction with my life kind of thing in general.” When the interviewer probed further, she was able to respond with “he did not communicate very well.” P4 also spoke about her dissatisfaction, her affair, her lack of happiness in her “work, where I lived, two of my closest friends died all around this same period of time.” After she talked about the confluence of events she sighed, “I guess it was the perfect storm.” She could not really clearly justify her divorce. For some reason this was one area where she hadn’t really been able to move on.

P23 remembered, “We had a pretty good marriage for a number of years and then he was transferred...and he became very, very friendly with a lady down there and I was suspecting of that.” This is the participant whose husband admitted he was gay. Despite that, P23 could look back on her marriage and reported a lot of it was “pretty good.” P21 reported it was a normal marriage. “There were good times and there were bad times.”

Difficult marriage. Seven participants recalled how difficult it was to be married to their ex-partners. P24 saw her husband and marriage as difficult. “He just came into the living room and it seems like there was always something he would find to fight about and so again he found something to argue about.” For her this was the state of her life and her marriage.

P6 talked about her experience with her ex; “hard to live with. The whole marriage honestly was hard almost from day one. If anything went wrong it was always my fault...there was a lot of tension, there was too much tension.” She talked about having regrets over the state of her marriage and family. P12 was more up front about her unhappiness. “I am not sure I am at a place of peace.” P12 described painful fights during the marriage.

Because we fought all the time and it was, he could not hold down a job basically from day one. I got pregnant two months after I got married, so there was a baby now involved in the picture and by the time she was born it was hard. Actually, my thoughts-- we've never had a happy marriage.

P20 reported about her marriage, "It was bad, he wasn't happy, I wasn't happy, we just couldn't seem to communicate. All that time was miserable. He was just mean to me." She also described one incredibly difficult time for her during the marriage.

He would do mean stuff that you would never expect. It seems almost petty to talk about things but after years of being treated a certain way, you just think, wow is it really necessary to treat someone that badly. For example, he bowled a lot and drank along with it...one night I showed up he was furious. He yelled at me, 'What the hell are you doing here, I don't want you here. This is my night, I don't want you around!'

This is just one of the vivid examples that P20 was able to share during the interview. To this day she doesn't know why it was necessary for him to do that to her. All she could say was, "I am telling you, he is a difficult person." P20 spoke about another experience of insecurity within her marriage.

After a few months of his having moved out, I told him 'okay, either you decide you are coming back home or we're going to get a divorce; because I am not taking care of everything by myself. You cannot live out there and drop by the house whenever you want to.' So he moved back home, slept on the couch for a few months and it was real tense for a while.

Two participants described their husbands as "losing it" during the marriage. P7 talked about her husband's decline and subsequent substance abuse issues. "In the middle of our

marriage he just fell off the world.” All while she was busy working and raising their child. P18 remembered the haunting words of her husband towards the end of their marriage and how he would beg her not to leave. He would tell her, “you are my best friend; you can help me with it. It’s my fault, but you can help me and you can save me and you can get us through this.” This was the participant who described her ex as having had several affairs and had a girlfriend who broke the living room window at Christmas time. He had experienced losing his business, filing for bankruptcy, and ultimately the divorce.

These participants who described their experiences as difficult all talked about the pain they incurred during their marriages. Among all 25 of the participants, P5 was unique. She stood out among them because of the amount of time she spent working on saving her difficult marriage.

It started just with me realizing that my husband was pulling away and not being as happy as he used to be. He seemed very depressed a lot of the time and I felt like there were walls going up that I just really couldn’t kind of get through to. There were lots of years of constantly feeling like ‘am I going to do something wrong that’s going to finally end it’, you know.

For P5, the tension produced insecurity. “Look how long I was in an insecure spot in the relationship--it was years. He never really committed himself during a whole long, long time.” At one point she asked him to make a decision about the marriage. “I said, ‘you need to make a decision,’ basically so when he left, I didn’t consider it a divorce step.”

But in her heart she always thought he would choose her. This she described as being a very difficult personal process for her. She longed for him to give her feedback on what was going on inside him.

If he could say ‘I feel neglected in this way or that way’ ...I would feel like I had a chance.

Of course, I still stood on my head and tried to do everything right even though he

wouldn’t tell me there’s something wrong. That was very frustrating.

She reported that she really wanted her marriage to work and it was really difficult to fix something when she didn’t know what exactly was broken. She does remember one conversation the two of them had.

Well, he told me at one point...that he needed to change some things in his life...I

remember saying, ‘well you know, with all of the things that you can change, why did

you pick it to be me?’ and he said, ‘you think that you’re the first thing I picked’ and he

started going back and naming the things that he had done...none of that was bringing

him happiness...he’s on antidepressants now and probably will never be off of them.

This seemed to ease some of the pain for her, knowing it was something inside of him that was making him unhappy, not her.

Marriage was one-sided. For ten of the participants, it seemed that their marriage was one-sided. Complaints of not enough help or pay off for the hard work did make their way into narratives. P10 reported “I always sacrificed any kind of luxury because [ex] always got what he wanted.” P13 described her experience, “He would do grocery shopping and some cooking but that’s pretty much where it ended.” P11 talked about her financial support of her spouse. “I supported his business, paid all the bills, and health insurance all the while he was developing his art business, which became successful.” She related how her ex chose to focus more on him than the family.

He told me he had to spend some time with this woman to kind of try to figure things out.

It wouldn’t be sexual, you know, that’s not what it was about and so, he spent a lot of

time with her and not with his children and I. It seemed to always be kind of...and for 10 years, I have kind of felt like the marriage had died.

For P11 this was indicative of her ex-husband and their life together.

P12 spoke about her husband being “very dependent on me financially and really emotionally and later on spiritually. It wasn’t about what I needed; it was about what he wanted.” The lopsidedness of the relationships eventually began to take a toll on these women. Besides financial support, women reported also having to do more than their fair share when it involved household duties and doing things for the family. P15 reported she did everything.

The landscape, doctor’s office, school, activities with my kids, birthday parties, sleepovers, barbecues, housework, cooking, painting--he wouldn’t do anything. I would be the one to generate everything. I began to wonder to myself, ‘what do I need him for?’ Alongside that narrative, P17 added,

He was lazy and was never at home. I had to do everything. The first thing he said to me was, ‘how did you buy the house?’ I bought all the cars, the house, because every time something big came up I would say ‘let’s sit down and decide how to do this.’ He would say ‘just take care of it.’ If you bugged him he would just get mad. So I took care of everything and he could fix nothing. After the divorce, I didn’t notice anything different. P17 decided that in the end, it probably made her divorce adjustment a little bit easier, because nothing was all that different for her and the kids.

For P18, the one-sidedness of her marriage was primarily in the parenting role; she spoke about feeling like a single parent during her marriage.

My ex was not involved with the kids; his friends were always a priority over his kids and his wife. It takes two, but when he did come back to the marriage, he brought back

\$50,000 in debt with him. He had been trying to support his girlfriend and their lifestyle and support us as well.

P18 reported during the interview that she believed she took a lot of emotional abuse from her ex. She said she did it for the sake of the family.

P8 described her marriage as very lopsided, “I’m doing my own thing, taking care of the kids, the house, doing everything myself--essentially I was a single parent.” The one bright spot for her: she reported that because she had done all of the caretaking by herself, she knew she “could live as a single woman and make it on her own.” She reported she believed her ex “did her a favor in a way.” P19 reported she did everything during her marriage; her ex had a severe alcohol problem. For her, the one-sidedness seemed normal.

P9 talked about feeling unimportant to her partner. “I was feeling unloved because money was always important to him...I never felt, and I don’t know if it wasn’t so much he didn’t show me he loved me because he worked hard.” She also talked about the time during her 50th year when she felt alone and unimportant.

I’m up north...I started having chest pain and arm pain. My parents were there, and my husband was not...they called the ambulance and took me to the hospital and gave me all kinds of tests. It wasn’t a heart attack, but I was admitted overnight. He didn’t come. I told him ‘I was fine and the tests looked fine’ but he didn’t come and that hurt. It still hurts (tearful).

She spoke as if the event had occurred a few months prior, but at the time of the interview it had been more than 10 years earlier. The pain of not feeling important to her husband still lingered. When the interviewer asked if this had any influence on her decision to divorce, P9 remarked, “It certainly did!”

Besides the state of the marriage, other factors impacted the women, their ex-husbands, and the relationship. Based on the narratives of the 25 participants it may be important to look at how these extra factors may have impacted their lives and possibly their post divorce adjustment.

Extra factors during the marriage. Some of the participants endured events that I thought made their lives more out of the ordinary; they are described in this section.

Death. Three participants experienced the loss of a son prior to or during the divorce process. P3 spoke about the death of her son (e.g., he was shot by a criminal in the neighborhood). His death was hard on her and her other children; she experienced this loss prior to her divorce and reported it was “the hardest thing to go through.” In 1987, P9 had to go through the experience of losing a son; he was diagnosed with cancer in 1985 and died two years later. She had been struggling with marital problems for quite awhile before that.

Finally, I just decided to really work together with my husband when my son got sick and we pulled together. Actually, illness and death can send you apart more often than not, but in our case it pulled us together sort of.

After her son’s death her family endured pain, she said and she tried to connect with her husband but wasn’t able to. She divorced him six years after their son passed away. She talked about how painful both events were in her life, but the pain of losing her son was “over the top.”

P20 reported she had an adult son who was residing in a group home. She had filed for divorce and shortly after filing her son became gravely ill with an infection and was transported to a local hospital. She believes the group home did not adequately care for him and he died from complications due to pneumonia. She reported it was devastating. So she is unique in this study that she buried an adult son and filed for divorce simultaneously.

Mental health issues. Three women (e.g., P9, P12, and P24) reported they struggled with

personal mental health issues during their marriages. P9 spoke candidly about her own struggle. “We would separate...but mine were bipolar issues. It turns out I’m bipolar, I didn’t know that. Through all this time I didn’t know that.” She spoke about her ongoing battle with her disorder; she struggled for years to find the right medication, the right psychiatrist, and the right therapist. As for now, she accepts her diagnosis but reports she believes she is “more than her illness.”

P24 spoke about the depression that she experienced. “I think I was so depressed at that time I just looked at him and said, ‘I want a divorce.’” She believed her depression was present toward the end of the marriage, but she wondered if she had suffered with it for years. P12 talked about her time of insanity; she felt desperate and lost during the end of her marriage.

I had to find, I needed to be sane. I was truly losing it emotionally and spiritually. I was losing it. I felt like, I felt like I would go to bed at night and would say, ‘God, just take me, I don’t want to live anymore.’ I was extremely depressed...it was then I started to seek a divorce.

Thirteen participants spoke candidly about their ex-husband’s struggles with mental health and substance abuse issues during the marriage and the post divorce adjustment process (e.g., P1, P2, P3, P5, P7, P13, P15, P19, P20, P21, P23, P24, and P26). P26 spoke of her husband’s ongoing, pervasive depression. “He was depressed and wanted to stay at home with me right next to him and not move, not call my family on the phone, not visit with friends and not go to work.” She understood it, but found that she could no longer live with it.

P5 believes her ex-husband struggled for years with depression. “Depression was a real big part of this whole picture.” She reported he finally went on anti-depressants and is still on them. P1 talked about the mental health issues her ex struggled with for most of his adult life, she has deep compassion for his struggle.

My ex is a Vietnam veteran. He has PTSD, and he...was the person who found his brother when he committed suicide. All the things impacted him traumatically; his inability to relate to me and our children, his withdrawnness, all of those things were symptoms of his underlying ailments. The man had problems. I knew he had these problems when I married him.

Despite his mental health issues, she remembered thinking that she could help him through this. In the end she understood she did not have a clear enough understanding of his issues and felt she could not do it any longer.

Ten participants (40%) spoke of their ex-husband's substance abuse issues that occurred during the marriages (e.g., P2, P3, P7, P13, P19, P20, P21, P23, P24, and P26). Alcohol and drug use was often cited as one of the reasons the marriage ended; the substance abuse caused financial struggles, depression, disconnection, and emotional pain for the participants. None of the participants reported personal substance abuse issues.

P19 talked about her ex. "I mean he was an alcoholic and still is." For P3 she talked about alcohol and drugs being everywhere. "He was, you know, just on drugs and stuff...I would find rum bottles, and white powder-like stuff in bags and stuff." For her, marriage to a man who used drugs and alcohol felt like a lonely experience. P20 was very blunt in her description of her husband.

My ex-husband was a drinker. He loved to drink. He loved to go sit in the bar and drink.

He didn't do anything, unless there was going to be alcohol involved. It was the reason to go someplace, or it was the reason not to go someplace. It got to be so bad that for him there was no coming back. It was kind of too bad, you know (tearful).

The pain of remembering got to be a bit overwhelming for P20 as she talked about all the years

her marriage and life revolved around his alcohol use, and she was still incredibly saddened by all of that.

P23 reported that she tried to avoid confronting her ex-husband. “So, I never really confronted too much, although we had many arguments. He was a very heavy drinker if not an alcoholic.” She does believe that he drank to hide his pain; when he came out to his family (i.e., he is gay), she reported his drinking lessened.

P2 talked about her ex-husbands substance abuse. She reported that the first six years of their marriage they had both been social drinkers; they turned their lives over to God and both of them stopped drinking. She then went on to talk about her ex-husband’s return to alcohol.

[M]y son said, ‘I hope he’s not going to go back in drinking.’ Anyway about a week later, my boys showed up over here, cause my ex had been caught drinking. The boys said to him ‘we don’t care anything about the alcohol: we just want to know if you are having an affair.’

For this participant it was a painful difficult time and ultimately it signaled the beginning of the end of the marriage. P7 reported that her husband got caught up in cocaine and other drugs and just “lost himself.” She reported it was a difficult marriage to be in.

Three women mentioned that their exes smoked a lot of pot (e.g., P13, P21, and P24). P21 reported, “[h]e was smoking pot a lot, and drinking. I just got tired.” P24 talked about her ex’s drug use. “He smoked pot; I hated that he smoked pot. I mean he was a constant pot smoker.” P13 described her husband as just wanting to sit on the couch and watch TV; she attributed it to his pot smoking. She reported he even obtained a license to grow marijuana (e.g., care for plants for others with a marijuana card). She never liked the idea of that and didn’t want it around the house; so he did that at his parent’s house.

Abuse. Research does support that violence and abuse can be predictive of divorce (Sanchez & Gager, 2000). Ten of the participants spoke about the abuse they suffered during their marriages (e.g., P1, P3, P6, P7, P9, P19, P21, P22, P24, and P25). Their narratives describe these events as ongoing and pervasive. For P22 the abuse was a daily occurrence. “All the time we were married, he talked bad about me in front of the kids, would put me down in front of the kids, blame me for things, and they thought it was my fault that he left.” The pain of the emotional abuse was secondary to that of having her children withdraw from her and side with their father after divorce proceedings began. She also spoke of all the times they tried to make the marriage work.

The marriage I had been in was a very abusive marriage. We had seen 12 different marriage counselors over the years. So, we had seen many counselors and nothing ever worked and the last ones we saw were specifically dealing with abuse; and he had been in group counseling with a counselor who specifically deals with men in that situation, but in the end nothing mattered.

P19 told of her experience of abuse. “First of all I was verbally abused, then it became physical and my self esteem was down to my knees.” During her 23-year marriage, her husband had been an abuser of alcohol and his abuse towards his wife had gotten progressively worse.

He thought I was cheating and he got really mad at me and threw a stainless steel cup at me and it broke the glass in the door of the kitchen. He then proceeded to come around and took my head and shoved it into the safety glass window in the back. I got away only because I always kept my keys in the car because he would do this on occasions.

Coworkers provided support on Monday. “When I got to school on Monday, a couple of the teachers saw the bruises...one of them called a lawyer and one called a therapist. They both told

me ‘you have to get out.’” In this case, P19 credits her social support in helping her escape an abusive situation and she sought outside help (e.g., lawyer, therapist) to support her as she exited the marriage.

P21 was in an automobile accident and could no longer work. She spoke of her ex-husband’s verbal abuse towards her once she no longer could financially support the family.

Well, I was in an accident and he was very, very supportive from the beginning part and I had a lot of jobs...I was put in a position where I couldn’t work; he blamed me for the accident...He was staying out late at night and he wasn’t violent, but he became verbally abusive.

It was this point in her marriage that she decided to stop the pain and abuse and seek a divorce.

Eleven participants reported their ex-husbands were controlling (e.g., P1, P2, P7, P9, P11, P13, P16, P22, P24, P25, and P26). P1 remembered how “it seemed like he was always monitoring how much I drank because he was worried about the kids getting it [alcohol].” She laughed after that statement and rolled her eyes. She talked about how that was just one example of how her ex had to have his finger in every area of her life. P2 remembered her ex much more vividly. “He had a way of doing that. He was a very controlling person, he really was.” She then went on to explain it all stemmed from his mother, who she believes is the most “controlling woman I ever met.”

P16 saw her husband as controlling her by nitpicking her. “He saw fault in everything basically; I had to keep everything clean.” She remembered feeling very controlled by him through his faultfinding. P24 married her husband when she was young: she reported that he was very controlling of her, “but at the time, I didn’t see it that way.” Her perspective began to shift when they moved from their mobile home to a nice house situated on a cul-de-sac. As she began

to meet her neighbors and her family began to be integrated into the new neighborhood that is when she started to see how controlling he was. She recalled the neighbors began to talk to her about his actions towards her.

The women picked up on how my husband talked to me. They would pick this up and they would say ‘it’s not right the way he talks to you. The way he yells at home and the way he makes you come home all the time’ and I didn’t see it because I loved him. To me, that’s the way I lived since I was 16.

In this situation it became apparent she was living in some sort of a bubble. She didn’t know any better, because she had no reference point. It was after she and her family moved to the cul-de-sac that she started to gain a new perspective and her independence.

P26 spoke about her marriage and how controlling her partner had become over the years. “[h]e was disabled for about half the time we were married. I think he was jealous and he got more and more controlling and I thought, ‘you know, I can’t do this much longer; it’s making me crazy.’” She did believe that he became more controlling as his physical health deteriorated. “It was hard on him emotionally and physically: he was constantly in pain. He had both knees replaced eventually and he was on a lot of pain meds. I think that the pain meds probably also influenced his personality.” Her compassion for him allowed her to not blame him; but she still wanted a different experience in her life and she realized that her ex was not going to change his controlling nature. So she decided it was time to end the marriage.

The State of the Marriage: Children

Each participant parented children with her ex-husband (e.g., P7 and P26 had one child with their ex). When the women spoke of their marriages, many participants included their children’s experiences; for them it seemed almost as important as their own. P5 recalled that her

two children felt their family was perfect prior to their dad leaving. “They sat around the table saying, ‘you know, we are like Ozzy and Harriet.’ They didn’t know that their dad had actually asked for a divorce.” For P5, her children’s loss of the dream of the perfect family just added to her pain of having to go through an unwanted divorce.

Some women recalled their children fighting against the idea of a divorce. P25 described the fighting between her and her ex. “We used to fight about everything and my son used to cry and say he didn’t want us to get a divorce.” So even before the divorce, it became difficult for the women as they watched their children observing their parents’ lives.

P7 recalled that her daughter had at one time a close relationship with her father, and then it started to change.

She was sad and angry but...they had a real relationship a long time ago and I’ve only recently found out some things. There was no abuse...but as early as age 6 or 7 he would set her up with dinner and leave. She would look all over for him and he wouldn’t be there.

For this participant, her daughter’s pain is still impacting her adjustment process. P7 reported she still struggles with anger towards her ex; her anger is about what he did to her and especially what he did to their daughter.

Telling the kids. P16 recalled an especially painful day when her son found out his father was divorcing her.

My son...said, ‘if you are that mad at dad, if you are that angry all the time with him, why don’t you just divorce him?’ I told him, ‘You know, son, he is divorcing me.’ He was shocked; he said ‘What? What are you talking about? What did you just say?’ I said to him, ‘your father is leaving me.’

She remembered shortly after that night.

I remember on New Year's Day, he covered up on the couch until the evening. I would check up on him, he was like in shock...He finally came down and sat at the dinner table and he just looked at my husband and said, 'Just tell me dad, is there another woman? Tell us.' He was so angry that he slammed his fists on the table...My husband said 'no', but my son got really upset and started to cry.

P16 talked at great lengths about the pain her two sons went through because of her spouse's actions. For her, that pain almost seemed more intolerable than the pain of her husband having an affair and leaving the marriage.

Participant 21 remembered her kids working hard to convince their dad to stay in the marriage. "You know you all have a lot of years invested and been together a long time and why do you all want to give this up." It was hard for her to watch her children advocate to their dad to stay married to their mother. She remembered thinking that "I should just tell them to stop but she couldn't bring herself to do it." She reported she was in too much pain.

Support from daughter. P12 talked about the support her daughter offered to her before she decided to divorce.

'Mom, I've watched you as far back as I can remember. You have never been happy. I've seen the fights, I've observed the silence. I've seen the begging, pleading and crying and I've seen all of this and it has gotten you nowhere. You're still very unhappy and you're miserable. You've taken care of dad; you've taken care of me and my kids. It's time you take care of you. So, I say, go for it.'

For P12, this was a validation of all that she had given during her 31 years of marriage.

The State of the Marriage: Exiting the Marriage

For this group of 25 women, a divorce after a long-term marriage makes them somewhat unique. They have different perspectives on their process. For those who contemplated divorce, it often occurred over a long time frame; for those who were left by the spouse, it resulted in a huge shift in their lives and their lifestyles. Exiting the marriage may be viewed from the life course perspective as a life changing event (Hutchison, 2011).

Incubation period. Women came to the decision to divorce in several ways, one theme that emerged from the data was length of time some took to make the decision. This in itself became an event labeled as the incubation period; this phenomenon has been described within the divorce literature (Bair, 2007; Määttä, 2011). Fifteen of the 25 participants (60%) described contemplating divorce for a long period of time. This sample of women described thinking about, dreaming about, and planning on how they would end their long-term marriages.

P1 reported, “I had anticipated divorcing my husband some years before.” P10 described her incubation period.

I spent times running those scenarios in my head and thought; ‘I don’t think so, I’ve committed to this, he’s not a terrible person, every marriage is going to have flaws.’ I began thinking about leaving not that long into it. I started to understand what he was like. There was a sadness that I always carried with me, and yet he was a good person. She spent a good deal of her marriage contemplating ending it; the irony of it was, he found someone else to love and ended it for them.

P12 described her incubation period. “My chiropractor...asked me ‘how long have you been married?’ I told him 31 years...I knew it was over the first year I was married.” That represents a 30-year incubation period for this participant.

P13 reported, “We never did anything fun in our marriage.” She reported she thought

about divorce for 15 years. “I can remember in the 1990’s thinking this is crazy, I’ve got to do something here.” She talked about researching the cost of a divorce at that time, how would she live and how would she support herself and her two kids who were 10 and 12. At that time in her life she decided that it wasn’t the right decision for her. “But it was building in me and I knew that once the kids were gone I’d move out and I was okay with that.”

P15 reported that around the time she was 45, she “thought about divorce for about five years or so and that’s when the sexual problems started.” P18 reported, “I fell out of love at least a year before I initiated the divorce.” P20 described her incubation period.

To be to totally truthful, I saw a lawyer three times during our marriage. It was rocky. Maybe I was terribly unhappy and didn’t realize it. We were married in 1976; it was probably 10 years into the marriage when I started to think about divorce.

She was married to a man who drank excessively most of their marriage.

P25 is Catholic; she remembered being unhappy and described when she started to contemplate divorce.

Since a year from when we got married we had problems. A lot of things happened, and I started having...male friends, who treated me so much better; and so I began thinking ‘is this how I really want to live the rest of my life?’

She reported she had an affair before she divorced; the affair allowed her to feel a way she hadn’t felt in a long while. She reported that feeling was what gave her courage to file for divorce.

P26 remembered when her husband went on disability and life became filled with pain; life got difficult for them once his pain disabled him physically and emotionally. “So, after probably a year or two it got worse and worse. I began thinking about divorce.” P7 simply said, “for 10 years.” P8 reported she thought about it for “seven years.” P9 had been contemplating

divorce since her “daughter was a baby:” her daughter is 40 years old.

P3 talked about her incubation period. After a few years of his drug use and running around she “had moved from him to this house here” which she bought with her own money. She remembered thinking a long time about ending the marriage: she really struggled with it. In the end, she did it because she felt she had no other choice. P4 described her incubation period. “I had been kind of looking; I had been sort of looking to get out of the marriage for awhile. I’d say, around the age of 30.” She had found love with her affair partner: once that happened she felt it was time to end the marriage.

P6 described her incubation period. “I was really seriously thinking about...divorce for... probably 15 years.” She spoke about the time she had hired an investigator to “snap pictures” of her ex and his infidelity. At the time she thought she could use them in her divorce suit.

The investigator had given me picture of his car parked in the driveway, there was snow on it, and you could tell it had been there a while. I took the pictures had them blown up to an 8x14 size and I confronted him about the affair at his office one day cause I knew he couldn’t lose it at the office.

When she finally divorced she was surprised when it turned out to be just fine.

These 15 women had thought about divorce for years; they had the tenacity to endure an unhappy marriage. They listed reasons why they stayed: finances and children were primary. In the end they were able to complete the incubation process. The incubation period and the skills and abilities formed during this time may be what make this group unique among other divorced women in this country.

Decision to divorce. During the interview process, several stories begin to emerge about what actually led up to the divorce for each of the women. When P24 asked for a divorce, her

husband's response was, "You'll never make it by yourself." Instead of letting his threats scare her and back her down, she talked about it making her "angry and more determined" to end the marriage.

For P26 it came about over a period of time until one day she snapped. "Periodically my husband would get angry and threaten to divorce me and one day I just said, 'that's the last time you threaten. The next time you threaten that you want a divorce, you are going to get it.'" Soon after that her husband threatened and she followed through on her promise: she has not regretted her decision. For P8, the decision to divorce was hers, but she came at that decision in a very slow manner. "My former husband earned very good money, he earned a six figure income. I was kind of dragging my feet getting out of the marriage."

P22, the graduate student, described her marriage as very unhappy, and she depicted her husband as controlling and cruelly abusive. She even talked about the times he would get angry at her and storm out of the house, sometimes gone for a few hours or even a day. The last time they lived together under the same roof, the pattern of cruelty started to re-emerge. P22 asked her husband to leave until he could "cool off." She had no reason to think this would become a permanent move.

But, after three or four or five days, he didn't come back...and I called the stock broker and he wouldn't give me any information...Then, he said 'when you have a divorce as contentious as this,' and I went blank; didn't even know we were getting a divorce and that he wasn't coming back. I was in shock.

She indicated during the interview that it "just added to the awfulness of everything."

P20 talked about her final decision to end the marriage.

So, finally he said, 'do you want a divorce?' I said 'absolutely!' I had filed in August and

I stayed in the house until November, it was kind of weird. I don't know if it happened to so many people, but it was like, he said 'I'm not changing any locks.' I think he thought I'd come back, and I don't think he figured I would go through with it.

P20 knew that this was the right decision for her. For others it was a much slower decision making process.

P21 had gone on disability after a car accident. She talked about being worn out and finally filing for divorce.

I just got tired. I was emotionally torn from not being able to work and then you would think that you being in a marriage for better or worse or in sickness and in health, I tried very hard and put up with it along the way and I got tired. I told him if he 'didn't straighten up I was going to leave and file for divorce.' I don't think he believed me.

Leaving. For P12 leaving the marriage became her only option; she talked about her breaking point in the marriage. "When it got to the point where that was not an option--to stay--I knew I would rather be alone than to be with somebody and be alone."

P1 pointed out she left him for survival. "Oh, I love him. I'll tell people I didn't leave my husband because I did not love him; I left him because I couldn't stand it one more day." P1 thought about leaving for quite some time. She talked about the day everything shifted.

My son went to Cedar Point to work for the summer. He left on the 11th and I started looking for a place to live, a different place to live. When I found my house here in [city] and decided I was going to buy it. That was when I told him I was leaving.

She talked about the timing of her leaving and how her children and their well-being were at the center of that timing. She wanted to wait until the last one graduated high school. For some women in this study, leaving became a point of survival; they did it because they felt compelled

to. P21 felt compelled to leave, but has regrets over the marriage not working out. She talked about her feelings towards her ex, “I still love him. I still do. I still have his picture up there. The kids had that made for us.” (She pointed to a framed family portrait on the wall). P20 reported having no regrets about leaving the marriage. “I missed my house more than I missed my marriage.” For her there was loss: it just wasn’t over the marriage.

P22 is in the resolved group. She was able to provide an analogy that beautifully described her divorce process from beginning to end.

Over a two-year period I realized that this process was like when you wash up on the island. You are almost drowned and water-logged, and you look back at where you came from. It is like you build this beautiful life, gorgeous puzzle, pick it up to show somebody and the minute you pick it up--whoosh, it falls apart. Then you begin the walk up the beach, picking up shells and rocks and rebuilding your life.

She certainly has begun to rebuild her life.

Throughout the 25 interviews, the narratives began to shift; from talking about the marriage to how it ended, and how the women began to rebuild their lives. They each spoke about the initial pain of ending the marriage (e.g., early stage), then the narrative shifted to learning how to live their lives without their ex-husbands (e.g., adaptive stage). Then the narrative shifted again to the final stage of the divorce adjustment process which I labeled, resolved or unresolved (i.e., two years or more post divorce).

Stages of Divorce Adjustment: Early Stage

A stage process of divorce adjustment emerged from the data; it made sense that just as their identities shifted along a stage process, the actual divorce adjustment process would take place in stages. Three stages are identified as occurring post divorce: early, adapting, and final.

The early stage is the first four months of the divorce adjustment process; this phase was about pain, crisis, shock, and trying to stabilize. Most of the women reported they started to feel a shift in their process around the fourth month and this stage usually went pretty quickly. P19 reported, “It only took a couple of weeks to get over the divorce. There was nothing there.” The adapting stage is characterized by significant changes in the lives of the divorcing women (e.g., moving, telling the kids, telling family, reorganizing finances); for the purposes of this study it is generally defined as months four to 23. The final stage (i.e., resolved or unresolved) is characterized as being two or more years post divorce, which this sample was at the time of the interview.

Early stage identity. This stage of the participant’s identity development is earmarked by a single event: the realization she is getting a divorce. Many of the participants described how hard the early stage of identity shifting was. P24 described her experience: “during that time, probably just learning to be on my own.” P3’s identity shifted to becoming a person who broke a vow. “That was the hardest thing: when I took my marriage vow I took it to death do we part. Because for me, that’s a covenant.” P5 reported: “I was such a naive fool.” P26 also began to experience an identity shift. “The hardest thing for me is that I am not a quitter and I felt like a quitter. I felt like I gave up.”

P18 described her identity shift. “My image was tied up in ‘not being divorced.’ My refusal to accept divorce caused me tremendous pain.” Her identity shifted when she began to realize divorce was her only option. P1 spoke about her shift towards independence.

It was a little scary but it was never desperate. Part of the cost of being the boss for me was having to depend on and relying on professionals that I did not know if they were honest or not. That was a huge learning curve for me.

She took on her new role, learned new skills and found ways to evaluate and deal with skilled trade professionals.

P10's identity shifted. She saw herself as part of a couple and needing her husband, she thought of divorce for years but never thought she could go through with it. "Seems kind of cowardly now that I know I can do it." She found support during this time in her circle of friends. "I reached out and really my good friends have been my good friends. When I got divorced I fully expected that I would never go out or be with anybody again." She also experienced a shift in her dating belief system. "I couldn't imagine after being married to one person for 32 years ever having sex with anybody else anymore. I thought, 'oh my God, are you kidding me. It's not the 20-year-old body that I had anymore.' Once she got used to the idea of being divorced she shifted her identity to that of being a homeowner.

I looked at so many houses and this one I bought was the only one I could picture myself living in; it was perfect. I thought 'Okay, well, get over the fact that you grew up on this street.' For the most part, I look at the past 32 years; it's just the feeling that I worry about how other people look at that or something.

She has grown in independence and she now knows she is courageous. She has proven it to herself.

P11 described her identity shift in the early stage of her divorce adjustment process. "The hard part was the grief over it not working, investing all of this time... and 'who would love me now anyway?' I mean I'm old and I'm not in the running." Part of her grief processing and identity shifting included yoga and spirituality.

I think that's what yoga yielded; it was like my new age counseling. The yoga teacher incorporated it; she took all the Catholic stuff and put it to yoga and prayers. It was

interesting and I think that Catholic part--not that she was trying to be Catholic--but it resonated with me.

She was able to experience some spiritual shifting while working through the grief of a lost marriage. P12 described her role in her ex-husband's life. "I was his security. He was very dependent on me financially and emotionally and later on spiritually." Part of her early stage processing included learning how to be on her own in the world.

Initiator. Initiator status is often correlated with a better post divorce adjustment (Wang & Amato, 2000). For the sake of this study, the initiators were identified (e.g., 'both' means husband and wife filed for divorce conjointly).

Both. Four women reported that they and their partners both initiated the divorce (e.g., P1, P2, P17, and P25). P25 reported, "I got really tired with his attitude and figured out that I was going to file for divorce and he didn't like that so one week later he filed." P2 reported, "I started the divorce...I came in contact over the years with this man, he's a pastor" and he said to me, "really you should go for separate maintenance." She explained this was not technically a divorce but a legal process. She reported "it cost me an extra amount of money," but felt it was the right thing for her. Before that process could be completed her ex-husband went to the courthouse and filed for a divorce, within two months. P1 remembered her divorce action clearly. "Actually I did not want the divorce...I just wanted to get away from him." She reported her ex insisted on filing for divorce.

Ex. Six women (e.g., P5, P10, P11, P16, P22, and P23) reported their ex-husbands initiated the divorce. Five of the ex-husbands moved out prior to the divorce. P2 reported, "He took off." P10 noted her ex-husband "didn't say he wanted a divorce that day, but he told me he was moving out." P11 reported her ex moved to his art studio for months before talk of divorce

was initiated.

P22 remembered the impact her ex-husband's leaving had on their daughter.

She was sitting at the desk at the computer and he went and got his things and never said anything to anybody. It was at night, got his things, never said anything to anybody, got in his car and shifted it into neutral and backed it down the driveway and that's how he left. So, she was just--it was extremely hard on her and he never came back.

This is the participant who found out she was getting a divorce via the stockbroker.

P5 reported her ex moved out on the "25th wedding anniversary...I believe the moving trucks came on that day." P23 reported her ex moved to be with his partner in another state. "So, he said he had to file for divorce because he and [his new partner] wanted to buy some property and he couldn't buy the property still being married."

Wife. Sixty percent of the women initiated their divorce (e.g., P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P9, P12, P13, P15, P18, P19, P20, P21, P24, and P26). P6 spent years contemplating divorce. "It was the hardest decision I've ever made. I really, really did not want to do this; I mean I really dragged my feet a long time." P21 described her leaving.

One day, I said I am going to get a truck and I was looking around for an apartment and I found this apartment. I called the person up and told him, you know, I am willing to put security on the place. I got me a truck, I called the kids up, and I said I am up out of here. She was the participant who had been in an automobile accident and now was on disability and could not work; despite financial ramifications she still chose divorce.

P26 described her divorce initiating process.

And so on our 24th anniversary, he said that I 'needed to hire a lawyer and get a divorce' because he wasn't happy that I went to a movie for two hours. And I said, 'Be careful

what you ask for, remember what I told you' and he goes 'Nope, I want to.' I said, 'Okay, it's done.' He was going to file and then he wouldn't get with it and then four months later I filed. As soon as I made my decision to divorce him I was at my place of peace.

She has no regrets about initiating.

P17 talked about her decision to end the marriage. "In the fall of 1998, I told my husband that 'I wanted a divorce'...I was not going to be treated the way I was being treated before." She reported it was a hard decision but one she felt she had to make.

Events. Certain key events began to emerge from the data in the early stage of divorce adjustment. These events centered around legal matters, mediation, moving, others' reactions to the divorce, and employment. The following events emerged from the data and seemed prominent during the early stage of the divorce adjustment process and are highlighted below.

Legal matters. This section will describe the early stage legal experiences of the participants. P7 reported she had real issues with her ex during the legal and settlement process; she believed he made it much harder than it needed to be.

We had agreed he would buy me out...he voluntarily gave up legal and physical custody of our child...I was really a full-time single parent. Then, after the divorce was final in December, he didn't pay me the settlement.

In the end, after many court visits and extra legal maneuverings, she got the settlement.

P8 described her legal process. "So, I filed for divorce but I needed to find somebody that I felt comfortable with. I hired a female lawyer. She was fabulous; she looked out for me." She then proceeded to describe a painful legal process. "We went through hell for 1.5 years. He didn't want to give me anything in terms of an equitable type of settlement, in and out of court."

In the end she felt she got a fair settlement: she does think it took far longer than it should have.

P9 spoke about her intention to separate. “I knew I had a significant investment. So, I went to see a divorce lawyer and told her I wanted a separation and we worked out a separation plan.” She then reported that her ex made the separation into a divorce. “In the process my ex brought out his true colors, and so then it switched over to a divorce.” P9 said she wanted out. “I had a great lawyer but I didn’t listen to her. My lawyer was livid. I just didn’t listen to her. I made her do what I wanted.” She got less than the lawyer was asking for, she believes her impatience cost her monetarily.

P1 is a retiree with legal benefits as part of her benefits package. “But I of course got the divorce because it was my benefit; you know the legal services were part of my benefit. So I was the one who had to do it.”

The day before the divorce was final I went out to the house. We went over the paperwork; he signed where he needed to sign. I went into...the judge’s chamber...I talked to a clerk. She went over everything with me. She said, ‘Okay, I’m going to take these back to the judge and go over them with her and she is going to sign them and then all you have to do is go downstairs and file them.’

She then added, “He never showed up for anything. He never left the house. I did it all.” P11 and her ex used a mediator.

I had an attorney and I would take this stuff to her. I had to have that person in the background so that he would not try to screw me. He wanted all what he thought was his property and he wanted me to take the house which was the least valuable part. And he had this business.

P12 reported, “We didn’t get a lawyer involved.” P13 reported she hired a lawyer but “he

did not get a lawyer.” She reported they had a meeting with a mediator to go over financial stuff.

The lawyer was great with him. She explained that ‘we are doing this as nicely and easily as we can; we are not blaming you for anything.’ She explained that ‘your wife is not leaving you for any reason that would make you look bad.’ She then told him that ‘you are going to move out and all these bills are paid and that’s it. She pays for the house.

P15 told her ex-husband, “I am going to hire a female lawyer to represent me in the divorce.” She explained that her lawyer is a “feminist lesbian and she gravitates towards women’s rights” and she found that very helpful. P16 remembered thinking she and her ex would use the same lawyer; he said, “No, you have to get your own lawyer: mine will not represent you.” She remembered, “I got a lawyer, but I was in no condition mentally and emotionally to go through that process.” She explained her brother helped her choose a lawyer. “We chose a lady lawyer close by my house, where I could drive to. You know, lawyers are out for themselves. I paid her a lot of money.” She talked about her disappointment with her attorney.

I don’t feel she did a good job. She got me half, but I thought I was a good candidate for life. I only got 12 years of alimony. I had no experience with this; I don’t think she did a good job for me. They would send a packet and charged me for copying and everything. She charged \$250 per hour. I just wanted to settle with whatever.

She also remembered her attempts at negotiating.

I never really worried about the money, I trusted my husband until he started to play some games with me. My dad and my girlfriend confronted me during this time and both of them begged me to not meet with him at a local coffee shop. They both told me, ‘you cannot sit down and negotiate with him.’ Thank goodness I listened to them.

P16 reported she never wanted a divorce, was shocked by his affair and his secret bank account,

and felt betrayed by the legal system and both sides of the family. For her this was just another example of how she was treated poorly.

P17 went to court with her attorney: her husband used her lawyer.

We used the same attorney, but she really represented me. I didn't tell her why we were getting a divorce because he was running for office at that time. He was still my kids' father and it would have probably gotten back to them...everything kind of went my way. She reported she is completely happy with the legal and settlement process.

P2 described the lawyer she used. "I used to clean a law office for 21 years...and he took me under his wing. I had a good lawyer." P20 reported her ex "opted not to have a lawyer." She then described what she did.

I got a lawyer on my own, a female lawyer. I mean you hear about some horrible people that go after their husbands or whatever. I just wanted to separate evenly; I didn't want alimony or anything. We didn't have children at home I thought it should be even and we should just start over...getting rid of the stress of the marriage was a million times more than what I walked away from.

In the end she experienced freedom.

P21 described her legal process. "I went to the legal aid and talked to them and they sent me paper work and I filled out the paper work and got it submitted. It only took like about three months." P22 reported "it was awful and it lasted two years, a horrible thing." That could be expected since her ex had done everything to make her divorce adjustment process harder.

"Yeah, I didn't have a good attorney at first." She expressed disappointment in her first lawyer.

I...wanted a Christian attorney and he was not...effective; so I went and looked for a good, a really strong female attorney...I liked the one I ended up with, not necessarily

because she was female but because she was good and professional and she wasn't so awful that she would try to take somebody and ruin them. She was just fair.

She believed her ex dragged this out longer than was necessary.

P23 reported, "I didn't have to do anything." She reports she was served with papers and that was it; everything was fair and things were split evenly. P24 interviewed her lawyer first before hiring her.

I didn't know what I was doing. I went home...I said, 'Well, I have a lawyer, you may want to get a lawyer.' He said, 'You got a lawyer?' Well, what he did was get a woman lawyer and I knew why he did that--because he thought he could control her. I thought 'that's a bad move because he doesn't listen to what he should know; he doesn't listen to a woman.'

P24 believed she stood up to her ex when she hired an advocate for her best interest.

P25 reported she "chose her attorney because he knew the judge and the judge hates women...He wasn't likely to do anything for me and being a minority as well." She did not believe her lawyer did a good job; she feels he missed a key piece by not including legal language in the divorce settlement that stipulated where a parent can live after the divorce. Her ex demanded the minor children stay in their current school district. When P25 moved in with her mother that meant she could not place the children in a school close to where she was living. She was forced to drive her sons 25 miles every day to school. She blames her lawyer for that.

By not getting the 100 mile radius you are given when you are good as gold and your kids can go to school wherever...He should have known better. I was going to keep the house and then we turned the tables when we went to mediation.

She felt cheated by the legal system.

P26 reported, “There was an attorney who I consulted with and she was trying to get couples to kind of resolve their differences by more of a sit-down-and-problem-solve process.” She reported she liked the simplicity of the process. “We did a small mediation, and then I downloaded the forms from the Internet.” As far as settlement she reported, “I took the contents of the house, he took the contents of the garage. We agreed to sell the house, but he could live in it until it sold.” She felt it was fair. P26 described what happened when it came to present the settlement before the judge.

My ex wouldn’t accompany me. So, I basically showed up in court and the judge looked at the papers and said, ‘Well, this is an interesting way to split assets,’ and I said, ‘Yeah, I don’t have to clean the garage that way.’ Then it was all done.

She reported her lawyer “gave her confidence and told her what to look for and then it was just filling out the paperwork.” She found that helpful.

P4 spoke about her legal experience. Her ex-husband spoke to a family friend who was a lawyer. The lawyer friend “advised my ex to clean out all the bank accounts.” That made her angry. “Then I got an attorney. That put everything in motion.”

The experience of hiring lawyers, filing legal paperwork and going before a judge ranged widely in these participants’ cases. Some processes seemed cheap and easy, others were expensive, long and drawn out. In the end, everyone ended up with a legal dissolution of their long-term marriage. Legally these women went through divorce the way most women have done for years. What makes this group of women unique is they did so knowing they were ending their first marriage--a long-term marriage--and many of them were divorcing at an age when other women spend their days wondering about grandchildren and retirement not starting over.

Mediation. Ten (40%) participants (e.g., P4, P8, P11, P13, P15, P16, P18, P22, P24, and

P25) entered into mediation with their divorcing spouses. For P22 it was a painful event. “We tried mediation: nothing worked. It was like the most horrible thing other than the marriage.” For P8 it was court ordered. “The judge said to go to mediation.” She reported she felt she got a fair settlement out of the process. Mediation for P18 was not a great idea “because the mediation just prolonged the divorce” and she did not see it as beneficial. Her belief is “the lawyers make out when there is mediation, so they wanted to mediate.” P11, P13, and P15 all reported using mediation as part of process and felt it was a good idea.

P16 remembered her mediation experience.

We did seven hours of mediation. He sat in the same room as me. I thought I was going to die. There was crackers and cheese. My friend came there with me: she could only stay three hours...I wasn't thinking straight, I just signed the papers and wanted to get out of there.

She reported she felt shortchanged by the legal process.

P25 reported mediation benefitted her.

My husband did not want to pay anything; he thought the house was worth more if I bought it from him...so now you pay me for that. So, we turned the table around and so it was smart for my lawyer to do that and we didn't do that until mediation.

She used mediation to gain a more favorable result.

Mediation is being used more extensively in many areas of family law. It was helpful for some of the participants and for others not so much. What it was designed to do is “create harmony where there is disharmony” (Lowenstein, 2009, p. 233) and to help keep down the financial costs to the clients. In some cases that happened. What makes this group unique in the mediation process is the length of time they had been married; during a lengthy marriage many

things can be accumulated, finances may be more intertwined, and pensions are larger or already being paid out to the pensioner. This may complicate the mediation process and in some cases the participant (e.g., P16) may not emotionally be ready to engage in it.

Moving. Most of the 25 participants (e.g., 72%) ended up leaving their family home permanently; some stayed (e.g., P2, P3, P8, P11, P13, P16, and P23). P24 was compelled to stay in the family home prior to the final divorce decree; she moved post divorce.

Another difficult thing was during the early stage of divorce, me having to live there in the house; because. My lawyer said, ‘Don’t leave because you will give up the rights to the house.’ That was very hard. I would lock...my bedroom door...and prop up something.

Some participants, like P12, moved to smaller places. “I didn’t need anything else because I went into an apartment. I have been in an apartment the last four years.” She admitted it was the way to go for financial reasons but found it to be a tough adjustment; she just recently purchased the home she currently lives in. P18 talked about her relocation early on in the divorce adjustment process.

After the divorce I moved into a two-bedroom apartment. I was there way too long, but I never felt that I could get a down payment for my own place, and I was afraid I didn’t have the longevity at the school I worked at when it came to taking out a loan. She did eventually qualify for a loan and bought her own condo.

Other participants went full steam ahead with relocation. P17 needed a new place that had wheelchair accessibility for her handicapped son.

I had lived in a condo at the end of our marriage; so I had the builder install a garage ramp...so that I could get my son in and out in his wheelchair. I would bring him home a couple of times a week...I did a ton of work.

