

EXPERIENCE OF YOUNG ADULTS FROM DIVORCED FAMILIES
(Research conducted at the Rand Afrikaans University)

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OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie is ontwerp om die effek wat ouers se egskeiding op die ontwikkelingsfase van jong volwassenheid het, te bestudeer. Die doel van die studie was om sekere insig te verskaf oor die langtermyn effekte van ouerlike egskeiding. Die wyse waarop ouer-kind verhoudings in geskeide gesinne persoonlike identifikasies vorm en hoe hierdie aspekte die individu se vermoë beïnvloed om van die gesin van oorsprong afstand te doen en die wyse waarop die jong volwassene se gedragpatrone in intieme verhoudings beïnvloed word, was van spesifieke belang. Die studie was kwalitatief van aard en data is ingesamel deur indiepte, ongestruktureerde onderhoude (as deel van 'n terapeutiese proses), met drie jong volwassenes wie ouerlike egskeidings beleef het. 'n Intra-individuele ontleding van die inligting verskaf deur elke deelnemer het 'n begrip verskaf van hul fenomenologiese beleving van ouerlike egskeiding terwyl 'n inter-individuele ontleding van hul ervarings 'n bespreking van algemene en kontrasterende temas en patrone verskaf het. Die resultate dui daarop dat ouerlike egskeiding 'n proses is wat individue se ontwikkeling beïnvloed. Alhoewel hierdie proses negatiewe aspekte insluit bied dit ook die geleentheid vir kinders van geskeide ouers om hierdie aspekte te verander en aan te pas om positiewe betekenis daaruit te verkry.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the way in which the effects of parental divorce surface during the developmental period of young adulthood. The aim of the study was to offer some insight into the long-term effects of parental divorce. Of particular interest was how the parent-child relationships in divorced homes foster personal identifications and how this affects the individual's ability to separate from the family of origin as well as the young adult's patterns of relating to others in intimate relationships. The design of the study was qualitative and data was collected through in-depth unstructured interviews (part of a therapeutic process) with three young adults who have experienced parental divorce. An intra-individual analysis of the information offered by each participant rendered an understanding of their phenomenological experience of parental divorce while an inter-individual analysis of their accounts permitted a discussion of common and contrasting themes and patterns. The findings indicate that divorce is a process that influences development and helps to shape individuals into the people they are today. This process includes negative and detrimental aspects but also provides ways in which individuals can alter and adjust these effects in a way that is meaningful and positive.

INTRODUCTION

Divorce is a phenomenon, which necessarily affects both children and adults. Unfortunately, the increase in its occurrence has not alleviated its effects and many still grapple with these effects years after the legal separation (Kaslow, 1994:66).

Although a divorce is by definition a legal event it is a process that rarely begins with a summons and infrequently ends in the courtroom. In fact the legal divorce often just marks the culmination of a painful process that began earlier in a marriage and has numerous sequelae in the post-divorce period (Kaslow, 1994:67). For this reason, it is important that divorce is conceptualised as a process rather than a single event. It is also important to recognise that as a process, divorce is a different experience for an adult and a child because the child loses something that is fundamental to its development - the family structure. The family structure lays the foundations that supports the child's physical, emotional and psychological ascent into maturity. The collapse of this structure leaves the child in a world that is temporarily without support (Pipher, 1996:10). As with other crises, the effects of divorce are experienced individually by each member of the family. However, the body of research on its effects suggests that general themes do arise and that specific reactions may be intensified during different developmental stages (Todorski, 1995:190; Pipher, 1996:11; Hines, 1997:375).

Examining the effects of the divorce process within the conceptual framework of this study offers one perspective on how children are affected by divorce at various stages in their development. Attachment theory has long been viewed within the context of infant and child development with a primary interest in the effects of poor attachments, separation or loss of attachment (Bowlby, 1969:86, 1982:67; Kernberg, 1982:894). Although most of the early theorists focused on loss of attachment through neglect or death, the relationships between attach-

ment and divorce is becoming a research area in its own right (Todorski, 1995:189). The value of an approach such as this is that it allows for an investigation of the potential effects of the divorce process on the development of individual internal working models. This in turn facilitates an understanding of the impact of divorce on the expression of attachment behaviour, on the patterns of attachment that may be set up historically in the family and the possible influence this may have on the young adult's present relationships.

