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Women and Mid-Life Divorce Losses and Triumphs

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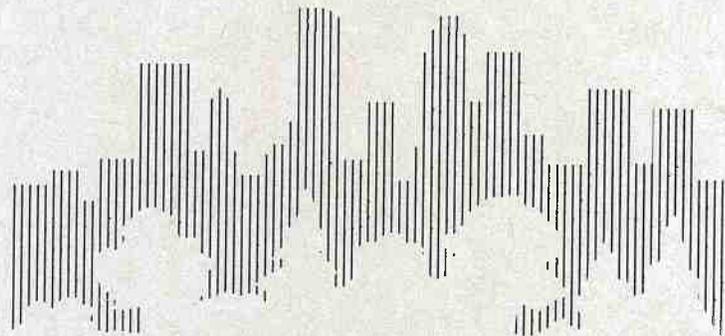
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MASTERS IN SOCIAL WORK THESIS

Christine Kocinski

Women and Mid-life Divorce
Losses and Triumphs

1997

**MSW
Thesis**

Thesis
Kocins

WOMEN AND MID-LIFE DIVORCE
LOSSES AND TRIUMPHS

by

Christine Mary Roegiers Kocinski

A thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of Augsburg College
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Social Work

Minneapolis, Minnesota

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**MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK
AUGSBURG COLLEGE
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA**

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DEDICATION

TO GOD BE THE GLORY, GREAT THINGS HE HAS DONE

I dedicate this thesis to the Lord Jesus Christ, for He is the one who set me on this path and reminded me of His word that says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Phillipians 4:13)

He also declared, "do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8) This is my life goal.

AND

To my son, Ben, who by his very existence was a catalyst in making this dream come true. Ben, you are a precious gift from God.

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A very special thank you to my son, Ben, the light of my life, who wasn't always thrilled with my busy schedule, still he encouraged me with this poem:

do the best you cen
do the best you ce
becaus if you don't
you will fail

Thanks, Ben. I love you.

A special thank you to the women who participated in this study. By sharing from the depths of your hearts and souls, you enriched my life and enlightened helping professionals everywhere about the losses and triumphs of mid-life divorce.

A heartfelt thanks to the following therapists, Richard DeBeau-Melting, Dorion Macek, Dick Obershaw and Stephen Pranschke, who volunteered their precious time to search their client base for possible participants, mailed consent forms and cared about this project. Without your support and cooperation, this could not have been accomplished.

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And last, but far from least, is the endless list of family and friends who babysat Ben, left groceries on the steps, cleaned my house and yard, prayed with me and for me, encouraged me and believed in me. There was a time during these two years when I felt I was hanging by a thread from a precipice; your love made all the difference!

ABSTRACT OF THESIS
WOMEN AND MID-LIFE DIVORCE
LOSSES AND TRIUMPHS

CHRIS M. KOCINSKI

June 1997

The purpose of this study was to report the findings of a qualitative, exploratory study with women who divorced during the mid-life years of 35-55. Paul Bohannon's six stations of divorce was used as a framework to explore the legal, economic, community, emotional, co-parental, and psychic losses expressed by women as a result of divorcing in mid-life and factors proving beneficial in coping with these losses.

Data from ten open-ended, structured interviews were collected and analyzed. This data revealed themes of depression, anger and sadness, yet hope for further growth and a better life post-divorce recovery.

Implications for social work practice include, the involvement by social workers in the legal and political arenas to make an impact on legislation affecting child support, being responsible in private practice to hear where the client is in her recovery and offer her support and resources appropriate to her present state with the caveat that the social worker must help her normalize her crisis and help her move at her own pace to healing.

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WOMEN AND MID-LIFE DIVORCE LOSSES AND TRIUMPHS

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Few events in the life-cycle require more extensive changes in activities, responsibilities and living habits (or cause greater alteration in attitudes, reranking of values, and alterations of outlook on life) than does a change from one marital status to another. (Bogue, 1949, p. 212)

Overview of research topic

The experience of undergoing a divorce is becoming an increasingly common phenomenon in the United States today. As such, it affects directly or indirectly almost everyone in our society (Gray & Shields, 1992). At any given time, a large segment of every community will have a significant portion of its population attempting to deal with divorce. Over the past thirty years, divorce has increased at such a rate that it is estimated over 50% of first marriages will end in divorce (National Center for Health Statistics, 1981; Spanier & Canst, 1979) and 75% of second marriages will fail (Shapiro, 1984; Walen & Bass, 1986; Walters, Carter, Papp, & Silverstein, 1988). With these kind of statistics, it is clear that the risk of divorce is high for all who decide to marry. However, the sharpest increase in divorce is now occurring among mid-late life couples (Lloyd & Zick, 1986; Uhlenberg, Cooney, & Boyd, 1990; Walters, et al., 1988), and it is this population which is the focus of this study. Although there are

varying definitions of middle age using biological, psychological and social factors, for the purposes of this study, it will be defined as between the ages of 35-55 since 35% of all divorces occur within this age span (Arnold & McKenry, 1986).