P19 reported she had nothing when she left her marriage, so she and her son moved into a rental home.

We rented a house; the way I see it, it only took a couple of weeks to get over the divorce. There was nothing there. We hadn't had any relations for over five years. We lived in the same house; he was drinking all the time. The kids and I did everything together and he was pretty much on his own.

P19 remarked that the move was very easy on her. She and her ex had not felt connected in a long time (i.e., separate lives) and moving was just the final step for her and her son.

P4 spoke about the process she and her ex-husband went through in finding new living arrangements.

During the separation, I slowly moved to my boyfriend's house, and then he and I decided it did not work out living together, so I moved back into my house...Once I got my new job in the new city, we moved here...It was very difficult moving from a place that I had lived for 30 years with friends, moving to a new place with really no community.

When asked if she regretted moving to a different city, she replied; "I like this location a lot more. I like the work and it's hard to separate the work from the move. I would not have found that kind of work still living there."

P5 shared what her moving out experience was like. "I sold my ex the house. I couldn't stay there, because I felt like I needed a fresh start and some new people. He would have let me have it if I wanted to stay there." Some of the participants chose to leave the family home. For P5 it had to do with the memories attached to the home that inspired her to want to find her own.

P6 is unique from at least one perspective--moving out. She had taken years to initiate the divorce, had lived in a separate bedroom for years, and even after she divorced took time before

relocating.

I didn't move out until after the divorce, about two months after. My ex actually asked me when I was leaving, so that inspired me to find my own condo. We never separated until after the divorce was final.

She talked about how she was paralyzed by a lot of her own fears for most of her adult life and she was shocked that she was able to find a nice condo that she could afford.

Other women in the study were able to navigate their own way via when it came to moving out and moving on. P20 spoke about being able to eventually purchase her current home, but in the interim she "moved into an apartment for a short time and didn't really like it." She did report it got her out of a mess with her husband, and eventually she found her own home which she reports is "very comfortable." P21 moved into a rental home when she relocated originally and from there she "moved into an apartment. I don't know where he moved because I didn't pursue finding out."

P25 lived in the house with her husband while they were divorcing. "It was the worst six months: it was very difficult to be in the house with him. A lot of things happened; the police were over a couple of times. He was a very angry man." She later talked about that being a horrible experience in the early stage of the divorce adjustment process. Once the divorce was over, she moved back to her mom's house. This was one way she could transition and rebuild her finances. She spoke about her generosity towards her mom years earlier (e.g., she bought her a home) and how that has paid back today.

She had a bedroom in the basement, three bedrooms upstairs and just her and my aunt lived there and so it worked out when I moved in...I realized that there was no way that I am going to move anywhere; so for three years I had three storage units full of things.

When she felt she could afford it, and with mom's financial help, she purchased a home that was a short sale. During the interview she kept talking about how lucky she felt to be able to live in such a nice home in a nice neighborhood near her son's Catholic school.

P1 was more candid about her move to a smaller home. "I moved from a house that was almost 3,000 square feet to one that was barely a 1,000," she remembers, "I had furniture piled up to the ceiling in my basement, I didn't know what to do with. But I'll take it, I'll take it all." When she moved, her two adult children moved with her. "My son is still with me: my daughter moved out in May." Along with downsizing, she also had less debt. "I went from a house that was worth \$280,000 to one I paid \$28,000 for."

P9 purchased a home in order to gain some space in the marriage; she was actually licensed as a real estate agent at that time and she and her husband had owned rental properties during the marriage. She eventually moved back home when their son became gravely ill. Two years after his death, P9 realized she wanted to divorce. Once she made the decision, she relocated permanently and found it to be a good move for her.

Moving was cited as being an important event in the early divorce adjustment process. One unique perspective for this group of women divorcing was that of relocating. Many of the participants had not lived on their own prior to the point of moving out during the divorce process. For this cohort, renting or buying their own home represented a unique life event in their lives (Hutchison, 2011).

Employment. Of the 25 women interviewed, 56% were employed at the time of the divorce (e.g., P1, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9, P11, P12, P13, P19, P20, P23, P24, and P26); others were either not working or were retired. When P16 found out her husband had been unfaithful she responded by looking for a job even though she hadn't worked in many years prior to ex's affair.

One day I got so upset that I walked out of the house and the first week of December I went to the mall. It was our 20th wedding anniversary. I was looking around and went into a jewelry store and I asked them if they had an opening? They gave me an application and I went home and filled it out. During the interview I told her my story. For this participant, getting a job was a good first step during the early stage of the divorce adjustment process. She talked about how doing that felt empowering to her and how it helped her to focus her attention somewhere other than on her pain.

P26 had been living in Texas after she decided to divorce; she had found out that she was losing her job with her company. So for her, finding a job was crucial at this stage of the divorce adjustment process.

At that time I was working...in Texas and in the beginning of August I was called into the office and the company was dissolving...and so I was looking for a job. As you can guess it was not good timing for me.

P26 found a job back in her home state of Michigan, and moved back during the divorce process. She started at the end of August, flew back to Texas over Labor Day and went to court to finalize the divorce, then drove back to Michigan to continue in her new position.

And I had to show up in court because he wasn't going to do it. So, I had to fly back to Texas and it was Labor Day Weekend and Tuesday showed up in court and the divorce was signed and then Wednesday I started driving my car back to Michigan to come to my new job.

She described it as a "whirlwind process."

P23 was employed as an elementary schoolteacher at the time of her divorce. She described her early divorce adjustment process. "At first I just engulfed myself with work.

Whether I was sitting there doing nothing I didn't have to come home. Home was hard." She later talked about finding a buddy in the lady janitor who worked there after classes were out. She talked about how helpful it was: being at work, sharing her story, and listening to the janitor's wisdom. She remembered that she had thought about retiring a couple of years before her divorce. Her employment was extended due to financial reasons. "I needed to work longer, nine more years past what I originally wanted to."

P1 was retired from another job and had started a second career prior to her divorce: she was already working as a nurse for a home health care agency during the time of her divorce.

I was able to work, but for a while the divorce did affect my work. I was probably not performing at my optimum. I was just a little dazed, confused, distracted; probably not completing tasks, as well or as efficiently as I should have.

She reported that she soon got off the third shift and found herself in a better place at work.

P10 was already retired at the time of her divorce, she remembered; "I got a job at the bookstore. I thought I needed to get out of my head completely out of my element. I worked in a classroom with kids and here I am in a retail job." She remembered feeling overwhelmed at times. "I didn't know how to work a cash register it was completely challenging." She believed her previous career was an important part of getting her job. "It was of course, one of the reasons I got hired in, is that I knew children's literature." She described her experience at the time.

They trained me on the cash register which I had never done in my life. I would be overwhelmed. Then the manager would say 'Okay, today we're going to teach you customer service.' I learned how to handle the phone, place orders on the computer, and how to juggle people--all the while freaking out all day; at the end of the day I would think 'Okay I can do this.'

This could be seen as an isomorphic process, both working outside her comfort zone and divorcing later in life. Both were challenging, but she found out that she had abilities to get through them.

Eventually the store closed and she got laid off. She thinks it was a great experience for her at that time in her life. She continues to think about going out sometime soon to look for another job. Her second career, though short-lived, seemed to be what many of the participants went through in the early stage of their divorce process: new experiences. They are unique in the fact that many of them had not had to face new challenges in many years, at least independently. Challenges in the later years can be a good thing or they may prove to be overwhelming.

P2 spoke about finding her job. "I had a newspaper one Sunday afternoon...I found an ad for an administrative assistant...I applied and I got the job. I had to work a lot, and very hard." She reports the money helps out when she wants to do something extra for herself or her grandkids. P3 talked about childcare as a means to earn extra money. "I kept my grandchildren and did childcare for my daughter during that time."

At the time of her divorce, P6 decided to look for a second job.

I ...got the job at ____ in October and I moved out of the house in November. I needed to work a lot and I knew I had to increase my hours to support myself...I can see people until 8 o'clock or something and stay and do paperwork for four hours and I come home many nights when it's 12 a.m.

She reported she works two part-time jobs as a mental health professional and has learned to spend her money more conservatively post divorce.

P8 had a master's degree in education when she divorced. She believed that women who were stay-at-home moms for many years, are at a disadvantage in the job market after a divorce.

Nobody wants somebody that's been a stay-at-home mom...I forced myself out of my comfort zone and I went into the Michigan Works Office...to attend a 'Tools for Effective Jobs' workshop... I actually met with somebody to help me with my resume...She said, 'my boss saw you last week...she is looking for someone'...I stepped outside my comfort zone to do something and the next thing I know I have a job.

Her experience captured what the literature describes as network support; she found it to be very helpful during her divorce adjustment process (Krumrei, Coit, Martin, Fogo, & Mahoney, 2007). She worked there part-time for a while when she found out her "ex lost his job; I was working two to three days a week teaching these workshops and helping with resumes, and I was making good money." She reported she is a good saver and budgeter and does not feel the need to do more right now, although she is open to whatever may come her way. Several participants (e.g., P2, P4, and P8) spoke about having skills that allowed them to be good savers and budgeters during their post divorce process.

P13 was working full time as a salaried employee when she filed for divorce.

I will obviously try to make a few hundred extra dollars once in a while. There are opportunities on the side, like if someone wants to come in and record something; I could get in some extra hours. There are just not a lot of opportunities where I work to earn overtime.

She reported she has had to be creative with her money; she has a renter living in her home and he contributes financially, she had a big yard sale and she has learned to budget.

P12 talked about losing her job being a greater stressor than her divorce. "Right after I left him...the stress was due to my job loss. I was on Xanax at that time, Wellbutrin, Prilosec...but I'm not on the antidepressants anymore." P12 remembered feeling more fear and

anxiety over her job loss rather than her divorce.

Money was a priority for many of the participants early on in their divorce adjustment process, and it was something that came up often during the 25 interviews. This group of women had been married for most of their adult lives; many of them had to learn how to be financially independent while in their 50s and 60s. The need to learn how to be financially independent post divorce does not make them unique in the divorce literature, but the age at which they are acquiring the skills does.

P9 talked about her education experience. “I got my degree in 2005 I went to school right after my divorce...then my mother got sick. I was actually working my job at [local mental health agency] at the time.” Her education allowed her to become “more employable” post divorce. Employment was an event for many of the participants: equally important was the subject of money and finances. All of the women talked about financial issues that came up early in their divorce adjustment process.

Financial. During the early stage of the divorce adjustment process, one theme seemed almost universal to the participants: it was everything that had to do with finances. For the purposes of this study, the word financial incorporates money, debt, and assets. These themes were described with great passion during the interviews. The theme of finances also continued into the adapting and final stage of the divorce adjustment process.

Money. P10 remembered her response early on. “I was freaked out about the money. I was completely freaked out.” Conversely, P1 reported, “It pretty much, sorry to say this, it pretty much went on my terms.” P16 reported that before she found out about her husband’s affair, she found out “he actually opened up an account the year before that I didn’t know.” During the course of their marriage they had been partners in everything, including finances and banking.

She reported this was hard for her, to know that he had kept this secret from her. P16 spoke about her experiences with financial matters early on in her divorce adjustment process.

I knew all the bills. He trusted me with the money...At this time he was still transferring \$3,000 every month to pay the mortgage and the bills...In 2009 I was telling people that I trusted him with the money; but the more I thought about it the madder I got. He is the cheater...So I took \$12,000 out of the account and made 12 house payments ahead. He was so upset with me for spending the money.

For this participant, the reality of the divorce really began to set in around financial matters. Her husband still lived in the family home and bills were paid. In the early stage of her divorce adjustment process, the financial part of the marriage became an early meeting place for discord.

P15 talked about her financial struggles early on with her ex-husband.

He was supposed to give me \$850 per month for alimony for eight years; but because he declared bankruptcy he ended up only giving me \$500 a month for five years. I feel like I am giving him \$350 a month and I regret that and it pisses me off. I have money, but I don't have money like he has. I know he has \$300,000 plus in his retirement fund.

She talked about still having a lot of emotion around the financial piece of the divorce.

P11 described her financial dealings with her ex. "I probably didn't get enough. The part I didn't ask for was part of his investments, which I could have, but it just wasn't worth that to me. I can take care of myself. I've always known that." This sense of self-efficacy seemed to embolden her. P21 reported she struggled financially after her car accident. "I was a burden when I could not work. I had five jobs. I used to work and he was used to me taking care of him. I am the one that took care of things and bought everything." Once the divorce was final she lived on SSDI and his alimony payments; she reported feeling worried and frustrated over this

area of her life.

Four women in the unresolved group (e.g., P7, P15, P16, and P21) reported during the interview that they were still struggling with painful feelings about money and debt and their divorce (e.g., feeling betrayed, frustrated, feeling cheated). At the time of the interview these feelings had not been resolved.

Debt. This area is where some found a great deal of pain when their relationship was ending. During the divorce proceedings, P15 discovered that her husband had accrued \$78,000 in credit card debt. She reported during the interview that she had no idea. “We live under the same roof, we have the same cars, how did this guy use all this money?” She reported she felt lied to and wondered what else her husband had been doing without her knowledge; she felt betrayed. When she decided to divorce she was unaware of the debt. P15 remembered feeling really upset and surprised when she found out the true financial state she and her husband had co-existed in. “I found out after I initiated that we had no equity in our home. This was quite a shock. He also had credit card debt I didn’t know about.” At the time she knew she would be financially struggling, but she did not know the true scope of her financial situation and this was hard on her.

P23 described her process. “He moved and when he left he didn’t take anything other than his personal belongings, his computer, a TV, and his car. I mean he left me the house, all the debt, and we had a lot of debt.” P7 reported that her husband had become addicted to drugs, during the marriage. He had stopped paying bills, and became very irresponsible. “He left me with all the expenses...I was paying two mortgages, insurances, had a daughter to get through college.” She also had to clean up the house before it could be sold.

The court took receivership of the house because it had gone into foreclosure and it was

up for nonpayment of taxes. So, I had to have him forcibly removed and had to have the locks changed three times because he kept breaking into the house...do you know those shows where they show you terribly trashed houses--that's what he had done, in addition to having set a fire in the living room.

For her, taking out the trash took on a whole new meaning. She also reported it took a while to get her credit straightened out. "I had to get an attorney and I had to have them call the credit company and get my name off and that was two years."

Assets. For the purpose of this study, assets are defined as property or financial holdings that the couple accrued during the course of the marriage. P23 remembered one condition early in her divorce adjustment process. "There is one thing that I will fight you on and that is if you have any attachments to my retirement." She talked about how calming that was for her to know that her retirement would not become part of the settlement negotiations.

For this group of women, taking care of their financial future (i.e., retirement) was a huge concern, since many of them would be ready to retire within a few years of their divorce. This added an additional burden to this population and makes this population unique when compared to younger divorcing women. Research is clear on this: the older the age at the time of the divorce, the less time the person has to make up their financial losses post divorce (Hayes & Anderson, 1993). The idea of 'less time' may have a negative impact on post divorce adjustment.

For some participants, assets seemed to have very little meaning at this point of the process. P16 remembered feeling so depressed "at that time, I said to him, 'take whatever you want. I don't care.'" Later on the negotiations took on a more solid form. She remembered it being a very painful process; "the house looked so empty after he left." This may be an additional layer of pain post divorce for these women. Many of them (e.g., 16) had been in

marriages more than 25 years (mean = 26.1 years); couples often acquire many assets during a long-term marriage. For this population, asset division may prove to be more painful.

For P5, assets seemed to be no big deal. “I mean it was what you would call an amicable divorce, I guess as far as assets go. I mean it wasn’t like we fought over things.” P1 described her husband as being completely withdrawn from the process. “I tried to get him to discuss personal possessions and household stuff before the movers came in.” His withdrawal was tough on her; he ignored her and acted as if this process didn’t matter. She remembered telling him through a closed door, “I’m not going to take anything you don’t want me to have, but I would like to have some stuff.” He refused to answer her; she reported she took everything except his bedroom set, a couple of chairs and the kitchen appliances. She justified her actions because he had told her, “What you don’t take I’m burning in the back yard” and she believed him.

P4 had a more equitable view of assets and money. “You know I wanted half of what we had; there was some dispute over what half was.” On the ill advice of his lawyer/friend, her ex was the one who had moved all the money from the joint account to one solely in his name. When she told her lawyer what her husband had done, the lawyer replied, “He doesn’t get to keep it.”

P10 remembered the asset division process of her early divorce adjustment “when we were splitting up paintings we had, furniture we had aside from the stuff he took at the beginning I got adamant about some things and like, you know, like I like that picture.” But once she moved into her house, those feelings changed. “I still have some pictures leaning against the walls; pictures that I like, but I somehow cannot hang them up.” She seemed to wonder about why that was. Gregson and Ceynar (2009) described this phenomenon in their research as the need for divorced women to be different from their married selves.

P13 initiated the divorce and reported she felt responsible, so her view of their joint assets seemed a little more egalitarian.

I just felt like because I made that decision that he should not have to sit back and be financially burdened...He didn't take any of the credit card debt or even have a car payment. He wasn't working, but he got no debt out of the divorce.

P9 remembered the financial part of her divorce in a humorous way. "He wanted to take care of me but he didn't want to give me my share. I didn't take the monthly stipend; I just wanted out." But she did recall, "There were other things he wouldn't let me have. I wanted a simple chair and said 'no,' he didn't want me to have that and some other miscellaneous things." During this process, her daughter chose to get involved. P9 spoke about a very painful moment during that time. "My daughter ripped me a new one in an email. She told me I was selfish and I had no right to anything from the home." She remembered feeling devastated; after that, she recalled "not fighting so hard." This may be a unique feature within the divorce literature: adult children inserting themselves into their parent's divorce process.

These participants had to learn how to stand up for themselves during the early stage of their divorce adjustment process. This happened in the mediation and legal proceedings, and in financial matters. Many of them talked about how proud they were of advocating for themselves and learning how to navigate financial situations.

Women's experiences early stage. During the interviews, different experiences began to emerge; stories and narratives stood out in the data and from within these emerged several sub-categories. Among these experiences--surprising depression is an important one. The women perhaps did not believe they were capable of being depressed. So perhaps the surprise was the important component.

Surprising depression. Several participants remembered experiencing depression during the early stages of their divorce adjustment. P21 recalled her experience. “It was hard. That’s why I take my depression pills. I was in a deep depression.” P4 vividly remembered her experience of being down. “I was really depressed during that time, thinking I made a terrible mistake--all of that.” P4 remembered feeling overwhelmed. “I felt the depression thing come on so strong and the power of it just blew me out of the water, surprising me--that I would lose control of myself that much.” She also believes she struggled with menopause. “[It] surprised me that it was a big deal emotionally. I think the depression and the menopause came in together. The hormonal thing threw my bearings off.”

P1 spoke about her experience.

The depression caught me totally off guard; I did not anticipate it. I thought I was going to be so happy to have this over with. But I wasn’t; I was depressed, I was tired. I had really low energy, I was just sad...it started when the divorce was final and it lasted until spring.

She remembered it feeling all encompassing and like she “would never be happy again for the rest of her life...[It] caught me totally off guard, I did not anticipate it. I was surprised by the amount of depression.” P25 reported she encountered depression. “I have depression I must say. Oh yeah, I’m still on Celexa.” She went on to describe her experience with depression “when I am totally depressed or something and that happens because you know, right now I wonder ‘am I doing everything right for my kids. What can I do to help them not be like their dad?’” She and her ex have not been able to co-parent as well as she had hoped. The depression coupled with the lack of cooperation with her ex seems to have been overwhelming.

Failure. Bair (2007) and Thomas and Ryan (2008) described this phenomenon of feeling

like a failure post divorce. P12 remembered the intensity of her experience early on. "I had felt like I had failed in every area at that point. You know, my marriage failed and now my job was failing and everything I do fails, everything I touch is failing." P4 reported, "I have a failed marriage." P19 talked about feeling "like a failure a lot of times." P10 doesn't like to be labeled as divorced, when asked why, she responded, "Feels like a failure. I don't like to fail." P22 reported that, "Through the divorce I thought I was a failure, I thought I was a horrible person, and I thought that I was to blame for everything and that I was totally incapable as a person."

Emotions. Guilt was described as one of the early emotions experienced by the participants; guilt has also been found to impede the divorce adjustment process (Boney, 2010). P1 remembered, "I had some guilt associated with leaving him, because of, you know, some of the issues he has; I kind of felt like I was leaving someone with severe disabilities." P1 believed her ex suffered for years with PTSD; she also knew that he never sought help for his issues. "My husband used my Blue Cross five times more than I did. He had more prescriptions, more doctor visits, more stuff like that, and I felt a lot of guilt. I didn't want to take anything away from him." Even at the time of the interview she was experiencing some guilt. "I still feel it. It's less frequent. Like with Thanksgiving, my kids will go to see him. I will make sure they take a ton of leftovers out to him, so he will have a holiday."

P12 described her experience, "It was the guilt. I was just riddled with it...the guilt of leaving him, the guilt the church put on me, guilt that my mother had put on me for years." She continued,

My mother and I are okay. My mother, in the beginning, when I first told her what I was doing, she basically gave me the silent treatment...and I said to her... 'I'm doing this...you don't have to like it, but I would ask that you support me.'

She also remembered struggling with forgiveness. “I was having a hard time forgiving myself. It was me I couldn’t forgive.” She remembered crying out to God for relief. “I don’t know. I just kept saying, ‘Lord just give me something to release me.’” She reported that “God did forgive.” When she was asked about achieving self-forgiveness, she laughed and said, “Oh yeah, when my ex left and went to Texas with that 35-year-old. Then I had no problem with it.” When I asked how her mother came to terms with her divorce, she reported “She basically came to me and said, ‘I don’t want to lose you. I don’t agree with what you’re doing but I don’t want to lose you, either.’”

P15 spoke about her emotions and the guilt she experienced early in her divorce adjustment process.

Emotionally you see it is very hard because you go through different kinds of emotions when you get a divorce, like feeling guilty. My kids were adolescents and I have regret at times, ‘like should I have stayed together for their sake?’ They went through a lot of problems due to the divorce happening in their adolescent years.

P15 was unique in this sample because her two sons are still minors; she believes the fighting might have negatively impacted her children and she reports feeling guilty about that.

P4 spoke about her experiences with guilt after she left her ex-husband for her affair partner.

It was painful for the first couple of years. Yeah, that’s sort of like, that’s where I talk about the guilt, the suffering for my kids. Part of it was the guilt in screwing up their family. When my ex repartnered, she was so cruel to my daughters, I started beating myself up again. It was hard.

She talked about guilt stemming from leaving a good marriage, having an affair, causing her

children pain; guilt for her seemed multi-directional.

Several participants (e.g., P9, P11, P13, and P26) all reported struggling with guilt in the early stage of their divorce process; but all reported they were able to work through their feelings and not let guilt hold them back.

Two other feelings seemed to emerge from the data: resentment and anger. Fifteen participants reported experiencing anger and/or resentment early on in their process (e.g., P2, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P15, P16, P17, P18, P21, and P25). P10 recalled her experience.

The two things I got angriest at were that I was out of love with him, Number One, and money Number Two: I was pissed off about...money. Here I was supposed to be in the golden years when I could go where I wanted to go and do what I wanted to do. The other one was all the times that pissed me off because I took care of him so many times and now I'm going to be old and taking care of myself. It just made me so mad!

She was able to talk objectively about her experience now, but she remembered that the anger felt overwhelming and consuming to her at that time in her early divorce adjustment process. P10 added she remembered right after she got a job in a bookstore, "I had no time at all to be thinking about being divorced, being mad, being sad, angry. I confess there were days when I would be standing at the register and trying not to cry." She also remembered feeling angry about being stuck with the work around the house and preparing to sell the home. "I had to do all the work" once her ex-husband left the home.

I had to find the real estate lady, do all the prices and I had to do any fixing up, clean house every time there was open house, and shovel the driveway. That winter it snowed every other day and I would be out there shoveling at 11:30 at night because I got out of work late and who knows, maybe someone would call and want to see the house so it was

exhausting physically and mentally...and I was so mad because I was doing everything. She commented at that point in the interview that going through all that work and physical activity was hard, but she also realized it was a “great way to get out my emotions.”

P12 remembered feeling resentful along with the anger. “I was looking for peace in my life and simplicity in my life. I ...had to make the major moves and changes to get there and I resented that.” She talked about eventually resolving her anger and resentment; she believed that resolution was allowed to happen because God was able to release her from her feelings.

One participant experienced fear during her early divorce adjustment process. P24 had been married to an emotionally abusive and controlling man; she remembered one time when she agreed to meet him to give him some paperwork.

I met him in a parking lot to exchange some papers after the divorce and he said, ‘you’re going to listen to me’ ...He looked around the parking lot and I thought, ‘oh, no, something is going to happen here’ and I could tell something was going to happen...I knew he was not going to let me leave...He said, ‘no, you are not going anywhere. This is not going to end up good for you’...So I drove off shaking.

When she was asked about ever seeing him again, she replied, “No, because I was really too afraid to see him again. That’s the only time I called my son because I was really afraid he might follow me because he was so upset.” She spoke about her son and his relationship with his father.

He never talked back to his dad....he said to his dad, ‘if you ever go after mom again, in the end you will lose me as a son’ and that did it...So, he’s left me alone; I am still kind of scared of him...I still am kind of leery but I don’t think he’ll do something that stupid because he knows he would lose his son. My son was there, but I didn’t want to drag him

into anything with the divorce. I didn't want him involved in any of that. She talked about still feeling a little bit of fear and anxiety even today. She recalled that night and can't help but think she came real close to dying: she just knew it in her gut.

This may also represent a new layer in post divorce processing for this population: depending on adult children for support, a role reversal of sorts. Divorced women depending on adult children is supported in the literature (Wright & Maxwell, 1991).

P24 spoke about another experience that she went through. "I didn't go out of the apartment anywhere to meet people or anything for months and then I just started getting stir crazy." This was after the fear she experienced with her ex-husband. When I asked her to tell me more about that experience, she replied;

One night I said to myself, 'Okay, you are going to go out.' There is a country bar down the street and I have always wondered what that was like. My ex would never let me go to a bar.

She remembered feeling nervous that night, but she ended up doing it and was glad she did.

Several participants described feelings of numbness and disconnection early in their process. P1 described her feeling of numbness and feeling disconnected from self early in the divorce adjustment process. "There wasn't an emotional connection I went through the motions...and did exactly what I thought I should do." She remembered feeling like she was living on autopilot. P12 talked about the mechanical living she experienced in the early stage of her divorce adjustment process. "My thing was to just get through, day by day and I was just going through the motions after awhile." She remembered feeling disconnected, wondering how long all of this would last. P11 remembered feeling disconnected. She spoke about her process. "I can't explain what it was: it was just an emotion that was hard to resolve." P17 pointed out

once she felt disconnected, she just got busy. “That’s what got me through it, being busy.”

Isolation. Several women described the experience of isolation. P15 recalled, “I don’t know if it was me or them, because I isolated.” She went on, “I didn’t call them...and they did the same. You know, all the friends I had when I was married, my neighbor, none of them communicated with me and come to think of it I didn’t either.”

P4 described her experience in a similar manner, “My kids live very far away; my family is in [another state]. I did not have any real support: I felt isolated.” P5 also felt the need to pull back. “I was a loner. I had family around, but during the time when I first got this house, this was it.” P10 talked about her experience. “I pretty much holed up in my house.” P12 also spoke of isolation. “Apartment living was fine except that it was getting to where I felt more isolated. I didn’t feel like there was any--what would be the word--it didn’t feel like home.”

Shock. Feeling shocked was also talked about; some women spoke of never having imagined they would be divorced at this stage of their lives. For this population, long-term marriages produced a sense of security. P10 captured this perfectly: “I guess at the beginning, just getting over that feeling of, like, I never thought in a million years that I would be in this position.” She further went on to talk about her expectations that were thwarted. “Yeah, I guess, shock and sadness. I thought I was going to be one of those people...but to get dumped on your ass and think ‘hey this wasn’t supposed to happen,’ that was shocking.” She remembered how numb she felt; she spent the first few weeks in the early stage of her divorce adjustment just being “checked out emotionally.”

Other women in the study mentioned experiencing shock. P11 reported, “I was just kind of in shock.” P16 described her experience, “I remember thinking over and over, and he left me, after 24 years.” P2 remembered feeling shocked. “I had no indication of the divorce.” For her the

shock of it felt overwhelming.

P22 spoke of finding out via a third party, which was somehow even more shocking. “I didn’t even realize what he [stockbroker] said to me and it didn’t really even hit me.” I remember thinking, “What are you talking about?” When her husband had left a few days earlier, she had thought it was for him to cool off and calm down. For her, the shock of finding out your husband wanted a divorce was enough, but to find out through the stockbroker? That was shock on a whole other level.

P5 spoke of her experience. “He called me while he was gone and I asked him how he was doing and there was a long pause and he said, ‘I think I need to tell you that I want to get a divorce.’” She remembered feeling numb. “Well I mean I knew things weren’t going really well, I never, never dreamed that that would be the case.” For her, the shock of not knowing where she stood in her marriage, coupled with the idea that her partner told her over the phone, was very overwhelming. She described it as “too much” to handle. “I remember being very shocked, this can’t be happening at my house. You know there’s just no way that this is going to happen, [ex] would never do that.”

Shock can manifest in different ways. P6 described her shock experience. She had talked about her experience of contemplating divorce for many years: she knew well her husband’s temperament and how angry and volatile he could get. She put off divorce for many reasons. So when the divorce was finally in process, she felt shock at the ease of the process. “I would have never have thought it, but our divorce went smoothly.” Her shock looked different, but it still represented a valid experience, one that could be described as getting something that you never expected. “From the time I filed, we never had one ugly moment which I never expected.”

Loss. This theme was experienced and described by many participants; the underlying

theme of loss permeated the women's narratives. P12 described her experience with loss. "I think that's when the reality of the divorce hit me, my life hit me, and everything about my life hit me all at once. I lost my marriage." She recalled the moment when this hit her, and how powerful that was for her, "the loss of the life that I had, that I feel like I built outside of my husband. That's what I grieve, being in the church, in the ministries. I did enjoy that." P25 spoke of her loss.

It's sad because you are a baby boomer and you have a master's degree and have worked for 16 years making a pretty good living, and now I am here, out of a job and the business that you started to grow got flat-lined because the divorce takes so much out of you. Her loss was focused around work, but she attributed some of that to the pain of the divorce experience.

P5 talked about her loss. She was still very much in love with him when he asked her for a divorce; she and her two children were devastated. Out of that pain she spoke about her actions towards him; she was embarrassed to admit it, but she dragged her kids into it by encouraging them to talk to their dad about stopping the divorce. "Because I wanted him to know how they felt about this and that he'd messed up things for all of us." She admitted that it wasn't the best thing she could have done.

P17 had health issues while she was in her divorce adjustment process. The loss of her health coinciding with the loss of her marriage seemed to amplify the experience for her.

The summer after my divorce I had breast cancer and it did not run in my family...So I had a partial mastectomy, lymph nodes and radiation. Some medical people told me cancer can be attributed to stress. She seemed amazed that she was able to go through so much at the same time.

P15 experienced multiple losses during her early divorce adjustment process. She admitted during the interview that she had started an affair during the marriage; she did it out of loneliness and desperation. When she filed for divorce, her affair partner also ended the relationship.

I lost my friend and my lover, I was on unemployment, and then I found out my ex had lied to me by hiding debt from me. Because of his bankruptcy after the divorce, I had to go from \$850 to \$500 per month for five years. My kids were acting out, having bad grades and my son started using drugs. It was too much: I was overwhelmed. She still reports feeling somewhat desperate; she has not repartnered and she is struggling with finding a full-time job and with paying her bills. She reported that she feels sometimes like she will never be “totally okay ever again.”

P20 described her experience with multiple losses.

My son died in the fall of 2005. It was the same time as the separation from my ex. My son had been living in a group home, and had a few bouts with pneumonia and being sick (paused interview, P20 was crying). It is really hard to talk about I guess. It was pretty sudden actually.

For her the loss of her marriage was eclipsed by the loss of her son.

Loss also seemed to center around relationships. P22 was the participant whose ex-husband had been emotionally abusive and controlling and who she found out about the divorce from the stockbroker. She described her experience of loss.

I lost just about everybody I knew. His side of the family wouldn't talk to me; gone...My family, I have one sister that will talk to me; everybody else is gone. My mom won't talk to me, parents' won't talk to me...My kids also really pushed away and they were very

angry and very mean. I felt like I lost. I feel like I could cry at this time, I just lost everything at that time.

Her experience seemed to be more global than others that were interviewed. She talked about how it was the suddenness of everything that also contributed to the pain of her experience. For baby boomer women who experience multiple losses (e.g., children, network, and family), there can be a magnification effect. Numerous losses, suddenness of events, and timing all add up to making the early divorce process that much more painful and difficult to navigate.

P1 also reported that the loss of her husband's family connections were very powerful. "That was my family, you know. It was really hard to lose that connection." P24 talked about her experience with loss in the early stage of her divorce adjustment.

It was like I left everything. I left my family, which was my ex's family, they were my family, my friends in the cul-de-sac...gone, and I don't see them anymore because I'm not in the cul-de-sac, not in the club. I lost my place in the club.

P23 remembered when the man delivered the divorce papers to her door; she described her surprising experience of loss.

I don't know why, it was just tough. The guy came and says you need to sign this and 'I said, what is it?' and it was the divorce papers that had been filed. I truly think in the back of my mind for a long time that I thought he would come back. I think it was there. That was the finality piece of it. I didn't cry.

Even though she and her husband had decided divorce was the best option (he had already moved to be with his new partner), it was still experienced as a loss when the paperwork arrived.

P21 talked about a loss of a different kind. "I don't cook as much as I used to. I miss cooking big meals, family meals. That's the part that is painful." The connection she experienced

during family meal times was important; not having it represented an ambiguous loss for her.

Primal states. Under this section I describe experiences that are relevant to the divorce adjustment process, but do not necessarily fall under one category. These experiences describe states of being, feelings, and instability. Not one single name could adequately capture the experiences; but these experiences did emerge from the data, and are presented here to give the reader a sense of the early experiences of some of the participants.

Three participants mentioned they went on the “divorce diet” in the early stage of their adjustment period (P12, P15, and P19); they suggested that the stress of the divorce caused them to eat less and they did lose weight. All of them reported they had trouble eating and raw emotions prevented them from thinking of food.

P8 described her experience. “The one person who supported me through it was my lawyer. Other than that, honestly I really didn’t have anybody.” She said this in a matter of fact tone, very resigned. For this researcher, this experience of feeling alone and unsupported did not quite fit under the theme of loss; it seemed more passive of an experience.

P9 was the initiator of her divorce and she spoke about feeling misunderstood in the early stage of her process. “At that point, even when the kids got mad, I don’t think I felt guilt. I felt misunderstood but not guilt. Even with my faith background being anti-divorce, I just felt I had to leave: I was dying inside.” For her, the experience was a lack of empathy from others around her.

Along with her, P12 also reported feeling judged and misunderstood within her church community.

Divorce was not acceptable, because it just wasn’t done...for me to be a Christian and as involved in my church as I was, and there was no adultery, and for me to walk away the

way I did, they just thought I went off the deep end.

When she tried to talk with the Pastor's wife to explain her reasoning, she remembered feeling admonished by her. She (i.e., Pastors wife) had basically told her to "grow up and go back to your marriage." She remembered vividly the feeling of a slow burn and said to the Pastor's wife, "Well, okay, you're entitled to your opinion but until you walk a mile in my shoes, you have no right to judge me." She walked away from that church and never went back. This was a loss of possible social support for her during her divorce adjustment process.

Three participants (e.g., P10, P22, and P23) described feeling stuck/paralyzed and one talked about the experience of instability. P22 described her dual experiences. "I would look at a drawer and I couldn't decide what to throw away and what to keep. I just couldn't do it." She then described the unstable feeling that she experienced in the early stage of her divorce adjustment. "It felt like they put you in a jar, shook you up, and then put you out and you are supposed to stand up and you are just like wobbling, you know; where am I?" For her, the indecision preceded the instability; this was a jarring and memorable event in her process. While she was being interviewed, she expressed that she was surprised she could tap into those memories so quickly and feel so much of that energy around that time in her life.

P10 also remembered feeling off; "for a couple of months I was always off balance and kept saying 'okay, you can do this.' They always say when you do something out of your comfort zone, that's a good thing; and I truly was uncomfortable." P8 reported she too found it to be a positive experience when she went to a workshop on finding a job. "I forced myself out of my comfort zone."

P23 spoke of her experience. "After he left, I felt paralyzed, like maybe I was going to make a wrong decision." If you recall, this is the participant who found out her husband of 34

years was gay: he had also been a heavy drinker for a large part of their married life. Her previous stability was in a marriage to a person who was gay and probably an alcoholic. When he came out and asked for a divorce, it became a very destabilizing time for her.

P6 spoke of her experience as being one of relief. She had been in a long-term unhappy marriage, had friends praying for her all the while she was contemplating divorce. She lived for years with a man who had “anger control issues” and whom participated in a great deal of infidelity. She reported that she even believed he was a narcissist.

I was so relieved. I was so worried. I mean this, it was like the biggest gray black cloud was over my head for it felt like 30 years, and like it was gone. I was amazed. I can quit worrying about, ‘am I going to get a divorce,’ ‘what will happen to the kids,’ ‘will I go through some horrible humiliating times,’ ‘will I lose my relationship with the in-laws.’

Everything turned out okay.

She was also highlighted earlier as having the experience of shock in the early stage of her divorce adjustment. So for her, the dual experiences of shock and relief turned out to be a positive experience early on in her divorce adjustment process.

Outside reactions in the early stage. This group of women represents a potentially unique group within the divorce literature; they may be some of the first in their families to obtain a divorce after a long-term marriage. Family and friends may be shocked at the divorce, and their responses may prove to be either a support or a hindrance to the participant’s post divorce adjustment process.

Outside reaction to the divorce. For P24 the experience she encountered when her friends and neighbors found out about the divorce was revealing.

Well, one friend, I think she was married and maybe she got upset because of something I

may have said, but I never got an answer texting her. The other friends were fine. Some of my married friends were fine. Some of the ones I worked with for a long time, their husbands were fine. The ones in the cul-de-sac were different; they treated me differently once they found out.

She remembered this was a painful event; these neighbors had been her friends, they had been the ones who challenged her to stand up to her ex-husband. She never could understand why the neighbors treated her the way they did as soon as she announced her intention to divorce.

P3 remembered her family's shock at the news. "When I told my mother and my sister that I was getting a divorce, they couldn't believe it." They had watched her suffer, being married for many years, and could not believe she was divorcing him. She laughed when she remembered the story. I asked her, 'what is so funny?' She just talked about remembering the shocked expressions on their faces and what it must have been like for them to see her in a "totally different light." P6 talked about the support she received for years from her friends.

I had friends who had been praying for me forever. My friends were great--they were so supportive...I think they were all thinking 'if she ever decides.' I definitely knew I had a lot of support.

P7 reported, "When I did tell people that I was going to divorce, people had absolutely no idea about the marriage, none. I had never, ever let on that there was any problem or issues." She remembered colleagues and friends being shocked. For her daughter, it was a blessing. "She was relieved, really relieved when we did finally get divorced."

P25 described an unbelievable scene when her sisters-in-law found out about the divorce. "It was horrible. They tossed my stuff, all my personal things. They all grabbed my stuff and they tossed everything into the living room." Even while she was recounting the story, the pain

in her voice was evident. She just seemed confused, how people she had known for such a long time could treat her in such a manner.

P4 talked about a delay in telling her family and friends about her decision to divorce; she was the participant who could not justify her reason for leaving an “okay marriage.”

So I waited awhile, like six months, before I let them know. My daughter was getting married...it was about a year. Some had reacted badly...I thought that our joint friends were my friends...It was a shocking divorce to our friends. Some were mad at me: some people couldn't handle it. I guess it wasn't as easy to stay friends, both of us, with people. She talked about how “once the shock wore off,” some of her friends reconnected with her. This seemed to help her process during the adapting and final stage of divorce adjustment.

P6 talked about feeling the need to tell her husband's parents about the divorce; he left it up to her to inform his family. She was very connected to her in-laws and wanted them to hear about the divorce first hand.

I told my sister-in-law about our divorce: she didn't know about it [divorce]. I explained to her that I needed to talk to her mom and dad about the divorce and I asked her, ‘Will you go with me?’ I wanted her to be there for her mom and dad to be a support to them.

They had 3 kids: we'd be the first ones to divorce.

For P6, it felt like the right thing to do. She talked about how hard the news was for her mother and father-in-law; but she reported she felt good about herself for handling the situation in the way that she did. She did talk about losing respect for her husband for leaving the “dirty work” of telling his folks to her.

P12 and her ex-husband were heavily involved in their church. She was worried about letting down the pastors and congregants; she was unsure of their reaction and kept the news

somewhat secret for an extended period of time.

I wasn't going to continue a charade, if you will, and so we went to the pastors only and we told them what was going on and we said we were going to step down and nobody in the church knows what's going on. We didn't want anyone to know. I didn't even tell my work until eight months into my separation. It was during that time I decided I was leaving him for good.

For her, it seemed appropriate to shelter others from the news. In some way, she believed that it made her process easier.

Family. Not surprisingly the theme related to family appeared routinely throughout the interviews. This was one of the biggest themes to emerge from the data in the early stage of the divorce adjustment process. Perhaps a unique feature to this cohort, a divorce at this stage of life was very shocking to family members. This theme will be broken down into categories of reactions from the ex, ex's family of origin, kids, grandkids, participant family of origin.

Ex reactions. P1 spoke of her experience with her ex-husband when he finally understood that she was divorcing him. "He came to me at some point in time after all this, a couple of weeks later, and very heartfelt--it broke my heart--and said 'Isn't there something we can do to turn this around?'" She spoke about feeling sad but also angry; she had tried for years to create change in their relationship but he would not support that. She remembered thinking, "It's too late, and don't you get it?" For her, his reaction was like everything else in their marriage: too little, too late. She also recalled that early on in the divorce adjustment process he had an over-the-top reaction when she bought her small house. "He also got really mad when he found out I was buying the house before the divorce was final." She believed that his thought process was the following: "If I should die in the car accident, he thought that he would end up financially

obligated for that house.” She felt a little hurt but she understood that his Number One priority was always money--not her or the kids.

P4 left her husband for her affair partner. “He was the one who was left; he was rudderless. He did not know what to do with himself.” She reported that was hard for her to watch and even harder to know he was suffering because of her decision. “That was really hard--thinking that I was the kind of person who would leave somebody who wasn’t bad.”

P10 described her husband’s reactions early on in the divorce adjustment process.

I guess the meanest thing he said was, ‘I am not giving her [affair partner] up: like don’t even try to talk me out of it because it’s not an option.’ That’s as blunt as he got; he felt bad and he felt guilty.

Her description of her ex’s reactions seemed to make sense; he met someone else, fell in love, but still felt committed to his wife and adult kids. But she also recalled, “Whenever I would go out, I would run into somebody who’d ask how’s [ex]? Everyone wondered how he was because of his motorcycle accident the previous year.” She continued to explain, “It was a huge ordeal for me, because he didn’t tell any of his friends he had left me.” She spoke about this being very painful for her early on; she was being constantly reminded of the divorce and abandonment and rejection of her. She remembered being angry at him every time someone stopped her to inquire about him, and for not letting any of his friends know he had left her.

P13 recalled her ex-husband’s reaction when she finally initiated their divorce.

I think in the beginning, he thought he could talk me out of it...then the arguing really kicked in. He seemed to ramp it up. ‘You never gave me a chance.’ I just looked at him and told him, ‘Forget it; I have given you all the chances I had to give.’

She explained that his reaction seemed to empower her. It was as if she had some internal

struggle surrounding her decision, and because of her ex's reaction, she was able to resolve her struggle and move forward with her decision.

P24 spoke about her ex's reaction with their son. "I know it upset him. My ex and I had agreed to tell our son together. 'Yeah, yeah, we'll tell him' he had said. Well, he didn't. He just blurted it out to him." She talked about how disappointed and angry she was with her ex; she wasn't totally shocked, but she thought that the way he did it caused their son more pain than was necessary. This she felt bad about.

P5 remembered, "He did hurt me in other ways that I think he was clueless about. Like when he said, 'This won't be that much different. You'll have your income, the kids will be here and I'll still see you often.'" Then she added that her ex-husband could also be very caring towards her. He was very open to her expressing her emotions to their divorce and her process. "He just felt I was entitled to feel however angry I wanted to be." She spoke about how his reaction was somewhat freeing for her and helpful for her process. She did recall that he was kind to her.

One thing that helped me that I could credit my ex with is that he didn't tear me down.

He didn't say I was worthless or wouldn't be able to find anyone else. He didn't say I was crappy in bed. He didn't say things to bad mouth me...He didn't do things that would...make me feel like less of a person.

P5 talked about her ex-husband's caring and kindness towards her early in the divorce adjustment process and how it was probably the single most helpful thing of all.

Due to the length of marriages for women in this sample and the amount of time spent together while married, the ex-husband's reactions may be an important factor early in the divorce process. For this population, respect may be an important concept to look at throughout

the divorce process; this cohort was raised to respect people in authority, elders, and God. Respect, or lack of it, may be an element that allowed women to adjust well or not so well post divorce.

Ex family of origin. Several women talked about the powerlessness they experienced all the reactions of their ex-husband's family post divorce. Due to the length of time this sample was connected to their in-laws, loss of their support and connection may play an important role in baby boomer women's divorce adjustment. Ten unresolved participants and five resolved participants reported their relationships with their in-laws were strained or nonexistent post divorce (P1, P2, P4, P7, P12, P15, P16, P21, P24 and P25 and P8, P9, P13, P18, and P22). Four participants reported that the loss of their relationship with their ex in-laws negatively impacted their post divorce adjustment process. P24 was the participant who experienced fear when she met her ex in a parking lot to exchange paperwork; she reported she missed her mother-in-law. "She was like my mother when my mother died." She reported she missed her in-laws more than she did her ex-husband. She spoke about her in-laws' reactions and how painful it was during her early divorce adjustment process.

I was very close with my ex's family. I was like his mother's daughter because I had been in the family since age 16...They didn't talk to me for like a year because they didn't know what to do. They knew they had to support their son so if they talked to me it was kind of like betraying him.

She felt abandoned by them; this represented a huge loss for her. Just recently she has been meeting secretly with her ex mother-in-law (i.e., the woman is afraid of her son finding out) and P24 is thrilled with that reconnection.