In reviewing the effects of early attachments on present relationships, Byng-Hall (1990:228-229) incorporates both attachment and systemic principles in noting that insecurity in one family member's past attachment relationships can affect the individual's current relationships and resonate throughout the family system. Byng-Hall and Stevenson-Hinde (1991:189) identify the following four ways in which security in attachment relationship may affect other relationships. An individual may attempt to 'capture' an attachment figure within the family, turn to an *inappropriate* attachment figure, or respond *inappropriately to attachment behaviour*. For example, by reacting to past insecurity by becoming a compulsive caregiver in present relationships. Finally, the individual may *anticipate loss* similar to past loss and, in trying to avoid repeating that loss in a present relationship by perhaps avoiding emotional dependence, may actually recreate the earlier situation of loss. Gurian (1994:2) highlights the effects of loss of early attachment as well as inappropriate attachment relationships between parents and children. He focuses primarily on the effects of mother-son relationships and suggests that the child on the receiving end of a negligent or compulsive caregiver is likely to carry those attachment patterns into their adult relationships. According to Gurian (1994:15), the avoidance of emotional dependence is a frequent response to both loss and 'smothering'. As pointed out, the adult child may evade emotional dependence on another for fear of losing it. At the other

extreme, he/she may despise and avert the emotional dependence of another towards herself/himself for fear of being smothered. In such instances the emotional dependence of the other person may be quite appropriate but is perceived as suffocating and overwhelming (Gurian, 1994:16).

Todorski (1995:195) stresses that the fact of divorce or separation somewhere within the family system does not necessarily constitute a problem or 'loss' that will have dire consequences for the family. It is the *lack of resolution regarding the loss*, rather than the fact of loss, that must be identified as problematic. She further emphasises that within a secure adult relationship, it is possible to 'correct' the extreme splits and working models that were forged in early relationships. When the adult child is not in a secure relationship or where it is not possible to explore the reworking of internal splits within the individual's current relationship, a therapist may stand as the attachment figure. In such instances, the therapist provides a 'secure base' against which the individual can explore the resolution of attachment issues (Bowlby, 1988:1; Cashdan, 1988:12-15).

Divorce is therefore conceptualised not as a single event but as a process that affects parents and children differently at various points in their development. The divorcing couple's ability to negotiate the different stages in the process and their ability to resolve the loss of the marriage is seen to greatly affect both their own adjustment and their ability to offer appropriate parenting to their children.

Of particular interest is the influence of attachment issues across generations. It would seem that a lack of resolution regarding the loss of a significant relationship is often related to insecurity in early attachment relationships (Todorski, 1995:195) Moreover, the manner in which parents may compensate for poor attachment relationships not only affects both the couple's relationship but also resonates throughout the family system. This occurs

when the inability to resolve the loss of a marriage affects the parents' attachment relationships with their children (Gurian, 1994:56). The consequent disturbance in the child's attachment-equilibrium is often carried into the adult child's own relationships, and so the cycle is perpetuated.

In conceptualising the way in which the effects of divorce manifest during the developmental period of young adulthood, it is important to understand the cumulative effects of this process throughout an individual's development. The two primary developmental lines that evolve throughout life in a complex and dialectical process relate to the establishment of stable and meaningful interpersonal relationships and the development of a consolidated and differentiated identity (Blatt & Ford, 1994:247). Meaningful and satisfactory relationships with parents contribute to an evolving concept of the self, and, in turn, new levels of a sense of self, or of identity, lead to more mature levels of interpersonal relatedness in adult attachments. As a result, the ability to forge a meaningful relationship with a partner during the period of young adulthood is dependent on the adolescent's ability to negotiate a separate identity, which can be traced back to the childhood levels of autonomy and finally the nature of the attachment relationship between parents and child (Marcia, 1980:159).