Since no-fault divorce was written into the law books on January 1, 1970, much has been written about divorce, with most of the research focusing on individuals under age 35 (Lloyd & Zick, 1986). Frequently, the recommendations of these studies include the need for more information regarding those who divorce in mid-late life (Arnold & McKenry, 1986; Chiriboga, 1982; Lloyd & Zick, 1986; Uhlenberg et al., 1990). In particular, it has been noted that women appear to be more susceptible to the stresses of mid-life divorce (Peck & Manocherian, 1989; Wallerstein, 1986) and make frequent use of social service agencies (Sands & Richardson, 1986). The particular concerns affecting women who divorce in mid-life range from the loss of long-held social position to the shrinking remarriage pool. They must also contend with body changes, the possible overdependence on young adult children and unfair labor market conditions (Bogolub, 1991). Bonkowski (1989) also reported findings of depression and financial vulnerability among middle-aged, suburban divorcees. Parallel phenomenon were expressed by Caucasian, blue-collar, middle-aged women with specific emphasis on the lack of money, lack of male companionship and the fear of a lonely old age (Rubin, 1979). Although these phenomena are not unique to the middle-aged woman, Wallerstein (1986) and Rubin (1979) agree that the frequency, duration and intensity of these problems are more significant in this group versus their younger cohort. Whether leaving or being left, the mid-life divorcee clearly has more to lose than her younger sister (Chiriboga, 1982).

On the other hand, Singer (1975) sees divorce as an opportunity for new growth, a chance to gain a sense of autonomy and individuation. Though the frequency is rare, Rubin (1979) reports there are some women who report divorce at this stage in their life to be a psychological relief, an exciting vocational challenge. Others believe the process includes both grief and growth, a time of reassessment (Wiseman, 1975; DeFazio & Kleinbort, 1975; Gray & Shields, 1992; Kraus, 1979). But this readjustment to a new and perhaps better adjusted state seems to follow a period of stress and crisis in which a person tries to resolve numerous difficulties in her life.

Research purpose and significance

Divorce is a decision of major proportion with long term rippling effects. It is often compounded by societal and familial stigma and the intrusion of one's own guilt and feelings of failure (Crosby et al., 1983). However, after the initial losses or perceived losses fade with time and deeper understanding of oneself, many women may identify strengths they have discovered in themselves or unexpected benefits as a result of divorcing in mid-life. Whatever the outcome, it is important that clinicians, who work with divorced women, gain knowledge and understanding of the divorce recovery process to better assist women going through this lifestyle change (Hagemeyer, 1986).

Overview of research questions

The literature review that follows will elaborate on divorce as loss and grief as well as discuss factors which may affect the outcome of the divorce recovery process. Various theoretical models have been purported to describe this process with Paul Bohannan's six stations of divorce used as the framework to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the losses expressed by women as a result of divorcing in mid-life as they relate to Bohannan's six stations of divorce?
- 2) What factors proved beneficial in coping with these losses as related to Bohannan's six stations of divorce?

Concepts and variables

The key concepts and variables will be conceptually (C) and operationally (O) defined as follows:

- Divorce:
- (C) A legal dissolution of the marriage bond, a complete separation
 - (O) The legal dissolution of the marriage contract between two people

- Mid-Life:
- (C) Intermediate in age, from about 45-60 years old
 - (O) Ages 35-55 based on agency records

- Losses:
- (C) Act of losing, that which is lost
 - (O) Those items, individuals, concepts self-reported as loss (example: loss of a dream of growing old together and retiring together)

- Coping:
- (C) To strive or contend, to cover with success
 - (O) The tools, persons, concepts that were beneficial in working through each station of divorce (example: support groups, a spiritual connection, confiding in a good friend)

- Factors:
- (C) Any contributing cause or agent
 - (O) Self-identified contributing cause or agent

Beneficial: (C) Helpful, profitable

(O) Self-identified as helpful and profitable

Identification: (C) Act of identifying, a mark or means of identifying

(O) Identification takes place through the recording of responses to questions in the interviews

Strategies: (C) Tactics, maneuvering for battle

(O) Self-reported positive tactics that aided in divorce recovery

Six stations: (C) Emotional, legal, economic, co-parental, community, psychic

(O) Emotional (dealing with the deterioration of the marriage)

Legal (based on grounds)

Economic (dealing with money and property)

Co-parental (dealing with custody and visitation)

Community (dealing with changes in friends and community views)

Psychic (dealing with regaining autonomy, attachment issues)

CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, divorce and its resulting problems received wide-spread attention in research and the media. Trends since that time indicate that an increasing number of older people will be dealing with divorce as an adjustment issue as well as the typical age-related adjustments. These trends include societal and individual acceptance of divorce, changing population trends and shifting roles of women away from the activities of home (Blatter & Jacobsen, 1993; Kraus, 1979).