Cutoff did not seem to be an unusual event; P15 recalled that once his family found out,

“they quit communicating with me completely.” She felt hurt and she was angry but knew “there was nothing I could do to change it.”

P1 recalled, “It was kind of awkward. You have to realize it was only like seven weeks after my divorce was final.” This was the first Christmas party where she had seen her in-laws since the divorce. She described the awkwardness of the situation.

Typically his family would walk up to me and their first line of questioning would be, ‘How’s [ex]?’ I was their connection to him. Now I wasn’t, because I divorced him.

They’re like, ‘Hi.’ They didn’t really quite know what to say. It was really awkward. Like several other participants, she remembered feeling disconnected and out of her element when she encountered her ex-husband’s family. But eventually she learned to reconnect with them through her children and is satisfied with that new connection.

P8 spoke about her ex-mother-in-law’s reactions, and how hurt she was early on in her divorce adjustment process.

His mother turned her back on me. Yeah, she turned her back on me and won’t have anything to do with me, but she did that with his first wife, too. I understand why she did, because it’s her way of supporting her son and welcoming the new wife in...but I thought that these are her grandchildren here. It took me a long time to take that in.

She was able to make sense of the ex in-laws’ withdrawal and disconnection. Gaining perspective on the other person’s actions may have enabled her to understand her own experience differently and not get stuck in the pain (i.e., self-transcendence).

Kids’ reaction. For all of the women in this research study, it became apparent that their kids’ experiences were very important to their own divorce adjustment process. Most of the children were in their late teenage years or were adults when the divorce occurred; some of them

even had children of their own. A few women had minor children at the time of the divorce (e.g., P7, P11, P15, P19, P22, and P25).

Some participants saw their children experience relief after the divorce was initiated. P10 spoke about her children's reaction. "The only people who have ever said, 'I'm not surprised,' were my kids." She talked about how strangely comforting their reactions were to her. "Both of their reactions were they were mad at him." P11 remembered her daughter's reaction early on. "She was 16 when we separated and she knew that's exactly what would happen. Someone said to her one day at a family event, 'I hear your parents are getting back together,' and she said, 'Over my dead body.'" P20 and her ex-husband had agreed to tell the kids communally; she recalled it like it was yesterday.

When I told them their father and I were getting a divorce...they were actually relieved. I think they thought I was going to tell them I had cancer or something, because they were like 'Oh my God, is that all?' I was like 'Thank God', because they were old enough to understand all of this.

She spoke about this being the first big hurdle she needed to get through in the early stage of her divorce process and she was glad to know the kids would be okay no matter what.

P21 believed her kids are hiding their feelings about the divorce. "I don't think they took it as well as they want me to think. I think they are in denial of their feelings but they just don't want me to see it." She talked about suffering during her divorce adjustment processing watching them suffer; she wants them to be okay with her divorce but understands they have to process it for themselves.

Other participants saw how the divorce hurt their children. P5 remembered her children were deeply hurt by their father's decision to divorce. She recalled that her "son never talked

about it” with her. She never remembers sitting down with him and discussing his feelings about it. “It’s not like we had deep conversations about the divorce.” She wonders to this day if maybe she should have pushed him harder on expressing his feelings.

P17 remembered her handicapped son not really understanding the divorce and he struggled with it. “He had the hardest time with it.” This was hard for her to watch: she was never really sure how much he understood. The not knowing how her son was doing seemed to add an additional layer of pain early on for her. P17 described a positive experience with her other adult son, during the early stage of her divorce adjustment process.

He was around for two years after my divorce, so he would come to dinner most nights because he liked to eat. He helped me with things around the condo. He eventually moved out of town because he got tired of listening to things that were being said about his father and he just wanted out of the county.

She spoke about feeling sad about the pain that existed between him and his father and this did add an additional layer of pain to her process.

P8 had three sons with her ex-husband. He traveled a lot for business and she reported he had several affairs during the course of their marriage. When she was asked about her children’s experience during the divorce, she remembered that her oldest seemed to suffer the greater loss. “The oldest one, it was sad. Every once in a while he would ask me about times when things were good, because he remembers when times were good. He had the most memory of dad.” As far as the two younger ones go, “They just remember dad always being gone.” That made her sad. She felt sad for all three of her sons, and how they missed out on experiencing their father the way she had, early on in the marriage. She talked about how her sons experience their father currently. One son reported, “He is not going to be very nice to the waitress; I almost want to

apologize to the waitress ahead of time before we are seated because I know dad is going to be an asshole” (laughs). She reported that has helped her divorce adjustment process tremendously, having the children adjust to the divorce. She talked about it being much harder on her if she saw her sons were still suffering.

P6 remembered her children’s reaction early in the divorce adjustment process.

That Christmas, [ex’s] girlfriend was there at the house; they were going to go on a ski trip and [ex] told my son, the youngest, that his girlfriend was coming on the ski trip. My boy was so mad...But they kind of smoothed that out and it turned out okay...She is still around and she’s a neat gal and she’s become part of the family...She’s very neat, very stable emotionally. I think she’s a good influence.

P6 talked about feeling relief when the divorce went so smoothly. She also spoke about feeling more relief when her sons’ seemed to make the transition.

Sometimes children externalized their pain and for P16 that was certainly the case; she remembered her 17-year-old son’s reaction to his pain. It was devastating for her. “I talked to people about my son...I was cleaning his room one day and I found two cans of beer. He drank the beers to put himself to sleep. That really devastated me.” Shortly after that she quit her new job and decided that no matter what, her children were going to be her primary focus from that point on.

P18 spoke about her 17-year-old son’s reaction to the divorce. “He understood that I had to do what I had to do, but he cried.” She remembered how much pain that caused her to see her son cry like that, and then she remembered what he said to her. “You know mom, I know dad didn’t know how to be a dad; but he doesn’t even know how to be a friend either.” She knew in that moment that both she and her son understood this man equally well.

Participant 19 talked about her kids' experience early on. "Worst part was the kids. The girls were already gone; my son was a different matter. There were so many other things going on." When she left their dad, she remembered her daughters telling her, "Mom you should have done this 10 years ago." As she moved through the divorce adjustment process, the kids watched her struggle. "The kids said mom, this is what you wanted, right? Then why are you so sad?" She talked about how she could have both experiences; she understood that even though this is what she wanted, she also carried sadness about the way it all ended.

P2 watched her kids' struggle trying to understand their father and his erratic behavior; he had an affair with a coworker and started drinking again. "So that was what was so crazy with my kids--dad knows he's doing wrong but he is still doing it." She felt bad for them "because he's not the person they thought their dad was." The children's pain seemed to amplify her own.

P22's kids' reactions stand out among all 25 participants interviewed. She is currently a graduate student, the woman whose ex-husband was very controlling and abusive towards her. She had asked him to leave the house until he could cool off; she later found out about the divorce from her husband's stockbroker.

My kids weren't talking to me; they were very mean to me...I did not know about this until last year, but my daughter spent every Friday at the superintendant's office, bawling her head off during her last year of high school....I would go to the homecoming thing but she wouldn't talk to me...she was so angry...I tell you, being a stay-at-home mom, it was like ripping my heart out.

She remembered one time she took a friend of hers to an event where her children ignored her.

She said, 'Why do you do this? Do I have to just rip you out of here and not let you go to these things?' She couldn't stand it. It was like this at every event I went to. Finally...I

just stopped going after about two years...I didn't get invited to my son's college graduation; that was really hard.

Her daughter's avoidance of her for an extended period of time was painful; she even believed it kept her from moving through her divorce adjustment process. She kept focusing on her relationship with her daughter and she remembered feeling constantly hurt and rejected by her.

P13 talked about a different experience she had concerning her children's reactions to her divorcing their father.

Oh, there were periods where they wouldn't take my phone calls; there was a lot of anger going on there. I get they were having all kinds of different feelings about the divorce...They kind of took his side a little bit. Then there was the 'What are you – crazy?' kind of thing going on. It all boiled down to, 'now look what this does to my life.'

She went on to say,

I think there was a mixed bag of emotions for them. They were angry at me because they believed I blew up the whole family. I think there was some selfishness there, too, because if they want to see both of us, let's say at Christmas, they know they'd have to do it at separate times.

She spoke about understanding her daughters' reactions, but she also acknowledged the pain their reactions caused her early on in her divorce adjustment process. She even acknowledged she was surprised at their selfishness during this time period. She talked about her oldest daughter's response to the divorce.

'Sometimes I feel like you two are the teenagers and I am the parent and you're the kid now. Like, you two are just out there and are crazy and you do things.' She also was very

angry with me. She told me that I wasn't the person that I used to be: she thought I switched who I was and now she couldn't come to me anymore. I don't know why, but she just felt like I had abandoned her somehow and I don't know why.

For this population the reaction of the kids may take on a different feel; many of the children are adults and perhaps their reactions impacted mom differently. They can be viewed as being supportive or as rejecting.

Another unusual response came from the adult son of P23. His response was due to two unique events: the divorce and his father coming out to his family that he was a gay man.

[H]e sat me down and told me he was gay and told my daughter; then he called my son, who works in Chicago. He called him at work and he told him that he was leaving; my son said, 'You know, I understand, dad, that things have not been good for a while' and my ex said 'I also want to tell you that I am gay.' I was so angry at him; you don't do that to a son at work.

She described her son's response. "My son couldn't reply and so for a very, very long time, my son had nothing to do with his father. That really bothered me." She was so relieved when her son met a woman who later became his fiancée. She told him "He is your dad." Since that time, her son and her daughter are reconciled with their father and are okay with his new partner; this made her life and her process much easier to deal with. She found out that information delivery is very important to children and maybe more so for adult children.

Grandkid's reactions. P12 talked about her experience.

I found out later on that my granddaughter had a hard time with it...and nobody told me. I said to my daughter, 'Why didn't you tell me?' She said, 'Okay, mom, you were going through issues yourself and falling apart and I didn't want to burden you.'

The addition of grandchildren's experiences makes this population very unique among the divorce literature.

Family of origin. Some participants spoke about their own family of origin's reactions to the divorce. P12 remembered her mom being very anti-divorce, and how this really added stress to her divorce adjustment process.

My mother was a big factor at this stage. She came from a family of six, and she was the oldest and came from a divorced family. She remembered it being awful for her and her family. She kept saying, 'At least stay for the kids, at least stay for the kids' because she wished her parents had done that for her. In fact, her mother actually left the kids behind with their father.

P12 remembered the first time she wanted to divorce. "I remember I had wanted to leave for about a year...I did ask to come home and my mother wouldn't let me." She recalled feeling very alone and isolated; her mother was unresponsive to her during the early stage of her divorce adjustment process.

P5 described her father as being very upset and angry at her ex when he started divorce proceedings; she knew it would be hard on her parents.

Well, I just didn't want to listen to him just totally tear my ex down all the time. I don't know, I guess I was still defending the jerk. I would kind of end up being in that spot. I would defend my ex to my dad even after things had gone so poorly.

She described how this negatively impacted her divorce adjustment process. "I couldn't talk about my pain to my parents." She was afraid of sharing her process with her dad because he would just go on and on about her ex: for her it was like a double edged sword.

Insights. During the early stage of divorce adjustment, some women experienced having

new insights about themselves or their process. P1 realized, “It was a sad thing. Divorce is a sad thing.” P17 described her insight about divorce and death: “So death and divorce put you exactly in the same place. You are alone. I never lived alone; for 60 years I was with someone. That was the first thing that was really hard.” This experience of being alone for the first time in decades makes this group of women unique within the divorce literature. Later on in the interview, P17 shared the question that has plagued her since the divorce, “It just makes you crazy and you think, why did I get the lousy one?”

For P22, her insight came during mediation. It centered on the notion of not knowing, or being unsure. “I told the mediator, you know something, you all don’t understand. You have been with someone for so long and you have put 100% into the relationship. I said, ‘It doesn’t get any better and it gets worse.’” During this early stage of divorce adjustment she began to have a voice. She started to learn that she could speak up and she could say ‘no.’ For P22, empowerment was crucial to her divorce adjustment process.

P10 described the very beginning of her divorce adjustment process. Her husband had told her he was in love with someone else and wanted to divorce her; she was shocked. She had previously arranged an out-of-town visit with a friend; she had offered to cancel the trip to be with her husband but he told her there was “nothing to talk about.” So P10 left town to visit her friend. She described what her insight was like.

We had been friends since 7th grade...and of course I broke down when I saw her...but then I would just kind of put it away. I knew when I went back from that weekend my life was never going to be the same. ... When I got back, he had not only moved out, he had taken half the furniture.

The support she received from her friend during that initial crisis was very important to her

process. P10's insights hit her rapidly; for her, the timing of it all was overwhelming. "I actually honestly didn't know he was going to physically move out that weekend when I was gone." She further described how she experienced things in waves. "I think there have been different points along the way where I came to certain points, when he left that first spring. That whole summer was like the depths of despair." The insight she eventually developed was two-fold: "He left me with everything to take care of and I wish it wouldn't have been so much thrown on me." She understood her process by looking at it in hindsight. "I can see now that I was overwhelmed with all of it so isolating and withdrawing were my only ways to cope." This speaks to the idea of self-transcendence described in the literature "as the ability to make meaning out of an experience" (Wiggs, 2010, p. 220).

P6 now understands a little more about herself than she did prior to divorce. "I knew it [marriage] would be hard, but I thought it was going to be hard and pay off, but it was hard and then didn't pay off. That is tough."

P12 seemed very philosophical about her divorce. "I didn't see it at the time...to see that everything happens for a reason." She reported that this process has influenced other areas in her life as well; she looks for meaning now when things happen. Self-transcendence may be a phenomenon that happens to women near the age of 50: they may have the ability and maturity to look at their lives retrospectively and make meaning out of pain. This ability may help bring meaning to their divorce experiences. The ability to transcend self may be an important factor in post divorce adjustment (Wiggs, 2010). It may also be one factor that sets baby boomer apart from non baby boomers.

Within a few weeks to a few months of the filing of the divorce paperwork or the actual divorce, many of the participants described a shift in how they started to experience their divorce

adjustment process. The timing was variable but for all of the participants, this shifting did occur. I labeled this the adapting stage of the divorce adjustment process. Within this stage the reader will begin to notice many of the participants began to move through their adjustment process: relocating, started to rebuild their networks, dating, and looking to their futures as divorced women.

Stages of Divorce Adjustment: Adapting

For the purposes of this study, the adapting stage of divorce adjustment is considered to occur between four months and two years post divorce. For many the divorce becomes legal in the adapting stage. From an emotional or social perspective, it may have happened sooner than the legal divorce or later, depending on the woman experiencing it. For the purposes of this study, the adapting stage is characterized as the rebuilding stage. Women in this study were engaged in a variety of activities including tying up loose ends from their marriages and either buying new homes or remodeling their homes. Some started to form new social support groups and some started dating. What did begin to emerge from the data was the identity changes that were starting to occur within this group of baby boomer women.

Adapting stage: Identity shifts. During the adapting stage period of identity shifting, some women described their experiences as life changing. P12 had to relearn how to be in a world that seemed foreign to her. “I am not a party-er. So, that part of my life I have to adjust and adapt to: it’s hard.” She is also learning to become a person who works on her issues. “I am a firm believer in, if you don’t deal with what happened in your prior relationship you are never going to have the relationship you want: you are going to carry it with you.” P13 shifted her identity in a big way. “My oldest one said, ‘You don’t understand the ripples when you do something like that.’ I told her I understood them: it is the way it is. I am being selfish for the

first time in 30 years.”

P22 talked about a spiritual shifting for her during her divorce adjustment. She is the participant who reported all of her children rejected her and ignored her for the first few years past the divorce: this was extremely painful for her. She sees this from a spiritual perspective: just recently her children have started to reestablish a relationship with her. “My spirituality changed. I had to realize that they are God’s kids. I had them for awhile.” The trust she has built within herself has increased in ways she never thought possible. During the adapting stage she had to learn to become self sufficient, increase her skill set/education to get employed, and learn how to be on her own (i.e., without a controlling husband).

A few women reported changes in their identities once they started to enter the dating scene during the adapting stage. P10 realized her sexual identity started to reemerge; P7, P11 and P20 found their sexuality during the adapting stage; P5 got a face lift in order to look “less tired” and more like her old self.

Adapting stage: Life transition events. Several of the participants described moving, selling, relocating, fixing up, or purchasing a house as part of their divorce adjustment process. These seemed important and are highlighted as representing part of the adapting stage of the divorce adjustment process. P10 was a prime example of how leaving impacted her: “I was really mad that I had to leave the house.” The home took a year to sell. “When I sold it and had to move into an apartment, I was mad that I had to live in an apartment.” Later on she talked about looking for and buying a new home. It started when she shared her divorce story with a woman who worked at a bank. The bank employee had told her that when she got “her own place, the happiness will start to come back.” P10 remembered thinking, “That sounds whacky.” She remembered feeling differently when she bought her house and moved in. “Oh I have to go back

to the bank and tell her she was right. It was magic.” She recalled,

I guess it was when I felt in charge of my life again. It was hugely scary and half the time

I was sounding like a dope to my real estate agent. ‘How does this work?’ and ‘What am

I doing?’ and asking questions, and yet at the same time it was empowering.

She also spoke of deciding how to make her home her own. “It’s something like, well, this is my house now and if I put it up, it’s because I decided...I’m finding all those things from then, I’m just letting go of one by one.” She seemed to draw conclusions from her process. “I don’t know if it is helpful or just a side effect of it all. I guess it is shedding the old life little bit by little bit.”

The theme of empowerment runs throughout the narratives of the 25 women; its source varies but the results remain consistent: women in this stage began to reclaim their power. P5 described her home purchase and remodeling that seemed to parallel her own personal process.

I had things out in the hallway. They were kind of my mission statement that says, you know, no matter where you go, there’s no place like coming back home. And I wanted this to be a real home for me and so putting a lot of me into it did that.

For P5, it was cathartic to purchase and remodel her own home by ripping out the old stuff and installing new. She talked about going to her house every day, after teaching in the classroom, and how it seemed to give her purpose. She enjoyed the physical labor attached to the process and talked about how proud she felt, once the house remodeling was completed.

P20 described her process. “Physically I was doing well. I had girlfriends and physically I was doing more stuff. I felt good about kind of making a home for myself and making my own way, I guess.” During the interview I asked if she might have experienced some depression or still be grieving (e.g., death of her son) she indicated she thought she might have and remarked that she “had gone through a lot in a very short time frame.”

P12 had just recently purchased a home (e.g., in the past nine months), after living in an apartment. She moved to a different county closer to work. She left her family, friends, and her church community and literally had to start over.

You know, even though I enjoy my house and I am getting used to the area down here, I still feel like sometimes I am like a cow being put out in a pasture, like I don't have a purpose anymore. I go through bouts of that. I don't have a purpose anymore, but then I have to get that out of my head because that's just part of my background that I am still struggling with. That's part of my process.

She spoke about being happy at her job and in her new home, but she seemed a little discontented.

P23 described her need to redecorate the house after her divorce. "The house never really had my touch to it. Not really and so, you know, after he left one of the first things I did was take down all the wallpaper." She remembered this being cathartic,

I put it up but I took it down and that was therapeutic. Well, I don't think he had been gone a whole year and this whole place was wallpaper...you start taking that stuff down...little at a time...you think...I've got a lot of time and it doesn't matter. I don't have somebody here saying this place is a mess: clean it up.

She summed up her entire adapting stage in one paragraph. Her redecorating efforts had its ups and downs. "Well, after I got the paint on, I wanted to cry because I didn't like it. I lived with it for about five years and then redid it." She added, "I like this now, and I am real happy with this. I waited because I don't like to paint. I hired it done."

Adapting stage: Physical changes. Eleven women (e.g., P1, P5, P7, P10, P11, P12, P15, P19, P20, P21, and P26) commented on their physical health and their bodies and talked about

how that became a part of their experience during the adapting stage of their divorce adjustment process. P1 began exercising at the YMCA. “I took exercise classes at the ‘Y.’ I did that until last year.” She reports that was helpful. P21 spoke about gaining weight post divorce. “I just feel that, you know, I am getting older now and I have to start taking care of my health. I think that I was stressed out with him and I ate, ate, ate, ate.”

P19 spoke about losing weight during this time of her life. “Right after the divorce I lost a lot of weight. They call it the divorce diet. I wasn’t eating and I was running three miles per day; that is, until my knees gave out.” P12 and P15 also spoke about losing weight with the “divorce diet.”

P10 reported, “I consistently have ups and downs with my health because of the arthritis, I was diagnosed when I was 13 and so I have always dealt with it and so I’ve had good and bad periods.” She reported she did experience physical changes during the adapting stage of her divorce adjustment process. “I lost about five or 10 lbs at the most, but I became a little more fit and I had a little more muscle riding my bike and so I looked a little better than I had.”

P5 described her physical body changes. She lost weight unintentionally; she attributed it to her not cooking post divorce.

I wasn’t working on losing weight; I just didn’t have to cook for anyone. The kids were both gone and during the time they were both out of the house I didn’t have to cook. I never liked to cook; I don’t cook now.

She and her current husband are both retired. She reported she is happy not being tied to preparing meals like she used to.

P11 remarked on her physical changes. “Once he left, I was probably at the lowest weight I can be. When I’m in a relationship I don’t want to exercise, I want to hang out with that

person.” P11 remembered after her divorce.

I did a lot of hiking and biking, especially hiking. If you hike a difficult hike like a glacier and get to the top, it puts things in perspective and it kind of wears you out and all that other stuff goes away. It empowered me. You know, ‘I can do this.’ I never thought I would be doing those things.

P7 Also spoke of her changes in her weight.

You know, when you’re a mom and fixing meals and this one won’t eat this and this one won’t eat that--then it was cooking for people who had wanted certain things. And I cooked the way my mom cooked, and it’s a whole different way to cook now, and the last part of the year I just cook because it’s a healthier way of living. It gives me better karma.

She reported that she likes the physical changes that have happened to her since her divorce. She also talked about experiencing some trouble with sleeping. “I would say I was clinically depressed and manic because I didn’t sleep well for three years--the finances and divorce and everything else that was going on. I could not sleep.” She eventually was able to get some rest and her sleep patterns returned to normal.

P12 spoke about changes in her sleep patterns. “Actually since the divorce, actually since I left hi--it happened. When I was married I slept all the time. I am not sleeping as much now.”

P10 spoke about being impacted physically during this stage of her divorce process. “At the same time, it [selling the house] kept me so busy and exhausted that I just had to keep going. I just had to keep going.” She also spoke about her increased levels of exercise. “I’ve become more physically active, I think, not a huge amount, but a little bit more.” When I asked her about that, she replied, “When I first realized that I was getting naked with someone new, that’s a big motivation.”

P20 spoke about incorporating more physical activity in her life as well. “I started doing things like physical activities, a couple of marathons and just started socializing a lot more.” She began to talk about how much exercising added to her sense of well-being.

Exercise is absolutely fabulous. I have a son and his wife who run and do marathons. So they would do stuff and I would join them. I would do walking while they were running so it was fun and a chance for me to have something in common with them.

She found exercise to be helpful to her emotional state, she liked the changes in her body and she liked that it got her socializing with other people.

P4 spoke candidly about some physical and emotional changes that hit her during the adapting stage in her divorce adjustment process. She reports she experienced a “whopping depression and menopause simultaneously” and they both were powerful. She remembered feeling completely surprised by the onslaught of depression. “I felt the depression thing come on so strong and the power of it just blew me out of the water, surprising me that I would lose control of myself that much.” She was also surprised by the impact of menopause. “It surprised me that it was a big deal emotionally. I think the depression and the menopause came in together. The hormonal thing threw my bearings off; before that I was always able to keep it together.” She remembered feeling helpless and powerless at times. She is sure that this greatly impacted her divorce adjustment process in a negative way.

Adapting stage: Alone. P5 spoke about her two adult children being away at college while she was moving through her divorce adjustment process. “They were in college so I was literally alone. I was alone, yeah.” She also spoke about her feelings at that time. “I was sad. There was sadness there. There was some loneliness.” She also remembered how the sadness just “hung there” for her. As she moved through her process she began to experience her sadness in

different ways and around different things.

I did struggle and I think some of this got brought up in my small group at church. Was it scriptural for me to be able to remarry? And that was a lot of what I was struggling with.

You want to talk about sadness,- it brings it all back. That really made me sad. I worried I might have to live the rest of my life alone.

This was a real struggle for her during the adapting stage: was she doomed to remain alone?

P4 reported she felt a lot of things during her adapting stage: “freedom and this loneliness go back and forth. There is a tension between them...The themes of loneliness and just the emotions that are part of my life are universal human emotions not unique to me.” P18 reported she felt loneliness during the adapting stage of her divorce adjustment. “I wouldn’t have to be married, but I don’t particularly want to live by myself.” The irony is she is 11 years post divorce; she has not remarried and is currently single. She has adjusted to living alone but desires to change that at some point in her future. P10 reported, “I also think I am a person that could be too good at being by myself at times and I think it’s not good for me.” She has built a social support system that encourages her to get out of the house. P24 remembered, “I just was by myself.” P20 discovered “I don’t mind spending time alone. I really don’t.”

P7 talked about her friends’ response to her being divorced at her age. She reported, “I think it’s more to do with how they feel about the other person because often they’ll say, ‘I just can’t imagine being alone,’ and before I started my relationship with men I came to peace with being alone.” She saw this as an important step in her process.

P12 reported, “The only thing I have bouts of, is loneliness.” She reported this started in the adapting stage and she is still experiencing it three years post divorce. P21 struggles with “being alone. Right now, I don’t have any other relationship.” She reports this is hard for her to

experience.

Adapting stage: Parenting and issues with children. In the adapting stage, several women talked about coparenting struggles and worrying about their children post divorce. P26 spoke about her new way of being with her son and her ex-husband (i.e., de-triangulated). “Mom’s not a rescue ranger and dad was a rescue ranger. That [parenting of son] was some things that we disagreed on.” She can see post divorce how she and her ex had different perspectives.

You know, if my son wouldn’t get up and go to work and lost a job, dad would harbor him and let him live at the house and not be responsible. And so when I moved 1,300 miles away and my son would call me and say, ‘they turned off the lights’...I would say, ‘I’m sorry, you are 24 years old and you gotta get up...go to work.’

She remembered feeling like her son always went to his dad when life got difficult; she knew that it was not good for her son, but when she was married she felt powerless to change that dynamic.

P25 reported her coparenting issues with her ex-husband. She is unique in this sample; at the time of her divorce she had two very young children. She was also angry because the court would not allow her to put her sons in a Catholic school in the county she moved to. Her ex-husband demanded they continue in their previous Catholic elementary school. She reported this was quite a burden for her, transporting them back and forth.

I suffered for two years, I really did. Driving my kids for two years was not really easy...I could not believe that, you know, the judge denied my motion... It is awfully hard to build a business or find a job when you are driving your kids...He really put me in a really bad situation where there was no way I could find a job.

Her mom was previously against divorce but after she watched her daughter driving so much, many things changed.

Finally, now my mom got tired of it and says, 'He is abusing you, he is being a bully, and you need to do something...because you have divorced him and he is still abusing you emotionally.' So, over this time I've been putting together a whole document of all these things he has done and go back to friend of the court...it's tiring.

What if P25 could have looked at the judge's decision and driving her children long distances to school from a different perspective? Would that have allowed her to begin to let go of negative affect? What if she could have reframed or made meaning of this difficult experience. Making meaning might have allowed her to see, her mother shifted from being nonsupportive to supporting her post divorce. If she had been able to reframe the experience, perhaps she would be able to let go of the pain. As a result of her mother's support (i.e., her mother's attitude shifted), her mother loaned her money for a down payment on a home in the county where her two sons were attending school.

Coparenting issues continue to surface, but at least for now she has less drive time on her hands. She talked about the improvements she has witnessed in their coparenting.

We have an area by Walgreens...to exchange. It used to be a police station after our divorce...This is the first time that he's driven and I let him drive to the circle here to drop off the boys as we have an agreement. I have physical custody of them but in the summer we alternate weeks and then in the weeks we have one day.

P18 worried about her children. "My concerns were for the kids and the baggage they were carrying. My daughter, she won't speak to my ex." And for others, children were a motivator.

P23 decided she did not want to move in a negative direction during her divorce adjustment

process. “I didn’t want to feel angry. I didn’t want that bitterness. I don’t know; I wanted to set a good example for my children. I guess I want them to see me not as an angry person.” P12 had a similar goal. “All I want out of this is that I don’t become a bitter, angry person. I think I dealt with it the best way I knew how.”

Adapting stage: Adjusting to “freedom.” Fifteen of the women spoke about a new sense of freedom post divorce. It made itself apparent in several ways but the impact on the participants seemed to be profound. P23 simply said, “I can come and go as I please.” She spoke about freedom offering her choice. “Yeah, because I cook for just myself and I can make exactly what I want.” She seemed happy about this part of her process. P24 (e.g., married to a controlling husband) described her experience of feeling free.

It took a long time, about six months to even think about, or condition myself to be a woman on her own and do things by myself. I didn’t have that control over me anymore, so that was really strange.

Her freedom was a new and strange way of being in the world: she said that was a great way to be.

P7 described a lightening of the load for her and her daughter, a sense of freedom that impacted both of them.

It was just like the weight of the world was lifted and I had a chance to be real. I just had a chance at life. I was just so burdened. A huge sense of freedom...I could have some peace and quiet...My daughter and I would sing and dance and would have friends and go places. I went to the movies and listened to music and traveled.

She also talked about her ex seeing their daughter at a family member’s funeral. She remembered overhearing someone ask her ex, “Who is that woman?” and she was shocked to hear him reply,

‘I have no idea.’ She told me during the interview, “My daughter hasn’t changed that much and I can’t believe he didn’t recognize her.” This seemed incredulous to her, but it was further evidence at how far over the cliff he had gone.

P11, who lives in Montana, spoke of her experience feeling freer during the adaptive stage of the divorce adjustment process. “Yeah, I think it really freed all of us up without my ex in the household. Like my daughter was up at college and she was more willing to hang out with me.” She spoke about why she thinks this occurred. “It’s ridicule and criticism that he ran on.” Once he left, the difference was amazing. P17 spoke about her sense of freedom.

I am busy all the time. I have a full life. My ex and I used to do everything he wanted to do or he would pout. So now I am doing things I never used to do...but if I wanted to see certain movies, it could only be certain movies he wanted to see. We could only see people he wanted to see. Well I can do whatever I want now.

P13 spoke about what the new freedom meant for her. “I can take the day off and I can watch a movie all day long if I want it is okay. If I don’t call my kids every day, it’s okay.” She also mentioned another kind of freedom she experienced, this one regarding stuff she owns (e.g., clutter). “I’ve actually gotten rid of stuff because I don’t need it. I had a garage sale last summer; we got rid of \$500 worth of stuff.” For P13, freedom from clutter was a positive event and maybe a sign that she was moving forward with her life.

P1 spoke about her experience with feeling free post divorce. “I have more free time. I get to do what I want to do with my time.” The freedom extended to her physical space. “I have a room in my house devoted to my sewing--never had that before. I always wanted it, which is perfect--you could put projects out, leave them and shut the door.” She has more time to herself. “I garden and I sew and I do what I want when I want. I clean the house when I want. If it gets

dirty for a few days there's nobody there to tell me to clean it." For her, the experience of freedom is having choice in her life. She was the participant who had lived in separate bedrooms during her marriage and had been living a separate life during her marriage. But for some reason, this divorce provided a new sense of freedom that she found empowering.

P12 talked about being freed from a previous belief. "I cannot control everything; that's been a big lesson that I have had to learn and it's also been very freeing." P21 spoke about moving into freedom and appreciating it in her life. "I don't have someone questioning me about how long I'm gone. I'm gaining freedom and I'm learning to love it." P9 reported, "Anyhow I am now on my own and now I have real freedom." P24 reported her freedom sort of grew on her, little by little, "doing what I want to do which was hard for me at first." She reported she has gotten out from under the control of her ex. For her that is freedom.

P26 talked about her experience. "Have I adjusted? I have--very well, I must say. I have more money than I had when we were a two-income household and I have freedom to have friends and socialize." P6 reported, "I thought of this yesterday. I still feel like a bird let out of a cage. I do. I feel great." After her divorce she reported other's reactions to her freedom.

I think I had 10--not exaggerating--about 10 people come up to me at different times at church and they would say, 'You just seem to kind of glow, you just seem so happy.' It was like I was a bride or something (laughs) and I was happy. I was just, I felt like this huge weight was lifted off me.

For her, freedom was noticeable by others.

P5 was very forthright, "I just have the freedom to be different in this relationship...no more walking on egg shells. Now I am a lot more free to spend money how I want." She continued, "My first husband left me I blamed it on him and his depression and I thought that it

was his thing. If [current husband] left me, I would think it was a ‘me thing.’” For P5 attribution may have played an important role in her post divorce adjustment process.

Adapting stage: Working through emotions. P10 talked about the disappointment she experienced. She had built a vision for her life. “I thought I was going to be one of those people...being everything you’re supposed to be.” She ultimately felt like she failed when her ex left her, “and to get dumped on your ass,” this was hard for her to absorb. She reported that loss was hard to overcome.

P5 spoke about a feeling of resentment towards others (e.g., ex-husband serving in a leadership position in the church). She remembered how she shared some of her marriage struggles with the Pastor and a few others. She was a little shocked that her ex-husband was still allowed to serve in a leadership position and was never talked to by the minister. “I kind of resented that he [pastor] never talked to [ex] about the way he was treating me.” This was a painful part of her divorce adjustment process; she carried the resentment with her for quite awhile.

P4 spoke at great length about dealing with guilt and pain and jealousy over leaving a good man. Since she left him, he has repartnered with a woman who has wealth. Her daughters tell her things about their dad (e.g., places that he is traveling). She mentioned experiencing some anger and resentment around that. “So a part of me is pissed, thinking he is doing better than me, and traveling more than me.” When I asked her to expand upon that she replied:

A lot of things that I find out, so many marriages that end in divorce. So did mine. I’m not so unique; my ex was able to move on from me, that I left him for somebody else. I’m not hiking the Appalachian Trail in my life. I’m not excelling at any major kind of thing. I guess mainly it is just the realization that I’m just having this average kind of life.

She paused after saying that: she seemed a little lost. At this point in the interview I just waited.

It may be that P4 was struggling with an existential crisis during her marriage; this predisposition before the divorce (i.e., trying to find herself) may be one reason why she struggled post divorce.

P16 spoke about resentment and the loss of what could have been (e.g., grief) and how painful this was for her during this stage of her divorce adjustment process. “It is tough; you cannot share those moments of your children together. I once was able to travel all over the world, but no more.” P1 reported that she felt as if she had abandoned him; he had mental health issues (e.g., PTSD) that affected her and the kids. She felt she had no choice but to leave him. “I honestly felt like I left him to deal on his own with something that he and I had been dealing with together for 22 years.” When I asked when she stopped loving him, she responded, “I love him. I’ll tell people I didn’t leave my husband because I did not love him; I left him because I couldn’t stand it one more day.”

P26 remembered feeling stupid during this stage of her divorce adjustment process. Her life is so good now she can’t even remember what her old life used to feel like. “It made me feel a little stupid, like did I really stay longer than I should have?”

Adapting stage: Financial issues. A recurring theme that ran throughout the interviews was that of money (e.g., finances). Many of the participants touched on this, some of them struggling, but most all of them talked about how it was something they had to learn to deal with in order to move forward. P1 remembered, “It was hard. Things were touch and go about how expensive it was; but I really did well.” She did add, “Around money, it took me a while to settle into being a single mom with two kids and no financial net under me.” P24 remembered the financial piece of her adapting experience as a crazy time in her life.

I did good at first. We split the 401k and I left some money out. Truthfully, because while

was married, I couldn't spend money without my husband's approval, I just kind of went crazy and shopped, shopped, and shopped and I did it all the time until I got used to it. She reported she went through a great deal of money and even regretted spending so much, but she felt it needed to be done.

Financially, I am not doing badly but I think I didn't take control a lot. When I found out my wages was enough...I feel more secure being away from the married life, I think. I can control myself and I think he controlled all the bills and all that...This is all new to me. I know I need to control it more, but I pay my bills so they're not late. I feel good about that.

P19 is eight years divorced, remarried, and self-described as 'secure' financially although during the adapting stage she really struggled. She left the family home, moved to a rental home, then in with a friend and slowly regained balance. She described her experience with financial struggles. "I paid everything off. I got my credit back to where I could buy a house. I bought a new car." She then added, "It is funny. I sometimes get upset when I see I don't have an attached garage on this house...it took a lot of work to get back to where I should be."

P16 spoke of the financial struggles that she went through in the adapting stage of her divorce adjustment. Her husband was an academic; he had an affair and decided to end the marriage.

The alimony just floats me. For the past two years I barely make \$1,000 per month, I need to make \$3,000 in order to survive. I can't travel much. I think I traveled twice to visit my parents. I was going to go this weekend to see my mother who had surgery two weeks ago, but I changed my mind. I cannot spend \$150. My son needs a car and his is broken. I am trying to save money to buy him a car.

P22 is currently a graduate student and was the one who found out about her divorce from her ex-husband's stockbroker. "At one point, my husband stopped paying--what do they call it? Spousal support, household support or something like that--he stopped." She remembered this was painful for her. "He made me--we had a Suburban and I had to sell it. Well, he locked the money up and wouldn't let me have the money and I had no car. For six months I had no car!" She continued, "He locked that up and so he wouldn't pay what his monthly amount was." She remembered it being very difficult. "So for 11 months every charge card I had I took out a loan and I was living in this house and had to pay all the bills." In the end he paid her off.

He had to pay it in a lump sum when the divorce was final...we lived on a huge hill and the driveway was almost a quarter-mile long with a steep hill and so I couldn't pay the plowman and couldn't pay the money. We had eight inches of snow that winter and I remember trying to drive and shovel that stupid driveway.

When I asked her how she earned income post divorce, she spoke about becoming a house sitter on several occasions.

Dog sitting and house sitting that gave me a little extra money. You know how stressful this is. It is like one night I had to go to the bathroom and I couldn't even remember where the bathroom was. It took me a bit to think what house am I in? I mean I was working like 80-hour weeks between teaching at [university] as a graduate assistant and then doing research with my professor.

P22 reported she still is struggling financially; I reminded her she is a graduate student. She agreed, but she spoke about the fear and the pain she experienced during that part of her divorce adjustment process. She seemed to be haunted by the memory of it. She did talk about it being her dream to graduate and purchase her own home. She hasn't lived in her own home since the

divorce was final.

P10 was very direct with her husband on financial matters during the adapting stage. “That was another demand he wouldn’t argue with. I would say, ‘As long as it takes for the house to sell;’ I would say, ‘You would have to split the house bills with me.’ He did.” She felt good about sticking up for herself with him around financial matters.

Adapting stage: People along the way. In the adapting stage, participants also described the people they encountered on their journey; some were uplifting and others not so much. In some cases family and friends supported them during the adapting phase and other times family and friends inhibited their process. What began to emerge from the data were people within the participant’s sphere who had the potential to support baby boomer divorced women’s process or to inhibit it. All of the women described people they encountered (e.g., new and old) during the adapting stage of their divorce adjustment. Some people had a positive impact on the process; others were a source of stress.

Ex-husbands. P16 reported during the interview that her ex was still very angry and was treating her poorly.

My ex is so angry and resentful, he was writing me horrible emails, and he still does...The email said, ‘Today is our anniversary and our divorce has become final’ ...He said in the email, ‘I would like to take you to dinner...if you could put away your anger and resentment.’ He said, ‘If you don’t put that away, it will only eat you alive,’ or something like that, something negative...I would break down and cry.

She went on to further describe how her ex-husband was acting during this stage of her divorce adjustment process.

In April he sent me another email asking to meet me for a cup of coffee. He had decided

to move to [another state]. He wanted to see me before he left. I was planning on meeting with him. In the meantime he decided to contact my family in [another state] and ask if he could visit with them. He sent the email to my siblings and parents.

P16 reported this felt like a betrayal to her, she couldn't understand why he did this.

My sister sent him an email congratulating him on his new job: she told him the family missed him and they invited him to write back to them and would like to see him. He asked if he could see my parents in their new home. He went there before me. I was supposed to see them on the same day that he went. The night before my visit my son told me that and I was really upset.

She reported she felt betrayed by her ex-husband and her family of origin.

I told them, 'I am not going; you boys can go with your father to see your grandparents.'

My younger son went but my older son did not go. So he went to lunch with my family and I was very upset and that put a strain on my relationship with my sister and my parents--because they chose to meet with him. I could not believe my sister chose to email him twice and she never told me. They were on my side: they should have checked with me first.

The pain of her ex-husband's behavior coupled with the perceived betrayal by her family and the pain these caused for her oldest son seemed to be overwhelming for her during this time. One factor that may be present in long-term marriages ending in divorce is the idea that ex-spouses may maintain connections with their ex-in-laws and the families wanting to stay connected with the ex as well.

P1 spoke of her ex's ability to rewrite history. She understood that he has severe mental health issues (i.e., PTSD) and assumed that the way he copes with most things in his life is to

rewrite them where he is seen as the victim.

By the end I was responsible for everything. He had rewritten the entire history of our 22 years together and made me into the bad guy and everything that had ever gone wrong was my fault. I think I was even responsible for the war in Iraq, and the financial collapse, the Wall Street debacle too. I think he found ways to make all of that on my shoulders.

She sort of laughed while she was describing her ex's viewpoint, but underneath her narrative, pain was emerging. She had spent 22 years with him, she still loved him, but his version of their story seems to deny all the hard work she had put into their family. His denial of her efforts seemed to evoke a new kind of pain, one akin to invalidation and can be likened to feeling denied. This invalidating by the ex may not be unique to couples that experience divorce; but in the cases of long-term marriages perhaps it is more acutely painful. After all the time and effort that went into the marriage (e.g., 22 years) to have the ex deny everything may be especially painful for baby boomer women who often see their marriages as part of their personal identity.

P5 spoke about her ex's behavior towards her during the adapting stage. "Well, he said, 'I really screwed up terribly.' He said, 'I know you're the last person in the world I should ever complain to but I am miserable.'" She remembered agreeing with him but also wondered why he was doing this to her now?

P11 remembered a really crazy stunt her ex pulled on their son while she was out of town.

This was the craziest thing. Two years ago I left my car with my son, because I went out of town for a week or something. When I came back I drove him to his apartment and he said, 'Now I don't want you to get mad.' I'm like, 'Why?' He went on, 'Dad told me he

should have had paternity testing done because I don't look anything like him.'

She remembered thinking, 'Is he crazy, has he lost his mind?' She felt a deep need to apologize to her son for his father's actions. Her son was gracious about it, and told her he was okay with dad's 'craziness.'

P12 talked about her ex's obsession with her. His obsession seemed to center around the idea that she had been cheating on him.

He became very obsessed and started stalking me; he accused me of having an affair... Then he started calling work and looking for me. At that time I was working in two locations driving back and forth. It got to the point where he was so obsessed with this whole thing it was driving me crazy.

She eventually was able to cut loose from his obsessiveness and she remembered the feeling when she was no longer being stalked by him: 'It felt like freedom.'

P25 reported until this day her husband does things to her that is cruel and abusive. She believes there is some monetary reasoning behind his behavior. "He doesn't want me to have a thread of his money. He hates the fact he has to pay child support." She also continues to get nasty emails from him. "He still emotionally abuses me, asking me if I have gotten a job and all this stuff in emails and that I am a loser. He is a very cruel person."

P17 remembered after the divorce was final, her ex "would come over crying and beg me to take him back." She remembered thinking, "That was never going to happen."

Reactions of family and friends. The participants also described others' reactions to their divorce and the impact it had on them during the adapting stage. P7 felt supported when she spoke about their mutual friends' reactions. "I didn't lose friends. He did." P9 reported her experience. "The most difficult thing was losing friends." That was something she didn't

anticipate. P19 talked about not letting her extended family know until after it was over. “They didn’t know anything about the divorce until it was over. It was very shameful.”

P13 spoke about the difficulty of telling people about the divorce and their responses. “The hardest part was the actual telling--not filing so much--but telling different people. After 27 years, people look at you like, why now? That was the typical response, why now?” P1 kept wondering why everyone in her church thought she wanted to date. “For example, the guy at church thought I was datable.” She went on to describe what it was like for her to be misunderstood.

I did not see myself as being datable...Every once in awhile my friends will say ‘What about, this or that?’ And I’ll be, like, ‘Have we not covered this territory a hundred times. I am not interested in dating.’ And yet we seem to revisit it a lot...As a newly divorced woman I was seen by others as datable. I did not make that change in my own head, but other people were making those changes in their own heads.

She reported that people at her church are finally getting the message that she is not datable at this time.

P10 mentioned a phenomenon that had not been talked about in any other interview. It involved a friend’s reaction to her ex-husband. “I think she was showing way more emotion, way more anger than I felt anymore. Honestly, I am kind of relieved at this point.” She reported that she told her friend, “I know why you’re angry and that’s a way of supporting me but I want you to know I’m not that angry.” She then went on to explain her friend’s reaction, “I think she thought it was her role to be mad at him for as long as I needed her to be.”

Adapting stage: The role of social support. Within the divorce literature social support is viewed as very helpful and important to the divorce adjustment process (Wang & Amato,

2000). For this group of women many of them experienced social support, but a few did not.

Positive support. Two women (e.g., P12, P25) were able to secure mortgages for a new home because their mothers financially supported them. P12 talked about her mom's financial help. "Well, I just moved into this house. This is something that I never thought would ever happen. My mom helped me get in." P25 echoed the same sentiment. "I moved to this house in September with the help of my mother who cosigned. Otherwise, I had the savings and everything but it wasn't enough to do it by myself." P19 spoke of her parents providing financial support at times. "There were a couple of times I had trouble with the rent, so I went to my parents and they lent me the money. I paid them back." But overall she states, "Financially I am pretty proud of myself."

P7 reported her ex-husband had literally trashed their family home. In order for her to get her money out of it she needed to clean it up. She remembered how supported she felt by her two friends that helped with the clean up. "I spent four months with two extraordinary friends cleaning that house." They were a huge support for her.

P12 mentioned a cousin that supported her. "I definitely had a cousin and she had already gone through two divorces and she is a Christian; she has been a very good support system for me." P5 spoke of emotional support coming from a married couple in her church; they both had gone through a divorce and found love with each other.

They were a huge resource...prior to all of this and had gotten together as two divorced people. They were like the light at the end of the tunnel for me because I could look at them and see how happy they were.

For P5, support came in the form of hope and inspiration. The couple also spent time with her talking to her about their experiences of pain during their divorce adjustment process. She added

that her ex-brother-in-law was supportive; “his brother went to divorce court with me.”