AIM OF THE STUDY

A great deal of literature that documents the effects of parental divorce focuses on the behavioural effects that appear to surface in the children concerned (Buchanan, Maccoby & Dornbusch, 1991:1008). These studies have focused on those aspects of the child's experience that are measurable and quantifiable. There is, however, less work on the child's intra-psychic reaction to parental divorce and how this affects the child's overall development. It is hoped that what emerges from this study will be of practical value to counselors dealing with clients who have undergone the experi-

ence of parental divorce.

Thus, the study aims to provide a conceptual framework for therapeutic practice and to serve as a basis for future study and counseling interventions with individuals who have undergone this experience.

As the aim of this study is to capture the essence of individual experience the research underlying it is qualitative in nature. It is also believed that an individual approach will allow for greater flexibility and a more in-depth investigation with each of the participants. Apart from its theoretical value, the goal of this study is to facilitate awareness in each of the participants. It is hoped that through the process the participants will gain a greater understanding of who they are, how their developmental histories have contributed to the formation of self and what aspects of self they carry forward into new relationships.

DESIGN

A qualitative investigation approach was followed in order to examine the participants' experience of parental divorce in detail. This allowed for the development of a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. The qualitative approach aims to capture the phenomenological and experiential world of each participant and to highlight the fundamental connectedness of human beings to all aspects of the self, the other and their physical and natural environments. As the variables involved are largely unknown, the investigation process needed to have flexible guidelines and an emergent design. The phenomenological perspective is viewed as a central concept in qualitative methodology as it guides the search, structure and process of the study (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975:32). A phenomenological process values the faith of 'not knowing' and regards uncertainty as fundamentally conducive to the free emergence of the participant's ways of being. A lack of certainty is seen to allow

both participant and investigator to be drawn into the unfolding depth of experience, as it is progressively described. As a result, those involved in an investigative process of this kind are seen to surrender to a movement that feels larger than both parties (Todres, 1991:142).

The qualitative paradigm is based on induction, holism and participantivity (Neuman, 1997:331–335). Holism is the assumption that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and that context is essential for understanding a situation. The qualitative approach therefore aims to gather data on numerous aspects of a situation and to construct a complete picture of the social dynamic of the particular situation. An important assumption of the qualitative paradigm is that an understanding of a situation from the perspective of the participant is necessary. The focus is on the experiential states of actors and their perceptions of the situations.

In this study the aim is to understand the developmental and personal histories that relate to and that have helped to establish the young adult's present relational functioning. The manifestations of these 'causes' are considered in terms of each participant's behavioural, emotional and cognitive experiences and are understood in terms of possible antecedents rather than general laws.

Data Collection

The method of data collection in this study was unstructured in-depth interviewing. The interviews were conducted in a therapeutic setting over a period of at least two months. According to Neuman (1997:329) data collection conducted in the absence of a structured basis, is fundamental to qualitative investigation. As each of the participants was in therapy with the investigator, the information pertaining to the investigation topic was obtained as part of the overall therapeutic process.

A major advantage of collecting data in this man-

ner is that it allows for an atmosphere of openness and trust to develop. Not only is this conducive to the participants feeling comfortable enough to talk freely and unreservedly but also, it allows them to be observed on verbal and non-verbal levels over time.

In order to ensure that the data in this study were elicited in an effective manner, the investigator always kept in mind an overarching 'investigation schedule' which stands as a backdrop against which discussion is generated. In this study the conceptual framework was based on an integration of the systems and object relations perspectives. Together they offer a framework that highlights the connections in and between the self and others on various levels of human existence. By highlighting the fundamental connectedness of human beings to all aspects of the self, the other and their physical, natural and transcendental environments, this view emphasises the unique and phenomenological experience of each individual.