Despite these trends, little has been written regarding the loss and adjustment of women who divorce in the middle and later adult years. Often these women need assistance in coping with this unanticipated life transition and the grieving process associated with the losses described by them. Some of the life cycle tasks facing middle-aged women who divorce may include: transitioning from the role of wife to single person, figuring out who they are apart from their spouse, reworking dependency issues, making peace with the finality of no more children, developing new relationships that provide self-esteem, acquiring job skills, parenting their own parents, releasing children (empty-nest), grandparenting, losses of friends, family and relatives to death, physical and mental health issues and the loss of youth in our youth-oriented society (Blatter & Jacobsen, 1993).

Even though we learn to accept many of these losses and changes as we grow older, women in particular struggle with separation and isolation.

Whereas separation, differentiation and autonomy
have been considered primary factors in male

development, the values of caring and attachment, interdependence, relationship and attention to context have been primary in female development... Women have tended to define themselves in the context of human relationships and to judge themselves in terms of their ability to care.

(Carter & McGoldrick, 1990, p.32)

Given that women are especially vulnerable to problems regarding separation, it is not surprising that a divorce in mid and later life is experienced as devastating. In this chapter, the concepts of divorce as loss and grief will be explored along with various theoretical models of divorce recovery. Specifically, Paul Bohannon's six stations of divorce is reviewed. This theory guided the design of the research instrument. Also significant are the factors that affect the outcome for women who divorce in mid-life.

Theoretical/Conceptual Frameworks

Researchers have offered numerous theoretical models to describe the process of divorce recovery. Salts (1979) has divided such models into two general classifications: those that focus on the emotional or affective dimensions of the process and those that describe the process with a focus on behavior/event dimensions. In the first category would be Herrman's (1974) application of Kubler-Ross' five stages of grief to the divorce recovery process. Wiseman and Kraus (1975, 1979) put forth similar descriptions with slight variations. Their five stages of emotional crisis are described as 1) shock and denial; 2) anger or guilt, a time of fixing blame; 3) anxious bargaining to salvage some of what is being lost; 4) depression and resignation; and 5) acceptance

and renewal. Others in this same category include, Defazio and Kleinbort's (1975) three stages of marital dissolution and Kraus' (1979) use of Falek and Britton's (1974) five phases of coping. The four models of the behavior/event dimension are: Waller's (1951) seven alienation crises and four stages of readjustment to the loss of the mate, Kessler's (1975) seven stages of emotional divorce, Kressel and Deutsch's (1977) four periods of psychic divorce and Bohannan's (1970) six stations of divorce recovery which will be used as a basis for this study and elaborated on further in the next section. Each of these models allow for individual differences. An individual may repeat stages, skip some or have stages occur simultaneously. The order, intensity and duration also vary from person to person. Basically, each of these models designates three distinct time periods: from first serious thought about divorce to separation and/or filing, from separation and/or filing to final decree, from decree to closure.

Of the four behavior/event models, Bohannan's six stations of divorce (emotional, legal, economic, coparental, community, psychic) was chosen as the guiding framework for this research due to its comprehensive nature. According to Jackson & Donovan (1988), it is the most detailed of the various models. However, the qualitative nature of this research invites the respondents to inform the researcher of their reality. At times, it is noted that the research findings will take the reader beyond Bohannan's concepts. Following is a more detailed look at Bohannan's six station model.

Bohannan's Six Stations of Divorce

For the purpose of this study, Paul Bohannan's six stations of divorce will be drawn upon to sort out the complex social phenomenon of divorce. Bohannan (1970) believes that part of the complexity in divorce arises due to six things happening simultaneously. He calls these six overlapping

experiences: (1) the emotional divorce, which centers around the problem of the deteriorating marriage, usually begins before separation and is played out in spouses withholding emotion from each other. Kessler (1975) calls this stage the "point of no return" (p. 29); (2) the legal divorce, based on grounds, happens when the final decree is rendered by the judge. Although grounds are no longer used as a sanction for an award of divorce, some believe that "irreconcilable differences" cloaks the grounds each might use; (3) the economic divorce, which deals with money and property, occurs as partners split their possessions and set up separate households; (4) the coparental divorce, which deals with custody, single-parent homes and visitation, entails the distinguishing of parental roles; (5) the community divorce, surrounding the changes of friends and community that every divorcee experiences; some friendships die, some fade slowly and some new ones begin; and (6) the psychic divorce, with the problem of regaining individual autonomy; partners go their separate ways and must also separate their identities from one another (Bohannon, 1970; Smart, 1977).