P7 spoke about what support looked like for her.

I found that the year I divorced, there was a whole group of families that went through the process together in our congregation and they did a lot of things socially and not necessarily that we went to everybody’s affairs but as a group we did things.

She found that network support as being very helpful in her process; “It comes up that you’re the single one and once your friends get married, you don’t get invited...I experienced that and I got a little hurt; now I am just annoyed.” She actually talked about how that caused a shift to occur for her. Now that she is repartnered she makes sure to ask her single friends out when it is appropriate. She remembers what it felt like to “not be part of a couple.” She also talked about music being a support to her.

During that time there was music that spoke to me at certain parts of my life. There was a piece from ‘City of Angels’ that I listened to for the first nine months after my divorce.

The song reflected where I was at, and gave me some comfort.

P4 spoke of her biggest support, during the adaptive stage of divorce adjustment, being her youngest daughter; the idea of adult children supporting divorcing parents is found in the divorce literature (Wright & Maxwell, 1991). “Yeah, my youngest daughter was a big support, because she is divorced, too. We were both single women and we talked about that.” She did have to limit her discussions about her ex. “I don’t want to say it was a mistake...I think the confusion hit them hard. I think they thought we were all pretty happy, too, and they didn’t understand it so much when it came apart.” She did talk about how she felt a little rejected when her daughter started dating a man. She remembered thinking she lost her divorce support buddy.

P13 is a unique participant in an unusual way. Her biggest supporter is a man who lives

with her who is not romantically involved with her (i.e., his choice). She views him as a friend, but would be open to it becoming something more.

I have a friend on Facebook that I met up with again after all these years...He has been through a couple of divorces and he knows a lot about the process. Spiritually he helped me, by helping me get back into church and things like that. He's actually living with me now. He needed to move and he is sharing my house, pretty much.

She found his support invaluable to her (e.g., spiritually, emotionally, and financially).

I think I'd like it to be more than just friends, and I am not sure what is going on with him. He does help financially, so that's good. It's taken some time for him to get financially situated. He is getting SSD now; he wasn't when he first moved in. So now he can give me money towards the bills. We were sharing transportation, now he could afford to buy his own car and that's great.

What makes this support unique is that this seems like a romantic relationship (e.g., living together, socializing together, and financial support) but it is platonic.

I know his kids. I know his grandchild and they accepted us like we are a couple. They don't know any different, they don't know we're not dating...He and I do fun things together. You know Comerica Park? All those years I was married, my husband would never take me. He didn't want to go to Detroit: he wanted to stay home.

She is happy with the support she is getting from her friend and is enjoying their friendship in a unique way.

Several women spoke of receiving support from fellow congregational members. P25 said, "I cried a lot. We all cried and we all went through a lot. It [church group] was a kind of place where I could bear all. I cried a lot."

P1 received support from her minister. “My minister at the time was a divorced woman. I had told her about how surprised I was to be depressed, and she told me she had experienced the same thing.” She remembered feeling less abnormal. “That gave me the validation I needed to know I wasn’t the only one experiencing this, that it was normal.”

P10 got support and friendship from her realtor/friend.

I was going to look for a house my real estate lady that I got, actually turned into a really good friend, she was extremely supportive. Every time she came over, I was crying, going through all this by myself and she was super supportive...We’d look at a house, stop for lunch and continue on.

She reported that they are still friends, even though she bought her home and plans on never moving again. She also spoke of friends who wouldn’t let her mope around the house. “Yeah, my friends helped me by propelling me into doing things. Also getting out and getting that job was forward motion and that helped me more than anything.” P10 lives in Michigan, her siblings do not. She spoke about sibling support. “I have three sisters; they all expressed support but nobody did much other than that. I have two sisters in another state; one sister talked with me a lot and she always checked on me.”

P11 spoke of support coming from some women in her neighborhood. “I had knee surgery right after we got divorced and my neighbor had breast cancer, somebody else had surgery, and we kind of like took care of each other and stuff.” She continued on, “Hearing other people’s stories and being able to just process right then and there with support was helpful for me.” She also felt supported by her children. “My kids are really close to me and I don’t think it’s in a bad way. They are funny and make life light and they make me cry (tearful) and they really give me that support and love I crave.”

P11 lives in Montana, her siblings do not. She described her sister's support; "I think she wants to be supportive but doesn't exactly know how to do that." She reported that she kind of understood why that was, she acknowledged that their family of origin did not teach them how to be emotionally supportive. Her brother flew out to Montana for a visit during this time. "I think it wasn't helpful for him. He doesn't talk much and I think he felt at a loss, like he didn't know how to help me." She did appreciate his efforts and she could tell it was hard for him.

P24 remembered feeling supported by a comment her brother made to her.

My brother told me he actually admires me because he thinks I am a very strong person throughout this whole divorce and he really admires the way I am so upbeat and not let things get me down. I met people and made new friends.

P6 spoke of her main source of support as her faith. "I've had time to really kind of get to know God. He does talk to me, I mean, and like, I just feel like it gets you through the worst time and makes the best times better." She went on to describe her personal faith. "I had fear but I also knew that God had gotten me through all kinds of hard times and troubles...He wouldn't let anything happen to me that He couldn't use for good."

P15 reported her family was supportive. "My family in Puerto Rico supported me, talking to them on the phone. They came twice to visit me too." She also mentioned her family doctor was supportive. "I told him about the sexual issues my ex had been having. He said two things that were very helpful. 'Well you are so different, I couldn't imagine you waiting such a long time to go without sex.' Then the last time I saw him he told me, 'It was a good decision.'"

Four women spoke of attending Divorce Care© classes through their local congregations; they report they were enormously helpful. P17 said, "I went to the Divorce Care Classes at the Methodist church: they didn't care that I was Jewish." When I asked her to expand on that she

added, “It is kind of nice because everyone there is feeling like you; you don’t think you are crazy there. In my group, everyone’s ex had found another partner.” She said the class “ran about 12 weeks and the leader was someone who had been in the class. It is kind of religiously based. You start off each class with a videotape. It is a national program.” One thing she heard on the tape made a vivid impression. “I remember the person on the tape said it would take at least four years to get through the divorce adjustment process.” She believed that helped her a great deal in her process.

P20 reported on her experience.

My sister had been divorced like a year and a half earlier than I was and she had been going to some Divorce Care class. She ended up teaching a class. I went with her a few times and just kind of listened. She went on from there and got her degree in Christian counseling and stuff. She has been a big resource for me.

P1 was unique among the participants in that she saw her new dogs as a support. “They really add a lot to my life: they bring a lot of joy to my life. They are a pain sometimes but I enjoy them.” She reported her ex would never let her get dogs; he thought they were too messy. But she reported they keep her company and give her a reason to go out for a walk.

Nonsupportive experiences. Several women spoke of people that were not supportive during the adapting stage of their divorce adjustment and how this impacted them. P4, who left her husband for another man, remembered negative reaction was hard on her. “Some were mad at me. Some people it wasn’t as easy to stay friends.” She recalled feeling alone and isolated from her friends; her children lived several hours away and her family of origin was out of state. This nonsupport was painful for her.

P8 recalled some people from church turned on her. “When you go through a divorce, it’s

like you have cancer. I had some unrealistic expectations of having support from people.” She seemed to be able to make sense of their nonsupport.

P2 remembered feeling hurt by her mother during the early stage of her divorce adjustment. “My mother was very destructive; she would say hurtful things to me when my husband left. She was never supportive.” She continued, “I was raised with that my whole life, it wasn’t anything unusual.”

P10 was more generous to her nonsupporting friends, “I don’t think I had bad friends. I think sometimes I didn’t appear to need any help.” She was able to make sense of others’ reactions. She did have a nonsupportive experience with her mother; she described her mom as a “negative resource.” She explained, “I wasn’t being able to talk to people about my pain, and I knew I didn’t want to cry, so I sent her an email and told her what happened.” She explained to her mom, “I can’t talk now: just give me a little bit of time.” She wrote me saying, “Take as much time as you need and call me when you can talk.”

I called her a week later and she was furious. Why? Because I took so long to call. Her response was--after being mad at me for not calling--she was furious that I had wasted 32 years. At which point, I said, ‘How can you say that to me?’ I have two fantastic kids and plenty of happy years. She was not supportive in that way. I felt I had to defend myself and fight and I didn’t want to.

She found her mother’s reaction to be less than supportive and reported she was even hurt by her mom’s response to her divorce. She also described a nonsupportive friend she had during the early stage of her divorce adjustment.

My really good friend that I thought was going to be there was a disappointment to me. She was a friend who had been divorced for 15 years, who I saw through other things.

She turned out not to be so helpful. That was kind of a disappointment to me. I don't know why, but it was a weird thing. We're still friends. We have had a few ups and downs but I don't know what it is; I almost at times feel like she doesn't like me single. This still is a puzzle to her.

P15 remembered feeling ostracized after her divorce started.

One of the things I think that, once you are divorced and if you have married friends, then you become an outcast. That is the first thing. I don't know if they feel like that because you are divorced--they are jealous? Or they think you are going to jump on their husbands? Or maybe the lifestyles have changed and we have different lives now. P15 reported feeling outcast. P19 spoke of feeling excluded by her reference group. "I think the hardest part [is] people don't want to invite you because you are divorced. He never came with me before, but that didn't seem to matter."

For P16 it was a betrayal. She reported she felt betrayed by a friend. "My ex confided in my girlfriend and she never shared any of it with me; she was my best friend. Now we are no more." P9 remembered feeling a little abandoned when she got divorced. "The life I lived when I was their friend is a totally different life than the life I lead now. I changed. They moved on." She reported that today, "we still connect on Facebook and send each other caring dots but we don't hang out and I don't get together with anybody." She talked about having some sadness around the loss of connection.

P17 felt really unsupported by an old friend: "One was a college roommate. When I told her that I was getting a divorce--that was it. We no longer saw each other for lunch; it was like I didn't exist anymore."

P25 had an unusual nonsupportive experience. "I did have my mother who wouldn't let

me open up to the family friends to tell them I was getting divorced.” In her family, divorce was a shameful thing and she understands why her mother wanted her to tell no one, but remembered thinking that it would have been nice to be able to talk about her process with other people. The cultural taboo of divorce in her family prevented her from accessing social support during the adapting phase of her divorce adjustment process.

P4 spoke about looking for support in the form of books; she never found any that felt right to her. “I looked for self-help books kind of thing. Most books for divorced women, divorces are usually--the woman is the victim. Who’s then freed by this divorce? None of them were quite appropriate for me.” P16 talked about looking for a divorce support group and could not finding one. “I am still looking for it.”

P1 spoke about feeling misunderstood by her church community.

It ticks me off that they are not listening or they don’t hear what I am saying or they assume that what I am saying is because of the trauma of the divorce and really it’s just how I feel. They’re not getting it.

She also remembered feeling unsupported by “people who look at you and say ‘what the hell were you thinking?’” Professional people, lawyers and financial advisors and “all kinds of people look at me and questioned my financial decisions. They would say to me, ‘you are giving him everything.’ I told them it was my choice.”

P21 talked about her nonsupport experience.

My siblings, they were worse. They made it worse because they had a more negative impact. Because they were like, ‘oh, he was no good and I’m glad you aren’t with him anymore and glad you are gone.’ That hurt; I was like, wow. I wish you would have told me before. Now, I need you for some comfort and I don’t need you to be hurtful.

She remembered that added to the pain of her divorce.

Even with nonsupportive people in their lives many of the women in this study seemed to know that they would be responsible for building their new social support system. Their experiences while doing so are documented below.

Proactive support building events. Several participants described taking charge during the adapting stage of their divorce adjustment. They increased their social support, began dating, and chose to move through the pain and work on forgiving their ex-husbands.

Social support & network rebuild. Krumrei, Coit, Martin, Fogo, and Mahoney (2007) found in their meta-analytic review that social support (e.g., specific and network) is one key to positive post divorce adjustment processes. They even suggested that network support (e.g., support group, circle of friends) “promote all forms of positive adjustment” (p. 160) post divorce. Several women in this study confirmed that idea. P22 spoke of her feeling like her world was crumbling, then finding ways to rebuild her social support during the adaptive stage of her divorce adjustment. She described her rebuilding process.

It’s like one by one, it gets rebuilt and it’s like a friend would put that piece in and you know, someone at the grocery store would put that piece in, and a coworker would do that one, and another friend and so piece by piece my world gets rebuilt. I think I have a wider range...of friends...Now, there are single people, married people, Christian, Non-Christian, retired; there are all kinds of people in my network now.

P22 was the participant who reported she had lost everything in the early stage of her post divorce adjustment process. She also talked about living in a bubble when she was married, very sheltered. Her ex was very controlling; she hadn’t even known any divorced people prior to her divorce. She also had the experience of having her children turn their backs on her; she was

really alone post divorce. P22 reported, “My social friends are my dance friends mostly right now. I have met all new friends.” Her ability to open up and expand her world (e.g., enter graduate school, start dancing) seems to be a skill that supported her divorce adjustment.

P24 remarked, “Little did I know that I just needed to get out of the apartment and...communicate with people.” She also learned, “I cannot rely on my friends who have husbands and have things to do: they can’t keep me company all the time so I better get out there and socialize.” P24 spoke about this experience. “I went into the bar by myself. I ordered a beer, walked around because I thought, ‘There must be other single people here,’ so I just listened and eventually people came up and talked to me.” From there she began dating. “I liked the music and then got to know people. Then I started dating a couple of guys there.” Through that experience she was able to expand her social network. “They would introduce me to people and eventually you do start talking to other women.” She now has formed a new family. “It’s like all the people at this country bar know me...and most of those people are like my family. They’re my friends.” She remembered how much courage she had to muster in order to make that first step into that bar; she was proud of herself and glad it paid off.

P13 has enjoyed her re-socializing experiences; she and her male friend/roommate attend social events together. “The most things that have changed are that I’m getting out and doing more things. I am going out and seeing plays at the Fisher Theater that I had never been to in my whole life.” She is excited about her free time and can’t really believe she is doing all these new and exciting fun things.

P23 spoke about her resocializing experience. “The ladies in my social circle are my new friends. We play cards. I have met most all of them post divorce.” When asked what they do together, she replied, “I like to go out to eat, play cards: there’s just camaraderie; they’re not all

divorced, some of them are widowed.”

P17 described the way she started rebuilding her social network during the adaptive stage. “You start building new friendships and you start meeting single people...You build a whole new life. You start from zero and your friends change, because most of my friends we saw as couples.” She described her new social support system. “Ladies I golf with and play cards with...I see them for lunch. Wednesday nights they all go out to dinner without their husbands, so they included me in that group and that really helped a lot.” She talked about an informal group she became a part of during her post divorce adjustment.

A divorced friend of mine...started a group where people would meet for dinner once a month. It wasn't to date; it was just to go out to socialize...I met two ladies from that group who were also single...We traveled together and saw each other a couple of times per month...So you have to build a whole new life. I have so many different women friends and do so much and I am so busy now.

P17 is the woman who has a handicapped son who lives in a group home; she still spends time with him each week. In the mean time she is busy socializing and having fun with her new reference group.

P21 spoke about forcing herself to go out. “I go visit my friends more now. I didn't do it at first.” She has changed who she spends time with. “I deal with the ones who basically are single. I kind of chose a different set of friends.” She talked about joining a neighborhood watch club. “They have a meeting and so I decided to take food. They talk about the neighborhood and stuff. I started getting involved with organizations so that keeps me busy.”

P12 described her rebuilding process and why it was so necessary,

I couldn't go to church anywhere up there because I would run into somebody I knew

everywhere. Moving here, I found new friends...I found a very good support system of friends at work and I found a nice church. I feel like I have found a church that doesn't shame people.

She spoke of the time she reconnected with a friend after her divorce had been final.

That was the first time in two years that we had seen each other or talked with each other since I left my ex. She came up to me and said, 'I just never knew what to say to you and I always wanted to call you and I never knew what to say.' I said to her, 'How about that you loved me.'

P10 reported having an unusual and eye opening experience with a friend of hers. It was during the adapting stage of her divorce adjustment. She found out her friend was starting her own divorce process. "I thought [the divorce adjustment] was pretty resolved then, but I don't think it was because, even though I had little conversations with friends...I ended up really talking it out with my friend." She went on "She got hit with a bombshell...she found out her husband had an affair. I then became her support system." This event caused her to dig deeper into her own experience. "I had been through it and yet at the same time I am supporting her I am realizing that I am still having emotions about it--sadness, anger." She then talked about how this was the final step she needed in her own divorce adjustment process.

We went for long walks and a lot of mornings she would meet up and we would walk for an hour and just talk...went out drinking a lot...We had so many evenings where we would sit and drink and talk, and talk, and talk, and talk. She would talk about her ex. He was way worse than mine, a hundred times more than mine: he was horrible. She had teenagers; the whole experience was so awful.

She reported that because of this experience with her friend's divorce, she began to develop a

new appreciation for her ex-husband and their divorce process.

Yeah, he fought over everything which my ex never did...It made me realize and in some ways made me appreciate how my ex handled it. I found myself somehow kind of able to stick up for him.

This was strange for her. She talked about never thinking it would be possible that she could ever defend her ex-husband. So something about this experience caused a shift inside of her.

P26 has rebuilt her social support system. "My social circle is some of the other administrators in the school district where I work now and some from the previous school district." She is now repartnered. "I have a significant man in my life. We have been seeing each other for 6 ½ years." She spends time with family. "I spend a lot of time visiting with my sisters. I was...raised by a pack of women. My dad died when we were kids: my mom and her mother raised us." She reported "I spend a lot of time being social with others when I am not working."

P1 reported she did not have to rebuild too much. She rearranged her relationship with her ex-husband's family, but she was able to maintain her primary support system. "I have a real strong connection with my church. So that is where my biggest connection is, my friends, my social network." She considers herself fortunate.

Dating in the adapting stage. The question about dating and repartnering was posed to all 25 participants: their responses varied. They ranged from P6's statement, "I don't have any desire to date" to P19's response, "My dating motto? I will date anybody who wants and anybody that asks!" For most of this cohort of women, dating was something they had not done in over 20 years. Many of them felt out of touch with the dating world; they weren't sure they knew the rules about dating any more. Some tried online services and struggled with that. Some just decided they weren't ready to date or felt they just did not want to put themselves out there

again. Dating and repartnering is cited in the divorce literature as being very helpful during the post divorce adjustment process (Steiner, Suarez, Sells, & Wykes, 2011; Wang & Amato, 2000). For some women, it may be difficult to be proactive in the dating scene post divorce. They are older, the rules changed, they have children/grandchildren, and their bodies are different. But they also have experience at life and may know more about themselves and what they truly want.

P10 reported, "I kind of had a fling with an old college friend, about a year after the divorce. There's nothing wrong with my sex drive and I thought, well, that's weird, I want to have sex all the time again." This was helpful to her personally; when I asked her why that was, she explained it.

That it wasn't me. I always told my ex, 'I would like him to hug me more and kiss me more.' He knew that, but he could never do it and I gave up because I wasn't getting it. And that helps me to know that if I get into another relationship, that this was not me, it was about him.

She described how the realization of this was huge for her process; all those years she felt like there was something wrong with her. Now she can attribute the lack of desire in her marriage to the relationship, not to herself.

P20 spoke about her own self discovery with her partner.

It is actually much more intimate; it is wonderful. It is mentally and wonderfully physical and we have a wonderful sex life. We spend more time laughing about things than anything else. I think it has to do a lot with age, too: we are both more mature.

She reported feeling surprised; she never thought she could feel this way with a partner.

P6 spoke about her reasoning behind her decision not to date.

One of the reasons is that I think, if given the chance, I think I would repeat some of the

co-dependency. This was my choice and I set myself up and that's one reason why I don't want to date and I'm not sure I can do that much better a second time.

She talked about spending a lot of time thinking of divorce, and spent a lot of time in therapy talking about her life and her decisions.

P8 reported, "I have not dated. Because I feel like I have to put myself back together, and to me the best thing that I can do is be as healed as I possibly can." P3 also spoke about her lack of dating during the adapting stage divorce adjustment. "No, I am not dating right now. I told my children, if I meet the right man, I told them I would. I said I sure would, I would get married again."

P9 was one of the participants who spoke about having affairs during her marriage. She later admitted that she was diagnosed as suffering with bi-polar disorder and believed a lot of her struggles resulted from a chemical imbalance. She has dated "three men since my husband," and she has lived with two.

I dated different guys off and on that...I liked dating but I don't know how I ended up living with these guys who come, they stay, and they don't go home. It's like they want to hang out all the time and I should have never allowed it, but I enjoyed their company.

At the time of the interview, she reported she had invited a man to live with her and she wants to end the relationship, but hasn't figured out how to go about it.

P7 went through a painful process divorcing her ex-husband who had fallen into addiction. "I didn't want anybody and didn't want anybody to want me. I couldn't handle the relationship." Once in awhile she would think about dating, "I would feel that it would be okay, and then I would get up and do something. I wasn't ready." She knew she had to work on her issues.

For me I know exactly what it would have been. I would have repeated my issues because I didn't have enough time yet to have identified or grieve the loss, identified what had gone wrong, and then gone past what he did wrong to what I did wrong and then decide what it was that I needed to do to not repeat the mistakes; and that's a long process.

She described her early dating experiences.

I didn't get hooked up with anyone bad. Each relationship was a better and better experience and it was about me. I learned I could do that, could enjoy myself...I did not find it difficult to begin the process of becoming sexual--I did not. It has been a huge growth area just discovering my sexuality. The sexual activity and having the sequence of relationships in which I began to explore my own sexuality was all about me.

She is currently in a committed relationship. When asked what that was like, she responded:

It was one of those things where a friend had a friend and we liked each other and we just started hanging out so it wasn't like I was trying to date. I found that it was very helpful to be comfortable in a relationship and be attractive and sexual.

When asked about remarrying she responded,

I am struggling with being in a committed relationship because my previous committed relationship had ended so badly. But we are struggling together...It's about the commitment. I figured out that to be authentic and real...not need the relationship. I really want this; I don't need it...We're lucky because we are 60, we don't need to have a house, don't need to have children, and so we don't need. But we can want.

She reported she and her new partner are happy and feel connected. She reported she is not ready to marry and is not sure she ever will; "I am happy where I am at."

P5 is currently remarried and reported she is very happy in her new relationship; they met via a mutual friend. They have now been married for 10 years.

I think it was probably at least a year after the divorce was final before I really felt like this was at a place of resolution, and I didn't date anybody or even make any efforts towards that at all, until I had been divorced for about two years.

P5 talked about getting plastic surgery after she finished remodeling her house. She is unique among the sample of women; no one else admitted that they had any plastic surgery during or since their divorce adjustment.

I got the surgery when I looked in the mirror one day and didn't like what I saw. I was working horrendous hours and I had lost weight and I just looked tired...I thought, 'why am I socking all the money into this right now and what would probably make me feel better would be to look into the mirror and not look so tired.'

She reported an added bonus post-surgery.

Oh yeah, one of the bonuses that happened after the surgery was when my ex came over to pick up something, and I had a new hairdo and he got out of the car and looked at me and he went, 'Wow, something's different. New hairdo?' and I knew it was worth it. Just to see the look on his face--it was priceless.

She felt she needed extra confidence before she could start dating.

I think it was probably not in the forefront of my mind at that time, but I think I knew that I needed a little more self-confidence before I could put myself out there. So I did that and then I went to a singles group at the Presbyterian church and I actually went to a Matchmakers thing where you pay money and they set you up with some guys although that was kind of a waste of money.

She stated the following about the Matchmakers dating service.

[I]t gave me practice; I needed practice. So, by the time I met [current husband] I had some practice and felt a little more confident.

She then went on to describe how she met her current husband.

My friend from childhood hooked me up...we had many phone conversations...and then he came to pick me up...We went to dinner and you know me, I yack...he loves that because he is not a yacker...and I met another guy that was very interesting...dating both of them at the same time; that was the most exciting thing I have ever done romantically.

After they were engaged her ex showed up.

The funny thing, is once I got engaged my ex called me. 'I want you to really think this through before you really marry him.' I couldn't believe it. A part of me was so angry at him for trying to rain on my happiness. I just told him, 'It is too late for me to listen to you now.'

She reported she is happy in her marriage and she is glad she went through all that stuff dating entails. She believed it was "well worth the effort."

P1 talked about her lack of desire in dating during her divorce adjustment.

I don't know if it is really a surprise to me. I thought that maybe by the time we had gotten to this point, like three years down the road, that I would have some renewed interest in dating or being with somebody else. I don't, not even a little bit. That's kind of a surprise to me. I've had some offers and they send me into panic attacks.

P10 spoke about her dating experience during her divorce adjustment period. "I wouldn't mind dating but I haven't quite figured out how to go about." She talked about meeting an old school friend at a reunion (e.g., he is married) and they have been seeing each other; right now

she is about having fun and enjoying her sexuality, but she is not sure how she feels about being in a relationship with someone.

A few participants spoke about their online dating scenarios. For this group of baby boomer women, the online dating world may be a totally foreign experience. This generation did not grow up with computers and social media; this makes them unique when compared to their younger cohorts. P11 spoke about her foray into the online dating world. “I would say, ‘Thanks for the message or the interest, but I’m not interested.’ I would read the profile and if there is any clue there (laughs). No, in the beginning, I think you’re so flattered that somebody’s interested.”

P12 tried online dating services and experienced disappointment. “No good, because they’re just a bunch of pigs on there in my opinion. All they want you for is sex.” She did talk about a man with whom she became friends (not online).

I would go out with him because I have known him for two years now...He has never put the moves on me, even though there has been that flirtatious type of thing and it’s just been friendship with us. He is a part of my life...He’s never been married, he is going to be 50 this year, but his thing is that he wants just a friendship with me.

When asked why he refuses to date her, she said,

He doesn’t want to date me because he is afraid that if it didn’t work out he doesn’t want to lose me as a friend; I am okay with that...My belief about dating is I really want to get to know the person before I really commit myself again. I am not going to jump. I’m just not going to do it.

She seemed to indicate that she would like her friendship with this man to be something else, but he doesn’t seem willing to want to change what they have. She does report that she is open to meeting a nice Christian man, but to date has not been successful. “I’m willing to give that to

another man but not at the expense of my own being.”

P25 has two sons in school. She laughed when I asked her about dating or remarrying. “I would like to have a partner. I am thinking of going to church or to the library. Like how do I find somebody if I never leave my house?”

P16 spoke about having friends who are trying to set her up with bachelors.

My ex-husband’s old boss is a widower: he is 78 years old. His wife died 5 years ago. My father is 72 and this man is 78...I am 50. He is really just lonely and I said, ‘I would love to have your company for dinner.’ I feel bad; I have no problem having dinner with a friend. I feel sad for him.

She seemed open to the idea of dating, but has not dated anyone since her divorce. She is busy helping her son finish college and she is trying to get her house sold.

P17 formed new social networks during her adaptive stage. When it came to dating she simply replied, “I am not a trusting person. I am not looking for a man, where some of the women in my social circle are.” P18 spoke about her disappointing experience with an online dating service.

I did the eHarmony thing for a couple of year--that was miserable. The men have been disappointing that I’ve dated. Usually it has more to do with their level of education than anything else. They are not very interesting to talk to; they don’t have much to contribute. She continued on about her views of repartnering in the future.

I haven’t given up on marriage. I do hope to find a significant other. I don’t think I would have to remarry, but I don’t particularly want to live by myself. At my age, I don’t know how possible that is. I tell myself, ‘You are educated and you are attractive and you are a sincere person. You are educated and you have qualities that men would appreciate or

admire.’ But then I think, where are they? I don’t know.

She talked about her dating and sexual experiences post divorce.

There were four men I was sexual with after my divorce. There was one individual where I can truly say I enjoyed the sex. As for the others, it was just matter-of-fact. During my marriage I never faked an orgasm, but after the divorce I found I had to learn how to fake one because I hadn’t decided whether or not I wanted to continue in the relationship. I didn’t want the sex to be the bottom line as to whether I stayed with him or not.

P18 was the participant whose husband had multiple affairs, and had a brick thrown through her window at Christmas time by his mistress.

P24 reported dating and becoming sexual with another man was not easy.

I think it was hard; of course it was hard because I only had sex with my husband. I mean it took me a long time. I never climaxed with any of the guys that I slept with; I only slept with three other guys before my boyfriend.

When she was asked to expand upon that, she added;

There was something blocking and I think it was because it wasn’t my ex. I had to adjust a lot: my ex was very obese. So, having sex with men that were normal size was awkward and it still is, but my boyfriend is so attractive that way, so I manage. Except that he is 42 and wow, he is young and you really want somebody younger. I wasn’t thinking he was that much younger than me. I thought ‘My God this is not going to work.’

P24, who is 55, reported she is happy in her current relationship and is learning how to be with a younger man. She still has one dilemma.

If I stay with him he doesn’t make that much money. He doesn’t have me on his papers

for insurance. Should I be looking for somebody who can support me--and I hate to do that, you know. So, it's like, I just say the old cliché, follow your heart.

P19 is currently happily remarried. She started "dating people so that was a lot of fun." She spoke about how she hadn't done that in a long time and missed the socializing. She told me, "My dating motto: I will date anybody who wants me and anybody that asks me. I then started to date my son's high school football coach who was going through a divorce." She talked about how that played out.

My son would come home from practice and tell me, 'The coach thinks you're hot.' I said, 'What?' He said, 'Yeah, everyone in the locker room is talking about you.' He went up to the coach and said, 'Are you talking about my mom?' The coach told him he was and asked my son if he could date me and would my son mind? My son said, 'No but she hasn't dated anyone in 23 years.' It all just fell into place, it was just magical.

When I asked her about that process she provided the following narrative.

We were all part of the same group of friends at school, which were all teachers...He was a lot younger than me...Then my son graduated. I went to see my friends in Oregon and when I came back I turned 50, he was in his late 30's. I said to myself, 'I am too old to be doing this.' So I quit dating the football coach.

She then spoke about her emotional experience dating for the first time in 23 years.

I just dated the first time and I couldn't imagine kissing anyone and sitting next to them. It was like watching a movie...When you are in your 20s and getting married, everything is different when you have kids. I had a hysterectomy so I didn't have to worry about getting pregnant, which was a big deal. So it was the best ever because we didn't have little kids there.

I asked her to tell me about her experience with dating her current husband.

My daughter had set us up. He was used to doing everything just like I was. We used to fight to outdo each other. 'I'll mow the lawn; no I'll mow the lawn. Well let's mow the lawn together?' I mean things like that; we had to learn to compromise. I remember going to the therapist and saying, 'I still don't know what to do.' All she said was, 'Breathe, just breathe.' That was hard for me to adjust to.

She compared her current relationship and that with her ex-husband.

I didn't know how to be with someone who didn't need something from me. My first husband did absolutely nothing. I did everything. I took care of the kids, the laundry, cooking, grocery shopping, everything.

She reported she is happy and loves her life. She never imagined it could be this way, although she did report that her current husband has a young son. P19 has had trouble with her step-son's mother; this has caused some distress in her life.

P20 described her dating experience post divorce. She was married to a man who drank heavily and her son died during the time she was beginning her divorce.

The first gentleman I dated, we were friends; there was nothing sexual...We got along very well. We had lots to talk about...No sex and he knew that...It was just fun. The other gentleman, we met on Match.com. We tried a relationship for about six months...We did have sex and it was okay; it wasn't wonderful. I don't know, I guess we didn't communicate well.

When asked about her current relationship she reported it is great.

My current partner stimulated my brain incredibly before he stimulated anything else. I was extremely happy. He made my brain so happy and I recognized it. It was a

communication thing.

P20 drives to his place almost every weekend. She says he makes her feel good about herself.

P24 described her dating experiences at a local country bar.

Yeah, little did I know that he was watching me for a while and I didn't know that? So, he started talking to me...and he walked me out to my car. He then came over and I gave him my number and next weekend we went out. Probably, it was over a year, because in between that time I had dated about four guys but none of them were really--they didn't work out. I didn't know what to do on a date.

P24 had lived with her husband all of her adult life. He had controlled most aspects of her life. She believed she led a very sheltered life until they moved to the house on the cul-de-sac. Her dating during the adapting stage of her divorce adjustment was another avenue in her life that she had to re-explore.

P26 is an administrator in a high school, has a great deal of education, and a powerful job. She knew she wanted to be with a smart man and probably a professional.

I dated a couple of men that I think I was--I just hate to say it--too smart for them. They thought that; I think they thought they were smart people in their own field. I think they looked at me and thought, 'Oh my God, she is a professional and she does this and that and she supervises 80 employees and 1,200 kids and I can't do that.'

She finally found a man who is a professional and very smart: her sister introduced them.

Oh, he is much more tolerant and more active in a sense of going places and traveling to places of interest, going to museums and a little more cerebral, I guess, than my marriage with my ex. It's not really a marriage because [current partner] doesn't live here or pay bills here but just when he is here he helps with the cooking and making sure the bed is

made if he is here and things like that.

She reported she is happy in her current relationship and she feels like her life is very full at the moment; she has “no idea what the future holds” for her and seemed to be all right with that.

Forgiveness. A few participants spoke about actively working towards forgiving their ex-husbands, and reported this was helpful to their process. P8 forgave her ex and found it helpful. “Every nail that you hammer in your brother’s hand keeps you on the cross, which is the forgiveness thing.” She added, “You know, I’m only hurting myself if I harbor anything negative towards him. I’m only holding myself back from my greatness by holding any negative energy towards him.” P11 reported having forgiveness was important for her process.

Paul Ferrini said having hurt feelings and holding a grudge, you are not hurting them: the only energy and pain you are causing is [to] yourself. So, forgive them and let it go and let them live with their issue. You don’t have to carry it on and that was great. It was great information that I needed.

She reported she let her ex off the hook and decided to move forward.

P3 reported, “I was able to forgive him.” When asked why, she responded, “So you could forgive and release him and let it go.” This seemed to be all she needed to say about that. P5 reported that she and her new husband forgave the ex-spouses.

Yeah, we’re two victims and we’re both--both of us--willing to forgive. Both of us tried hard to give our spouses second chances and make it work. Neither of us looks back and thinks if we had done this differently to save the marriage. We don’t have any regrets.

Around the two-year mark is when many divorced people feel as if they are ready to move on with their lives. For the sake of this current study, the two-year mark (e.g. and beyond) will be labeled the final stage; it does not mean that all issues and feelings have been resolved.

What it represents is a place where the participants can think about new beginnings and adventures. It is also the point in time where according to the divorce literature, many divorced people start to feel as if they can start their lives over again (Hetherington, 2003).

Stages of Divorce Adjustment: Final Stage, Resolved or Unresolved

The final stage of divorce adjustment is characterized by one element: time. The literature suggests that it takes most people two to three years to adapt post divorce. All of the women in this study, by design, are in the final stage of their post divorce adjustment. However, not all had reached resolution: 10 fall into the unresolved group and 15 the resolved.

This stage was divided into two categories: resolved or unresolved. This decision was made based on the participants' responses during the interview process. Some reported they are 'at peace,' some reported they were not. For the women in the resolved group, the final stage is labeled resolved; for the women who self-reported they were not at peace post divorce, the category is labeled unresolved.

Resolved/Unresolved Stage Identity

In this current study, 60% (i.e., 15) of the participants reported some form of emotional closure occurred around their divorce (i.e., reported they were 'at peace'). Many of the participants reported positive identity shifting in the final stage of their divorce adjustment.

P23 is an example of a woman who experienced an identity shift: a woman who is divorced from a gay man. She made decisions that supported her new identity: she postponed her retirement; she built an active network of friends; and is currently an active, single grandmother. The one thing she chose not to do was date or repartner. Her new identity is being single. She reported that she is happy, and is friends with her ex-husband and his new partner.

When I got ready to retire...I just said 'You know, it doesn't matter if I have \$100,000 or

\$10,000: I can't work anymore...I'll be fine.' My mental health is better now than it has been in a long, long time. It improved: because before the divorce, I walked through this house on egg shells never knowing when he was going to explode.

She sees herself as a happy, retired, single, vibrant grandmother with a wide circle of friends.

P25 sees herself as an advocate now. Since her painful divorce experience, she believes it is her mission to help other women in similar life situations.

I became a resource for other girls and other friends who are going through a divorce like me, first marriages....So, things that I knew that I should have done, I told them, so for me, had I had that, it would have been so much easier. You know, it opened up my eyes, because a long time ago I was critical of someone getting a divorce.

Her turning point created another avenue for her to help others.

P22 shifted her identity dramatically. Prior to the divorce she was a married, stay-at-home mom. She was living in an emotionally abusive home, married to an overly controlling man. Today, she is divorced, more assertive, and a graduate student at a major university. She is dating, doing ballroom dancing, and learning how to do research and give presentations. She reported she "has more work to do" on herself, but she sees areas in herself where she knows she can experience growth. She is learning to take challenges head on and is learning she is adventurous.

I think I have been able to change that and feel some capabilities; I am not a horrible person. I am not perfect, but there is a lot of good in there and I just need to focus on that.

This counselor has helped me with that. I changed the way I am; I try to be more assertive.

She understands she is in a process of continued growth and development even seven years post

divorce.

The assertiveness is hard for me and I know that is expected in the workforce and I see this at [university]. They like people who are assertive, go and do their job, take care of it. It's really hard for me to just take charge of something and just do it. I need to work on that.

She among all of the women I interviewed kept referring to herself as doing something she never thought she could do. She is experiencing growth and changes on a consistent basis; she never gave up on herself or her process; this new sense of self-efficacy is apparent in her description.

P11 reported that she has experienced a shift in her attitude post divorce. "I think that comes with age, too. I don't care what other people think." This may be something unique to this population (versus younger women) who experience a divorce: not caring as much what other people think about them.

P20 described how her identity has shifted throughout her divorce adjustment process. She was married to a man who drank alcohol excessively, and was mean and cruel to her throughout their marriage. She also lost her son to an infection at the same time she was initiating the divorce. She has endured a lot.

If 5 were the highest, I guess I am about 4 out of 5 on the confidence scale now. I did it by talking to a lot of people--learning to be by myself, learning how to sleep alone. I figured out who I am, really. That gave me my confidence...It seems like once I got past 50, different things are not so important [as] they used to be. I am much calmer and less uptight.

Perhaps another unique feature of this population is reaching an age where confidence and calm seems to come a little more naturally; perhaps there is something about turning 50 that causes a

shift within women. She began talking about her new partner. “He has also been a big influence on how I have more confidence in myself.”

P12 seemed to be wrestling with the final stage of her identity process.

I am still struggling there. I am not where I should be, in my opinion...I do not want bitter or angry in my life and I do not want to become that old woman that sits and waits. If there’s a chance for a relationship I want to take it, even though I know what I want in a relationship. If I don’t get that, I want to make sure that I am okay with that.

P4 is struggling as well; she is the participant who left her husband for her affair partner. “Yeah, my definition of my self: I wanted to see myself as a person who was truthful and kept promises. My divorce was the breaking of the promise.” She has not yet been able to fit this new awareness into her self-identity.

P10 is shifting in strength and fearlessness. “I always thought I was fairly strong. I think I am stronger than I thought. I think I have become a little more fearless.” She also talked about her identity shifting process. “I see myself still growing and changing. My divorce was just the beginning for me. I feel like I am a work in process.”

Shifts in identities are a part of the divorce adjustment process; these women had been in long-term marriages for a majority of their adult lives and now are free. Only 2 women in this sample can refer to themselves as a ‘wife’ (e.g., P5, P19). That represents 8% of the sample; a huge shift for these baby boomer women. Their new identities no longer include that term: wife. For this group of women, single may be the preferred state of being.

Resolved/Unresolved Stage Adjustment

During the final stage of the women’s divorce adjustment process, many of the participants spoke of positive and hopeful things they have and are continuing to experience. A

few of them spoke of having a new sense of comfort, being empowered, and being happy; and others have talked about places in their lives where they are experiencing a feeling of being stuck.

The final stage is the place in a person's divorce adjustment process that is defined as two or more years post divorce. In this sample, seven women are at the two- to three-year mark post divorce (e.g., P12, P13, P15, P16, P21, P24, and P25); three women are at the four-year mark post divorce (e.g., P1, P10, and P17) and the other 15 women are all six or more years post divorce (e.g., median = 9 years). Some have navigated the process successfully (i.e., self-report 'at peace') and others have had more ups and downs in the divorce adjustment and find themselves feeling stuck (i.e., self-report 'no peace').

The 25 women interviewed are all, by definition, in the final stage. Fifteen participants self-reported that they felt resolved in this stage of their divorce adjustment process (e.g., P3, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10, P11, P13, P17, P18, P19, P20, P22, P23, and P26). These women are categorized as being in the resolved category of the final stage. The remaining 10 participants self-reported they did not feel at a place of peace post divorce; they were placed in the unresolved category (e.g., P1, P2, P4, P7, P12, P15, P16, P21, P24, and P25). Some of their narratives and experiences will be described in the following sections.

P1 described her current place or 'state of being' as content and comfortable; she is happy with her life. She reports she is not yet at a place of peace post divorce. She is not dating (by choice) and is working as a home health care nurse. She retired several years earlier from a General Motors job and reported she is enjoying having a second career. "I have a smaller home; I don't worry about paying my mortgage. I stepped down to what was a very comfortable level for me. I am definitely not living large; but I am not in poverty either." When I asked if she was

at peace about her divorce she indicated, “maybe” and could not expand further on what prevented her from completing that process.

P4 is eight years post divorce and presents as one of the stuck participants in this study. When I asked if she was at peace about her divorce she indicated she was not at a place of peace. She had an affair while married to her husband, she divorced him for her affair partner, and then found a new job in a new city and moved away from her community. She also spoke about losing two close friends (e.g., cancer) during the time when she was exiting the marriage. She reported her experience up to this point; “sort of that realization that I’m not all that unique.” She seemed to be resigned to her experience. “I know as you age you get unique in some ways that happens: we are so peer driven as kids. I see that you know it’s just this life is not all that unique. It’s just what it is.” When I probed further and asked her about possibly dealing with disappointment, she agreed. She is disappointed in herself, and her non-uniqueness.

P7 has been divorced for 12 years and reported she is still not at a place of peace in her divorce adjustment process. She reported she has a much better life, she is repartnered, her daughter and grandchildren are happy and doing well, and she is retired and feels financially secure. But she reported that she was so angry and resentful, so hurt, so devastated by her ex-husband’s actions that she just couldn’t let go of the pain; she indicated she is working on it.

Loneliness final stage. Richard Bach is credited with the following quote: “The opposite of loneliness is not togetherness: it’s intimacy.” This may prove to be insightful for some of these women in the final stage of the divorce adjustment. Questions about intimacy were not asked of this sample, but it may be that some of the women were not able to find intimacy in the final stage. Some women did describe experiencing loneliness during this stage of their divorce process. P12 talked about her experience.

The only thing I have bouts of is loneliness...but I am not willing to go back into the craziness of somebody's issues...I want a real relationship...I'm telling you there have been nights...should I go back to him but then I go no, because there is nothing worse than feeling alone when you are with someone. I would rather be alone and have no one. This is a different type of alone. But it's not as paralyzing.

P21 spoke about her experience with feeling alone during the final stage of her divorce adjustment. "There are some moments when you are out and see couples together. I get those periods but they are kind of thinning out now...Being alone--it is an adjustment. Right now I don't have any other relationship." She is the participant who was in a disabling car accident.

Financial final stage. P23 represented someone who had to find a different way of handling her finances in the final stage of her divorce adjustment.

I did adjust my shopping and spending post divorce. Even now I notice that as hot as it's been, you know, some people set their air conditioning at 80 degrees. I'm not doing that, it's too hot...If I want to buy something, I will buy it; but I may think more than once about it. I know I need to buy a new car. This one runs fine even though it's 12 years old. She is a retired schoolteacher; she worked at paying off their debts. At this stage in her life she has found a way to get her needs met, but still have financial balance in her life.

P22 had some questions about choices she made early on in her marriage. She seemed to have some doubts about decisions she made years earlier. She currently is a graduate student and chose to not work and raise her children when they were young.

I can't just go get a job; I don't have a career...I quit it when I had kids. So maybe I should have stayed in that and I would have had a career; but I would have had to give up what I gave my kids and so that's really a hard thing to decide. But you know I don't

have the security. You don't have financial security...I can't save money and put it in retirement.

She described feeling torn about her past decisions; she is living a life (e.g., graduate student) that isn't allowing her to make a lot of money. She hopes that very soon she will be able to find a good paying job with benefits, but she is not there yet; and she is struggling financially. She hears about things her ex is doing.

You know, he can go and fly off and see my son in England any time he wants. I couldn't really afford a place of my own...I think I am still in the process. That's why I really want to graduate so that I can get a job and be a normal person...I think I have been wise about it and careful.

She seemed to understand that she is in one of the stuck places (i.e., financial security) in her divorce adjustment process; she doesn't seem to be in denial, she is aware she has more work to do around it.

P15 is another participant who seemed stuck in the financial area of her adjustment. She is currently unemployed and is looking to put her master's degree to good use. When her ex retires she gets part of his retirement. "He is not retired yet: he is 61. When he retires I get \$150,000. Even if he doesn't retire, I am entitled to it once he reaches a certain age."

P18 spoke about feeling behind financially. "I didn't start a Roth IRA until after I divorced him. As far as my ex was concerned, we would retire early from the business and sell the chess sets he liked to collect. We sell those and live." P18 felt she did well with her money management throughout her divorce adjustment process.

My alimony went to help the kids because there wasn't a nickel that my ex would contribute to their education. I had no trouble paying my bills; I was mostly working full

time. I was able to sock away some money into savings.

She was the participant who was married to a man who had several affairs. She spoke about her husband building a huge business, having to go through bankruptcy, and not saving for retirement. Despite all of that she reported feeling good about her financial process.

P4 had very little trouble with financial matters throughout her divorce adjustment. “That was huge, actually, I was always aware I could live by myself and I thought about it a lot.” She knew that she would be okay financially; it was never a worry for her. During her marriage she spoke of their financial acuity. “In that time, we both saved a lot of money: we wanted to travel and do things. I’m a really good saver. So, we saved.”

P21 struggles even now financially; she is on disability and can no longer work. “I mean not having my job and working the way I used to. Well, one of my daughters--she helps me. She gives me money. I don’t want to make him mad; if I do he will stop paying alimony.” The lack of financial security was hard for her to cope with.

Employment in the final stage. Nineteen women are not retired. Each of them fell into one of three categories: working (14 participants; 74%), looking for work (21%), disabled – can’t work (P21). Of the 13 participants still working, 42% are in the unresolved group (e.g., P1, P2, P4, P12, and P24) and the rest are in the resolved group (e.g., P6, P9, P11, P13, P19, P20, P22 and P26). All of the women still working reported liking their jobs and getting satisfaction from their work.