Participants

The choice of participants was based on the criterion that the young adults were between 18 and 30 years of age and that they had experienced parental divorce or separation during childhood. As the aim of all qualitative investigation is to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon as opposed to a quantitative goal, which is generalisability, the qualitative investigator cannot randomly select a sample. Instead she has to carefully select participants who have experienced this phenomenon. This purposeful approach to sample building acknowledges both the complexity that characterises human and social phenomena as well as the limits of generalisability (Maykutt & Moorehouse, 1994:275).

The sample for this study comprises three young adults, two of whom are white females and the other is a white male. They were all seen on a weekly

basis for a one-hour therapy session at the Rand Afrikaans University's Institute for Child and Adult Guidance. The participants were informed of the nature and the aims of the study and all participants gave consent for the information elicited during their therapy session to be used in this study. For the purposes of protecting the identity of the participants, names and other identifying details have been changed. The small size and homogeneity of the sample limits claims to generalisability.

Data analysis

The nature of the qualitative investigation is such that a great deal of data is collected which has to be written up so that it can be analysed and worked on. It is suggested that tape-recording, notes or even videotaping of interviews ensure that the information elicited will be reliable and validly transcribed so that accurate analysis can take place (Neuman, 1997:363). As the participants of this study were however particularly sensitive to tape and video recordings, and the presence of either appeared to hinder the therapeutic process as well as the collection of data, the investigator took notes during each session. These notes were systematically reviewed after each of the therapy sessions and given back to the participants to ensure that each participant agreed with the investigator's surmise of what had emerged during the session.

The notes taken were transcribed as the first step in data analysis. This was followed by a careful reading of the transcripts to get an overall impression of and immersion into the participants' world. The transcripts included all verbal material offered by the participants as well as general observations and impressions of the participants, their mood, facial expressions, body language and process issues.

The interviews were then divided into the smallest segments of the text that were meaningful by themselves. Maykut and Moorehouse (1994:235) refer

to these segments as 'units of meaning'. Themes, both similar and contrasting were identified and excerpts from the interviews were used to support identified themes. A process of 'dialoguing' (De Vos & Fouche, 1998) the themes, meanings, patterns and contexts was used, by means of which the investigator engaged the resources of self, supervisor and others (e.g. lecturers and colleagues), texts, theory and related literature. This was a questioning, discursive process, which aimed to look for deeper meanings, similarities, differences and patterns.

An intra-individual analysis of each participant's account rendered an understanding of the experience of parental divorce in context for that individual, while an inter-individual analysis permitted a discussion by category, of common and contrasting themes and patterns. Due to limited space, the focus will hereafter be mostly on the inter-individual analysis with some specific and significant references to some of the intra-individual analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study suggest that parental divorce is a process that has varied and intricate effects. It would seem that the nature of these effects are to a large extent determined by the manner in which the divorcing couple negotiate and resolve the loss of their marriage. For children, it would seem that the experience and effects of this process are greatly influenced by the way in which the divorce alters the dynamics and boundaries within the family system and the consequent effects on the parents' relationship with their children. The extent of this influence seems to be determined largely by the parent's ability to resolve the loss of the relationship and to move on to a different but autonomous sense of self. As a result the nature of the parent-child relationship is seen to be one of the most significant factors in determining the effects of parental divorce. The following sections provide more detail on the experience of parental

divorce by focusing on the development of the self, individuation and the effects of parental divorce on intimate relationships.

The development of a sense of self

The experiences of the participants involved in this investigation suggest that the parent-child dynamic that developed through the divorce process affected their ability to separate from the family and to develop their own integrated sense of self. Although the parents of two out of the three participants were remarried, none of the participants felt that their parents had resolved the loss of their first marriages. Moreover they all appear to have experienced their relationships with their mothers as becoming over-involved and enmeshed after the divorce. With respect to the relationships with their fathers, although all three participants maintained contact with their fathers and where supported by them, those relationships appear to have offered more physical than emotional support. There also appears to have been a high degree of role reversals between the participants and their parents. This was particularly evident in the participants' relationships with their mothers where they all seem to have experienced a very strong sense of responsibility for their mothers' well-being. Loren (23 year old, white female) perceives her situation with her mother as follows: *"I'll just have to deal with the guilt that comes with leaving or I'll be staying with her till she dies"*. The effects of the perceived enmeshment and heightened sense of responsibility not only made it difficult for the participants to separate from their families but seems to have played a crucial role in the participants' sense of self and their experience of and functioning in intimate relationships.

Cashdan (1988:89) suggests that while children may relinquish parents as primary objects, they incorporate aspects of parental identifications as part of self. These identifications may be positive or negative and may be owned or alienated as part of self. Frequently those parts that are owned form

part of the individual's conscious awareness (ego boundaries) and are easily identified as parts of self. On the other hand, those aspects that have been disowned are usually relegated out of consciousness enabling the individual to suppress an awareness of those aspects of self (Gomez, 1997:13). This process is believed to lead to inner splits and difficulties in integrating different aspects of self. According to Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1990:83), children who are overburdened by their parents' emotional dependency, are not given the permission to develop as separate individuals with separate identities and the potential for the integration of these splits is severely diminished. The results of this study confirm these findings, as the developing sense of self that emerged in all three participants appears to have been a reaction to their mothers' emotional dependency and their fathers' absence. All three strongly identified with the independent and very responsible aspects of their characters and found it extremely difficult to acknowledge any form of dependency or vulnerability. In fact all three participants had relegated their needs for nurturing, care or dependence out of conscious awareness. Loren expresses her inability to express and experience some emotions as follows: *"I find it easier to joke and laugh about something that has hurt me than to deal with it in any other way"*.

There are various explanations for this type of influence on the development of the self. The first relates to the fact that in order for the identification with a parent to be experienced in a positive way, the object of identification (parent) needs to be loved and respected (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1990:83-84). One of the reasons that the participants appear to have had such difficulty accepting the dependent parts of self is that they strongly identify those parts with their mothers' dependency on them - an experience that they all regarded as negative. A second factor that relates to the female participants in particular is the fear of rejection. According to Black and Pedro-Carroll (1993:1020),

the absence of the father often leads to heightened identification with the same sex parent and intense feelings of abandonment by the father. The research suggests that this is most prominent in cases where the mothers were rejected by the fathers (Black & Pedro-Carroll, 1993:1021). While the mothers of both women initiated their divorces, both of the female participants perceived their mothers to have been rejected by their fathers on covert levels. Both experienced their mothers' dependency in a very negative way and both suggested that it was that aspect of their mothers' characters that their fathers could not cope with. Moreover, neither daughter experienced any male figure as being able to cope with their mothers' emotional demands. For this reason they believed that the identification with dependency in any form should be rejected.

Finally, a factor which seems to relate to the male participant in this study is that which suggests that individuals living with an opposite sex parent may be depreciated for their maleness or femaleness (Pipher, 1996:11). In this instance it seems that the male participant not only depreciated his own connection with the absent masculine as it was epitomised in his father but also only escaped such resentment from his mother by conforming to her version of what a man should be - supportive, caring and dependable. He also finds it difficult to connect with women outside his 'healer role': *"I have to play the rescuer but at the same time I hate myself for playing the role and I get angry at other women for playing into it"*.

The inability to integrate these aspects of self and the refusal to acknowledge their own needs for dependence appears to have affected the participants' overall functioning in a number of ways. While they all appear to cope and function extremely efficiently on a day-to-day basis, none of the three participants could say they felt that satisfied or content with the way they felt about themselves or the way in which they connected with their worlds. Their attitudes to their bodies and the way they look after and care

for themselves offers a good indication of the value they attach to themselves and the way they feel about who they are. The discussion on their emotional functioning highlights their subjective experience of themselves as people in the world as well as the way in which they chose to cope with those experiences.