Four participants are looking for work (e.g., P8, P15, P18, and P25); two are from the unresolved group (e.g., P15, P25) and two are from the resolved group (e.g., P8, P18). Six women are currently retired and were not working at the time of the interview (e.g., P3, P5, P7, P10, P17, and P23). P7 is the only retiree who is in the unresolved group.

Physical well-being. During the final stage of divorce adjustment, several women spoke about the current state of their physical well-being. P10 continues to struggle with her arthritis and is concerned what may happen to her in the future when she gets older. P16 continues to struggle with fractures in her vertebrae; she reported she doesn't feel she has money to spend on physical therapy. P21 went on SSDI due to a severe automobile accident she was involved in prior to the divorce; she reported her physical condition does not allow her to work. She reported she is struggling with the pain and disability has been hard on her.

P13 spoke about her concerns for her physical well-being.

I would say, weight. I want to feel better about my physical self. I am not feeling too good about that...it is just a matter of committing to it and doing it. I don't think it has really changed any. I still have the same issues of getting old that happens, and also being overweight.

Emotional experiences in the final stage. P7 described her current emotional state. "I'm still grieving, still angry with him." P19 spoke about the bitterness she still carries around with her.

I am bitter I don't have the things that other people my age have. I made the wrong choices...I have my health and I am thankful for that. I look at other couples that have double incomes and are retiring, and have cabins up north...I am also bitter because my husband's ex-wife...she is kind of a pain, and she is crazy. So I am kind of bitter that we now have two houses...I am bitter about her...I get no credit.

She reported she is 'at peace' in her post divorce process. She reported she earns a good income, has remarried a man (with a minor child and a crazy ex), and her children are doing well in their adjustment. She holds onto her bitterness, but it does not seem to interfere with her divorce

adjustment process.

P21 spoke about her current emotional field: loss, disappointment, and resentment.

It still bothers me. You know, I feel like he didn't put enough in for me to change my mind. I feel like it was all those years and I could have found someone else that could have made me happy. He didn't break up his affairs. I feel like I had been robbed.

P21 is the participant who was in a severe automobile accident and ended up unable to work. She is currently on SSDI and is struggling financially post divorce.

P16 talked about still experiencing emotional pain today: she seems stuck in her pain.

He always brought me gifts. I am wearing what he bought me. There are still certain things I cannot wear, some of the jewelry that he has gotten me in the past. He loved to shop for me and bring me home presents. He loved it.

While she was looking down, her voice dropped and she was carefully touching the necklace around her neck. Gregson and Ceynar (2009) described marital artifacts in their research, and how many women felt they needed to make changes in their lives during the adjustment process.

P10 talked about reexperiencing some of her earlier pain during the final stage.

I just had the flu a couple of weeks ago and it's the kind of flu where you cannot function...nobody was here to bring me food. I've had this hand thing and [it] completely incapacitated me for six weeks where I couldn't do anything...That's when I get mad all over again. I think to myself, 'This is when you should be here reciprocating for all the times I helped you.'

P10 described something that makes this group unique within the divorce literature: future payoff. Long-term marriages often provide partners a sense of security for when they are in their golden years; each put in to a 'bank' and then they can withdraw from that bank when it is

necessary. P10 took care of her ex after a severe motorcycle accident; she was his “nurse.” In marriage the expectation of physical care from a partner is normal. But P10 finds herself in a position (i.e., she has the flu) of need, and cannot withdraw from the account they had built together.

Several women talk about not having their marriages pay off for the hard work they put in (e.g., P1, P6). A few women never got the chance to collect on the marital debt they felt had been owed to them (e.g., P2, P10, P12, P16, and P21). Women in long-term marriages can have the experience of banking time and energy within the marriage; this can amount to a lot. Once a divorce occurs, the bank gets wiped cleaned; the lack of return on investment may provide a sticking point for some women who divorce later on in life.

The emotional state of happiness of some participants did not turn out to be the equivalent of a place of peace: some reported they were happy and had a better life, but have not yet reached a place of peace in their divorce adjustment process. P1 reported, “I am very happily single.” She then went on, “I like my life just exactly the way it is. I think that I am a happier person because my life energy is going to things that I choose that I direct, that I feel are rewarding to me.” She is not sure if she is at a place of peace post-divorce (e.g., feels guilty for abandoning her husband) but she does report she is in a better place in her life.

P10 spoke about her current happiness. “Aside for brief little moments, I don’t feel angry or resentful about the divorce anymore. I feel like he did me a favor. I feel kind of happy about the whole thing.” P11 echoed those sentiments. “I don’t have hard feelings or resentment or anything like that. In my heart, I’m a really different person. I’m happy.”

P7 previously stated she was “not at a place of peace” yet. She does talk about her emotional state of being, “I have an enormously better life than I did. I am very happy with my

life.” She described her experience from then until now.

After the divorce was final, it was just like the weight of the world was lifted and I had a chance to be real. I just had a chance at life. I was just so burdened. I had a good job, got a much better job. Socially I have friends, and I am in a relationship that I have been in for four years now and my daughter and I get along fabulously.

She continued on with her description.

And the places I’ve been and done and accomplishments I have made, I would have never been able to do that if I stayed married. I am real happy about that. I am very happy with the changes in my own self-esteem and my own feeling of self-confidence.

P17 reported she has an active social life and an active physical one as well. “I golf and I have always walked two miles in the morning. I have always been really active. That makes me happy.” P19 described her happiness. “Since my divorce, I have my own sewing room; I love to quilt. I love being creative. I always had, but I put it on the back burner. I realize now that it makes me very happy.”

Cognitive shifts leading to resolved or unresolved. Thoughts, thinking, belief formation, and meaning making were an important element of this sample’s process. Throughout the interviews, what began to emerge from the data was the cognitive processes these 25 women went through and how they were able to organize their experiences leading to being resolved or unresolved post divorce. Several of the participants spoke about their regrets related to choices and decisions that were made or not made.

Regrets. Women also talked about people and things they wished could have been different during their divorce adjustment process; some also spoke about regrets or how they wished they had done things differently. I describe regrets in this section because they seemed to

emerge during the final stage of the divorce adjustment process.

P2 regrets the whole thing. “I just wish it would have never happened because things would have been different in the family.” P1 mentioned she really missed having her ex-husband’s expertise around when things went wrong at home. “Home repairs...cars--you take the car into somebody and say ‘It’s making a noise,’ and they say, ‘Yeah, you need a whole new blah blah blah and it’s going to cost \$1,600.’” She remembered feeling helpless. “I don’t know, they could tell me anything. I wouldn’t know any better.” She reported she wished she had a male friend to fill in the gap and advise her on “guy type things.”

P5 wished “for people to know that I really tried.” She also remembered wishing that her children had reacted differently early on in the divorce adjustment process. “They both really tried to not take sides. There were times I wished they would have been angrier with their father but they didn’t.” P26 reported she had only one wish. “The only thing is that I wished that my ex did not have so much animosity against me.” I asked her why that was. She explained, “so that our son could have a more normal relationship with his parents.”

P4 spoke of her regrets. “I was married 30 years; I was in a club of successful long-term marriages.” She continued, “I knew all those little tricks of the long-term married club. Then all of a sudden I am not in the club anymore. I have a failed marriage. I regret that.” She regrets some things and not others. She, like others in the sample, experienced this polarization: the yes and no, good and bad, ambivalence of the process. She reported that she wished she had done the whole thing differently. “I wish I had a friendly relationship with him (ex-husband).” She went on, “I wish I had turned off the relationship with [lover] and gone through the divorce...I wish I had done that.” She talked about her affair, “inflicting pain on somebody else ...my pain was more like a dissatisfaction itch, which I still have; divorce did not change that. It just switched

one little bit of dissatisfaction for another bit of dissatisfaction.” She also spoke about wanting to hear about her story in the popular culture. She wished she had had books to read during her process. “There isn’t hardly anything out there about women who walk away from an okay long-term relationship. I want my story. I want to read more about what I went through and hang my little hook on.” She mostly regrets finding out she is human. “Whenever I hear someone cheated on someone, I still have a little thing in my stomach. I feel like a person who could keep a promise and tell the truth. I am human and part of the human condition. There it is. That is my biggest regret.”

P23 spoke about what she wished for: “A man, to cry on his shoulder. It would just have been nice to have a man’s point of view.” She also wished that her ex had told their son about his sexual orientation in a different manner. “If I could look back and change one thing...[it] is the way my ex told our son he was gay...It was so hurtful to him.”

P24 had a wish for her own family. “I wish I had my own family, because I would have had somebody to talk to...I just was by myself.” She had been pseudo-adopted by her mother-in-law when she was 16; she came from a dysfunctional family and had created her family when she partnered with her boyfriend/husband.

P25 wished she had not followed her mom’s advice and kept her divorce process a secret; in doing so she was denied social support. She wished her mentor “could have shared with me what she went through...when she was helping me and guiding me but I think, oh gosh, if I could have talked to her, maybe I would have known these things.”

She also spoke of her wish for a new partner in her life.

I would like to have a companion as I am the only child and don’t have that much family and I don’t want to grow old like all the female friends I have seen from my mom’s side

who decided never to get married again because they are widowed or had a bad marriage.

I am not like that. I would like to have that in my life.

I asked her once more, is there anything else you wished. She replied, “I wish that I would have married the right person and never had a divorce.” P19 also responded similarly. “I would have picked someone else to marry.”

P20 had regret. “I wished I had divorced earlier.” Along those lines P12 added, “I just think that if I had it to do over, I would have gone for it and left him way back then.” When she was asked to expand on that she said, “For myself and for them [children]. Now I don’t believe staying with him really benefitted them.” I asked her why she believed that; “I think it did more harm. I think my daughter is still trying to search for that daddy she never had. She is on her third marriage and that right there tells you something.”

P22 is a graduate student; she has struggled in many areas in her life since her divorce. She wished that she could have had a mentor. “They could have said, you know, this is what I experienced, this is what I went through, these are the things I did. I didn’t even know what to do and where to go.” She continued on with her wish list, “I would like to be financially stable, a job and a house. I wish I would have had a job.” She also added,

I would have had a purpose, I would have had finances, and I would have had a job and known who I was. I would have had something that wasn’t taken away from me, and some stability. I would have had to get up and go to that job; there would have been friends there that I could have talked to. That is what I wish I had.

She also added something else, something unique in this sample.

I would love to take dance lessons...That’s probably the other thing that has helped me not be depressed during this divorce. I think you cannot dance and be depressed at the

same time. The music is uplifting and moving and studying the movement and studying the brain and the chemicals released and communication between the brain; it just makes sense and now I understand why.

She reported she felt like she had gone through a lot since her husband left her. She talked about looking back from the moment her ex-husband's stockbroker told her she was getting a divorce to now. She marveled at her progress. She is doing research as a graduate student, she has new friends, and she dances.

P15 wished she and her ex could co-parent better. "My wish is to share our concerns about our kids, share the same way of raising them. I would like for my kids to do better."

P8 regrets that she and her ex do not have a cordial relationship. "I hope that if there is some kind of event that we both attend for our children, then we can at least be friendly to each other."

P17 had several wishes and regrets. "I wished I had picked someone else to marry...someone who is honest and believed in the vows." She expanded her wish. "I wish he would have been a good husband and a good father. You always wish that you would get a nice spouse that you could build a history and a family together and enjoy that." When I asked her if there was anything else she wished for, she responded. "I don't want to run into him or into her (i.e., his current partner). Other than that, I just want him to treat his kids good."

P1 wished "that my husband could have been different." She began to talk about the early process they both went through.

I know at that stage it would have been impossible to get him to go into counseling. I wish we would have had divorce counseling for closure...I was surprised he did not see it coming. It was like a freight train coming from 10 miles away...We never did discuss...the specific issues that precipitated the divorce...I would have liked him to

understand why this was necessary.

She also wished the early stage would have been different between her and her daughter.

My daughter and I fought an awful lot right after the divorce. For about three weeks my son moved out and moved in with a buddy of his...It did get better as time went by. It's a lot better now that she's moved out. But it was way better before that. There was stuff going on between her and me and stuff going on between me and her dad.

P10 had two wishes.

More money would have been nice...I wished that he and I could have sat down and really talked about it when it happened instead of 'this is going to happen.' I wish it wouldn't have been so much thrown on me, and I don't know how it couldn't have, but I just wish it could have been more of a process.

P10 is the participant who had her ex-husband's affair and divorce sprung on her right before she went on a weekend visit to see an old friend. She returned home to a half-empty house.

P11 regrets that she did not move after her divorce.

I have issues with the house I've been in since 1975...I bought it and then my husband came after that. It's old and it's a huge responsibility. This fall, you know, it almost made me crazy, both physically and emotionally. There was a time when I thought I should just sell so that I don't have to deal with it and so this year it seemed like it was overwhelming.

I asked if it was relevant that she had the house before she had her marriage. She seemed to pause. She responded, "I don't know. I had never thought of that before."

P16 had regrets post divorce about splitting up the parenting team. "You cannot guide them together." She is a devoted mother and understands that the divorce has forever changed

the way her children are raised.

P24 regretted staying in the marriage so long. “Probably that I would have been a smarter woman and more awake, more not needing resolution so much.” P5 regretted some of her interactions with her children.

I suppose probably the one thing I wished I would have done a little differently...was not verbalizing anything negative about my ex to the kids...There is still a part of me that would have liked to have grown up and grown old with him and shared grandkids together.

She went on to say she loves her current husband and their kids and life together, but when she stops and thinks about her past, she can’t help but wonder how it might have turned out differently.

P8 was blunt in her answer. “The only regret I might have had is why I waited so long to divorce.” P19 regrets her original choice. “Sometimes I think that I picked the wrong person...just wanted to be married.” She has “gotten okay” with her original choice of mate; she says she “can’t let it keep her from living.”

P17 answered the regret question this way: “Well, I don’t know if I have a lot of regret. I mean there is nothing I can do about it. I do regret choosing him, I do.” P3 was married to a man who emotionally abused her, physically hurt her and the children, cheated on her and used copious amounts of illicit substances. She offered her regret.

I really wished things had turned out better than they did; I always wanted to raise my children with a mother and a dad and a home and stuff...You know all three of my boys went to prison. When I looked back over my life and knew that my marriage and their father affected my children. I figured if I had took another path I don’t think my sons

would have been in prison. I should have divorced him sooner. I really regret not doing that.

She lost one son to gun violence and she has seen all of her sons imprisoned for crimes. She experienced her husband's maltreatment and yet she has a positive energy about her. When asked about that she responded, "Faith in God has seen me through the dark days."

P13 talked about regretting the way she informed her ex about her decision to divorce.

I think it was just telling, actually having to tell him and the way I did it. Which in retrospect, well maybe I shouldn't have. I actually wrote him a letter and left it on the table for him to find.

She went on to say she regrets hurting her two daughters by divorcing their dad.

I do have a little bit where I feel like it's because of my decision that I affected--you know--a lot of things. My daughters are both adults: they are not in any kind of a serious relationship. I hope that someday, once they are married, they'll be able to understand me and why I divorced their dad. Hopefully they'll stop and reflect and realize why I had to do what I did. I try to make them understand that.

She went on to say she still regrets the current state of her relationship with her two daughters.

I think it's the relationship with my girls I most regret. It has been difficult. It is still not that good. I have come to realize it will never be the same. Once you have gotten so far down the road with someone there is no going back. In some ways that is okay. We are all adults now. The oldest one is 27; even when she was away at college we spoke every day. Now it doesn't feel that way anymore. I guess she is more independent now.

She seems to be okay with her decisions, but still carries the weight of those decisions inside her.

P6 has some regrets. "If I could rewrite the whole script I would have acted more

maturely when I was 23. I would not have gotten married then. I would have broken up and waited.” She seems okay with her decision to divorce her ex-husband. She talks about how content she is and she is happy with the life she has created for herself.

Women with no regrets in some areas. P1 remarked on her decision to end the marriage. “I have no regrets” she replied to the question.

There was a whole lot of work and not a whole lot of payoff. I don’t feel as if I’m missing out on anything by not being married. Almost always when I’m out with my married friends and sometimes I go home thinking ‘Oh my god’ ...I did not see a whole lot of change in my social life after I divorced.

She regrets things that her ex experienced as a consequence of her decision to divorce, but the divorce itself? She reports it was the right choice for her.

P5 talked about her current marriage to her second husband.

Yeah, we’re two victims and we’re both willing to forgive. Both of us tried hard to give our spouses second chances and make it work...We don’t have any regrets. He’s always very kind and says to me, ‘Why should I be angry? I traded up.’

She added a personal note about her divorce adjustment. “I regret the actual divorce; but I feel like what I’ve done and the way I’ve done it, I don’t have regrets. I don’t have regrets about the post divorce stuff at all.”

P8 reported she has no regrets as far as the settlement portion of the divorce went.

My lawyer who is now my friend said that, ‘You remember that five years from now whatever you decide on, you are either going to be happy with your decisions you made in your settlement or you’re going to regret things in your settlement.’ I didn’t want to look back and say, ‘I wish I would have done that or have any regrets.’ I have none.

She spoke on her present state of mind. “Somehow there was a guy involved; I know this because I have three sons. I forget that I was ever married to him.” She laughed at her last statement; she reported this has been a journey for her. She likes who she is and doesn’t see how she would have gotten to this place if she had stayed married to her ex.

P13 reported she has no regrets about deciding to end the marriage.

No regrets. In fact, it is nice you are doing this interview; because I can see that two years have gone by and no, he hasn’t changed a bit. Everything he is doing right now, I would still be with that...It is kind of scary thinking that I could still be sitting on the couch with him having the same thoughts, only two years later.

She seemed to take in all that she had just said to me. I asked her what she was thinking about, she replied, “Just reflecting how much my life has changed for the better.”

P16 had lots of pain and lots of regret since she found out about the affair and her ex-husband’s decision to end the marriage. When I asked her about possibly regretting marrying him, she replied to me, “I felt he was the right person for me. I have no regrets in that sense.”

Growth realized post divorce. Some participants realized personal growth during the last stage of the post divorce adjustment period. P10 spoke about her personal growth, “I think I have become a little more fearless.” P13 spoke of her growth. “I think I got my confidence back. There were periods of time in my life where I would be confident and then not so confident...I’m not just somebody’s wife and somebody’s mother.”

P8 understood, “I needed to realize that I had to come up with the resources within myself in order to achieve that and in order to go through that.” She added, “I’ve had the opportunity to become the person I have always meant to be as a result of going back and retrieving all those little pieces of myself--as a little girl and all the way to the present.” P9

reported on her process. “I feel like I have gone through a whole lot of different phases in the nine or 10 years of finding myself.” P11 sees growth as a result of her development. “I think it has to do with maturity. I’m old enough to be the expert.” P22 reported, “I have gotten to that point where I know I can make it.” This growth or belief in self seems to be a theme running through the narratives of the resolved group of participants. She also reported, “I changed the way I am...I try to be more assertive...I feel like I have tried to grow a little bit in confidence.” She recognized her personal growth during the final stage.

Everything, everything, everything I do is out of my comfort zone. Everything! I guess in the long run it has forced me to grow in every area of my life...I am not one to get up and speak in front of people. I’ve never done a research project before. I’ve never done a publication. Nothing I’m qualified to do, but yet I have to do them. Two years after the divorce I started to have hope.

When I asked her if she wanted to say anything else, she added, “I learned how to be more assertive and how to be more autonomous and not so dependent. This has been good for me.” This is growth, from a woman who was married to an abusive, controlling husband for 30 years.

P10 began to understand her own strength during her process. “There’s something about having my own place and starting my own life by myself, which has somehow given me extra strength, I think.” She spoke about insight gained and growth she experienced along the way.

One was, the job helped me. At least I’m moving in some direction whether it’s where I need to go or not. I always thought I was fairly strong. I think I am stronger than I thought. I think I have become a little more fearless...I think ‘if I’m feeling it, I say it.’

I’m more confident in myself now.

Her confidence was apparent during the interview.

P8 realized her growth during the final stage of her divorce adjustment. “I don’t have to live by certain guidelines that were always part of my life. I could look at something else and say maybe this was a better fit for me.” She also added that while she was married to her ex, “I didn’t know I could envision a life outside my marriage.” P8 ended up entering into a place of gratitude. “I am grateful for the good times, but I am also grateful for the divorce because I would not be the person I am today were it not for the divorce.” P11 also spoke about her realization that led to growth. “Who cares what you do. The only person responsible for what you do is you. And the whole...sin and God and moral stuff doesn’t even apply. And, you’re fine, and that was huge for me.”

P13 spoke of changes she has seen happen throughout her divorce adjustment process. “It does help me be a little more grounded. I realize I can’t control things. I am not in control.” She then added, “I have to keep reminding myself because it is ironic, he was a controller. There are some things you just let happen the way it’s going to happen. My church helped me realize that I am not in control and I just have to let that go.”

P5 seemed puzzled by my question concerning growth post divorce. She thought about it and said, “I think I was surprised that I ended up being more capable than I thought I was, able to do things on my own as far as just take care of a house.” She remembered when she first noticed that she had started to move on in her journey. “Yeah, there was kind of a comedy TV show that is on now and it was about the exes and I told [current husband] we should probably tape it because it might be funny.” She told me how different it was for her to think like that. “That’s definitely different that I can look at those things now and find humor in some of it.”

P23 was asked by her son’s wife if she would like to go to an Oprah show. She agreed and drove to Chicago to attend the Oprah show; they had no idea who the guests would be. On

that particular day the guests were divorced wives and their ex-husbands who had told them they were gay. She remembered her daughter-in-law looked at her with panic in her eyes. P23 told her that she would be fine, and knew deep down inside it was going to be okay.

I truly believe that this was some kind of divine intervention...After a while, it got so that you know this is hard but I'm okay, everything is going to be okay and to get there I think you have to walk the bases. Well, I am sure there are a lot of people that would say they wished they would have never married but I am not going to say that. I am glad we had that time together. And I am glad we had the two children we had.

She had no regrets, had moved on, and was able to recognize her growth along the way. When I asked her to expand on that, she replied she realized, "I am a lot stronger than I thought I was."

P24 talked about the growth she had experienced but the cost was the pain of watching her son struggle. She had known her ex since she was 16 years old. She reported that he was very controlling and things would have stayed that way if they hadn't bought a home on the cul-de-sac, where she was exposed to other wives who weren't controlled by their husbands.

I'd thought my son would do okay with the divorce because he was older...it was worse for him. I think as you are older you expect your parents to stay together. We were like the parents that did all the sports with him and did all the parent things and we were just in everything.

This was hard for her, watching her son go through his parents' divorce.

It always stuck with me when my husband said, 'You will never make it on your own.' I knew I had to come out of this or then I'd live under a bridge; I have to do okay for myself. I've always had the same type of job and for 20 years I have been in this field. Little by little I began to realize things about myself...Do I struggle? Yeah, but I just have

to show that this isn't going to put me under a bridge somewhere.

She sees herself as capable.

P7 grew in knowledge of her abilities. "I discovered that when I needed to have it, I had an enormous amount of energy. And that I could do things I never ever thought I could do." She continued describing having to spend months restoring her family home that her ex had trashed. "Cleaning that house; I hate cleaning houses. I hate cleaning the house. Cleaning out that house was overwhelming; I didn't think I could do it. It was just a mighty task." She reported she has a renewed faith in herself. For P7 and P24, growth still occurred and yet they have not reached a place of peace yet.

People in the final stage. Women are relational beings; they define themselves by and within their relationships with people (Gilligan, 1982). In the final stage, people who the participants were in relationship with became important in their divorce adjustment process. Those people described by the participants will be highlighted below.

Children. Every participant had at least one child with their ex-husband. Being a mother was an important part of each woman's identity. Throughout their divorce adjustment, the participants all spoke about their children's experience of their parents' marriage and divorce. One participant (P22) was deeply wounded by her children's response to her early in the divorce adjustment process (i.e., they cut off from her). In the final stage and seven years post divorce, she is grateful to have her adult children reconnected to her and to once again be back in their lives.

I just am happy to have my kids back. There is nothing more that I want more than that. I don't think they know the whole story. I think they see things in him now that they didn't see before...I loved my kids and I put everything into those kids and to have them just

like totally turn against you...and not have any control over that...

She continued to reflect on her process,

I think that I really held on...it was very hard to let go of them and accept the fact that they would be no more, that my husband wasn't coming back, and I wasn't married anymore...I didn't have a job and didn't have the security and so to just let go...One thing that the Bible kept saying to me was to let go...I just had to literally lay in bed at night and force my hands open and let go of things.

She went through a great deal of pain and heartache in the early and adapting stages of the divorce process. In the final stage, she finds her life back on track.

P25 described a part of the relationship she has with her two minor sons.

My boys are taking piano lessons and I take piano. I love it and they love it. They have been in recitals and they have been in duets together. It's created a bonding between all three of us...we have a piano, of course. The piano came with me after the divorce, and we do that and that's how I spend most of my time.

P26 reported that she feels steady and stable in her life and wishes she and her ex had a more cordial post divorce relationship; but she spoke about being worried for her son.

Only from the sense that we have a son who is age 33 years old...who has not had a significant other in his life for the past 2½ years. My own concern is this: are you avoiding getting married because you don't want your mom and dad in the same room? He says, 'I don't think that's the reason that I'm not getting married.'

She talked about her relationship with her son today.

Yeah, he flies up once in a while from Texas. I talk to my son probably three to four hours a week...He talks to me when he is driving places and sometimes it's hard to

connect...We'd talk for an hour or we'll talk for five minutes and say 'okay, gotta go, got things going on'...He is very supportive.

At this stage in her divorce adjustment process, she has created a new relationship with her son, (defined by connection not by proximity) and she feels it works for both of them. P24 reported she has redefined a new relationship with her son.

He has always seen the way his father treated me and he didn't like it. He's married and his wife comes and goes when she wants. I have told him, 'Don't ever put your thumb on her'...He has adjusted very well; I was afraid he wouldn't get married...Our relationship has become a lot stronger...He would start calling me every night just to make sure I'm all right.

She is happy with her new partner and she is happy with the relationship she has with her son.

P13 spoke about her relationship with her daughters in this stage of her adjustment.

I am trying to remember how long it's been. At first, she wouldn't answer my calls or texts but now she will. It might be a week, I may not hear from her. She will let me know she is not ignoring me, but she is working two jobs. She told me this month she was working 60 days straight without a day off.

P13 has a working relationship with her daughters; it work, but she believes it could use some refining. She believes it has greatly improved and seems to think it will continue to do so.

P15 is worried about her two children at this stage in her divorce process. They both live with her ex-husband and she fears they are not working towards their life goals.

I don't know how these things are going to connect with the divorce but I noticed their behavior has changed. My son was caught smoking marijuana with a pipe in a parking lot; he has been using ecstasy and has gotten a DUI. He did not graduate: he got his GED.

My daughter had Ds and Fs in school. Their dad is very depressed, more than me. She sees her ex as not parenting their children well and she reported feeling powerless to effect change in the family system that she exited.

My children are in an environment where they don't have to do anything...My son is 21 and doesn't think about earning money, paying water/light bills or buying food...They all live separate lives, no connection. From what they tell me they live in filth. They prefer to live with him because they don't have any boundaries. When they visit me here, I cook for them, ask them about their lives. I don't think they like that.

P15 is deeply concerned with her children's well-being; her ex will not even speak to her.

P17 has three adult children. Her sons are twins; one is handicapped and lives in a group home. She reported she has a great relationship with them and is not concerned about her relationships with her children. She also talked about the unspoken policy she and her non-handicapped son have with each other. "My son was here on Sunday. He and I have a 'do not talk about dad' policy. But it doesn't work a lot of times."

P10 said, "Both my kids told me they think I look happier than they've ever seen me." She continued, "They said I'm like a different person. I really don't think so, but that's what they said." I asked her how she felt about their comments. She said, "Great I am glad they can see my happiness." All in all, eleven participants continue to be worried or concerned about their children post divorce.

Me and ex in-laws. Several participants spoke about the relationships they have with their ex-husband's family (i.e., ex in-laws). P22 described her feelings about her ex in-laws: "I have accepted it and I don't really like the personalities of that family; there is a lot of arrogance...I don't need to be good friends with them and I'm okay with that now."

P12 described her current relationship with them. “I don’t talk to his mother...The only one I talk to is his sister and that’s on Facebook.” P26 boldly proclaimed: “His family loves me. They invite me to all the birthday parties. They’re here in Michigan. He is still in Texas. They love me.” P21 is sad about her relationship with her ex in-laws; she described her current experience with her ex in-laws.

I see them but not like when we were together...I haven’t adjusted to that part. I feel like, me and my family was close, but I was more close to his. I think she is mad because I divorced her son...I would like more but they just keep shutting me out. I figure it is because they are mad at me. I don’t know what he told them.

During this part of the interview she appeared sad; she seemed to be struggling with telling this part of her story. The loss of her ex-husband’s family seemed to still be very painful for her.

P13 described how she would like her relationship to be with her ex in-laws.

I would like it to be friendly enough, you know? I don’t want them calling or writing me or anything. But if I go to a funeral in case one of his parents passed, I would like it to be cordial. I will have to wait until that comes.

She described this with very little feeling in her voice; she reported she doesn’t lose a lot of sleep over the loss of relationship with her ex in-laws.

P19 was married to an “abusive alcoholic” and talked about her current relationship with her ex in-laws. “They call me and send me birthday cards and they invited me to the wedding.” When asked what happened to him after the divorce, she said, “I know he went to live with his sister for a little while and his brother-in-law came up to me and told me, ‘I can’t believe what you went through. He is a pig. He would get drunk and put his dishes on the floor.’” She then described his sister as a real perfectionist; she found out her ex then moved in with a new

girlfriend and she took care of him.

P1 has a decent relationship with her ex in-laws; she was worried in the beginning that her ex-husband would sway them against her. Fortunately that did not happen. “He’s turned it all around in his head. I had plenty of witnesses. Anyone on either side of the family will tell you. They support me.” She tried everything she knew to save the marriage, but due to his mental health issues he just wasn’t able to cooperate with the change.

P7 is good with her relationship with her ex in-laws. “I am real happy with my relationship with my sister-in-law; that’s good. Would I like a relationship with my former mother-in-law to be better? I always did want that. It’s the best it’s ever been.”

P23 is happy in her current relationship with her ex and his family. “I have a good relationship with my ex and with his family.” She further went on to describe evidence of that fact. “It was tradition that every other year Christmas was at our house and the odd years were at his sister’s house and that has continued; even though he is not there, me and my kids always show up.” She laughed and said, “Yeah, they think I can walk on water but I can’t.”

P5 reported having maintained close contact with her ex in-laws.

I had sisters-in-law that I stayed close to and I still contacted my ex-mother-in-law after she got out of the nursing home and went back to her condo. I continued to go see her; she passed away a couple of years ago...I have a much better relationship with the family than I do with him.

P25 talked about her ex in-laws. “His mother was the only one that I was cordial to for the first time.” She had experienced a lot of hurt from them right after she decided to divorce. “I remember her trying to hug me one day when she saw me and I said, ‘I’m sorry I can’t do that. I hurt too much and would rather you didn’t.’” She reports they are now friendly to each other, for

the kids' sake.

P26 reported she is having a great relationship with her ex-husband's family during the divorce adjustment process.

They wondered how I stuck it out so long. I would call my ex-sister-in-law and she would tell me what my ex is doing. I would tell her, 'I really don't want to hear what my ex did. You know, that's not why I called you. I called you because I love you. We're sisters-in-law for 24 years and I don't want to lose that relationship.' Yeah, I think that helped me.

This may be another unique post divorce factor for this group of women--the post divorce relationship with the ex in-laws. Some of these women have been part of these families for 30 or more years; they represent a large part of their social support system. For those who were able to maintain some form of connection with the ex in-laws, it seems to have aided their adjustment.

Me and ex. Several women spoke about their current relationship, or their hoped for relationship, with their ex-husband today. P10 remarked on her current relationship with her ex.

I hardly ever think about him: it's weird. Although we get together once in a while...we have a nice lunch, talk about the kids usually. Christmas 2009, we invited him for a celebration...They [kids] know they are going to drive towards Detroit, meet at restaurant and have a restaurant dinner and I said, 'Well, do you want to invite him here?' ...I surprised myself...They were so happy.

She was glad she could provide that experience for her two adult children.

P12 has some ambivalence with her relationship status.

I don't want to be buddy-buddy with him...He truly is just having a hard time with this.

He has come a long way but, believe it or not, when I call him about our son, he'll sit and

talk to me, and he'll talk to me about other women. 'What do you think about this' and that kind of thing. I mean, it's really kind of crazy...I would like it to be where we are not as uncomfortable with each other.

She has a relationship with him but seems open to improving it.

P17 reported she and her ex do not speak unless they have to. "I just have a lot of disappointment; can't stand the sight of him. I don't hate him, but I don't want to be around him either." P15 reported she has not seen nor heard from her ex in a long time.

P5 talked about her current relationship with her ex-husband.

There were things I loved about him...but then every once in a while, I'm having a conversation with him on the phone...he starts that snide, rude way about him and I've got to tell you I don't miss that much (laughs). He emails me once in a while and Facebooks me once in a while.

She seems to have no animosity towards the man who left her family. She did mention one thing that still bothers her about him: "Except right at the end there when he didn't seem to want to give me the freedom to be happy with somebody else." She was happy to report, "I have to say that I was strong enough at that point that I didn't let that make me change my mind." She sees this as growth in herself.

P6 spoke about her current relationship with her ex-husband.

We're about a mile from his home. We share the dog. I mean we get along fine because it's a different relationship. I think I was pretty sure I would have a relationship with him that would be pretty good.

P23 reported a very positive relationship with her ex-husband; he had severe alcohol abuse issues and eventually told his family he had met a man and was moving to another state to

live with him. “We have always maintained a friendship...I still very much care for him as a friend and as a person.” She further explained, “We did have a lot of hard times” (i.e., alcoholism, affair, and being gay) “but I don’t have any bitterness towards him anymore. I mean he was always good...and his partner is very good to me.” She reported he has stopped drinking alcohol and currently is being treated for esophageal cancer.

We’re going down in about three weeks, my daughter and I are both going...and so I am going there for the week but after that we are going to go over and visit him to see how he is doing. I think it is better that he is not here because I really don’t have the tension and yet I can still be friends with him.

For her, it seems absence does make the heart grow fonder.

Several participants do not have positive relationships with their ex-husbands. P8 spoke about her relationship with her ex. “Maybe five years from now I can have a decent conversation with him, but now I cannot see myself.” But she did add, “Honestly, I’m grateful he did that because now, where I am in my life personally, I am in such a great, great place.” P8 talked about her relationship with her ex as being surprising.

He said to me on the phone--after I told him who I was and before I even asked the question--he said, ‘So, how are you?’ I thought really, you asked me how I really was. I was surprised that he was even interested...I said ‘Fine’ and got to the point.

P25 reported, “The battle continues. He is very vindictive and very angry that I have this house.” P22 has very little communication with her ex. “I could not even emotionally handle being around him, and so everything was done with email or attorneys. Just last year, I finally emailed him a question about taxes or kids or something, but no, we don’t communicate.” For her it felt safer if she avoided him and his controlling ways all together.

P20 reported she is open to a friendly relationship with her ex, but he is not. She was married to a man who drank excessive amounts of alcohol and was emotionally cruel towards her. “He doesn’t speak to me at all.” She continued,

I feel sad. I mean he is going through life as such an ogre. I think he has friends and a group of people that he spends his time with. They think he is great, entertaining and fun, but for some reason I was his target of meanness. I have never figured that out. I don’t know why.

P17 was married to a man who had several affairs during their marriage. They parented three children together, one handicapped. She described her feelings about their current relationship and if she could ever have a better relationship with him.

If he had gone on and had been good to his kids and not put someone else ahead of them (i.e., girlfriend)--probably...But you know you can go on and meet somebody new and you can have a different life. I just don’t know how you can hurt them [the kids]; I now just block him out totally because he is still hurting the kids.

P18 was married to a man who had multiple affairs. “Ideally I would like to be able to communicate with my ex on a regular basis.” She then went on to say, “I don’t think I could ever trust him.” P19 was direct in answering this question during the interview. “I have nothing to do with him. The last time I saw him was at my son’s open house; he told me to ‘keep track of the bills and [he] would pay half.’” She laughed and reported, “He never did.”

Ex and kids. This group of divorced women holds a unique spot within the current divorce literature; their coparenting relationship is based on adult children and their grandchildren. Neither parent is legally responsible to support children over the age of 18 (P25 is the exception); so any relationship the parents have with the children is voluntary. P10 described

her view of her ex-husband and their children's relationship; she reported that watching them struggle was hard for her.

He fell down for awhile and he has learned how to have a relationship with them. In fact, both of the kids feel like they have a better relationship with him now than they did before...He sees them occasionally, calls them and talks to them and emails them. His way of showing them affection is...by giving them something.

She also finds it strange that he has not discussed his current partnered relationship with the kids. She reports that the kids seem okay with their relationship with him; so she has determined she has to be okay with it too.

P20 reported that due to her ex-husband's drinking, their granddaughter is not allowed to spend time with him unless a parent is present. "My son and daughter-in-law don't let him keep the kids because they are afraid he is going to drink too much. They have told him that to his face." P26 reported that her son and her ex live in another state. "He's in Texas. He's about four hours away from his dad...not in the same neighborhood so he sees him once in a while." P18 reported that, "My daughter won't speak to my ex." She talked about how odd that seemed to her. She doesn't seem to want anything to do with him.

P17 sees her ex is still hurting the kids; "He still continues to lie to the kids and to me. He has no reason." The kids avoid him as much as possible. Once in awhile he will visit with their handicapped son: she is glad he is able to do that. She reported the kids felt it was their obligation to spend time with their dad. She says the children used to spend Christmas Eve with their dad but "this year he told them he was busy on Christmas Eve and they had to see him on a different day for dinner. Can you believe that?"

P1 reported that she was "the glue that kept the kids connected with their father," once

she left she wasn't sure if they could find a way to connect. P4 reported her ex-husband remarried, and since then he seems to be "less available" to their two adult daughters. The girls try to sneak in visits and phone calls when their step-mom is away on a trip. She reported she believes the step-mom makes it uncomfortable for the girls to connect with their father.

P19 reported that her ex is still drinking heavily and his relationship skills are very impaired when he is actively drinking, so she is not sure how he will manage to stay engaged with his children. P10 spoke about having a conversation with her ex about relating to their children differently now that they are divorced, he seemed to hear what she told him but she remained unsure if he could navigate a new relationship with his adult children now that she is no longer part of the equation.

Two participants from the unresolved group (P2, P7) reported their children's relationships with their fathers are nonexistent. P2 talked about her ex-husband's affair and how greatly it impacted their children; he even missed his daughter's wedding. She believes that he is too afraid to reconnect with his children and she worries that her children will never be able to have a relationship with their father.

P7 was married to a man who fell into drug use and became financially desperate; he also trashed the family home and left a mess for his wife to take care of (e.g., financial, legal, home). She believes her daughter hates her father and she won't even give her dad her address; he has never met his grandchildren. For both of these women this is painful: their children will not create space for their fathers in their lives and seem ashamed of their fathers and have cut them out of their lives.

Kids and his family. P17 reported that the kids' don't see their dad's side of the family very often. "They'll see their uncle here at my condo when I invite him over for a visit." But

other than that, they do not have a great deal of interaction with dad's side of the family. P4 reported that her two daughters are close to his side of the family. "One of my daughters is planning on spending the summer to take care of her grandmother in another state." She reported she has never felt prouder as a mother.

P5 knows her kids have a relationship with her ex in-laws. "They are connected; my kids are connected to their relatives. They try to get together for Christmas and stuff and I think they've made an effort to be a part of both families." P20 reported similar experiences for her children, "they are very close with his family: they were before and always will be."

P22 described her children's experiences with their father's side of the family.

They are still close to all their cousins. That family--they had a cottage on the lake about an hour north and we would take the kids up there on the weekends and the cousins were there and so they grew up and were always close to their cousins and so that has stayed.

Support network. This is one aspect of divorce adjustment that continues to be supported in the divorce literature (Hayes & Anderson, 1993; Krumrei, Coit, Martin, Fogo, & Mahoney, 2007). P18 is a good example of maintaining her support network during the final stage of her divorce adjustment. "I was really leaning on my mentor and friend by this time. I started to join other singles groups and this is probably six to seven years after the divorce." P2 reported she had a neighbor who turned out to be her biggest supporter throughout the divorce adjustment process. She believes this friend, her children, and her faith in God kept her steady throughout the ups and downs of her divorce adjustment process.

P20 spoke about her partner and his network being part of her support network. "My partner is definitely in my social circle; a lot of his friends and family have become a big part of my circle. My girlfriends--I have three very close girlfriends that I spend time with, too."

Eighteen women in this sample reported they had either maintained or rebuilt their support networks post divorce.

Seven women reported they were struggling with the rebuilding process (P2, P4, P9, P12, P15, P16, and P21). P4 lost two friends to cancer early in her divorce adjustment process and she moved two hours away from her community; P12 reported she moved more than an hour away and is in the process of rebuilding her support network. P2 reported her support system has shrunk since the divorce; she relies on a few close friends and God.

P9, P15, and P21 seem to be struggling with the rebuilding process. They have not found a system that they can plug into and feel fully connected. P16 is the woman in this sample that seems to be the most stuck in her divorce adjustment process. She reported she “gave up everything” for the man who divorced her. She has her two college-age sons in her network and a few girlfriends; her family lives in another state and she reported they betrayed her when they agreed to visit with her ex-husband. She is working hard to make sure her sons are okay and she focuses most of her energy on taking care of them.

Proactive events final stage. Women continued to take charge in their lives two or more years post divorce. Dating and repartnering is one example of a proactive event that occurred in the final stage of their divorce adjustment.

Repartnering. Of the 25 participants in this study, nine are repartnered (e.g., P4, P7, P9, P20, P22, P24, P26; P5 and P19 are remarried). P4 reported she and her new partner have not quite figured out how to live together (he was her affair partner). They have lived together three times and he has moved out three times; “I don’t have a good word for the partner I have now. We developed ‘emergency contact’ as a sort of a joke. We are now each other’s emergency contacts.” P9 is repartnered, but is looking to kick the man out of her house and hasn’t figured

out how to do it at this point in her life. P26 reported she is in a place that she would try marriage again.

I think I would like to have another marriage. Maybe a year or the second year I was divorced I dated a couple of people just for a month-at-a-time kind of thing, not very many and then about three years after the divorce I met my current partner.

The rest of the repartnered participants reported they are happy with their relationships.

Dating, not dating, or looking to date. Nine women are open to dating someone in the future, one participant is currently dating, and six have decided ‘being single and not dating’ is the right choice for them. The four oldest women in the sample are 64 years old. Three of them decided ‘staying single and not dating’ was right for them; P3 is not currently dating but reported she may be open to the prospect at some point in the future. P17 is clear the direction she wants to take: “Am I looking to get married again? Never!”

P20 is in her sixth year of post divorce adjustment: she was married for almost 30 years. She highlighted an event that occurred during the past year and reported it had a profound impact on her post divorce adjustment. “Falling in love was huge. He is a big part of my adjustment process in the last year.” She was the participant who was married to a man who drank a lot and was emotionally abusive and hateful towards her. She reported that meeting her current partner has really helped to shift her feelings in a more positive direction.

Coping mechanisms. During the process of interviewing, several women described various ways they found to cope with stressors during the post divorce adjustment process; therapy is listed at the end of this section. P18 admitted she smoked to deal with her stress during the divorce. “It is a terrible way to cope with the stress, but I absolutely did. I didn’t want my kids to know that I was smoking, so I would smoke in the garage.” She added, “I would go out

drinking with my friends.”

P1 reported, “When I first left him I drank a lot of wine.” She also added, “I like going to movies. I find it to be very therapeutic; a great escape from reality. A couple of hours in a dark room can be very refreshing.”

P10 reported, “I pretty much stayed in my house and cried.” P11 used humor. “I found a lot of things that were funny.” P12 used comparison to cope with her stress. “I always try to look at things around me and learn from them and say ‘that’s what I want and what I don’t want.’” When she struggled with loneliness, “I looked at a couple of my friends who have jumped into relationships...and I’m thinking I don’t have to do that.”

P13 reported, “I like to read: it helps me to not think. It turns my brain off.” P15 reported she “[i]solated herself.” She then said, “I stopped smoking 17 years earlier, and I started up again going through the divorce.” P19 reported she would “run when I get upset.” She admitted to a unique coping mechanism. “I deal with my bitterness by cleaning. My daughter says she can tell when I’m mad because I start cleaning; and it goes from ceiling down to walls and floors, and I mean everything.”

P24 talked about switching it up; “I can’t just watch TV all the time. I go shopping, too.” P21 reported, “What I do now is, I read a lot of inspiration and I read books and listen to music.” P2 talked about her faith. “I’m telling you what, if you don’t have the Word of God and if you are not a Christian, I don’t know how you make it. That is what brought me through.”

P4 is a mental health professional: she used a reframe to cope. “I just recently worked it out a different way of phrasing it. ‘I allowed myself to fall in love with somebody else.’” She also employed “friends and books and just sort of journaling time.” P5 reported she “read books and journaling was a good thing to do,” and “shopping was always a good thing to boost me up.”

She also spent a great deal of time remodeling her home she purchased post divorce. P6 reported she ate. "I tend to be a compulsive eater, so I gradually gained weight."

P7 and her daughter had a buddy system.

My daughter and I have a 24-hour, you can stay in bed and be depressed for 24 hours rule, but after 24 hours you have to get up and do something. If it goes beyond 24 hours, you call each other. So I never went for longer than 24 hours.

She reported it kept her focused and moving forward.

P8 reported she did several things to handle her pain. "Meditation and walking. There is a certain mutative thing there." She added, "That was another thing that helped me in the divorce. I am second degree Reiki and I would do Reiki on myself." She also wrote. "After the divorce I wrote an essay called 'I've Been to the Strip Shop.'"

P9 talked about her coping mechanism--online games. "I play Pogo...just to vedge and de-stress and at the same time I say vegging but then at the same time I play word games. I am stimulating my brain but at a whole different level." And she reports telling herself, "I know this is only temporary."

To forgive or not to forgive. Forgiveness is discussed as being a good coping mechanism within the divorce literature (Rye, Folck, Heim, Olszewski, & Traina, 2004). P23 reported she called the woman who had an affair with her ex before they divorced; she talked about forgiving her because she could not stand to hate her any more. "I called that girlfriend and told her I didn't hold her responsible for any of that." She reported she felt free and was glad she did it.

Some participants spoke about the lack of forgiveness during their divorce adjustment process. P16 spoke about forgiveness but only in a sense that she is not there yet. "It [forgiveness] was too hard for me. It is still hard. I just decided that I cannot." P4 still is stuck in

the process of forgiving; she talked about how difficult it was. “It’s about forgiving myself and just seeing it as you know we’re not all that unique. Yeah, forgiveness of myself, letting it go, I’m still working towards that.”

P25 joined a small group at a parish where a friend worshipped. “My Catholic divorced ladies group became a family support for me, prayed for me and all that, and after all that, I confessed. I went into confession and felt--not so much forgiving--I didn’t ask forgiveness from my ex-husband but I asked forgiveness from God for what I did.” She reported it was a positive experience for her process and allowed her to begin to move forward.

Therapy. Many participants made use of therapy before and after the divorce. Their experiences are highlighted below.

During the marriage. P5 was married to a man who knew a lot about therapy (i.e., he had an advanced degree in the field); she reported that her ex was always aware of what the therapists were trying to do.

That was part of the problem, though. He was always ahead of a counselor and he would say, ‘These counseling things just don’t work for me. I know exactly what they’re doing. I know exactly where they are going.’ And so he would, like, sabotage it. She reported they went to a few different ones but nothing seemed to help.

P1 described her therapy experiences. “Before the divorce and for some years later, as a matter of fact, I had been seeing a counselor. So I had that.” She continued,

Every once in a while it would really be insightful and I’d have an ‘Aha!’ moment...The main function [was]...giving me a safe place to vent; some place I did not have to filter my thoughts or my words...He was a huge support that supported me through the marriage and the divorce. The couples therapy got my ex to stop going to see him. The

guy was sort of saying, 'She has a perspective,' and my ex did not like that.

She saw the therapist for some time after her divorce; he eventually retired and moved away.

P11 described her first session with their couples therapist. "We started counseling together; so we saw that woman and the first meeting she said, 'Have you had a sexual relationship with someone else?' and he said, 'Yes', and I was like, 'You're kidding me!' The shock of it all was hard to take.

P15 reported she and her ex had gone to five different therapists over the course of their relationship.

When I got pregnant with my son, I was 32 and he was 40. He said to me, 'What are you going to do about it...abort it?' I couldn't believe it! I really wanted that baby. So I went to my doctor and told him, 'I am having a nervous breakdown.' He gave me a referral to a psychologist. My ex never went with me. When I began to understand my ex was having some sexual dysfunction I went to see a sexologist: he was helpful.

She found out information that helped her to see her situation from a different perspective.

P16 saw a psychologist for four months. When she found out her ex was having an affair, she emailed her psychologist and asked, "'Tell me how I should approach it.' She told me how to approach it." P17 had a dim view of her couples therapist. "I knew it was a matter of time. The divorce class was better than he was. He couldn't even tell my ex was lying. You cannot go to therapy if you are lying: nothing can help you."

P18 initiated couples counseling. "I thought it could help us. One of the conditions in regards to counseling was that he would focus on the marriage, even though we were living apart." She continued, "When I found out he was still seeing the girlfriend, I called the therapist and let him know that I felt it was really foolish to continue." She later recontacted him for

individual therapy for herself. “I did it before we divorced. The therapist kept telling me, ‘You have to be able to say the word ‘divorce.’” I guess I was hoping the therapist could help me make a decision.” She continued, “I just didn’t want to decide this on my own. Therapy was helpful, but it was short-lived.”

P19 reported she saw a therapist while she was getting a divorce. “After the divorce I quit seeing her.” She reported when she started dating her current husband she reconnected with her therapist. “I got back into therapy because of my upbringing. I was used to doing everything for everybody. My therapist told me I ‘needed to learn to be alone before meeting anyone else.’” She then reengaged with her therapist after she married her current husband.

He told me he thought I was distancing myself from his son. I told him it was because of his ex-wife. He told me to go back and talk to my therapist...My therapist told me that I ‘don’t need to spend time with him [stepson].’ She said ‘You already raised three kids.’ I told my husband what she said and that I should let his mother take care of him [stepson].

He didn’t want me to go back and talk with her after that.

She reported that overall she probably met with her therapist about “20 times” in total. She did say that she would “recommend therapy, because a lot of times when you talk to someone, when you say it out loud, it is like ‘Aha!’ and you understand a little better.”

P2 described her therapy experience. “Towards the end my ex wanted to go see a counselor. The reason was because the counselor would believe him over me. He had a way of doing that...I thought I am not going to put myself into that.” P2 talked about seeking therapy after her ex left to live with his affair partner. “After he left, he still wanted to go to a counselor; I thought all right, what do I got to lose... [Ex] told him how we are trying to work it out; I was about broken by then.” She remembered feeling so overwhelmed she could hardly participate in

the sessions. She does report that a turning point occurred for her during a session; the therapist turned to her and asked, “How did you ever end up with him?” I said, “What?” The therapist continued on but she remembered feeling stunned by his question.

We got out to the car and my ex told me, “I will never go back to him again.” I knew it was because somebody believed in me, and not him. If my ex couldn’t swoon you, he was done. You see, everybody liked him, but not this guy; this guy seen through the whole thing. But I was amazed that somebody believed me. I couldn’t believe it; somebody that actually believed that it wasn’t my fault.

She found that to be a memorable time in her therapy experience.

P20 described her therapy experience.

I saw a therapist for a while, but not too long. We tried that. My individual therapist tried to get us to see a couples therapist; we went once and never went back. A few things came up and we had to reschedule appointments and neither one of us ever did. He didn’t really like the therapist. I thought, ‘You know, if he really wants this he’ll initiate it and he didn’t.’

She talked about how helpful her individual therapist was for her after the divorce. “She was really good.” The therapist told her that she “was going to be okay and didn’t need to come back anymore.” She realized, “I guess I had lots of attributes and I am going to be fine.”

P22 talked about her experience with therapy pre and post divorce.

I did a lot of counseling; I don’t know the exact year but it was before the divorce...The thing I found most helpful is, I did counseling and my ex and I had like 12 counselors but I found this one...He was phenomenal. When I was going through the divorce I think I saw him weekly or twice a month. I had good insurance that paid for it. I don’t know

how I would have survived without it.

She reported she still sees him occasionally when she can scrape some money together.

I still see him on and off...I had a very sheltered life and a very abusive life and he helped me to see how people think...and I would take all the blame and all the responsibility and had no self esteem and there was no way I thought I could go to school.

She reported she started to experience PTSD like symptoms.

I had panic and anxiety attacks. I would be sitting in church...I would look seven rows up, [and see a man] sitting there with a bald head and posture who looked like my husband and I would have a panic attack. Just the sight of him or the sound of his voice or somebody of his posture--I thought he was going to attack me again...I had these panic attacks in these weird places.

Her therapist was able to help her process her feelings.

He would help me slowly...work through those to where now I feel I can actually enter a room with my husband...without having a panic attack...he would give me options...He had this little whiteboard and he would draw diagrams and choices and would draw the brain and tell me how people think and if I am having a panic attack and he would show me what the brain is doing...and I leave there and I feel like my life is not hopeless.

She now has hope.

I didn't think I would be functioning as well...He doesn't let you sit there and whine and complain and cry for an hour. Within five minutes he knows what's going on...What are you going to do and what are your options...and think that I am not horrible? I am not perfect but there is a lot of good there and I just need to focus on that. This counselor has helped me with that.

P22 reported they both tried therapy throughout. “Yes, couples or he would go separately or I would go separately.”

P24 described her brief stint with therapy.

We went maybe four or so sessions, because she would see us separate. Then she would ask me questions and I would tell her and blah, blah and he would try to get his ear up to the door to hear because the receptionist or somebody saw him to hear what I was saying.

P3 reported on her therapist. “She walked me through a lot of things. I just recently stopped seeing her. She helped me through a lot.” P5 spoke about her experience in therapy.

He was the one that told [my ex] that some people look at the glass half empty, some people think the glass is half full. Your glass is half empty and the water is dirty.

She continued on her own in individual therapy post divorce and found it helpful.

P6 remembered her individual therapy experience. “The one guy I saw...was seven years...and then years before that I went for about two and a half years and that was in the late 80s.” She continued therapy through a great portion of her marriage. “I was in counseling by myself in the 80s...I wasn’t so much thinking divorce it was more ‘how do I cope with all this and not go crazy.’” She re-entered therapy in 2000. “I think I went a long time. I try not to think about how much that cost (laughing), cost my ex really, not me. That was for about seven years.” She was able to make a decision to divorce and reported it felt “like stepping off a cliff.” She said, “I had rehearsed this with my counselor. I had a whole outline of what I was going to say. I was going to this counselor and mostly he would listen and I would just talk, talk, talk.”

P7 reported at the end of a three hour conversation, her ex said “We can go to counseling” which he had refused to do. “We did counseling for about six or eight months, at the end of which we decided to divorce.” P9 described her experience with therapy. “I did a little

before the divorce and it went on for a couple more years.” She continued,

I had been in a lot of counseling...with my son. We were in counseling because my ex is a task master and hyper critical and he was really hard on the surviving son...I had already gone through enough counseling...now I have real freedom and I was in counseling because my family thinks I’m crazy. So, I’m going to counseling and had a fantastic female counselor...In fact, she is the one who brought up bipolar...she came up with that-[it] was so profound--and in the meantime I started exploring the internet.

She reported she uses therapy on and off even until this day.

Post divorce. P22 continued to see her therapist once her divorce was final. “I still see him on and off. I have to pay cash out of pocket and that’s hard.” P7 reported, “I found such good support from my counselor. She is a fabulous person. She listened.” She reported she would take breaks from therapy.

I would see her for a period of time and then I would say, ‘I’m all right now and I’m going to move on.’ Then...I would tell her, ‘I need you fix me now’...Usually, I saw her weekly for about three months at a time. Every time I reconnected with her she would take my temperature if we were in a deep therapeutic place...‘No, I didn’t have any suicidal thoughts. I was happy.’

She reported therapy has been helpful and she saw it as something that definitely improved her divorce adjustment process.

P4 saw several therapists, before and after the divorce. She is a mental health professional and reported she understood what things needed to happen in a person’s life to help them adjust. She spoke about her depression lasting for one and a half years during her adapting stage.

I did counseling during the depression. I think I made [new partner] go to counseling with

me also, post divorce; this was during one of our break-up times. We did that together three visits. It was probably, the powerfulness of that depression that knocked my socks off.

When I asked her to describe that time she talked about the experience.

I just remember sobbing on the floor...not being able to move, the suicidal thoughts...It was like a whole bunch of pent-up grief over all my life changes...The things you used to enjoy are still there for you...if you could get to them. But you can't get to them...I would look around and think all this doesn't matter...It was like an existential crisis, like 'none of this matters, you're just gonna die!'

She did find one therapist, after she got hit by the "huge whopping depression," that really helped her. "She did EMDR with me. That was great, really helped me." She saw her for four sessions. "It was good. I would go back to her in a minute."

P5 described her post divorce therapy experience.

He was just a really nice man and scripturally he helped me; he helped me reconcile whether I could remarry after my divorce...He helped me feel okay with it; he said what I wanted to hear and I think he truly believed it...So, he helped me. I probably saw him once a month for eight or nine months.

P11 is a nurse and a midwife and resides in Montana; she reported she did not really benefit from individual therapy. But she did find a woman who did group work with clients.

I started doing psych work with a woman who kind of practiced transpersonal psychology, so we didn't do one on one therapy: it was big group. We worked well together; we danced a lot so you kind of wear yourself out and you get to your emotions earlier, and other people's emotions would bring that out, too. I did that for about two

years and came to realize that it wasn't about the marriage and all that stuff: it was about my grief and guilt.

She described some of the work she did in that group.

We did physical things like make a mask: do some therapy work and then you go and make your mask. It was over several days to assimilate what the whole process was about. We did a lot of it in the wilderness. So, we would have assignments do all day and then come together at night around a fire and it was amazing.

She reported the experience helped her tremendously in processing her pain post divorce.

P12 reported, "I'm in counseling right now; my goal in counseling is that I know everything that is going on in my head." She continued, "Even though I never took psychology and that I am kind of really interested in it: all I want out of this is that I don't want to become a bitter, angry person." She said she stopped for a while. "I stopped going for a while because I was going through some financial trouble where I couldn't afford to pay; but now I've started back going to her again." She believes, "I also knew that, you know, that therapy has been that for me, you go through a grieving process."

P13 described her short time in therapy. "Not too long, maybe six to eight appointments all together. It was through Oakland University." She remembered it was a service offered to students. "It was good: I don't know if it was enough. Sometimes I think I could benefit from more; but it did help. It helped me sort out some things as to what I would want in the next few years."

P26 described her short therapy stint. "I did see a counselor for a couple of sessions; just talked to me about how I felt about it." She reported she struggled with guilt.

I felt a little bit guilty about making my decision so firmly and so just talked about

that...the guy is physically disabled...I am not good with guilt...I saw the therapist twice. She asked me if ‘guilt was a constructive emotion and would it make things better?’ She just made me think about it in a different way.

She reported a little bit of therapy helpful to her process.

No therapy. Four women report they did not make use of any therapy services. P21 reported, “No, I didn’t go to therapy.” P24 reported, “Nope, didn’t think I needed to.” P25 reported she “couldn’t afford it.” P8 echoed a similar sentiment, “No. Well, I just figured if I needed to do it I would look into it.” She never did. P8 reported her husband cheated on her with several different women in their 22-year-marriage and was always away on business; she “felt like a single mom.” She is also unique among the sample because of the level of spirituality she reported obtaining throughout her divorce adjustment process. For a long while she was active in the church; around the time of the divorce she started to find a spiritual outlet in the form of a Yoga practice. She became very holistic in her belief system and started to use herbs and oils to promote her health and well-being. She never thought she needed therapy because she felt as if she was able to do everything on her own: ironically she found this out during her marriage.

Resolved or unresolved. This section will describe the women’s personal viewpoints on their divorce resolution. Each of the 25 participants was placed into one of two groups for the purpose of this dissertation (e.g., resolved or unresolved). Their placement in either group was based on their self-report answer to the question, ‘Do you feel at peace post divorce?’ The unresolved group (i.e., unresolved) consisted of 10 women with an average age of 55 years (i.e., at the time of the interview), who got married at an average age of 25 years; on average they were 5.4 years post-divorce and were married for 24.6 years before the divorce was final. Three of these participants (30%) were over the age of 30 when they married; the remaining seven

averaged 21.7 years of age at the time of their marriage.

The resolved group consisted of 15 women with an average age of 58.9 years, who married at an average age of 24.1 years: on average they were 7.9 years post-divorce, and were married for 27 years before the divorce was final. Two of these participants (13.3%) were over the age of 30 when they married. When comparing the unresolved group and the resolved group, some differences do emerge. The resolved group tended to be older, married at a younger age, married for a longer period of time and, on average they were 2.5 years longer post divorce.

Resolved: At peace. P10 reported her resolution experience. “In terms of the divorce, I completely feel resolved.” P11 reported, “That took a while, probably about four years for me to be at peace.” P17 believed she has achieved peace. “I feel at a place of peace over the divorce: probably last year I got there. It took me about three years to get there. I stayed busy and had many friends.”

P18 described her journey.

I think part of that is because my ex was in and out of the marriage; that roller coaster of emotion I was riding, you get to a point where you are glad just to get off that roller coaster. The peace that I found didn’t take long after the divorce, less than a year. She was calm while she spoke; she reported she was in a better place now.

P19 is a speech therapist in a local school district; she was married to a man who she described as an “alcoholic.” She talked about where she is at in this process. “I have adjusted. I am not totally upset about the divorce except where I felt like a failure a lot of times, but that was temporary.” P22 is a graduate student and believed she has “adjusted. I think that I feel comfortable single and I feel like I have a goal.” P23 reported, “I think by the time that the divorce was final I was pretty good with it; about a two-year process.” At the end of the

interview I asked her about the process of her ex coming out to her. She responded, “That was huge. He was gay: it wasn’t my fault. It made it much easier for me to adjust. I couldn’t make him happy.”

P26 had been married to a man who was in a great deal of physical pain and addicted to painkillers. She reported, “As I made my decision to divorce him I was at my place of peace.” P6 reported, “It was almost instantly.” I suggested that may be a record. She smiled and said, “But I may hold the record for the woman thinking about divorce the longest” (i.e., incubation period).

P9 described her process as taking “[a] year or two. There was a point where it was like I finally got past all the guilt feelings that everybody laid on me and I would say that was June, about a year to year and a half after the divorce.” P9 identified as being at a place of peace post-divorce, however she talked about still feeling unstable. “I am still getting a handle on it. I am still not stable enough. When I get out from the financial mess I’ve gotten in maybe I will feel better.” She also indicated she has a man living with her and would like to find a way to kick him out.

Fifteen participants spoke about being at a place of peace in the final stage of their divorce adjustment process. P11 seemed shocked when I mentioned the timing of her divorce process. “I never thought of that before. Peace about the divorce coincided with the empty nest.” P3 responded, “It took me awhile to get to that place of peace.” P13 answered, “I’ve been feeling that for about a year.” P23 seemed amazed by her process. “I am just really at peace and I don’t know what else I have done that helped that. I like the fact that I don’t have to answer to anyone.”

Unresolved: No peace. Ten women are not at peace in the divorce adjustment process.

P12 is one of them. “I am not sure I am at a place of peace. Actually, my thoughts are, we’ve never had a happy marriage.” She added, “I would say the peace was in the eyes of the church and kind of with my mother.” P4 had an affair and left her 30-year marriage to be with her affair partner: she reported she suffered with a “huge whomping depression” and she still carries around a lot of guilt. Some days are better than others and she is unsure if she will ever feel totally at peace. P21 reported, “I am somewhat adjusted post divorce. I’m learning now that living alone is not so bad.”

P1 said, while laughing “Am I there yet?” P1 described feeling several different things about her life and her divorce adjustment process.

I still have very strong loving feelings towards my ex-husband...It’s like a big old tapestry and there are all these threads: they never truly tell the whole story. It is just so complicated...he’s not in a place where he would accept anything from me. I guess I am kind of surprised that I still care.

She wants good things for her ex.

I still want him to be okay. The happiest thing for me would be, which I know is not going to happen, if he could find somebody else who would fill for him the role I played in his life. It would help me a lot, so that I could think that he’s okay. That would be a big relief. That’s kind of a surprise to me too.

P1 is not in a place of peace; she is happy but continues to have lots of polarized feelings. She continues to enjoy her life and believes it will work itself out eventually.

P2 reported her peace is “not with the divorce.” She did add,

I have peace with myself. I know that what I have done is right. I don’t have bitterness, the anger to say, ‘I wish that it wouldn’t have happened.’ I could say that. But do I blame

him, do I look at myself as a victim or martyr? No.

P2 is the longest divorced woman in the unresolved group. She seems to have settled in where she is at, and seems to be okay with it. She believes it is not in God's plan for her to ever date or remarry; she has decided to be happy with where she is and spend time with her children and grandchildren.

Five of the participants definitively report they are not at a place of peace in their divorce adjustment process. P15 reported, "No, I am not adjusted--not until I have a full time job, not until I am stable economically." P16 was left by her ex-husband when he fell in love with someone else. She described her process.

I am more adjusted now. It is really the past year I've gotten so much better. I've cried less. I am not able to say I don't cry every few days, but I don't cry like I used to cry. I used to go to bed and cry uncontrollably.

She reported she is working hard at getting to that peaceful place; she is not sure how to do that.

P25 the mother of two adolescent boys, reported, "We're not at a place of peace." She and her ex still have battles over their children and she has not been able to find full-time employment with benefits. P12 reflected on her peace process. "I am more at peace with my life. I have enjoyed everything that I did; I just didn't enjoy being with him. I am at more peace being without him." But she was unable to firmly commit to being at peace within the divorce process, so she was assigned to the unresolved group. P7 talked about where she is at in her process.

I didn't really think that changing my name would make a difference. It wouldn't have made a difference, and it would still have been there and it would have been my name and his name in all of the credit card data bases. I had to get an attorney...and that was two years so yeah, there is still no peace. Sorry.

P7 also reported, “Before I started my relationship with men I came to peace with being alone.” She added, “Except for still feeling angry with him, yeah. I have an enormously better life than I did. I am very happy with my life.” She reports having hope. “There is a hope there will be peace and I am working towards finding that.” She adds, “I’m still angry. I’ve just not resolved that.” She reported she is trying to work on it. She is the participant who was married to a man who had fallen into addiction, had trashed the family home, and ruined their credit.

P4 reported she is still struggling as well. She is a mental health professional who left her husband for her affair partner. “Getting to peace with it is still a process. I’m so not completely there yet.” I asked, “Basically about the last seven years or so you’ve been processing it?” She answered,

Since then, the depression thing came and went...I don’t think of my ex-husband every day...or that I was a person who broke marriage vows: I did not stick with it. I had trouble with that. That’s been one of the hardest things, still goes up and down; I can’t say I am happier since the divorce. I’m different, that’s all.

Advice to others. The last question I asked each of the participants was, “What advice would you give to other women in similar circumstances?” In the paragraphs that follow their responses will be highlighted. Within these answers I believe there is wisdom, the kind born out of pain and hard work. So perhaps it will enlighten the reader as to what some of the participants believed women undergoing a divorce should know.

P10 advised women undergoing a divorce adjustment to “do something, anything that causes you some forward motion.” She also added, “Don’t just do it for mental stability but actually change something so that you’re moving forward. I think that’s important.” P12 wanted women to understand that “an absolute grieving process” lays ahead for them. She also cautioned

them to “go through and not to let yourself stay in any one of those stages very long.” She reported she made use of therapy and found that helpful to her process.

P5 worked hard to save her marriage and wanted people to know that. “That’s a part of what I would like people to see. I made every effort.” She advised women to “do what they could” to save their marriage. P18 wanted women to know that closure is possible. She reported that she knew “the marriage ending was not my fault.” She initiated the divorce after her husband had multiple affairs. She believed she did everything in her power to save the marriage.

I think that was one reason why I felt the closure and felt more comfortable after divorcing, because I knew there was nothing freaking left. I had tried, you know, you try different avenues, you try to forgive, you try to retrust and you try therapy. Then you say to yourself, ‘Hey, you know, I’ve still got, if I live to be 80, I’ve got another 30 years left and do I want to ride this roller coaster forever? This man isn’t going to change.’

When she got to that place she knew it was time to get off the roller coaster. So her advice to other women: “Do everything you can to make it work. Believe in yourself. Then get off the ride at the next available stop.” P1 advised women to be wary of other people’s assumptions. “I guess one of the surprising things for me was I did not see myself any different post divorce...but the world perceived me differently.” She remembered that was a weird lesson for her to learn.

Tying It Together

All 25 of the participants were at least two years post divorce at the time of the interview: they had been married on average 26.1 years (resolved = 27 years; unresolved = 24.6 years) and were at least 48 years old at the time of the divorce. The participants were divided into two groups: resolved (15 participants; $m = 58.9$ years old, divorced $m = 7.87$ years) and unresolved (10 participants; $m = 55$ years old, divorced $m = 5.4$ years). The final phase of divorce

adjustment has been divided into two categories. For clarification purposes the ‘at peace’ women are categorized as being in the resolved category and the unresolved women are categorized as being in the unresolved category.

In both groups 60% of the participants experienced an incubation period. All of the unresolved incubators had a hand initiating the divorce (i.e., they initiated or ‘both’ initiated); and all of the resolved incubators initiated divorce proceedings.

All four of the women who reported having an extramarital affair fall into this dual category (i.e., incubator and initiator). Of the resolved incubators and initiators, five reported their husbands cheated on them during the marriage and four were serial cheaters. This group of 25 women tended to be more highly educated than others in their generation. Three women (12%) have a high school education; five women have some college (20%), four women have a bachelors degree (16%) and 13 women have a graduate degree (52%). Among this group of 25 women, 40% are educators or work in an education setting; nine are in the resolved group.

Helpful for this Cohort of Women

Several women reported they did or experienced things throughout their divorce adjustment process they found beneficial. Some of those things were support, freedom, home, food and bodies, socializing, cordial relationship with ex and/or his family, seeing their children turn out okay, dating or not dating, and post divorce care. Of special note: three women (e.g., ‘at peace’) had experienced the death of a child. It is this researcher’s opinion that the pain from the loss of a child overshadowed the pain from divorce. I have heard it described as the worst pain a parent might endure; perhaps for these three participants it set the stage for them to process the pain of the divorce differently.

Support. In the divorce literature, social support during and post divorce has been found

to be helpful and aids in positive post divorce adjustment. Nine women in the resolved group reported having good social support (60%). One woman (P9) referred to herself as a loner during her divorce adjustment and did not actively seek social support. Six women in the resolved group were able to identify “one good person” they found supportive during their post divorce adjustment.

Four women mentioned they proactively sought out new people, new places, and purposefully formed new social support. P13 has a male roommate: together they do a lot of social activities (i.e., concerts, shows, ball games) and she believes this has greatly improved the quality of her life. She and her ex used to stay home and sit on the couch. She had always wanted to go places and do things but he never wanted to accompany her. P17 and P23 both have increased their social circles post divorce. They joined a card club, go to movies and dinner with a large group of female friends, and they find new adventures to embark upon. Each of them talks about how different this is for them; when they were married they would have never dreamed of doing things like this.

P22 reported she is constantly out of her comfort zone in her new social network. She has joined a dance group and discovered she loves to dance; she does this on a weekly basis and can’t believe how much fun she is having. She has also formed new relationships with other students in her graduate program; she is learning how to do research, give talks and presentations, and how to use technology. She does all of this with a group of like-minded individuals whom she cares about. She has found this and dancing has made all the difference in her post divorce adjustment process. For this group of four women, social support was found to be helpful and necessary for their positive post divorce adjustment.

Freedom. Of the fifteen women in the resolved group, 93% reported they experienced

freedom post divorce; they no longer felt controlled, they could make their own choices and live their lives any way they chose. One woman in this group did not speak about freedom post divorce (P9). It was not a question that was asked as part of the interview protocol but for 14 other women it did emerge from the data. P9 had several affairs during her marriage she buried a son several years before the divorce, she is living with her partner whom she wants to kick out of the house, and she struggles with her own mental health issues. So for this one participant, freedom has yet to be experienced.

Home. Fourteen resolved participants did some things that are well supported in the current literature. One third of them remained in their home post divorce. Two thirds moved to a new place: all but one liked their new home. The exception is P22, who reentered graduate school and has lived in various places during the years following her divorce. She reported during the interview that one of her greatest dreams (yet unfulfilled) was to have her own home, a place she could call her own. Overall, 93% of this sub-group either stayed in the family home or found a place they could claim as their own.

Food and body. Ten of the 15 resolved participants reported diet changes, cooking differently, weight loss, and exercise were part of their divorce adjustment process. Three participants reported they actively worked out during their post divorce adjustment period and found it beneficial. Seven participants reported the benefit of eating differently and not having to cook in the same way as they did in their marriage. They reported they were enjoying the post divorce freedom in cooking and eating.

Relationships with ex and/or his family. Four of the participants reported that they have a good coparenting relationship with their ex-husbands. In all, 10 of the 15 resolved participants (67%) reported they maintained a positive, connected relationship with their ex in-laws. On

average, these 10 participants had lived 26.25 years within that family structure; most of them reported they had formed close connections with the in-laws during their marriages. This seems to be an important factor for this cohort of women maintaining a connection with people who were once family by marriage.

Dating, looking to date, and not dating. All of the participants were asked about their dating experiences post divorce. The average age of the unresolved group when they married was 25 years old; the average age of the resolved group was 24.1 years old. So both groups were close in ages at the time of their marriages. Only one participant was actively dating at the time of the interview; five resolved participants (33%) were open to dating but currently were not. Of special note, P13 reported she has a male friend (e.g., her roommate) that she would be open to dating; he is not ready.

Nine women are currently repartnered. P5 and P19 are the only women in the study who remarried; they both reported they were very happy in their new relationships. Four women reported that sex post-divorce was a much better experience than it had been within the marriage. These four women reported that being sexual post divorce and understanding that it could be great helped their self esteem and was a positive influence on their post divorce adjustment.

There were six participants (three from each group) who reported they were not interested in dating or repartnering. These women reported they were interested in remaining single and had no desire to change that status. The desire to remain single as age increases is supported within the literature (Mahay & Lewin, 2007).

Post divorce care. Four women in the resolved group reported they took part in an international support group program: Divorce Care©. All four of them reported this structured support group was held in a local church and facilitated by divorced people. The women reported

they found it helpful and informative; and all of them recommended the group to others who experienced a divorce.

Therapy. Twenty-one of the 25 participants (e.g., 84%) reported they used therapy at some point in their process (e.g., pre, during, post divorce). Only four women did not make use of professional therapists; they indicated they didn't need the help of a therapist.

Of the 15 resolved women, 12 of them (80%) made use of therapy either pre, during, or post divorce. Examining the narratives of the three resolved participants who never saw a therapist, there appear to be some factors that may have helped their post divorce adjustment process. P23 had struggled within her marriage to a depressed, alcoholic husband for 34 years until one day he told her he was gay. This made her unique among the sample, but it may also have been what helped her through the divorce process. She reported it "wasn't my fault: he's gay." She reported she struggled through her marriage, but once she understood that it wasn't her fault, her adjustment process seemed to go very smoothly. When a woman finds out her husband is gay it often correlates with positive post divorce adjustment for both parties (Corley & Kort, 2006).

P10 reported she had a one good support person to help her through the emotional pain; she reported this strong supportive person was crucial for her positive post divorce adjustment. P8 reported she found spirituality in the form of yoga and homeopathic remedies to be the strong support she needed during her adjustment period. As an adjunct, the three women reported their children supported them during the divorce process. So for these women, the need for a therapist may not have been as pressing; they had support, just not the professional kind.

This element of having adult children as support makes this cohort of women unique when compared to non baby boomer divorced women; for women under the age of 50 who

divorce, it is less likely they have adult children. Almost half (46.6%) of the resolved group reported having the strong support of their children during and post divorce. The eight women who did not feel they received strong support from their children seemed to be okay with the relationship they have today with their children.

Emotions in divorce adjustment. Throughout the interviews, emotions were often discussed. All of the participants highlighted moments when their emotions seemed to overwhelm them or were signals to them that some important experience had occurred. A few emotional processes will be highlighted in this section; they seem to be important within the divorce adjustment process of this sample of women.

Happiness. Fourteen (93%) resolved participants reported personal happiness in their current life; this is a large percentage. These women vary on dating status, finances, and employment. Yet, 14 of them reported they are currently happy with their lives. P9 reported the main source of her current unhappiness was her partner, who was living with her. She wanted to kick him out of her house but had not figured out how to do so. Her guilt is keeping her from making him homeless.

Guilt. Four women from the resolved group reported they experienced guilt during their process but were able to work through it. No particular process was credited with how they did it; they reported they do not carry any lingering guilt post divorce and believed this was an important part of their adjustment.

Anger/resentment. A lack of anger/resentment seemed to emerge from the data; none of the 15 resolved participants reported carrying any towards their ex in the final stage of their divorce adjustment. Some of them spoke of resenting their husbands during the marriage or during the early stage of divorce adjustment. All of them reported they were able to give up their

anger and resentment and move on with their lives post divorce.

The question is begging to be asked: what allowed these resolved women to let go of guilt, anger, and/or resentment? Some possible factors that may have helped them let go of guilt, anger, resentment may include: repartnering, great sex, forgiveness, watching a friend's divorce and finding out her ex wasn't so terrible, finding new challenges and adventures, realizing it wasn't her fault, feeling she did everything she could to save the marriage, letting go of a dream, immensely improved life post divorce, personal growth, compassion for ex, and experiencing a new sense of freedom post divorce.

Disappointment/failure. Five women in the sample reported feeling disappointment and like they were failures as a result of their divorces. Three of them were able to move through the feelings/beliefs about failing and recreate new lives for themselves. The question was not asked directly how this was accomplished but a few things that happened during their adjustment period might shed light on the process. Three women all dated post divorce; two of them repartnered. Perhaps these women were able to overcome a personal sense of failure because they experienced feelings through the dating/repartnering process that allowed them to see themselves differently: successful (e.g., women, partners, sexual beings). P10 got a job in a bookstore (despite being a retired schoolteacher); she reported this was scary and empowering. P19 completely rebuilt her life post divorce marrying a man with a young son. P22 left a life of the stay-at-home mom's to reentering graduate school and learning how to dance in a group she joined post divorce. These new experiences may account for why they were able to let the failure beliefs go.

What is it about these 15 women that caused them to answer resolved when asked the question, and how are they different from the 10 women who reported unresolved during the

interview? Several factors have emerged from the data that suggest people, things, events, or structures that were in place, allowed these women to move forward post divorce. In the following section we will look at the experiences of the 10 women in this study who are working towards getting to a place of peace post divorce: they are currently unresolved.

Not Helpful for this Cohort of Women

Ten of the 25 participants (40%) are still not at a place of peace in the final stage of their post divorce adjustment. This section will look at themes that emerged from the data that may help the reader understand what may have happened (or not happened) that negatively impacted this group of women's divorce adjustment process.

Nonsupport. In the divorce literature, support during and post divorce has been found to be helpful and aids in positive post divorce adjustment. Only two women in the unresolved group reported having good social support during the divorce adjustment process (20%); compare this to nine women in the resolved group who reported having good social support (60%). In contrast, four women in the unresolved group reported increasing isolation or becoming a loner during their divorce adjustment. Compare this to the resolved group, with only one woman referring to herself as a loner during her divorce adjustment. Seven resolved participants reported having "one good person" in her corner during her divorce adjustment: for many of them this meant the world. They had someone to talk with, process with, be with and lean on during their adjustment process. Only one participant in the unresolved group reported having "one good person" and that was P2. She talked at length about a neighbor lady who gave her sound advice and a "shoulder to cry on." She believes she would never have made it through the process if it weren't for her neighbor. One factor that four women in the resolved group mentioned was attending the Divorce Care© class at a local church. They each found it helpful, educational, and

were able to talk with other people going through their divorce adjustment process. No one in the unresolved group attended the support group.

Five women out of the 25 described ways they sought out new social support during their post divorce adjustment period: they reported being proactive. P24 is the only woman in the unresolved group who made a concerted effort to go to a local country music bar, hang out, and meet new people. She reported she met several men there and dated a few. She eventually met her current partner in the bar and reported many of her new friendships developed from her time spent hanging out there. For this group of women, support was found to be helpful and necessary for their positive post divorce adjustment.

Support from adult children was present in both groups of women. Three women in the unresolved group and seven women in the resolved group all report their children were very supportive and helpful during the adjustment process.

Children. All 25 participants reported they have good connections with their children but 12 participants (six from each group) reported they are unsure of the relationships their children have with their fathers. Four of the 10 women in the unresolved group reported they don't think their children are adjusting well post divorce. A few women are really worried about their children's well-being and worry they are not working toward their life goals. Five women worried about their children's relationships with their fathers post divorce and are concerned if this will have long-term implications.

Of the 10 women in the unresolved group, two reported their children have completely cut off their fathers. This worries the women, but they reported it wasn't their place to get involved. One participant is really struggling, watching her children flounder post divorce; they are living with their father and he has no expectations for the children. She reported she has lost

her influence over their lives, since they have chosen to live with him.

Freedom. Four of the ten unresolved participants spoke about experiencing a sense of freedom post divorce. All four of these women had reported how controlled they felt during their marriage; in contrast six of ten participants did not report a sense of freedom post divorce. Compare this to the resolved group where 93% of participants reported freedom post divorce.

Several factors may have prohibited these six women from experiencing freedom in the final stage of divorce adjustment. P2 and P16 did not want the divorce (e.g., exes cheated); P4, P15, P25 had affairs during their marriage; P4 is the only repartnered participant (i.e., unstable relationship); P15, P16, P21 and P25 are struggling financially; P21 cannot work and P15 and P25 cannot find employment. All six of them have a disconnected relationship with their ex-husbands; all of them have a strained or nonexistent relationships with their ex in-laws. For this group of six women, freedom may not seem possible at this time. They may be feeling overwhelming stress, worry, disappointment, alone and disconnected from others around them; some or all of these factors may be contributing to their inability to feel freedom post divorce.

Unhappiness now. Seven of the ten unresolved participants reported they were currently unhappy at the time of the interview. These unhappy unresolved participants do share some common characteristics. P15, P16, P21, and P25 are struggling financially; P12, P15, P21, and P25 are open to dating and being repartnered and have not been able to experience this post divorce; P4 is repartnered with her affair partner but she reported they “cannot find a way to cohabitate together.” P2 and P16 both reported they are not open to dating at this time; P2 cites religious reasons and P16 wants to help her boys finish college and become successful. P2 and P16 are in the family home: the others have moved post divorce. P4 and P12 moved to a new city for their jobs and lost their connections to the community; P12 reported the loss of her religious

community was the hardest part. P12, P15, and P21 moved to apartments in the early stage of their divorce adjustment. P25 moved to her mother's basement in the early and adapting stages of her adjustment. Recently, P12 and P25 have purchased new homes and report they like where they are living; P15 and P21 are the only participants living in an apartment.

Three unresolved participants (30%) reported personal happiness. The three women reported they liked their lives now. They are happy with their home or apartment, in their work or retirement, and repartnered or staying single. None of the three has contact with their ex but all of them have a positive connection with their ex in-laws. All three women left a marriage they could no longer stand to be in and carry emotions they have not moved through yet. No infidelity was involved: all three of the women could point to actual issues with their ex-husbands that caused them to want to leave the marriage (e.g., mental health, addiction, controlling). All three of these happy, but unresolved participants reported how much better their lives are post divorce; they subjectively reported they were either happy or neutral about their finances.

There is a common denominator among these three unresolved happy women: all of them reported being stuck in an emotional state they cannot move through. P1 reported she still carries a great deal of guilt, P24 still carries fear, and P7 still carries anger and resentment. All readily admit they are still struggling with these emotional states, and in the final stage for their divorce adjustment they have not figured out how to move through them.

Anger and/or resentment. Six participants reported they still hold on to some form of anger and/or resentment towards their ex-husband; all of them are in the unresolved group.

Disappointment/failure. Five women in the sample reported feeling deep disappointment and feelings of failure as a result of getting a divorce. Two of them are from the unresolved group. P4 and P12 continue to struggle post divorce with feelings of being a failure

or having failed. P4 left her “good marriage” for her affair partner; since the divorce she and her new partner have moved in together (and out again) several times. They cannot seem to work it out: she reported they love each other but can’t seem to figure out the living together part. P12 left her husband whom she believed to be overly dependent on her; she wants to date but has not been able to find someone. Both of these women have not been able to let go of feelings of being a failure; neither of them have had a successful relationship post divorce. This may be a factor impacting their post divorce adjustment.

Fear. Only one participant spoke of feeling afraid for her life (i.e., fear) during her divorce adjustment process. P24 had been married to a man (e.g., 30 years of marriage) who was very controlling; she left the marriage and reported it was difficult to do. She is three years post divorce. She did all the “right things” in the post divorce process: she worked, managed her money, shopped, formed new social support, started dating, repartnered, is currently happy with her life and has gained independence. She even secretly started to reconnect with her ex mother-in-law whom she is deeply attached to; she also believed she was being a good mom to her adult son during the process. So what is it that is keeping her stuck in the unresolved category?

It may be the emotion of fear. One event during her divorce adjustment has stuck with her; she reported she will “never forget the fear” she experienced one night in a parking lot with her soon to be ex-husband. She remembered, “The hairs on the back of my neck stood up: I knew I was about to die.” She was able to step on the gas and get out of the parking lot, but she reported this memory still haunts her; she is not sure if she will ever truly be safe. She is the only participant who spoke about fear and this type of experience during the divorce adjustment process. In many ways P24 has transitioned well post divorce; but this one lingering, haunting memory seems to still have an impact on her process. Perhaps it (e.g., know fear = no peace) is

the one factor that will keep her in the unresolved group.

Guilt. Four women in the unresolved group reported holding onto guilt. P1 still struggles with leaving a mentally ill husband (e.g., PTSD), and P12 knew her husband was very dependent on her and she feels guilt about leaving him to struggle on his own; P4 and P15 are two women who had affairs while they were married and feel guilt about that and in watching their children struggle with their lives and the relationship with their fathers.

Surprising depression. Three participants spoke of suffering a surprising, but painful depression during their post divorce adjustment. All of them are in the unresolved category. This seemed to have a huge impact on their process and none of them anticipated they would experience it. This surprising depression may be a contributing factor in a slower post divorce adjustment.

Additional losses. Seven women reported experiencing additional losses during their divorce adjustment that they never expected (e.g. not including the three women who buried a son). P4 reported that two of her best friends died of cancer prior to her divorce; this loss of support was devastating for her. She believed these two deaths impacted her divorce process negatively and added to the pain of her divorce adjustment. P24 reported she lost her brother during her early divorce adjustment. She had very few family members alive, so this loss was felt most acutely. P21 lost a parent, “My mom died the year that I divorced him.” She reported this coupled with the divorce was devastating for her; she also reported she experienced a surprising depression during the early/adapting stage of her divorce adjustment. P12 lost her church community which was a huge part of her life; to date she has not been able to rebuild that part of her community. P15 reported a pileup of losses (e.g., her lover, children’s well-being, money, and secret debt) that deeply affected her.

Two participants spoke of the loss of a dream. P16 lost her dream of parenting with her ex. “You cannot guide them together.” Along with that, she reported she regrets what she gave up for her marriage. “I mean just gave up everything for him. I supported him 150% with his career with everything I trusted him.” P2 spoke of her loss. “We were very...it always looked like...that was the hardest thing I had to do through the divorce was the reaction from people. We were perfect.” Perhaps these additional or co-occurring losses overwhelmed this group of divorced women (e.g., ‘no peace’). This is one area that is not well documented within the divorce literature the area of co-occurring losses and how they impact post divorce adjustment.

Dating. Four unresolved participants were open to dating but currently were not; P1, P2, and P16 reported they are not open to dating; P4 and P7 are repartnered. P12 reported frustration around this area of not dating. She reported she had tried online dating and hated it. She is the only participant in the unresolved group to admit she tried online dating; this phenomenon may be new and strange for this cohort of women. She did report she does have a male friend, whom she would like to date; but he is not open to that. She reported that his refusal to be open to dating was hard for her to understand and she still struggles with her feelings around that. P15 and P25 are looking for men to date but have been frustrated in not finding anyone that could happen with.

Nine women (i.e., out of 25) are currently repartnered: three of the repartnered women are in the unresolved group. No one in the unresolved group is remarried. P4 is repartnered with her affair partner but they are having trouble making it work and she is struggling with that piece of it. P7 reported she is happy in her new relationship and is in “no rush” to marry. P24 is repartnered with a younger man and reported feeling a little unsure about the age differences, but reported she is happy in this relationship. She is grateful he does not seek to control her (i.e., like

her ex-husband did). All three of them report sex post divorce is much better and has helped them feel better about themselves and has enhanced their relationship with their partner.

Post divorce care and therapy. No one in the unresolved group attended a Divorce Care© class. Of the ten unresolved participants, only P21 did not see a professional therapist. Therapy was broken down into three phases within the divorce process: pre, during, post divorce therapy. P1 and P15 were the only two in this sub-group that used therapy through all three phases of the process. P1 and P15 reported couples counseling was not helpful, but found individual counseling beneficial. P24 and P25 worked with a couples counselor, predivorce only; they reported counseling was not helpful.

P2, P4, P7, P12, and P16 used therapy during and post divorce (e.g., individual and couples counseling). P2 and P16 did not find either one helpful. P4 tried individual therapy (e.g., EMDR) and found it extremely helpful for her process and for the depression she suffered post divorce. P7 and P12 reported individual therapy was helpful to their process. Of the 9 women who made use of therapy at some point in their divorce adjustment process four of them reported therapy wasn't helpful (e.g., P2, P16, P24, and P25). P1, P4, P7, P12, P15 reported individual therapy was helpful to their process and reported that offering emotional support and promoting clarity were useful interventions on the part of the therapists.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of baby boomer women experiencing a mid to later life divorce. It was my expectation that by examining the context of these women's lives and experiences. I would be able to begin to understand what influenced their post divorce adjustment, either positively or negatively. Two broad research questions guided the study.

How do women divorcing in mid to late life describe their divorce experiences?

What influenced the post divorce adjustment?

This research utilized a modified grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; La Rossa, 2005). It provided a framework to help create linkages in the data allowing the researcher to better understand the divorce adjustment process of these 25 women. Bronfenbrenner's Human Ecological Theory (HET; 1977, 1979, 2005) and life course perspective (Hutchison, 2011) provided a theoretical base to further interpret the data (see table 2, Appendix E; Relating Research Questions to Theory).

In-depth interviews, demographic forms, and audio-recorded memos after each interview were used to inform this stage theory of post divorce adjustment and identity development for baby boomer women. By highlighting the baby boomer mid to later life divorced women population, this study contributes to the divorce literature in several ways. This study supports previous research in the area of things that are beneficial and important to positive post divorce adjustment, such as social support, financial stability, employment, good legal representation, repartnering, dating, the knowledge that the divorce was unavoidable, and children that are adjusting.

This study extends the research on baby boomer women in several important findings: having an incubation period is common; the desire to remain single may be higher in older rather than younger divorced women; redeveloping a positive relationship with ex-husband, reconnecting with his family is very important; adult children's post divorce adjustment can impact mother's adjustment; children having a connection with their father and his family is important but if that is not possible--letting go of that responsibility; having a place to live that is valued, experiencing freedom, and letting go of negative affect/toxic feelings (e.g., guilt, fear, anger and/or resentment, disappointment leading to failure).

The 25 baby boomer women described their marriages during the first part of the interview process. Across the sample, the average length of the marriage was 27.3 years. The shortest time married was 11 years and the longest time married was 35 years. The median for the sample was 27 years of marriage and the mode was 30 years of marriage. The numbers from this sample do not support what Krumrei et al (2007) reported in their research, "Forty three % of marriages end within the first 15 years of marriage" (p. 146). In this current study, only one participant (P25) was married less than 15 years.

For this cohort of women, it was as if the rules and expectations of marriage changed while they were playing the game. They are part of a generation that saw rapid growth in the divorce rate that was supported by changing divorce laws and lessening the social stigma of divorce. Sakranda (2005) reported in her study that older women still experience a social stigma post divorce. Post divorce social stigma was experienced by some of the 25 women in this study.

For the first time in modern history, this cohort had the experience of watching marriage become optional. This represented a shift within the culture and more importantly it ushered in the possibility that women were no longer confined to staying in unhappy marriages. The

permission to be happy intersected with the ability to divorce in an easier way.