It would seem that for all three participants the way they feel about themselves was negatively linked to their body image and their ability to nourish and care for their bodies. They all tended to over work themselves, neglect their bodies when they were sick and have difficulty eating properly. Loren finds it difficult to stay in bed during illness unless she is at "death's door". Both Tamaryn (25 years old, white female) and John-Daniel (29 year old white male) use clothing to feel less exposed to the environment. Tamaryn expressed anxiety over the approaching summer: "...have to shed the layers that winter clothing provides". Their seeming inability to nurture themselves may well relate to the fact that they received very little appropriate nurturing when they were growing up. The role-reversals that all three adopted suggests that it was easier for them to nurture and care for others than to care for themselves. A further possibility for the discomfort they all experienced with regards to their bodies may relate to the fact that an individual's physical appearance forms an intricate part of their sense of self (Marcia, 1980:160). The fact that all three participants felt that their bodies were in some way unacceptable could be taken to suggest that they experience a general discomfort with the way they appear in and to the world.

With respect to their emotional functioning, all three suggested that they found it easier to suppress their emotions than to express them. Secunda (1993:64) suggests that while many children from divorced homes feel resentful and angry that their own needs are not always met, they tend to quell the expression of these emotions. Loren feels simultaneously concerned for and stifled by her mother: "*I feel*

resentful towards her but at the same time I can't leave her alone". One of the reasons for this is because they fear that if they did, the parent may reject them. A second reason is that they usually feel tremendous loyalty and/or guilt towards the parent (Secunda, 1993:64). As the healthy expression of anger forms part of the process of separation, the suppression of such emotions not only forces the child to abandon her/his normal developmental pattern but also often leads to feelings of anxiety and withdrawal (Secunda, 1993:66). The inability to express anger and frustration towards their parents appears to have influenced all three participants' ability to separate successfully from families and particularly from their mothers. A further consequence experienced by the female participants was a difficulty in registering their own emotions. Both women felt that it was easier for them to experience general feeling of indifference rather than allow emotions of any form to enter consciousness. In order to experience the emotions she has, Loren needs to "*pass through*" her "*indifference*". Together with a fear of being rejected, it would seem that there was also an underlying fear that the expression of emotion was too closely associated with identifications with their mothers.

Individuation

The high degree of emotional fusion between mothers and children resulted in the participants finding it very difficult to separate from their mothers without resorting to some form of emotional blunting or cut-off. Bowen (1978:304) explains individuation as the process of being able to remain within the emotional intensity of the family without becoming engulfed by it. The two poles of unsuccessful individuation (namely, emotional fusion and emotional cut-offs) appear to have surfaced in all three participants.

Bowen's theory suggests that emotional cut-offs may be carried out in two ways: by intra-psychic mechanisms (such as blunting) or by geographical

distancing. All the participants resorted to geographical distance of some kind, finding it easier to physically distance themselves from their mothers than cope with the emotional overload and sense of responsibility that they experienced when in their mothers' proximity. The two female participants also appear to have resorted to affective blunting in order to cope with the emotional intensity and fusion in these relationships. The intense control that they both hold over their emotions and the general tendency to suppress feelings of frustration, anger or even pain appears to be a defensive response to the threat of being consumed by their mothers' emotions. The result is the apparent inability to register emotions and feelings that was referred to earlier.

Intimate relationships

Developmental perspectives on the successful negotiation of the tasks of intimacy and adult attachments suggests that they are directly associated with the individual's ability to negotiate previous developmental tasks of identity development, self-differentiation and individuation (Bee, 1996:222). The findings that parental divorce has the potential to hinder the negotiation of identity formation and individuation (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1990:102; Black & Pedro-Carroll, 1993:1019), suggest then that the effects of parental divorce may be carried over into adult attachments. The results of this study support these findings suggesting that the effects of parental divorce carried into adult attachments.

The participants' refusal to identify with their dependence appears to have been carried into their adult relationships. In their intimate relationships, they all assumed the role of the stronger, responsible partner finding it very difficult to expose their own needs and vulnerabilities to their partners. This intense need to remain completely in control made it difficult for them to commit or connect with a significant partner and the prospect of marriage was very threatening for all three. Tamaryn expresses

her fears as follows: *"I have always been very wary of commitment and quite scared of marriage"*.