This group of women may be viewed as revolutionary, but as is often the case, revolutions are best viewed in hindsight. The 25 women in this current study had both similar and unique experiences while married. Some experienced infidelity and some felt unimportant or undervalued in their marriage. A few of the women lived with spouses who abused them and some lived with spouses who abused drugs or alcohol and sometimes both. Some women reported they felt tightly controlled by their husbands and had very little personal freedom in their lives and some felt the marriage was very one-sided. Others reported they felt lonely and isolated within the marriage and a few slept in separate bedrooms. A few of the participants experienced death of loved ones and some experienced mental health issues. All of these events could be viewed through the life course perspective: as resiliency builders.

Resiliency builders are described as the tough times people experience in their lives that prepared them for the difficult times they would face post divorce (Caspi & Elder Jr., 1986). Using life course theory as a lens to view these women seemed appropriate, considering many of them experienced very tough times throughout the course of their long-term marriages.

The life course idea of resiliency builders may be an important factor for positive post divorce adjustment in this study. The difficult things these women went through in their long-term marriages may have given them leverage for a later life divorce. Resiliency building sets this group apart from the younger cohorts: they had more time to build resilience skills.

Three women buried sons; the resiliency developed may lend itself well to weathering future difficult life events and transitions. In this study, the death of a child was an event that was not anticipated; to have it occur for three different women was surprising. It is my belief that the death of a child changed these three women's perspectives forever. This was described as being

the most painful experience in their lives; perhaps death shifted their perspective on life and allowed them a new understanding: they could handle anything. All three of these women were in the resolved group post divorce.

In the end, the decision to divorce lay in the hands of 19 of the 25 women who participated in this research. This decision to end a marriage fits in nicely with the concept of human agency found in the life course perspective (Hutchison, 2011). In the following sections, we will take a look at predivorce identity, events during the marriage, incubation period, and initiator status and their potential impact on divorce adjustment.

Unified Theory of Divorce Adjustment: Pre-divorce

Predivorce identity. Based on 25 narratives, some attributes and characteristics that may have contributed to identity development emerged from the data. Many of the participants ended up living separate lives within their marriages, and many of them were thinking about and contemplating how to divorce their husbands for some time. More than half of the women initiated the divorce action; and in more than half the marriages infidelity was present. This cohort of women moved through a time in American history that experienced a massive cultural change; divorce became acceptable. Staying in an unhappy marriage became optional. The intersection of changing times and acquired resiliency, via living in an unhappy, long-term marriage, may have represented a perfect storm. The macrosystemic influence makes this cohort of women unique within the literature.

In the baby boomer lifetimes feminism reached new heights and birth control became a viable option. Many participants described themselves as trusting, naïve young women who believed in the marital vows they made. This group of women was raised traditionally, but with the onset of feminism and changing cultural norms, many of them grew towards independence.

The road they traveled throughout their lifetimes changed course and direction, causing these baby boomers to make some course adjustments. These micro and macrosystemic changes may have contributed to changes in their identities. During the interviews, many of them described themselves as never seeing themselves divorced in their later mid-life years. To use the analogy of life being a journey along a road, we can look at how difficult it must have been for these women to start on a road paved with traditional marriage values and end up at a destination that was never imagined: divorced.

They endured some bumpy roads along the way and found themselves far off course from their original destination. The scenery was different, the road signs had changed, roadblocks emerged, and the speed limits got faster. These 25 women started at similar points; as they all divorced, a fork in the road seemed to emerge. Part of the discussion from this point on will include: starting points, bumps in the road (e.g., abuse, substance abuse, and mental health issues), road signs (e.g., incubation, separate lives, controlling partner, and infidelity), speed limits (e.g., changing culture, development, and aging processes), the roadblock of divorce, and possible explanations why some women forked left and others forked right. We will also look at modifications made and potential baggage that was added along the journey. This summary will seek to discover how these women got to their final destination and how some of them ended up on the unresolved side of the road.

Separate lives. Prior to the divorce, 14 women (i.e., 56% of the sample) reported they were living disconnected, separate lives while married. This played out in several ways: separateness in daily activities, emotional disconnection, little or no sexual contact, and separate bedrooms. How did the separateness within the marriage impact post divorce adjustment in this sample? Having lived separate lives was most likely a factor that prepared them for living as a

single woman post divorce.

This study supports previous research by Hetherington (2003) and Bair (2007); both reported on the idea of couples living separate lives within their marriages. Perhaps this is a very old concept, but for the first time in modern history, women were no longer compelled to remain in a state of ‘separate but married’ existence. Baby boomer women had the opportunity to divorce, support families, have sex as a single woman, live in a less stigmatized way, and have full and happy lives post divorce. It is true that younger cohorts had already discovered this, but for the baby boomer cohort this opportunity became a reality during their lifetimes. Perhaps watching younger women divorce influenced their decision to divorce and allowed them the opportunity to know it was possible; this may have given them hope. This represents a change in the meso and macro systems that allowed microsystemic changes in the lives of baby boomer women.

Within some of the participants’ narratives the idea of separate lives began to emerge. Women in this study were attending religious services, events, and gatherings as single women. They were accepted as married into gatherings and public places but often were unaccompanied by their husbands; in some cases this went on for years. The impact on these women as they presented married but single must have given them a precursor to what divorced life might look like. Perhaps the 14 women (e.g., four ‘no peace’) who had been living separate lives in private and presented to the public as married women were better prepared for the road that lay ahead.

Some of the women lived in the hope that things might be different; someday they would have a close, intimate connection with their spouse; but sadly for them, that someday never arrived. They spoke of pain and disappointment they experienced throughout their marriages. Some of these women had dared to believe that living married while separate was a viable

option. Unfortunately their unhappiness seemed to reach a zenith and many of them filed for divorce. This is supported by recent research that suggests happiness gaps within marriages does impact people's decisions to divorce (Guven, Senik, & Stichnoth, 2012).

Once they decided they wanted a different life, divorce may have seemed like the only option. The concept of the unavoidability of divorce is what Amato and Previti (2003) reported as leading to a better post divorce adjustment. When divorce is the only option left to take, it eliminated the ruminations of the 'what ifs.' They purport that the lingering question of 'what if' is often what inhibits divorced people's post divorce adjustment. The authors found that divorced people who were left to wonder about their divorces (e.g., if things could have changed, if they stayed longer, if things had been different, or if they had more time) are the people who seemed to struggle more during the post divorce adjustment period.

Some women spoke about the separateness in the marriages being a great training ground for living as single, divorced women. They learned to be independent within the marriage. Many women created their own social networks, developed hobbies and lives outside their husband's interests and their marriages. Four of them went so far as to have affairs, an act of sexual separateness. It also may have been a way to end an unhappy or unfulfilling marriage.

In the end, many of those who reported living separate lives also learned that they had lives yet to live and could do so in a way that had joy and meaning for them, post divorce. Wu and Schimmele (2007) reported that longer life expectancy is linked to an increase in later life divorce. As people live longer and healthier lives, they often don't want to waste the important years ahead in marriages that no longer make them happy. This current study supports that research in that a majority of study participants found happiness post divorce.

Incubation. Fifteen of the 25 participants (60% in both groups) reported they thought

about divorce for many years. Määttä (2011) reported that the contemplation of divorce was the most difficult part for the participants in her study. The idea of ‘should I or shouldn’t I’ takes an emotional toll on those participating in the contemplation process. Her research was not based exclusively on baby boomer women, but the question is begging to be asked: what impact does this incubation have on those doing it, and how does it ultimately impact their post divorce adjustment process?

Many of the incubators reported thinking about and planning their divorces. This was often a discussion in their therapy sessions; in one case a private investigator was hired. Another emotional toll for incubators: women became more focused on their relationships with their children, often at the expense of their marital and sexual relationships. During the incubation period, some women reported feeling bitter and resentful, and others reported spending a lot of time worrying about the reactions of their husbands post divorce. Some immersed themselves in their work, their church, and their hobbies in order to distract themselves from the thoughts and feelings in their unhappy marriages. It would seem that for many of these incubators a great deal of time, thought, and energy was invested into the incubation process. Some positives did emerge from the narratives concerning the incubation process. Many women in this current study spoke about being absolutely sure they had tried everything to avoid divorce: the incubation time prepared them emotionally and mentally for divorce. During the incubation period they went through abuse, substance use, ups and downs, mental illness, infidelity, and being controlled by their husbands. Their incubation time prepared them to cope, support themselves, develop skills to live separately, and along the way it created strength and resiliency (resiliency building; Caspi & Elder Jr., 1986). By the time many of them reached the end of the incubation road, they understood that divorce was unavoidable; their road to continued happiness needed to include the

once unimaginable divorce.

Initiators. Fifteen of the 25 women in this divorce study initiated the divorce action; nine women are in the resolved group (60%) and six women in the unresolved group (40%). Four women (e.g., 3 ‘no peace’) in this study reported that both parties (i.e., husband and wife) had a hand in initiating the divorce. In total, 19 women (76%) had a hand in ending their long-term marriages. Amato and Previti (2003) and Wang and Amato (2000) reported that women are more likely to initiate divorce and this may lead to an easier post divorce adjustment. Sakraida (2008) suggested that women who initiated divorce experienced an easier post divorce adjustment when compared with those who did not initiate. Steiner, Suarez, Sells, and Wykes (2011) also concluded that initiator status does positively impact divorce adjustment.

When we examine the differences between the initiators of both groups, some differences do emerge. Most of the literature points to several factors that exist for women who initiate divorce: some of those differences can be age related. Younger divorced women are more likely to have either no children or younger children at the time of divorce when compared to baby boomer divorced women. Having younger children at the time of the divorce has been shown to have a negative impact on post divorce adjustment (Thabes, 1997). A majority of women in this sample had adult children at the time of divorce.

When comparing this group of baby boomer women who initiated divorce with younger women who initiated divorce, what differences emerge from the data? Baby boomer divorced women do find themselves drawing from a smaller dating pool, and they have fewer years left to work and save for retirement. Some from this sample had either retired or were near retirement when they divorced; retirement or the ability to retire can provide a sense of financial stability and hope that younger women do not have. This warrants further study.

Being an initiator did not guarantee the participants entry into the resolved category. Some factors that may enhance the process include successfully dating or repartnering, choosing to be single, not having young children, finding personal happiness, feeling connected and part of a social support system, letting go of adult children's process. Being the initiator and having additional factors present may be what leads to a better post divorce adjustment. Which combination leads to the best adjustment is open for further study.

Infidelity

Men. The experience of infidelity was present in 16 of the 25 marriages in this current study. In this sample, four women reported cheating on their husbands and 12 women reported their ex-husbands cheated on them. Allen and Atkins (2012) reported that when sexual infidelity is present in a marriage the chance of separation or divorce is four times greater. The important question pertinent for this study may be the question, what impact, if any, did infidelity have on post divorce adjustment?

Three unresolved women reported their ex-husbands cheated on them: they described incredible pain and rejection due to their ex-husband's infidelity. Two women reported they would never date or repartner and both continue to carry pain from their divorces. A third woman reported her ex was a serial cheater; she has not repartnered post divorce and continues to struggle with disappointment around not dating or repartnering. For this subset of women their husbands' infidelity may have negatively influenced their sense of self, caused them emotional pain they were not prepared to handle, and caused them to experience loneliness that was never anticipated. The hope is they will be able to process their emotional burdens in a way that allows them to create new meaning in their lives post divorce.

Of the nine unresolved women who reported their ex-husbands cheated on them, five of

them reported their ex -husbands were serial cheaters, and the women had endured years of sexual infidelity. These five women reported their ex-husbands cheating gave them resolve: they had put up with so much that when the divorce became real, they knew they had done all they could do and they considered divorce unavoidable. The other four women reported the infidelity was hurtful but none of them seemed to harbor any resentment towards their ex-husband's.

When comparing the unresolved and resolved groups, where infidelity was present, what contrasts and themes emerge from the data? The theme of serial cheaters seems to be important: five women in the resolved group were married to serial cheaters and one in the unresolved group. When they divorced, it may be they saw divorce as unavoidable; attribution can be made to some flaw within the ex that made it impossible for them to remain in the marriage. As noted previously, when divorce is seen as unavoidable or attribution can be made to something within the ex or the relationship, better divorce adjustment often ensues (Amato & Previti, 2003).

Kalman and Monden (2006) found some support for the idea of escaping a bad marriage can sometimes lead to a better post divorce adjustment. In either case, women who were cheated on, especially more than once, seem to have experienced a better post divorce adjustment. Given that this group of women had longer marriages and greater opportunities for partners to cheat, serial cheating proves to be an interesting phenomenon within this current study and warrants further study.

Women. Four women in the study reported they had affairs during their marriages; all four of them reported at the time of the interview they were currently unhappy in their lives. Only one of the four women is in the resolved group. She initiated the divorce and had several affairs during her 33-year marriage. She struggles with mental health issues and has for a long period of time. She has a bachelor's degree and is currently employed; she reported her children

are doing well and they have a great relationship with their father. She reported she is unhappy in her current relationship; he is living with her and she would like to kick him out but has not figured out how to do that. She is one of three participants in this study who buried a son.

The three other women who reported they cheated on their ex-husbands are in the unresolved group. They reported they had cheated with only one man: none were serial cheaters. All three have master's degrees, two are looking for work. One is repartnered; she initiated the divorce and is currently struggling in her new relationship. She repartnered with her affair partner and neither is happy when they live together; so the relationship has had its ups and downs over the past eight years. Her children live several hours away: she is aware that their father's relationship with them is strained. She takes responsibility for her children's strained relationship with their father and this causes her emotional pain. The combination of these things continues to negatively impact her post divorce adjustment.

The other two women who cheated have not repartnered, are not dating, and seem to have frustration over this area in their lives. One initiated the divorce, the other co-initiated the divorce. The one who initiated reported she is unhappy with her children's lack of growth and stuckness in their lives: they live with their father and she is worried he is not parenting them properly. She reported she has lost influence over her own children and reported feeling powerless to do anything to change it. The other woman co-initiated her divorce: she has minor children and she and her ex are constantly feuding over the children. All three women who cheated during the marriage reported their infidelity left them with guilt.

Cultural Shifts and Resiliency

So, what influences may have impacted the post divorce adjustment of these participants? Society culture in America shifted while they were married. Living in long-term unhappy

marriages was now optional; it was as if permission were given to baby boomers to make different choices. This macrosystemic influence may be the single biggest influence on their process.

A secondary influence seems to be the building up of resiliency. Throughout the tough times of their marriages, the women in this study developed skills that enabled them to move through the divorce adjustment process. For the three women who buried sons, the resiliency piece is very apparent. Something shifted in them when they buried a child: their perspectives on themselves and their lives permanently altered. For this group of women, this event may prove to be the biggest factor that allowed them to process a later life divorce. One potential inhibitor to this process seems to be unprocessed negative emotions. For most women in the unresolved group, carrying around negative affect appears to inhibit post divorce adjustment.

Unified Theory of Divorce Adjustment: Early

Early stage identity. In the early stage, many women experienced changes within the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The women talked about learning how to be on their own for the first time in decades and how this was an eye opening experience. Some believed they had become quitters or vow breakers and experienced this as guilt and shame. This supports what Bair (2007) and Thomas and Ryan (2008) found when describing participants who reported feeling shame and like failures when they divorced. Others began to realize they had been blind in their marriage and started to see themselves as fools.

Some women did not want to be divorced; they did not view that as part of their identity. A few hated the label of divorce and wanted to be identified differently. Many moved from dependence towards independence; some experienced a shift and began identifying themselves as courageous. Perspectives about their bodies, sexuality, and health began to shift; and they

began to change their beliefs and identities about themselves and their places in the world. For some of them, their identities were wrapped up in being loved by their ex-husbands and being a part of his family; this was a hard shift for some to make. Some saw their age as putting them out of the running for experiencing love and romance, and a few were too afraid to try again.

At this stage in their lives, many of the women reported having the ability to look and see themselves differently. Brizendine (2006) talked about mid to later life women having post menopausal zest (PMZ). Women experiencing PMZ and divorce at the same time may account for some of the identity shifting that occurred during the early stage of post divorce adjustment.

Within the literature, Wiggs (2010) described the experience that occurs when a crisis compels people to take an inward look at themselves: she coined the phrase self-transcendence to describe this intersection. This ties in with the current study's participants who experienced a crisis (divorce) and then many of them started to see themselves differently. Many began to shift and change as a result of their inward journey. Self-transcendence is described in the literature "as the ability to make meaning out of an experience" (Wiggs, 2010, p. 220). The author theorized that the ability to do this type of introspective work increased with age.

Many women in this current study experienced an inward journey. Some women were able to self reflect, create meaning from their experiences, and were able to see themselves differently. Their ability to do this produced changes and lead to their growth.

Legal. Twenty-one women subjectively reported they either felt neutral or happy with the legal process they went through as part of their early divorce adjustment process. For most of the women in this study, lawyers, mediation, court, legal filings, and judges were part of the divorce process; the participants did what they had to do to complete the divorce.

Four college-educated women were extremely dissatisfied with the legal part of the

divorce process; they described the legal process as being more painful and awful than it should be. These four women talked about lawyers, judges, mediators, and court rulings that left them feeling cheated, treated unfairly, misunderstood, overlooked, and disempowered. All four of the women reported the legal part of the divorce adjustment process extended their divorces, added unnecessary costs, and caused them unnecessary pain. The pain and distress was evident in their narratives.

Three of these women are in the unresolved group; they carry feelings of resentment, anger, and cynicism as if they were cheated during the legal part of the divorce. Thabes (1997) found that women who felt dissatisfied with their attorneys, seemed to experience more depression post divorce; that can negatively impact post divorce adjustment. Very little research has been done looking at women's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the legal process as a whole and correlation with divorce adjustment; more research is needed.

Moving or staying put. Eighteen women moved from the marital home during their post divorce process. One Danish study (Gram-Hanssen & Bech-Danielsen, 2008) found as people moved from their marital home they began the process of shifting their identities from married to divorced. This seemed to parallel the Dane's experiences in identity re-formation as they moved from the marital home to nonpermanent housing then eventually into permanent housing.

The majority of the women reported they were glad they moved: it helped them get away from memories of the marriage and they felt like they were getting a fresh start. Some of them enjoyed buying a new house, or moving to a new place. A few of them really enjoyed renovating and redecorating their new homes to suit their tastes; they reported it really helped them in the early and adapting stages of their post divorce adjustment process. Wang and Amato (2000) found no evidence to support moving to a different home post divorce is related to poorer

divorce adjustment.

In this current study, seven women reported they stayed in their homes post divorce; two of them are in the unresolved group. They reported they did not have any issues staying in the family home; they reported they did so because it made sense to them financially, emotionally, and wanted a place for their children.

Women's experiences. All of the women described various experiences they encountered in the early stage of the divorce adjustment process; these experiences centered on emotions, fresh insights, reactions from family members, and primal states.

Emotional experiences. Guilt was experienced by eight women post divorce; eventually the four women who got rid of their guilt reported they experienced peace in the final stage of their divorce adjustment. The four women still carrying guilt are in the unresolved group. Emotional fallout post divorce can be expected. Baum (2007) reported in her research that the initiator of the divorce often experienced guilt post divorce and it did negatively impact post divorce adjustment. Boney (2003) also reported that guilt negatively impacted women's post divorce adjustment processes.

Many women in this current study reported they felt anger and/or resentment towards their ex-husbands at some point in the marriage or early post divorce adjustment stage. Some women acknowledged their anger and/or resentment, but did not seem to be able to want to get rid of it (or perhaps don't know how). Rohde-Brown and Rudestam (2011) found support for an inverse correlation between holding onto anger and its impact on the ability to offer forgiveness post divorce. Two studies (Dreman, Spielberger, & Darzi, 1998; Wallerstein, 1986) found support for the idea that divorced women tend to hold onto anger and blame longer than men. It was also found that holding onto anger into the later stages of divorce adjustment was found to

negatively impact the post divorce adjustment process. This makes sense in the light of these current findings; the women holding onto negative affect seem stuck in their divorce process.

Some women in this current study reported feeling numb, disconnected, and/or mechanical in their daily interactions during the early stage of their post divorce adjustment process; and some reported feeling shocked finding themselves divorced at this stage of their lives. Many experiences these women reported are supported in the literature (Määttä, 2011). Määttä reported the first year of post divorce adjustment is most likely to have the most emotions: hate, grief, embarrassment, guilt, relief, and independence. The findings in this current study support what Määttä (2011) found. The early stage of post divorce adjustment is a maelstrom of emotions and that is completely normal. For clinicians, this could be an important therapeutic event for divorcing baby boomer women, normalizing the chaos of feelings present in the early stage of divorce adjustment.

Gaining insights. Several participants reported gaining insights about their journeys and how it helped them make sense of their post divorce adjustment process. The ability to make meaning of their marriages and divorces could indicate they had done their work towards healing and moving on. Meaning making is an important step in post divorce adjustment, and is supported in the divorce literature (Amato, 2010; Schneller & Arditti, 2004; Steiner, Suarez, Sells, & Wykes, 2011; Wang & Amato, 2000). Steiner, Suarez, Sells, and Wykes (2011) reported that of 133 divorced American women those who were able to “find meaning and have a renewed vision” (p. 43) post divorce fared better than those who did not.

Wiggs (2010) talked about the increased ability of people as they age to have more opportunities throughout their life course to make meanings out of their life experiences. She labeled this as self-transcendence; she described what many in this current study were able to do:

look at a stressor (i.e., divorce), enlarge their perspective, see self differently, and adapt accordingly.

Sprenkle and Blow (2004) reported that therapists often help clients understand life stressors and events differently by the use of “reframes, interpretations, explanation, or rationales” (p. 123). This idea of meaning making being helpful in therapy may also be generalized to women’s personal processes.

Many women in this study employed meaning making as an adaptive coping mechanism. Therapy may be one way this occurred in their divorce adjustment process, but perhaps it also occurred as part of their journey. Some of these women were able to look at their lives and used their abilities to see their divorces through a different lens. Some of these women gained insight about themselves, their exes, and their divorces; as a result they were able to create new stories that better supported their current and future journeys.

Some women in the unresolved group are stuck in this part of their divorce process. They do not seem able to reframe their marriage or their divorce. Their inability to self-transcend, or make meaning of, their experiences may be an inhibitor to their post divorce adjustment process. Women in the unresolved group appear stuck in the meaning making process and continue to struggle. They have not been able to find or create meaning in their divorce stories: infidelity, leaving a good man, pain of divorce, or seeing their children struggle.

Unified Theory of Divorce Adjustment: Adapting

Adapting stage identity. This stage of the identity shifting brought in several new areas of growth and exploration for the 25 participants. In order to support identity shifts, some women underwent physical changes: plastic surgery, new hair-styles, and weight loss by diet and exercise. This supports what Gregson and Ceynar (2009) talked about in their study of post

divorce women that lost weight, cut their hair, and got tattoos. In this current study no one reported getting a tattoo.

These external changes represented a shift in identity: “married” to “divorce.” Perhaps the intersection of age and development also impacted identity development; these women were in their 50s (i.e., 15) and 60s (i.e., 10).

Many women at this point in their lives have come to a place of life fulfillment; this is often associated with this stage of their developmental process (Erikson, 1980). Perhaps their ages set them apart from younger women that experience a divorce. For the women in this study, the changes were more focused on their homes and the cities they are live in, their finances, their children and grandchildren, and building their support networks rather than their physical appearances.

During the adapting stage of post divorce adjustment many of the women in this current study spoke about experiencing freedom and autonomy for the first time in many years; a few women reported freedom from the tight control of their ex-husbands and this new freedom seemed wonderful to them. This supports Hutchison’s (2011) idea of transition as “changes in roles and statuses that represent a distinct departure from prior roles and statuses” (p. 14). Some of the participants learned how to let go, trust themselves and others in a new way, and some began to see that being selfish is not such a bad thing. The culture they were raised in taught them that ‘being selfish’ was wrong; this represents a microsystem change taught from within a macrosystemic viewpoint (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Many of these women also underwent some identity shifting around the idea of linked lives (Hutchison, 2011). They had to unlink their connection with their ex-husbands and their families; many reported having grief responses during the early and adapting stages of their post

divorce adjustment. The unlinking created both positive and negative shifts in their identities--freedom and independence alongside worry and fear, trust in themselves and learning how to live with the dislike and mistrust of others. This adjustment process became a discovery process, which helped them to uncover different aspects of themselves previously buried, or never realized.

During the adapting stage, several women's mesosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) underwent changes and shifts. Their previous family connections are now altered, or, in some cases severed: this is supported in the literature (Bair, 2007; McDaniel & Coleman, 2003). Their families of origin no longer interacted with their ex-husband's families of origin; they are no longer part of their ex-husband's family system. In some cases, their child(ren) no longer interacted with their fathers and their fathers' family of origin. All of these shifts started to impact their identities, leaving them to wonder: Who am I now? Where do I belong?

Tasks related to the adapting stage of divorce adjustment. The 25 women in this study reported several key events that highlighted the adapting stage of their post divorce adjustment.

Housing. Many had moved during the early stage of the divorce adjustment period. Women in this stage found themselves moving again--moving to more permanent housing, or purchasing a home of their own. Gram-Hanssen and Bech-Danielsen (2008) reported this often occurs as part the identity reforming process during the divorce adjustment process. Mulder and Wagner (2010) reported that people who moved post divorce were often less financially stable or younger than their ex-partners. This could be said for some of the women in this current study. Some could not afford to live in the marital home: others could.

Reasons for staying in their homes were not elicited as part of the interview process, but a

few reasons did emerge from the data. Financially it made sense for some women to stay; a few felt connected to their home and wanted to maintain that connection--they did not want to leave this place. A few of them wanted to have a place for their children to come back to and visit; and most of them seemed settled in their decisions. It did not upset them to stay in the marital home.

Eighteen of the women reported they wanted a fresh start and chose to leave the marital home. Some moved into temporary housing in the early stage, and then they transitioned to more permanent housing during the adapting stage of their divorce adjustment. Only one woman is still in transition: she is in the resolved group. She is unique within this study: she is a graduate student and is waiting to complete her studies and get a full time job before she settles down in permanent housing.

Adapting task of re-socializing and rebuilding social networks. Some women during this stage of divorce adjustment found themselves learning how to resocialize as a single female. Social support and social networks are supported in the literature as being important in the post divorce adjustment process (Wang & Amato, 2000). For many of these women, a whole new social support system needed to be built. Creating new social networks is supported by the literature (Hutchison, 2011), but for these women, rebuilding of networks occurred in the context of dissolving bonds between themselves and their ex-husbands, their families, and other friends who were casualties of the divorce. This process is described by McDaniel and Coleman (2003) who reported that successfully ending bonds takes time and eventually does lead to a more positive post divorce adjustment. Many women in this current study accomplished these post divorce tasks--learning to resocialize, establishing new social networks, and resolving old bonds formed during the marriage. Those who have not completed this process were predominantly in the unresolved group; six women are still struggling with the resocialization process post

divorce. Women in the study described various strategies for rebuilding: going to a country bar and meeting new people that later became friends and dates, joining a dancing group, joining a card club; starting yoga, seeking out other divorced people, doing fun things with peers, traveling, and going on adventures. Women who were able to rebuild their networks reported their post divorce adjustment process became more bearable and they began to have more fun and laugh again. Rebuilding social networks is supported within the divorce literature as positively impacting post divorce adjustment (Bair, 2007; Wang & Amato, 2000).

Coparenting during the adapting stage. Even though most of their children were older, several women spoke of experiencing coparenting issues with their ex-husband's during the adapting phase of their post divorce adjustment. Coparenting is important during the divorce process and is supported in the literature as being a factor in positive post divorce adjustment (Amato, 2010); but coparenting adult children and cograndparenting is a recent phenomenon, unique to this group of baby boomer women and is not as prevalent in the literature. This current study extends the notion of coparenting to another level: adult children, with the added caveat of co-grandparenting. The women in this current study reported that learning how to co-parent their adult children with their ex-husband; and having a good connection with their ex was an important factor in their post divorce adjustment.

Adapting to new-found freedom. Some of the participants reported on their experiences of being and feeling free. Some talked about it being the first time in a long while, and for others the first time ever. Some women left their parents' home to get married, never having that sense of freedom and independence that many young women have today. This is not unusual for this cohort of women; it does make them unique when compared to their younger counterparts. This sense of freedom post divorce is supported in the literature (Bair, 2007; Duffy, Thomas, &

Trayner, 2002; Hayes, Anderson, & Blau, 1993). The sense of feeling and being free for the first time in their lives may prove to be an important and empowering factor in their post divorce adjustment.

Adapting stage task: Forgiveness. Four of the resolved women spoke about the forgiving their ex-husband. For these women it seemed to be a necessary and important step in their process. All four of them saw it as a spiritual act, a letting go of negative thoughts and feelings. Two used nontraditional spiritual practices to help them forgive, one offered her forgiveness to God, the other decided that she is happily remarried to a wonderful man and they both decided to forgive their ex-spouses. Forgiveness was not a question that was directly asked during the interview process, it was a theme that emerged from the data. For these women it seemed to be an important part of their process. Forgiveness and its impact on divorce adjustment is supported in the literature as being a factor in positive post divorce adjustment (Rohde-Brown & Rudestam, 2011; Rye, Folck, Heim, Olszewski, & Traina, 2004).

Adapting stage, back on the dating scene. Some women began to date during the adaptive phase of their post divorce adjustment process. For those who did start dating, they found it helped increase their self-esteem and helped them to feel more alive. Many of them were sexual with their dating partners and found they liked the way their bodies felt and reacted to another man. Some women spoke of feeling awkward the first few times they were sexual; many of them had been monogamous for many years and they reported it was a weird experience for them and it took some adjusting, but it was one they were glad to go through. Dating is supported in the literature as helping divorced people have a better and easier adjustment period (Wang & Amato, 2000). What makes this group of women unique in the literature is the length of time between dating their ex-husbands and dating post divorce. For those who did date, it was 20+

years since they had experienced dating. Some of them struggled with being older and having different bodies as they entered the dating scenes: this caused some anxiety. Others tried dating services (e.g., Match, online) and did not seem to enjoy the process. A few entered into the dating process with fervor and had fun. For this group of women it seemed new and frightening at the same time; the differences were they had older bodies and wiser minds. They indicated they knew what they wanted and felt they had less time to get it right. This phenomenon is untapped in the current divorce literature and needs further study.

Adapting: Physical changes. Some women started making some changes that impacted their bodies; they ate differently, exercised, and lost weight. Physical changes during the divorce adjustment is supported in the divorce literature and is recognized as being normal and adaptive (Sakraida, 2005). Some women in this current study found they started to think more about their physical appearance and their bodies; they worried it might impact their dating/re-partnering experiences. For those who decided they would remain happily single, no mention was made of attention paid to physical appearance post divorce. Perhaps they were accepting of their current appearance and found no reason to change it based on their decision to not date post divorce.

Adapting and dealing with ex-husband. The literature does support coparenting and interactions between exes for the sake of the children as leading to a more positive post divorce adjustment (Wang & Amato, 2000). What the women in this current study described seemed to be a different kind of event. Some women reported their ex-husbands started to confide in them and talk with them about their daily lives and their current issues. Several women described experiences that seemed to suggest the comfort of interaction was still present and seemed to be okay. Altogether these women were married to these men on average for 29 years. All of these women are in the resolved category. So perhaps, for baby boomer women, this could be a

potential factor in a positive post divorce adjustment process.

Unified Theory of Divorce Adjustment: Final Stage

Getting to resolved or unresolved. All of the women were at least two years post divorce; Hayes and Anderson (1993) reported post divorce women generally took about five years to gain a positive identity post divorce. The final stage represents a culmination of changes that this cohort of women have made in their lives, many that impacted their identities. Taking into account that “an older woman’s body image is the product of the negotiation and construction of meanings across the life course through interactions with significant others” (Clarke Hurd & Griffin, 2007, p. 716), this study found support for the idea that women at this stage in their divorce adjustment process became more accepting of themselves and their bodies whether they repartnered or not. This was particularly true of the women who chose to not date and were happily single. The ‘single by choice’ women were more concerned about their health and mobility than they were their appearance: this supports research done by Liechty and Yarnal (2010). The authors purport that “with greater age, body dissatisfaction was less predictive of low self-esteem” (p. 1199).

All of the 25 women experienced shifts in their roles. Transitioning from being married to being divorced is a necessary legal event in divorcing women’s lives. Many in this current study reported being glad they were divorced; a few of them reported they miss being a wife and a few reported they miss their ex-husbands. Some of them are open to remarrying: others are not. These women could be described as being in or having gone through a transition (Hutchison, 2011) in their identity formation. They are currently either single not open to dating, repartnered, remarried, single and dating, single and open to dating.

Several women formed beliefs that supported them being alone; others have found love,

which supports the belief that they are loveable. This could be seen as a turning point (Hutchison, 2011) in their identity formation: “a life event that produces a lasting shift in the life course trajectory” (p. 12). Lachman (2004) defined turning points as “significant changes in the trajectory of life or an experience or realization that causes someone to reinterpret the past, similar to a midlife crisis” (p. 315). The turning point of divorce for these women did create opportunities for identity shifts. Part of the new identities involved dating/repartnering, open to dating, or choosing to be single. The choosing to live life as a single person may represent something new within the divorce literature for women in this age category. Mahay and Lewin (2007) reported this phenomenon--choosing to stay single--occurred in women as they age.

At the final stage of post divorce adjustment, many of the women spoke of experiencing shifts in their identities and how they see and experience. They described an increase in self-esteem, self-confidence, and are more assertiveness in their personal and professional lives. This supports Hutchison’s (2011) idea of human agency and is supported elsewhere within the divorce literature (Duffy, Thomas, & Trayner, 2002; Määttä, 2011).

Several participants remembered feeling surprised at how much they have grown or changed since their divorces. They reported doing new things they never thought possible at this stage of their lives. They are interacting with and impacting their external environments in ways they had never imagined (e.g., becoming a graduate student, taking care of their own home, increasing spirituality, excelling at being a single mom, going to work, creating new support systems, and having their own money). This supports Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1986, 2005) concept of micro, meso, and macrosystems at work. It also supports what Duffy et al (2002) reported in their study on the experiences of well adjusted post divorce women: higher levels of self-esteem and more control over their lives.

Three women reported feeling like advocates at this stage of their identity. They reported they want to share their divorce experiences with other women and support them in their divorce adjustment process. This represents the concept of interdependence; this desire to move outwards to support others is an example of externalizing social support. Hutchison (2011) wrote about social support being “an obvious element of interdependent lives. Relationships also control behavior through expectations, rewards, and punishments” (p. 24). This form of social support may be viewed as an adaptive coping strategy in the lives of some women who experience divorce.

Many women reported an increase in self-esteem and self-worth, and how they view themselves and interact with their environments post divorce. This supports what Wu and Schimmele (2007) found with older people who had successfully navigated the post divorce adjustment process by “establishing renewed social identities that confirm their self-worth or usefulness outside of marriage” (p. 44). Many women reported they had grown since the divorce and some of them were impressed with the challenges and adventurous things that they have done since the divorce. Across both sub groups (e.g., ‘no peace’ and ‘at peace’) this growth has occurred; 50% of the unresolved group reported they experience themselves differently in a positive way. In the resolved group, 100% of the participants reported they see themselves differently, and are impressed by their own growth and the new challenges they have taken on. These positive changes they see in themselves and their lives may suggest that this is a necessary and important step in the post divorce adjustment process of baby boomer women.

Final stage: Time. Time to achieve resolution varied across the sample. Bronfenbrenner (2005) added a fifth element to his HET theory: the chronosystem. The element of time is important to consider in the post divorce adjustment period. Hetherington (2003) suggested most

people need two to three years to adjust post divorce. This sample was set up to reflect the two-year time period. At the time of the interviews, the average number of years divorced was seven years; the shortest time divorced was two years and the longest was 15 years. Of the six women divorced the longest, four were in the resolved category.

Most of the current divorce research is focused on people across age groups and various stages of development. Current research suggests that younger women who divorce have more years to earn money, repartner, and form new family networks. Baby boomer women realize they have more years behind them than they do in front of them and this makes their divorce experiences unique.

While they were describing their divorce process, many women spoke about wanting the latter part of their lives to be more liberated, freer, happier, and more “about them.” They already put in the hard work: they raised their families. The element of time is important when looking at post divorce adjustment; for baby boomer women, perhaps, it is the element they value the most.

Final stage: Children. Several women reported struggling while watching their children struggle. Some participants reported their children were upset, disillusioned, and shocked by the news of the divorce. This in and of itself is not uncommon for divorcing women; what makes this sample unique is the age of the children. A majority of the children were adults at the time of the divorce. This seemed to make the struggles even that much more painful. Perhaps the adult children felt they shouldn’t care as much if their parents divorced, but in reality, most of them were deeply impacted by the divorce. These women reported it was difficult for them to watch their children and grandchildren struggle; some of them reported it negatively impacted their own divorce adjustment process. All of the resolved participants reported their children have adjusted post divorce and they see them as having happy, productive lives. Some children

maintained a good connection with their fathers post divorce and the rest have formed different types of relationships with their fathers post divorce; this appeared to help the women move on as well.

In the unresolved group, the same cannot be said--70% of participants reported they are worried about their children and/or grandchildren. They have concern about their children's relationship with their fathers; some adult children seem to be stuck in their lives and are not meeting their goals. A few of the children have experienced cut off from fathers and their families. These women reported that watching these events negatively impacted their own post divorce adjustment process.

Wallerstein (2009) found support in her 25-year follow-up study that father/child relationships often became less close post divorce. She also reported that the closeness of connection with a child during the marriage did not predict the relationship post divorce. In this current study, Wallerstein's (2009) research is supported. The entire sample reported they carefully monitored their ex-husband and children's relationships throughout the post divorce adjustment process. A few mothers confirmed what Wallerstein (2009) found--a close relationship between father and children during the marriage, did not necessarily continue post divorce. One main difference between this sample and Wallerstein's sample: most of the children of the women in this study were adults and had left the family home prior to their parents' divorce. In Wallerstein's study (25-year follow-up) the children had been in the family home during the divorce and were interviewed after becoming adults.

Williams and Dunne-Bryant (2006) found that women without young children present at the time of the divorce experienced fewer negative consequences during the post divorce adjustment process. Most of this sample (88%) had adult children at the time of the legal divorce.

One participant had two grade school children when she divorced; another participant's children were in high school. For the unresolved women the age of the children seemed to matter less. What did seem to have negative impact: watching adult kids struggle (e.g., life goals, relationships, and emotions). For most of the women in this study, it wasn't custody issues they had to struggle with; it was feeling responsible for their children's process. A universal theme for this sample was that the experience of their children post divorce was almost as important as their own. For women who saw their children struggle through the divorce and come out the other side, the resolution of this issue seemed to enable their process to go more smoothly. For women who continued to watch their children struggle the continuing lack of resolution had a negative impact on their own divorce adjustment process.

According to Hutchison (2011) a life event is defined as a "significant occurrence involving a relatively abrupt change that may produce serious and long-lasting effects" (p. 15). For children, their parents' divorce could be viewed, from a life course perspective, as a life event. Very little information exists in the divorce literature on the impact of watching adult children struggle on the divorced parent's post divorce adjustment process.

Final Stage: Sustaining Relationships

Ex-husband. For women in this study, it was clear that relationships with ex-husbands are optional. Some women chose not to exercise their option and others believed it was a good idea to do so. For the women in this study who were able to retain a positive or working relationship with their ex-husband, they reported it had a positive impact on their post divorce adjustment process. This ex-husband connection seems to be important for two reasons: maintaining a bond with the ex-husband promotes continuity, and the children benefit from the connection. Gilligan (1982) reported women are relational beings; sustaining connections seems

to be hardwired into their psyches. The women in this current study had been connected to their ex-husbands for upwards of 30 or more years. In the cases where connection was maintained or re-connection was established, the women reported they were glad to have a positive relationship with their ex and it positively impacted their post divorce adjustment.

Bair (2007) and McDaniel and Coleman (2003) highlighted the importance of resolving connections and bonds formed during marriage. In most cases the bonds formed by these 25 women were important connections in their lives that had formed over a lifetime. Resolving bonds (e.g., ex and his family) may mean something different for this cohort of women when compared to younger cohorts. Younger divorced women, with minor children, are compelled to have a connection with their ex-husbands for coparenting reasons. Conflicts around younger children (e.g., custody, child support, visitations) may make these divorces unavoidably more conflicted. Most of the women in this study did not have minor children; there was no legal reason to maintain a connection with their ex-husband. When they did, it was by choice.

The women who did maintain a connection (or wished they could have) reported it had nothing to do with the children. One of the reasons they gave: this was a person they once loved. They shared a history, a family, and a life together. This historical reason provides a connection to their past and it may prove to be an important bridge to their future. Perhaps maintaining some connection with the ex-husband allowed these women to create meaning from their divorce, to look inside and see that their life journey did have a purpose (Steiner, Suarez, Sells, & Wykes, 2011; Wiggs, 2010). For this group of baby boomer women, maintaining a connection with the ex may have been one of the avenues that allowed them to move to a place of peace.

Relationships with ex in-laws. In the final stage of post divorce adjustment, women reported they had various types of relationships with their ex in-laws from cutoff to connected.

Six women (five ‘no peace’) reported they had distant or uninvolved relationships with their husband’s family during the marriage; those relationships did not improve post divorce and in some cases they disintegrated into cutoff. During the interviews these women did not seem to be distressed over the current state of their relationship with their ex in-laws.

Of the 25 women interviewed for this study, 19 reported they had formed close relationships with their in-laws throughout their marriages; 63% of them were able to reform relationships with their ex in-laws post divorce (mostly resolved participants). Those who were able to maintain a connection with the ex-in-laws reported it helped their post divorce adjustment process. They reported they felt loved, connected, and valued by people whom they had known for more than 25 years.

Of the 19 women who had close connections with their in-laws, seven reported they were not able to reconnect post divorce. This small group of women really did struggle with the loss of those connections; some of them continue to mourn that loss. It would seem these disconnections and inability to reform the connections negatively impacted their post divorce adjustment process.

From the life course perspective, linked lives and interdependent lives become very pertinent (Elder Jr., 1994; Hutchison, 2011). The idea of linked lives fits neatly into post divorce adjustment: “The differing patterns of social networks in which persons are embedded produce differences in life course perspectives” (Hutchison, 2011, p. 28). These women spent years linked to their husband and his family. After a divorce, social networks change, linkages are broken, and connections may not be reformed, so it is possible the trajectories of these women’s lives changed forever: this caused additional pain during their post divorce adjustment.

Elder (1994) described the concept of linked lives as central to the life course perspective

and included the idea of “interdependent lives” (1994, p. 6), which described the connections between friends and family throughout the life course. This group of women formed many connections over their lifetimes; they are woven throughout the women’s micro and meso systems. The first two years post divorce included: redefining connections, forming new connections, and disconnecting from old connections. Many of the women reported it seemed overwhelming at first; at the two year or beyond mark, many reported they had settled down in this process of connecting and reconnecting and found themselves in a good place.

This study extends the research by highlighting how baby boomer women’s post divorce relationships with their ex-husbands and ex in-laws may impact their post divorce adjustment. A greater number of women in this study are connected to their ex in-laws than to their ex-husbands. In some ways this makes sense; these women divorced the men, not their families. Those that stayed connected to their ex in-laws did not report they did so for the sake of their children; instead they talked about maintaining connections for their own sake. Over the course of their 20- and 30-year marriages, they formed close connections with their mother- and father-in-law, their brothers- and sisters-in-law and some of the nieces and nephews. This was not something they seemed willing to sacrifice. For this sample of women, connections with ex in-laws and/or ex-husbands did seem to enhance their post divorce adjustment. What seemed to matter the most was that some historical connection point was maintained post divorce. This idea of maintaining connection with ex in-laws seems important. Therapists can start to give permission to baby boomer women to maintain connection or reconnect in a meaningful way to their ex in-laws post divorce. This may prove to be an important factor in positive post divorce adjustment. Clinicians can also recognize and support client’s who are grieving the ambiguous loss of the ex in-law relationships.

When considering how this cohort is different, some differences do emerge. Non baby boomer women may not see a need to maintain connection with the ex in-laws. Many of the younger divorced women have minor children, and their ex-husbands are viewed as holding primary responsibility for his family connections. Also, they have spent less time in their ex-husband's family structure so their connections may be fewer. Finally, the macrosystem of the younger divorced women may have a greater influence over her by encouraging her to repartner, move on, and let go. Today's American culture seems to push the idea of leaving it behind and moving forward; for older women the cultural influence may be different, thus allowing them more flexibility in how they handle their connections within their family systems.

Loneliness, Repartnering, Not Dating, Single by Choice

By the time these women had reached the final stage of their post divorce adjustment, they had negotiated most of the crisis and the related overwhelming elements of the divorce process. Many of them starting to think about their romantic lives somewhere in the adapting stage; by the time they reached the final stage of their divorce adjustment process, most of them had come to a place of resolution. They were either resolved to stay single or were currently dating or repartnered, or were in a hopeful place of wanting and waiting to date; some were experiencing frustration around wanting to date and not being able to date. None of them presented with any ambivalence about what they wanted in the area of dating or not dating and repartnering.

Another reported benefit for these divorced women manifested itself in their next romantic relationship: they had learned how 'not to do it' in their long-term marriages. Many of the women who are repartnered reported they knew what they wanted in their next relationship and it was very different from what they had in their marriages. They wanted more freedom and

equality, more honest heartfelt communication and connection, and less fighting and separateness. They and the women who are hoping to repartner all say the same thing: they are not going to settle for anything less than what they want. Schneller and Arditti (2004) reported similar findings in their interviews with divorced men and women who repartnered: the participants wanted more egalitarianism, more expressive communication, and improved resolution skills. So this study extends the literature in an important manner. It shows that baby boomer women who choose to date and repartner do so with a common goal in mind--doing it better the second time around--and they are willing to wait for what they want.

Loneliness. Many participants reported feeling lonely at some point during the divorce adjustment process. This supports a 10-year follow-up study by Duffy, Thomas, and Trayner (2002) that found women who were not repartnered 10 years after their divorce struggled with loneliness. The experience of loneliness and not repartnering and the negative impact on post divorce adjustment is supported within the divorce literature (Amato, 2010; Bair, 2007; Duffy, Thomas, & Trayner, 2002; Määttä, 2011; Montenegro, 2004). Määttä (2011) reported in her review of divorced person's letters, "The feeling of loneliness disappears when one stops considering moments of loneliness as signs of one's worthlessness. Fear of being alone fades along with the growing realization that one's self can be 'enough'" (p. 428). Several important findings emerged from the data as important processes the women went through: finding themselves, feeling increased self worth, and learning to be okay when alone. Some women (i.e., who want to date and are not) reported they still struggled with loneliness. Further investigation is warranted in examining feelings of loneliness, self-worth, and how they impact the divorce adjustment process in baby boomer women.