A second area that appears to have been affected was the way in which the participants dealt with problems when they arose in their relationships. Bowen's (1978:305) theory proposes that young adults who resort to emotional cut-offs to cope with the individuation process are more likely to resort to the use of similar mechanisms in their relationships with others. Thus, when difficulties arise in their own relationships they tend to cope with these by placing emotional and/or geographical distance between themselves and their partners. It would seem that this relates in some way to all three of the participants in this study. They all expressed a general tendency to 'run' from problems when they arose in their relationships finding it easier to avoid their partners than to confront the problems at hand.

Further, the fear of losing control of their emotions resulted in the two women frequently resorting to emotional blunting. They both expressed a tendency to maintain a very tight control over their emotions both when they entered new relationships and when problems arose later on. This made communication within the relationships very difficult. The male participant did not appear to experience a blunting of emotions in his relationships. On the contrary, it would seem that he experienced an emotional upsurge when entering relationships and this resulted in him quickly feeling trapped and suffocated by new relationships: *"As soon as I feel needed, I feel possessed and want out"*. This contradicts the proposal by Black and Pedro-Carroll (1993:1022) that whereas women are more likely to experience a surge of emotions when they enter new relationships, men are more prone to a shutting down of emotions. It may be more appropriate to hypothesise that both men and women have the potential to experience either an emotional upsurge or an affective blunting as they enter into new relationships.

The participants' experience of and behaviour in

their relationships can also be linked to their parental identifications and the difficulties they experienced in integration of different aspects of self. It would seem that it is the male participant's identifications with a dependent feminine and emotionally absent masculine that resulted in his very easily feeling trapped and overwhelmed in relationships with women and the identification with the rejecting and distant masculine that left him feeling unable to connect and commit.

In the case of the female participants, their refusal to identify with their mothers' dependence resulted in their becoming overly independent and self-sufficient. Dunne and Hendrick (1994:24) suggests that this situation most frequently arises when the child perceives the parent's emotional survival or the parent-child relationship itself as being dependent on that child's refusal to identify with aspects of the other. Both women perceived the situation to be such that they had to be strong, independent and capable for their parents, but particularly for their mothers.

The findings of this investigation do to a large extent support the current literature on the effects of divorce. However, there is one area in which the investigator of this study believes that her study differs significantly from the literature that was documented in the previous chapters. The majority of the literature is presented in such a way that it suggests that the effects of parental divorce are permanent, irreversible and predominantly negative. While the findings of this study suggest that the effects of parental divorce are often pervasive, they are not necessarily irrevocable. The shifts that occurred in each of the participants as a result of this process suggest that these effects can be minimised and altered.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study provided a qualitative analysis of the

perceptions of a small, homogenous sample group. On its own it cannot provide the whole picture of the experience of parental divorce and it is unclear as to what extent the findings of this study can be generalised to all other young adults that have experienced parental divorce. However as Tesch (1990:1-5) points out, as the qualitative descriptions of various studies within the same field accumulate, they will make it possible for investigators to gradually "recognise" the phenomenon in the sense of a "second, fuller knowledge". For this reason, similar studies on the individual's perception of parental divorce could add to the findings of this study by investigating and describing the effects of parental divorce with a larger, less homogenous group of participants. Specifically, it would be valuable to determine whether similar findings were elicited with participants from different racial and socio-economic groups.

The investigator of this study was not only aware of the effects that this study may have had on the participants but stated as one of her goals, the desire to facilitate any changes that the participants may wish to procure as a result of their involvement in the study. Further research, which evaluates the potential to alter existing patterns of relating would add both to the clinical relevance of this study and to the theoretical basis for understanding the long-term effects of parental divorce.

In this study, the systems and object relations formed the basis of the theoretical framework of the investigation as well as the therapeutic process that was carried out with each of the participants. Conceptualising the nature and effects of parental divorce from other theoretical frameworks and implementing a therapeutic process that was guided by different conceptual frameworks would also add to the understanding of the phenomenon of parental divorce and how its effects are best alleviated.

Finally, it would be useful to determine whether therapeutic interventions directed at individuals in

developmental stages prior to young adulthood assisted individuals in the negotiation of tasks of intimacy.

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