In the AARP (Montenegro, 2004) national survey of divorced Americans 40 and older,

many reported difficult experiences post divorce. Loneliness and depression were reported by 29% of those surveyed. One of the most reported fears in the AARP study was that of being alone post divorce (45%) and not repartnering (24%). This current study supports what others have reported within the divorce literature: loneliness and not repartnering can lead to feelings of frustration and disappointment that can negatively impact post divorce adjustment.

Divorced women in the 50 and older category may experience less opportunities for dating when compared to younger divorced women due to smaller dating pools. Some women in this current study reported building new social networks that sometimes lead to dating opportunities. They also actively sought out connections and attended social events that helped to diminish feelings of loneliness and had positive impact on their post divorce adjustment.

Repartnering. This current study supports what previous researchers (Tschann, Johnston, & Wallerstein, 1989) found: post divorce is positively impacted by “development of a social life and a new intimate relationship” (p. 1033). Nine women (both groups) in this study are repartnered while two are remarried. Several studies within the divorce literature support the idea of dating/repartnering as having positive impact on the post divorce adjustment process (Bair, 2007; Duffy, Thomas, & Trayner, 2002; Molina & Mazur Abel, 2010; Schneller & Arditti, 2004; Thabes, 1997). This current study supports what others have reported about positive benefits of repartnering post divorce.

Seven of the nine repartnered women in this study reported they are happy in their relationships. Two women reported struggling in their romantic relationships: one unresolved woman has not figured out how to live with her partner, and one resolved woman wants to kick her partner out of her house and had not figured out how to do that. Overall the women who repartnered post divorce talked about how rich their lives are: they are happier, enjoying sex

more, and felt their lives have improved.

Not dating. Ten women (five ‘no peace’) in this current study are not dating and would like to be dating. All but one of the unresolved group reported they are distressed over not dating or being repartnered: they spoke of wanting this opportunity and feeling cheated at not being able to experience this. Five women in the resolved group and one woman in the unresolved group reported they would like to date and/or repartner, but report not being frustrated or distressed over it not having happened yet. This phenomenon warrants further study: frustration and disappointment over not dating and potential impact it has on post divorce adjustment.

Wallerstein (1986) reported that anger and loneliness were present in divorced women that had not repartnered or had redivorced; this was seen as negatively impacting their post divorce adjustment process. The divorce literature suggests that people who do not repartner seem to have a poorer divorce adjustment process: what is less clear is how baby boomer women, who choose to remain single, do in their post divorce adjustment process.

Single by choice. Mahay and Lewin (2007) reported on a recent phenomenon: older women are less likely to remarry. The authors suggest the reason is the women see the costs outweigh the benefits. This is supported by this current study. Six women, three from each subgroup, have decided to remain single and not date/repartner post divorce. Each of them reported they had ruled out dating: none of them felt it would be a good fit for them. Most of them reported they were tired of the drama, feared repeating their previous patterns, or were just ready to live life on their own terms and not cater to anyone else. Is this decision based on fear? Perhaps, or maybe the decision was made to support the women in their later stage of development: living life for themselves on their own terms.

A new normal may be emerging for some women over the age of 50 who are divorced:

opting to stay single and not date. This makes the baby boomer women unique within the divorce literature; when younger women divorce, the expectation for many is they will eventually repartner. For this cohort of women, that may not be the case; and opting to stay single may also prove to be the new normal (Mahay & Lewin, 2007).

Social Support

Thomas and Ryan (2008) and Hayes and Anderson (1993) reported social support has a positive impact on post divorce adjustment. There are several sources of support that women in this study sought. Some women described the support they received from their adult children and how it had a positive influence on their post divorce adjustment process. Wright and Maxwell (1991) reported on this phenomenon: mothers receiving support from adult children post divorce. This form of support distinguishes this cohort of women from their younger cohorts; younger women typically have minor children at the time of divorce that can offer little support.

The 25 women in this current study reported varying responses from family and friends concerning their divorces. Some experienced rejection from their peers and communities; some felt treated as if they were contagious others reported angry responses from family members and friends. A few women talked about feeling out of place in their places of worship; they spoke of not being included in social events once others found out they were getting a divorce. Some reported they had friends they never heard from again post divorce. For a few women this did negatively impact their post divorce adjustment process; one participant stopped going to church all together.

Many of these women were able to move through these painful experiences and found they were able to reorganize their social networks to better support their divorce status; others struggled with this. Sakraida (2005) found support for this when she reported older women who

experienced a later life divorce reported experiencing social stigma post divorce. She also reported the initiators of divorce reported both social support losses and social support gains during their post divorce adjustment process.

Typically, social support is seen as a protective factor during the post divorce adjustment period; what is not found in the literature is how others' reactions or responses (i.e., microsystem, mesosystem, macrosystem) impacted women's identity and post divorce adjustment. This current study suggests that baby boomer women do have great networking skills and have the ability to reform or completely rebuild their social networks when necessary; more importantly many of them were able to incorporate their ex in-laws in a way that supported their post divorce adjustment (and their children's).

Financial

In the final stage of divorce adjustment 10 (three 'no peace') women reported they were financially secure, eight (five 'no peace') were neutral about their financial security, and seven (three 'no peace') reported they were insecure over their financial status. The literature is replete with studies that continue to support the relevance and importance of financial stability as being a large protective factor in the post divorce adjustment period. The studies also report that the age at the time of divorce is important for women; the older a woman is at the time of divorce means she has less working time available to regain financial footing post divorce (Amato, 2010; Bair, 2007; Duffy, Thomas, & Trayner, 2002; Hayes & Anderson, 1993; Hilton & Anderson, 2009; Molina, 2000a; Thabes, 1997; Varner & Mandara, 2009).

This current study indicates women from both groups reported they felt secure, neutral or insecure about their financial status. This may suggest that other factors may be present in addition to financial that have an impact on adjustment. Of the 25 women interviewed for this

study, 18 of them are in the financially neutral or secure group. All seven of the women who are currently retired are in the neutral/secure group. The breakdown for the 11 women (i.e., neutral/secure) who are not retired is as follows: two are looking for work (both have master's degrees), one is on disability, and eight are currently employed. Three of the eight employed women are looking to retire within the next few years. This group of women represent as unique within the divorce literature: either retired or close to retirement and divorced.

When comparing this group of baby boomer women to their younger cohorts, financial security is important to both groups. What is different is that this group of women has reached the latter stage of their work lives. They seem to know this and, despite being divorced at this time of their lives, they seem to be more settled with their financial status and have come to a place of peace around it. Further study is needed on how this process occurred.

For this group of women, the data suggest that financial security or insecurity may be influenced by retirement status, education level, and current employment status. Some potential negative influences on post divorce adjustment may include working for low pay, not working and wanting to work, and having a master's degree and not being able to find work.

Therapy

Four participants (three 'no peace') reported they never made use of therapy at any point in their marriage or post divorce adjustment process, one reason offered was not feeling it was necessary. Of the remaining 21 participants, 17 of them reported they made use of individual therapy before, during, and/or after the divorce and found it beneficial and helpful to their adjustment process. Seven women reported couples therapy was not helpful or beneficial to their process; none reported they did divorce therapy work with their ex-husband. Many of these participants had made use of therapy this current study supports the literature that finds therapy

helpful for positive divorce adjustment process (Duffy, Thomas, & Trayner, 2002).

A Unified Theory of Divorce Adjustment

In order to look at what is helpful in the divorce adjustment process of baby boomer women, I examined the 15 women who reported they were in the resolved group in the final stage of their post divorce adjustment. Looking at the following three tables and the full divorce adjustment model will inform the reader as to which processes occurred at different stages and on which systems level the processes occurred.

The emotions experienced when the marriage ended varied. Table 2 represents at each stage the timing, the process, events and system levels that were impacted once the divorce became a reality. In the early stage, all of the women described various levels of emotions, akin to a crisis state. This impacted them personally and in some cases impacted their families and others in the meso level. The goal was stabilization of emotions and seeking emotional support. This goal was accomplished in several ways. Some used professional support. Some used family and friends as support. The point of the early stage is crisis abatement: stabilize the emotions involved and begin to move forward. The emotional state in the early stage may have been impacted depending on whether the woman was an incubator or initiator of divorce. If she was blindsided by the divorce, the crisis and accompanying emotions may have been more acute.

In the adapting stage many women sought support via professional resources and through informal means. They made use of their networks to help them cope with their feelings. If appropriate support could not be found, women found and formed their own support. For the women in the resolved group, this turned out to be an important step in their process.

In the final stage of divorce adjustment, the 15 resolved women reported letting go of their negative feelings and in some cases actively forgave their ex-husbands. They also had

found new support in their lives that helped them to complete this emotional step.

Table 2 Emotional

Emotional	
Early Stage	
Micro Meso	Emotional Crisis: Experiencing all of the emotional pain and trying to not be overwhelmed. Seeks early support and stabilization: family, friends.
Adapting Stage	
Micro Meso	Emotional Processing: Via therapy, Divorce Care class, Seeking support via family and friends.
Final Stage	
Micro Meso	Emotions Resolved: via family, friends, new support formed
Micro	Actively forgiving, practicing acceptance, letting go of negative affect

The new identities that were formed also followed through the three post divorce stages. The first stage mirrored the emotional crisis: a shattering of their identities. For some this was more shocking than others. For many women, the divorce led to a complete reformulation of their identities including a complete unlinking from relationships and roles held for many years in the marriage. The adapting stage includes a rebuilding or redefining of self, the post divorce identity.

Women in the adapting stage found themselves asking important questions. They tried many things and often made mistakes. The resolved women did not get bogged down in this stage; they continued to push forward and moved towards their new identity. They found they could live on their own and be happy. They formed new relationships, sought input when necessary, and incorporated new beliefs and values about self. Their identities were taking shape in ways that often pleasantly surprised them. They found they had the ability to choose and choose wisely. They kept people and things in their lives that supported their new view of self and discarded those that did not.

The final stage is where it all comes together and these 15 women liked and admired who they had become. They became a person who represented all of their experiences in a way that suggests that ‘I am okay’. They were free to be whatever they desired. They could choose to be in a romantic relationship or not. They de-triangulated themselves from their adult children’s process. They were living their lives the way they wanted to live. They were proud of their process and seemed pleased with the end result: a new identity to carry them into the latter stage of life.

Table 3 Identity

Identity	
Early Stage	
Micro	Identity Shattered: no longer a married woman. Who am I?
Adapting Stage	
Micro	Discovery and Redefining of new identity. Who do I want to become?
Macro	External influences on redefining of identity: culture, religion and media
Micro	Moving: establishing new identity as a woman living on her own via
Meso	redecorating, purchasing own home, establishing self in community
Micro	Financial: earning money, budgeting as a single woman, spending differently,
Meso	thinking and acting independently, Investments, Housing Costs
Exo	
Micro	Trying new things out, seeing how they feel, making corrections, working towards freedom and independence, trusting own decisions learning to trust instincts and her own opinions, seeking or not seeking input from others
Micro	Learning how to be a single mom to children
Meso	
Micro	Forming New Social Support-including ex in-laws
Meso	
Micro	Relational Status
#1	Choosing to Remain Single
#2	Dating or Open to Dating
Final Stage	
Micro	Seeing the impact on her life of choices she has made, making adjustments if necessary
Meso	
Micro	Settling in and owning the “new identity”
Micro	Children are okay
Micro	De-triangulating from their process
Meso	

Table 3 (cont'd)

Micro Meso	Formed new social support
Micro Exo	Financial Stability: education, job, retirement, other income
Micro Meso	Relational Status is settled. Firmly dating or open to dating, single, repartnered
Micro Meso	Living life with freedom: choosing people, places and things that promote happiness and a sense of well-being

Transcendence is suggestive of several things in the lives of these women. In the early stage it is dim and perhaps hidden from their view. This is expected, in a state of crisis and upheaval, hope is often out of reach. In the adapting stage of post divorce adjustment is where we can observe the birth of transcendence. They reported noting differences in their micro and meso systems. They saw the world from a new perspective; their reactions had started to change, new thoughts were beginning to form. Ultimately hope was starting to emerge. They could see they had a chance. They could get through this painful adjustment process. They experienced forward movement: trying new things, different events, all the while noticing they were changing and growing and succeeding. Insight starts to emerge in the adapting stage; this is the birth of meaning-making. They started to change the narrative of their lives. No more were they a victim. They could start to look back over their lifetimes and notice their journey and how it caused them to arrive at this point in their lives. Women in this stage started to regain power and control and learned to enjoy it. They chose differently, they experienced selfishness in a positive way. New goals are set and worked towards; all of this coinciding with being 50+ years old.

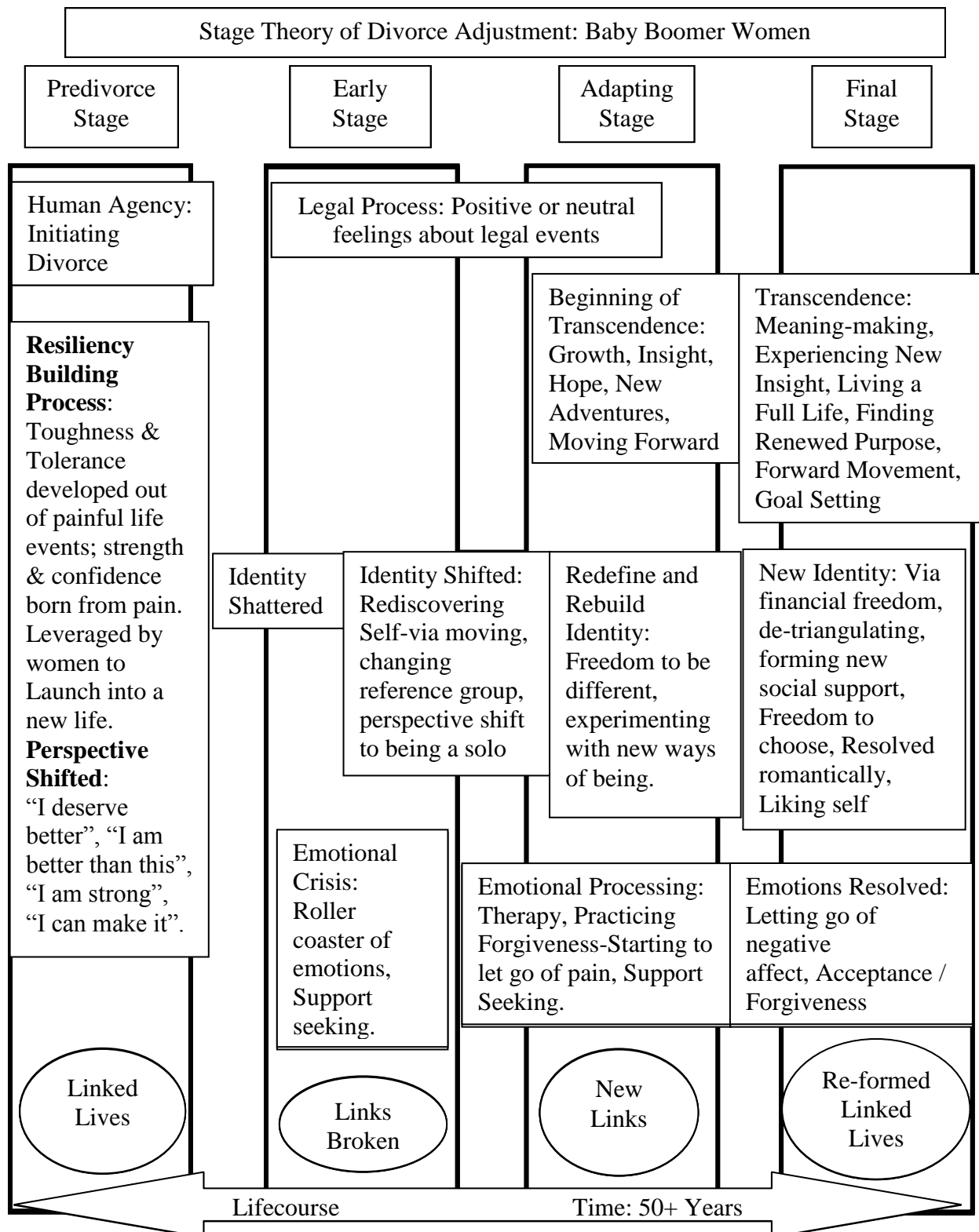
From a micro, meso and macro perspective these women were experiencing numerous changes. The culture of divorce changed. The media started talking about ‘gray divorce’ and several famous people became representative of this phenomenon. These women and their families were all experiencing this phenomenon. The women experienced change on several

levels and incorporated it and moved forward. They cared less about what others thought and they knew others were watching. They went on to have full vibrant lives and began to have grand adventures. They drew new people into their worlds and expanded their perspectives to include their ex, their ex in-laws, and new lovers and friends. All of this was born out of the resilience born from a painful life and marriage.

Table 4 Transcendence

Transcendence		
Early Stage		
Micro	Women experience little to none of the later stage attributes of transcendence.	
Adapting Stage		
Micro Meso	Women notice differences: growth, thoughts, reactions, hope	
Micro	Not holding onto the idea she is a victim or powerless.	
Micro Meso	Forward movement: new experiences, doing things differently, creating different events, improved responses in previously awkward / painful situations	
Micro Meso	New Adventures: doing something out of the box, moving beyond previous life experiences, doing things never thought possible	
Micro	Insight: starting to see how the past influences the present	
Final Stage		
Micro	Meaning-Making: using insight and forward movement as leverage to reframe and create her life story. Adapting and incorporating new behaviors and thoughts to match her new story. Knowing she has the ability to set new goals and achieve them.	
Micro Meso	Experiencing hope for a bright future: via new opportunities for social, emotional, physical, and spiritual growth.	
Micro Meso	#1	New friends and social activities
Micro Meso	#2	New emotional connections formed, or old ones reformed
Micro	#3	Body changes, new and improved sexuality, awareness of physicality
Micro Meso Macro	#4	Seeing the world from a broader perspective. Not feeling alone or disconnected from the big picture. Culture changing: Gray Divorce emerging in the media
Micro	Not seeking or needing other people’s approval, a sense of knowing she is enough and will be okay.	
Micro	Discovering or rediscovering her purpose, renewed vision.	
Micro Meso	Living a life that is full and one she is proud of, knowing others are watching	

Figure 1 Divorce Adjustment Model



Human agency is the process that leads women to believe they could divorce and survive and create and live in a better existence. Transcendence represents a step up to a new and vibrant level of growth and development. It did not occur for all women, but it was evident in the most adapted women who appeared to move forward (and up). Human agency was also important for those who did not initiate their divorce in that they still were acting on their own behalf (e.g., hired a lawyer, sought therapy, formed new social support) so human agency is an important element in all of life.

Resilience is the result of overcoming tough times. The divorce process built resilience. They grew stronger as they went along. Resiliency occurred in all of these women's lives to some degree – they all survived tough times and mostly difficult marriages. Initiating a divorce (did not happen in all the cases) may represent a tipping point, a resilience zenith so-to-speak. The women who initiated could not take the pain any longer and through human agency they chose to unlink their lives from their husbands and from many of the relationships in their ex-husbands circle. They believed they were strong enough and could make it through the process of a later-life divorce. They experienced a shattering of identities with the hope that their lives could be better.

Human agency involves the belief system. For these women, agency involved a belief in self. At some point in the process the “I can do this” came through and resiliency was the result. A belief in self translates into resiliency the application of that belief. Further research needs to be done, but I suspect that the incubation period may become relevant here. The women who were blindsided may not have had as much leverage to launch into the next stage; the incubators had a “heads up” and those who lived separate lives also built up resiliency: by leading a life that appeared to be single.

The final emotional piece is the acceptance/forgiveness or letting go of negative affect. None in the “unresolved group” were able to achieve this, but the “resolved group” did. So the question to yet be answered is what spiritual, family or internal processes were present in the “resolved” group of women? What seems apparent to me is the 15 resolved women’s ability to let go. Three of them let go of their children when they died. Perhaps the skills they learned in this grief/loss process helped them here? You have to also look at the concept of time. They were all 50 + years old, developmentally they were advanced. They were mothers and wives, some buried parents and children. Most had advanced education and worked full time careers. They all learned skills in all of these events, perhaps this too contributed to their ability to let go and move forward. This all comes together to shape women’s perspectives. A lifetime of events, impact and shape a person; the end result is what lead to transcendence, a new identity, and the letting go of negative affect (e.g., acceptance, forgiveness). Those who did better (i.e., resolved) created different meanings, identities that supported their view of themselves, new linkages, and perhaps most important growth. They grew as women and mothers. They recognized their own progress and saw it as good. This translated to their identities and lead to transcendence: a new belief about self.

Loss is a funny concept, we all experience loss in our lives. Loss is subjective. Many women experienced loss via divorce (e.g., financial, social and emotional) but perhaps loss was experienced much earlier on in the relationship and those who adjusted to loss early on experienced an easier process post divorce. This would fall under incubation, separate lives and resiliency building. But I suspect internal processes (beliefs, values, fear, shame) all contribute to the ultimate goal of being resolved post divorce and moving on to new adventures. Perhaps a thorough examination of FOO experiences might shed light here?

All things contribute to identity formation and re-formation. So I expect life experiences--who we love, and how we are loved, brokenness, unlinking lives, changing neighborhoods, starting over--all contribute to identity re-formation. All of these women became “divorced.” Not all of them seem completely okay with their new identity, although I believe a few of the “unresolved” group are much closer than they think. All things contribute to identity forming, reforming, and growth in general.

But considering this cohort experienced upheaval and change throughout their formative years may also be a contributing factor. The older baby boomers did ‘sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll’ and literally rebelled against their parents and the establishment. So perhaps the generational effect contributed to their ability to rebuild themselves post divorce?

In order to look at what was not helpful in the divorce adjustment process of baby boomer women, I thought it would be useful to examine the 10 women who are in the unresolved group in the final stage of their post divorce adjustment.

Emotions unprocessed. All 10 of the unresolved women were still holding onto negative affect in the final stage of divorce adjustment. Shallcross, et al (2013) looked at the construct of acceptance as a mediator for the processing of anger and anxiety. Their study found support for the idea of bringing acceptance into a negative situation or life event and being able to reduce anxiety and anger. They also purport that this process of accepting actually becomes easier as people age. This current study supports this research and may open the door for future research by adding guilt or fear to the list of negative affect that may be mediated through acceptance.

By examining the narratives of three women in the unresolved group--divorced the longest--some interesting data emerge. Their stories warrant further examination. Due to the length of time since the divorce, they stand out in the unresolved group.

They are holding onto negative feelings (e.g., affect) post divorce: anger/resentment or guilt. Two of the women are holding onto feelings of anger/resentment: one reported her ex had an affair and left her (e.g., divorced 14 years) and the other reported her ex got into drugs and financially devastated the family (e.g., divorced 12 years). The third woman reported she still carries guilt for having hurt her ex by having an affair and divorcing him (e.g., divorced eight years). They all seem to be stuck. They have not been able to move on, even years after the divorce is final. This makes them somewhat unique within the unresolved group; their experiences seem to suggest that time since divorce may be irrelevant if emotional processing post divorce is incomplete. This supports previous research that found long term anger post divorce can have negative impact on post divorce adjustment (Rye, Folck, Heim, Olszewski, & Traina, 2004). Future research is needed in this important clinical area.

Rohde-Brown & Rudestam (2011) reported withholding forgiveness negatively impacted divorce adjustment: they also found that people who suffer with depression are less likely to be able to offer forgiveness. In this current study, six unresolved participants reported they struggled with depression at some point in their post divorce adjustment process. The three previously mentioned participants all reported experiencing depression during the early and adapting stages of their post divorce adjustment. According to research (Rohde-Brown & Rudestam, 2011), post divorce depression can impact people's ability to offer forgiveness to self or to ex, and may have negative impact on post divorce adjustment.

Thabes (1997) reported that 26 participants were struggling with depression five years post divorce. They had endured abuse, infidelity during marriage, lack of forgiveness, lack of social support, little social activity, lower income, and not being repartnered. Many of the women in this current study experienced many of the same things. Further research is needed in

the area of unprocessed negative affect, depression and the impact on divorce adjustment.

All 25 women interviewed reported experiencing many feelings during their divorce adjustment process. One thing that all 10 women in the unresolved group have in common is being stuck in their emotional process: guilt, fear, surprising depression, anger/resentment, disappointment leading to feelings of failure. For the group of women in this current study, it would seem as if their unprocessed feelings are an inhibiting factor that is keeping them stuck (i.e., unable to move from unresolved to resolved) in their post divorce adjustment process. This current study extends the literature by highlighting several key negative affective states that if allowed to remain, may inhibit positive post divorce adjustment process.

How did the 15 resolved women avoid getting stuck in their emotional process post divorce? All of them reported experiencing many feelings during predivorce, early, adapting and the final stage of divorce. Several strategies or coping skills are present in the narratives that suggested they were able to move through their pain: they let go and ended up in a place of peace. They created meaning in their lives: by creating new social networks (e.g., card club); gaining education about their process (i.e., post divorce care, Divorce Care Class©); realizing they did all they could to save the marriage (e.g., it's not my fault, he's gay); worked to actively forgive their ex-husbands; found a place of stability (e.g., financial, employment, housing), falling in love; making a decision to be happily single (i.e., identity shift); starting new adventures (e.g., graduate school, dancing, going to fun places, and yoga); and experiencing freedom and learning to value it. All of these events and experiences emerged from the data; they seem to suggest it is very possible for women to let go of their negative affect and create a new life post divorce. Many of the unresolved women had positive experiences post divorce (i.e., dating/repartnering, moving, formed new social networks); none of them actively forgave their

ex-husbands, attended a Divorce Care Class®, or were able to give themselves permission to let go of their emotional pain.

One of the core strategies used by the resolved group was that of meaning-making. These 15 women can look back over the past three decades and see it for what it was: a long term marriage that did not work out. They did not get stuck in guilt, anger, resentment, disappointment, or fear. They viewed themselves as survivors with a bright future ahead of them. The ability to make meaning of their lives, the marriage, and the divorce seems to have made all the difference in the final stage of their divorce adjustment.

Timing. As in life, timing is everything; or, at least for this sample there is a minimum amount of time needed to accomplish the post divorce processing. For this sample of baby boomer women it would seem that four years is the minimal time needed to stabilize, rebuild, and reconnect post divorce. The current literature suggests two to three years but this current study extends the research and suggests that for baby boomer women, the time needed is four or more years. If the emotional processing is completed (i.e., dealing with guilt, fear, anger/resentment, and disappointment leading to feelings of failure) and the relational status is settled (i.e., single by choice, repartnered) it may be true that for baby boomer women, four years is a more realistic time frame.

Children. For this sample of divorced women, one potential key predictor in positive post divorce adjustment hinges on the well-being of the children and the ability of women to let go of their children's process. The 15 resolved women all reported their children were doing well and had adjusted post divorce; at the time of the interview 100% of their children were adults. Of the 10 women in the unresolved group, nine participants' children were adults. One participant shared custody of her minor sons with her ex.

Based on the narratives of the mothers, some observations could be made about the children and how this sample is unique. All of the adult children chose whether or not to have a relationship with their father, their father's family, where they lived, and how they wanted to be in relationship with both of their parents. Some of the resolved women reported their children continue to struggle in their relationships with their fathers. The children want their dads to be different: stop using drugs/alcohol, stop running around with women, be more available, be more mature, be less selfish, or act less 'crazy.' These resolved women have let go of their children's relationships with their fathers; they don't own it, control it, and try not to worry about it. All of them found ways to connect with their children post divorce: none of them try to manage the relationship between their ex-husbands and their adult children. This seems to have brought them a sense of peace post divorce. All 15 resolved women reported they had a good relationship with their children

Three of the 10 unresolved women reported their relationship with their children was strained on some level. Some of the unresolved women reported they are deeply concerned and worried about their children's relationships with their fathers. They watch their children wanting their dads to be different post divorce: stop being controlled by new wife, be more available, act less 'crazy,' be more independent, be more responsible: or they want their dad's to want to be in a relationship with them. All of these children want things from their dads (just like the children of the women in the resolved group). The difference for the unresolved mom's seems to be: they can't let go of feeling responsible for the relationship between their kids and their ex. This seems to be an inhibiting factor to their positive post divorce adjustment.

Data emerged from the narratives that seemed to suggest the resolved women were able to let go of the responsibility to fix or control their kids and their exes' relationships. Several

factors emerged on how these women were able to accomplish this letting go process. A few women invoked spiritual practices: acceptance, letting go, forgiving, or giving over to God. Some reported they let go because they felt they had to: it was no longer their job to manage the relationship between kids and dad. A few actively tried to patch up the relationship between kids and dad. If it worked they were happy; if it didn't, they gave up and reported they had tried. A few of the resolved women reported they supported their children in their frustrations with their fathers; they did not judge them or criticize them. They just love and support them and allow their children to follow their own path. Ultimately, they gave up the belief they could fix their children's issues.

All 15 resolved women reported their children are doing well in life, working towards their goals, with no obvious post divorce adjustment issues. All of the unresolved women reported they are concerned on some level with their children's post divorce adjustment process; they see them struggling to meet life's goals. The children seem to be stuck or have issues with their father and/or his family. The amount of worry varies, from P1 who wonders if her daughter and her ex will ever truly connect; to P7 whose daughter has totally cut herself off from her father. All of the unresolved women reported they struggle watching their children struggle. Some of them believe the pain their children are going through was caused by the divorce. One potential risk factor for this group: watching adult children struggle post divorce. A potential protective factor: letting go of being responsible for children's happiness. Because they have adult children, this cohort is unique within the divorce literature. Younger women with minor children believe they are responsible for their children's lives and relationships; some older women understand they are no longer responsible. This important difference warrants further study.

Social support. Adequate social support is a predictor of positive post divorce adjustment. Four of the 10 unresolved women (40%) reported they had good social support during their post divorce adjustment period; 12 of 15 women (80%) in the resolved group reported they had good social support during their post divorce adjustment process.

Nine of 15 resolved women reported they have a good connection with their ex in-laws, and four reported they have a good relationship with their ex-husband. Eight of the ten unresolved group reported they have little to no contact with their ex-husband's family; 90% of the unresolved group reported having little or no relationship with their ex-husband. Potential risk factors for this population may include having poorer social support during the divorce adjustment process, and not maintaining relationships with ex-husband and/or his family of origin. Further research is needed in this area of baby boomer women and the impact of connection with ex or ex in-laws on post divorce adjustment.

Employment. At the time of the interview, seven of 25 women were retired (one started a second career post retirement), 14 of 25 women were employed or not seeking work (one was a graduate student), four of 25 women were seeking employment, one of 25 was disabled. The divorce literature supports stable employment as a protective factor for people experiencing a divorce (Hayes & Anderson, 1993). Two of the four women seeking employment are in the unresolved group. The one woman who is on disability is struggling financially. She reported she has always worked multiple jobs to make money and support her family; since her accident she has not been able to support herself and is struggling to make ends meet.

This group is unique within the divorce literature due to the ages of the group (mean = 57.6 years old). In this sample, 28% are presently retired. Baby boomer women have devoted a large percentage of their lives to working; many of them are within a few years of retirement. Of

the ten unresolved women in this study, five are actively working (one is a retiree with a second career), one is retired and not working, one is choosing not to work, one is on disability, and two are seeking employment and they both have master's degrees. The last three women listed reported high levels of frustration in not being able to work; this could be inhibiting post divorce adjustment.

Forgiveness. Although the question was not explicitly asked during the interview, several participants talked about forgiveness during their divorce adjustment process. Of the ten women represented in the 'no-peace' subgroup, three of them reported they have not forgiven their ex-husband. Since the question was not asked explicitly, the rest of the participants 'state of forgiveness' is unknown. This is a limitation of this study.

Implications for Clinical Practice

Themes identified in this study suggest clinical implications for therapists when working with women from this birth cohort who are going through or have undergone a later life divorce. Therapists can consider focusing on skill building (helping client's process negative affect and the reasons why it is crucial to do so), creating new social support and managing anxiety/fear around that, coaching clients on living with freedom post divorce, and helping clients let go of adult children's pain and process.

Clinicians can best serve this population by normalizing worries and fears about dating and giving clients permission to remain single by choice. Clients can also be helped by clinicians giving permission to clients to stay in touch and connected with ex-husbands' and his family of origin. The relationships may look different but the connection seems to be an important factor for baby boomer divorced women. It might also be helpful for clinicians to remind their clients of the skills and abilities they have acquired over their lifetimes and how many of those can be

transferred to new areas in women's post divorce lives (e.g., employment, networking, social support rebuilding).

A therapeutic reminder can also be given to post divorce women who seem stuck in the emotional process of their adult children. This de-triangulation can be explained by clinicians as well as how important it is mothers to let children handle their relationships with dad and his family of origin. Giving permission to women to "let go" may end up being a simple but powerful intervention.

Limitations

Research bias was designed to be minimal during this study; however it is likely the researcher's bias influenced this study due to the qualitative methodology. A self-reflective process was used via field notes and regular meetings with faculty advisor; the researcher met with faculty advisor on the research questions and the interview questions in order to minimize bias. Bias may have influenced the questions asked during the interview; this was minimized by the use of field notes. Bias may have crept in through the process of coding: the faculty advisor offered feedback on codes and themes during the interpretive process. This process and these items are described in Chapter 3.

Limitations of this current study include: underrepresentation of cultural diversity. Twenty-five women were interviewed for this study, twenty of them identified as white or Caucasian. This sample was overrepresented in the area of education: 18 out of 25 participants had college degrees, and 12 of the 18 had master's degrees. This is outside of the norm for this cohort.

Baby boomer women experiencing a later life divorce is a broad topic and further study is warranted on their post divorce adjustment. Future studies are needed using larger samples, with

greater diversity. It would also be helpful to study the ex-husbands and the children of the baby boomer women who divorce. Further studies on baby boomer women are also needed to investigate the cause and effect process at work: separateness in the marriage and resiliency building, initiator status and the impact on adjustment, freedom impacting post divorce adjustment, choosing to stay single post divorce and its impact on divorce adjustment, frustration in not being able to date or repartner and its impact, retirement's impact on post divorce adjustment, a shift in financial status in later years and its impact on divorce adjustment, acceptance as a mediator for eliminating negative affect, forgiveness and its role on divorce adjustment, well-being of the adult children and impact on divorced parents' adjustment, adult children's support, and connections with ex in-laws post divorce.

This current study is a preliminary foray into the world of baby boomer divorced women. It is the hope of this researcher that further studies will be conducted; this group of women deserves a place within the literature, a place that tells their stories.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Divorced Women 50 – 64 Participants Requested

This research study will explore mid-life divorced women to find out about their divorce and post divorce experiences. The primary goal is to discover how women ages 50 – 64 have adjusted to life after their divorce.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR PARTICIPATION:

You must be a female between the ages of 50 – 64.

You must be divorced from your ex-husband for at least 2 years.

You must have been divorced after the age of 47 years old.

You must have parented at least one child with your ex-husband.

No prior marriages.

You must be available for an in-person interview, approximately 90 to 120 minutes in length, and a follow-up phone interview.

Participants will receive a \$50 Visa gift card for participating in the study.

If you are interested in signing up or finding out more about this study, contact

Yvonne P. Makidon, LMSW, LMFT, CAADC by telephone at (810) 659-7242 or

by email at: makidony@msu.edu

All information will be kept confidential.

Appendix B

Research Study: Baby Boomer Divorced Women's Experiences

Participant Number: _____

Age: _____ DOB (Month/Year): _____

Date of separation (Month/Year): _____

Date of Divorce Decree (Month/Year): _____

How long did the divorce take to complete: _____

Who initiated the divorce: participant ex-spouse

Number of Years Married to ex-husband: _____

Number of children parented with ex-husband: _____

Age of child(ren) at the time of divorce: _____ Gender: _____

Age of child(ren) at the time of divorce: _____ Gender: _____

Age of child(ren) at the time of divorce: _____ Gender: _____

Age of child(ren) at the time of divorce: _____ Gender: _____

Age of child(ren) at the time of divorce: _____ Gender: _____

Age of child(ren) at the time of divorce: _____ Gender: _____

Age of child(ren) at the time of divorce: _____ Gender: _____

Ages of grandchildren (if applicable): _____

Any previous marriages? _____ If yes, how many? _____

If yes, how did the marriage end? _____ death _____ divorce _____ other

What is your employment status (please circle)?

Employed full time Employed part-time Retired Unemployed Volunteer
Other _____

Where are/were you employed? _____

What is/was your primary employment function? _____

Profession? _____

Highest level of education obtained? _____

Current Income (including child support, alimony): less than \$10,000 \$10,000 to
\$30,000 \$30,001 to \$50,000 \$50,001 to \$70,000 more than \$70, 000

Please circle which statement below best describes your “current economic security”:

I feel: Very insecure Insecure Neutral Secure Very Secure

Race: _____

Ethnicity: _____

Religion: _____

How is your health: Excellent Good Fair Poor Other: _____

Any Current Health Concerns: _____

Any Past Health Concerns: _____

Appendix C

Interview Guide

Tell me the story of your divorce, from either the day you or your ex-husband initiated the divorce, until a point in time you considered the divorce to be resolved (until you were at a place of peace regarding the divorce). *The interviewer will ask prompts along the way based on the story that emerges but this process will largely be an uninterrupted version of the divorce and post divorce events.*

Key areas to ask participant about during the dialogue: divorce initiation, financial aftermath, child custody, legal proceedings, family support, friend support, social life impact, community support, effects on work life, any physical health effects, any mental health issues.

1. Tell me about the resources and people that helped you make it through the divorce process.

Anything else?

2. What do you wish you had during this time period that you did not have?

3. What did you find most difficult about your divorce?

4. Do you think you have adjusted post-divorce?

If yes, in what ways?

What helped the most?

If no, can you tell me more about that?

5. What do you wish had been different?

Anything else?

6. How did the divorce affect your financial well-being?

Working?

Salary?

Ability to pay bills?

Did you have to relocate?

Did any of the above change as a result of the divorce?

How?

How do you feel about the process/changes?

7. Did you have to gain new skills or increase your education after the divorce?

8. Tell me about your post divorce relationships with your ex-husband and his family?

How would you like these relationships to be?

Anything else?

9. What did you discover about yourself during or since the divorce?

10. What, if anything, would you like to see different?

Anything else?

11. How do you currently spend your time and who is in your social circle?

Your children?

12. How did the children experience the divorce?

- Did your relationship with them change?
- Did their relationship with their father and his family change since the divorce?
- Your grandchildren? (If applicable)
- Can you describe your relationship with them?
- Can you describe the impact (if any) your divorce has had on them?
- 13. New Partner(s)? (if applicable)
- Can you tell me about your dating/repartnering experience since the divorce?
- 14. If you have been sexually active, can you tell me what this was like for you?
- What has this been like for you?
- 15. Are you currently in a committed relationship?
- Can you tell me how this is for you?
- How is it the same or different from your marriage?
- 16. Have you changed the way you are in this relationship based on your experiences with your ex-husband?
- 17. Your friends?
- Have they changed since the divorce?
- 18. Your hobbies or free time?
- 19. Have you changed your physical activity level?
- How?
- Any surprises?
- Anything else?
- 20. Tell me about your health?
- Since the divorce how has it been affected?
- Weight?
- Lifestyle changes?
- Eating habits?
- 21. Tell me about your mental health.
- Anything else?
- 22. Have you been to see a therapist?
- Tell me about that experience?
- Did you find it beneficial?
- 23. Can you describe what impact society (e.g., peers, neighbors, community, the media) had on your post divorce adjustment process?
- Anything else?
- 24. What advice would you like to offer to other women undergoing the same process you did?
- 25. Is there anything you wish had been different?
- Can you tell me about that?
- Anything else?

Appendix D

Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research project. Researchers are required to provide a consent form to inform you about the study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation, and to empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Study Title: Baby Boomer Divorced Women's Experiences

Researcher and Title: Yvonne P. Makidon, LMSW, LMFT, CAADC – Doctoral Candidate

Department and Institution: Human Development and Family Studies, Michigan State University

I, _____, acting for myself, agree to participate in the research study entitled: Baby Boomer Divorced Women's Experiences. This work will be carried out by Yvonne P. Makidon, LMSW, LMFT, CAADC under the supervision of Adrian Blow, Ph. D., the Dissertation Chair. This study is conducted under the auspices of the Human Development and Family Studies program at Michigan State University in E. Lansing, MI., 48824, (517) 432-2953, as part of the requirements for fulfilling the Ph.D. program.

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The purpose of this study is to research the experience of divorced women ages 50 – 64. Results may be used to educate the field of Marriage and Family Therapy to provide more effective clinical services, while also helpful in expanding the current literature.

WHAT YOU WILL DO

Participation in this study will involve being interviewed for 90 minutes to 120 minutes in length, with a follow-up telephone interview for clarification purposes. The time frame for completing the interviews will depend on the availability of the participant, and the ability to coordinate scheduled times with this researcher. If you agree to participate in this study, we will do the following:

Sign a consent form.

Schedule and participate in a 90 minute to 120 minute interview, with a follow-up telephone interview for clarification, at a time convenient for both of us.

Agree the interview will be audiotape recorded.

Understand you will receive a monetary incentive of a \$50 dollar Visa gift card at the initial sit down interview.

It is important you are aware participation in this research is voluntary and you may stop the interview at any time. The location of the interview will be your choice: in your home, in the private practice office space provided by this researcher, or a mutually agreed upon location.

I agree to allow audiotaping of the interview.

_____ Yes _____ No Initials _____

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

There are no direct benefits for participation in this research project. However, you may experience positive feelings (e.g., a sense of relief in being able to talk about your divorce experience). You will receive a monetary incentive of a \$50 gift card following the 90 – 120 minute interview. Your story will help the Marriage and Family Therapy field better serve those in family transition such as yours, and will add to the clinical literature. It is hoped benefits to greater society will result with exposure and knowledge about these types of family transitions.

COSTS

There is no monetary cost associated with participation in this study. Any expenses incurred due to travel costs will be paid by this researcher. There will be a time cost of at most 2.5 hours (initial sit down interview plus follow up telephone interview).

POTENTIAL RISKS/SIDE EFFECTS

It is possible you may be asked about sensitive issues that could evoke negative responses. If you are observably upset to the point of not being able to continue the interview, I will stop the interview to ask and assess how you are feeling. If additional support is needed, I will provide you with the names of two therapists and a mental health agency that can help you sort out some of the feelings you may be having.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

The information you provide is confidential. Your identity and the identity of any persons to whom you refer to during these interviews will not appear or be used in this research project. However, phrases and/or sentences you say may be used anonymously as data in this study. You give your consent to have this data published. The audio files used in this study will be destroyed immediately after they are transcribed. Raw data, such as transcriptions and notes will be secured in a locked filing cabinet for a maximum of three years after this researcher graduates. At the end of the three year period the raw data will be destroyed.

YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW

By signing this consent form, you agree to take part in this study. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time. You may change your mind at any time and withdraw. You have not given up any of your rights or released this institution from responsibility for carelessness. You may cancel your consent to continue in this study at any time without penalty of loss of benefits. You have the right to terminate participation in this study at any time. Your relationship with this researcher or staff of the Human Development and Family Studies program at Michigan State University will not be affected in any way, now or in the future, if you refuse to take part, or if you begin the study and then withdraw.

If you have any questions about the research methods, you can call Yvonne P. Makidon at 810-659-7242 or Adrian Blow, Ph.D. Dissertation Chair at 517-432-7092.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS (*Required element of consent*)

If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part

of it, or to report an injury, please contact the researcher: Yvonne P. Makidon, 8323 Officepark Drive, Grand Blanc, MI 48439, 810-659-7242, makidony@msu.edu).

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

SIGNATURES

I have read this consent form and agree to take part in this study as it is explained in this consent form.

Signature of Participant

Date

I certify I have explained the research to _____ and believe she understands and has agreed to participate freely. I agree to answer any additional questions when they arise during the research or afterward.

Signature of Researcher

Date

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

Appendix E

Table 5. Relating Research Questions to Theory

Theory	Research Question	Interview Questions and Prompts
Human Ecological Theory	How do women divorcing in mid to late life describe their divorce experiences?	Tell me the story of your divorce, from either the day you or your ex-husband initiated the divorce, until a point in time you considered the divorce to be resolved (until you were at a place of peace regarding the divorce). Anything else?
Human Ecological Theory	What influence the post divorce adjustment?	1. Tell me about the resources and people that helped you make it through the divorce process. Anything else? What do you wish you had during this time period that you did not have? 2. How did the divorce affect your financial well-being? Working? Salary? Ability to pay bills? Did you have to relocate? Did any of the above change as a result of the divorce? How? How do you feel about the process/changes? Did you have to gain new skills or increase your education after the divorce? 3. Can you describe what impact society (e.g., peers, neighbors, community, the media) had on your post divorce adjustment process? Anything else?
Life course Perspective	How do women divorcing in mid to late life describe their divorce experiences?	1. What did you find most difficult about your divorce? 2. Do you think you have adjusted post-divorce? If yes, in what ways? What helped the most? If no, can you tell me more about that? What do you wish had been different? Anything else?

Table 5 (cont'd)

<p>Life course Perspective</p>	<p>What influenced the post divorce adjustment?</p>	<p>1.Tell me about your post divorce relationships with your ex-husband and his family? How would you like these relationships to be? Anything else?</p> <p>2.What did you discover about yourself during or since the divorce? What, if anything, would you like to see different? Anything else?</p> <p>3.How do you currently spend your time and who is in your social circle? Your children? How did they experience the divorce? Did your relationship with them change? Did their relationship with their father and his family change since the divorce? Your grandchildren? (If applicable) Can you describe your relationship with them? Can you describe the impact (if any) your divorce has had on them? New Partner(s)? (if applicable) Can you tell me about your dating/repartnering experience since the divorce? If you have been sexually active, can you tell me what this was like for you? What has this been like for you? Are you currently in a committed relationship? Can you tell me how this is for you? How is it the same or different from your marriage? Have you changed the way you are in this relationship based on your experiences with your ex-husband? Your friends? Have they changed since the divorce? Your hobbies or free time? Have you changed your physical activity level? How? Any surprises? Anything else?</p> <p>4.Tell me about your health? Since the divorce how has it been affected? Weight? Lifestyle changes? Eating habits? Tell me about your mental health. Anything else? Have you been to see a therapist? Tell me about that experience? Did you find it beneficial?</p>
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