Divorce as Loss

As individuals age, they learn to accept many losses in their lives--loss of the youth that can never be restored, loss of physical and sometimes mental capacity, successive losses of friends and family, possibly even the loss of their standard of living after retirement. Divorce in mid-life is yet another serious loss for women (Blatter & Jacobsen, 1993), although also an opportunity for growth, as mentioned earlier. Carter and McGoldrick (1989, p. 34) state that for women in particular "the threat of disruption of a relationship is often perceived not just as object loss, but as something closer to one's identity and thus as requiring a transformation of self and of the system." Wallerstein (1986) has provided an

overview of some of the losses facing mid-life divorced women. For ten years she followed the divorce experience of sixty primarily white, middle class families and found that those who were divorced in their 20s and 30s had reestablished themselves emotionally, socially and vocationally; those who were over 40 and under 55 had not. She found that these women suffered from divorce-induced loss of self-esteem and loss of household income. They resented their financially secure ex-husbands, they lacked male companionship and feared the departure of remaining children. Kaslow and Schwartz (1987) add that the woman who felt happily married may also mourn the loss of a dream; the well-earned retirement years shared with a loving spouse.

Hagemeyer (1986), in reviewing Bohannan's six stations of divorce, suggests that by correlating the stations with losses he can bring some perspective and order to this confusing process of divorce and thereby help those who feel "stuck" to move on to the next station. Hagemeyer's representation and his elaboration was helpful in forming the basis for the interview schedule used in this research. Following is his correlation:

The loss of intimacy/emotional divorce: The loss of complete openness and trust develops when partners begin to allow other commitments to take precedence over their marriage. Emotional distance develops as other interests take energy away from the partner.

The loss of parenting role/co-parental divorce: Separate living quarters bring up the question of custody and parenting roles. Issues of visitation and part-time parenting flood one's thoughts.

The loss of legal standing/legal divorce: The actual striking of the gavel and the statement "divorce granted" may signal for some a euphoria as if released from prison but for many it will be a day of intense grief. Few walk away from that day

without a deep sense of this being an important turning point in their life.

The loss of money and property/economic divorce: For the majority of women, divorce brings with it a drop in income, even when receiving child support. As the family savings is depleted, two households are set up and belongings divided, there is a realization that many years of work have resulted in a division of property and the sadness that this can bring.

The loss of community/community divorce: Like it or not, intentional or not, friends and faith communities come to see the divorced or divorcing individual differently than they had prior to the knowledge of the divorce. This may be in part due to uncomfortable feelings rather than outright disapproval but is nevertheless experienced by the divorcing individual as ostracism and rejection.

The loss of attachment/psychic divorce: The most difficult aspect of divorce, according to Hagemeyer, seems to revolve around the rebuilding of a separate identity without a spouse as a key reference point. Attachment appears to last long after the legal divorce takes place.

Divorce as a grief process

Divorce, particularly in mid-life, usually represents a major loss, and people who experience this loss need to grieve. They are losing a marriage with all its conscious and unconscious meanings. They are losing a spouse, a lifestyle and possibly even family and friends. Grief has been conceptualized as an "emotional response to loss that includes a complex blend of painful affects, such as sadness, anger, helplessness, guilt, and despair" (Raphael, 1983 as cited in Barsky, 1993 p. 40). Parkes and Weiss (1983) state that even if the marriage was clearly unhappy, intensive grief work may be required as a result of a long-standing attachment in the face of eroding love.

There are numerous writers, Bowlby, Lindemann and Parkes (as cited in Pappas, 1989) for example, who have detailed the stages and tasks associated with the grieving process. Although these authors generally were writing about loss through death, they have intimated that the stages and tasks can be applied to divorce grief as well. These authors offer four grief stages.

- 1) Shock/denial: immediate stage after the loss
- 2) Protest: preoccupation with lost spouse and obsessing over relationship details
- 3) Despair: Depression and disorganization sets in; Bowlby states that this is the stage when a person begins to accept the loss
- 4) Detachment or Resolution: person starts to reorganize their life and feels interested in new activities and relationships

John Bowlby, (1980) the father of the attachment theory, suggests four phases of mourning.

- 1) Numbing that usually lasts from a few hours to a week and may be interrupted by outbursts of extremely intense distress and/or anger
 - 2) Yearning and searching for the lost object, which can last for months and sometimes years
 - 3) Disorganization and despair
 - 4) Reorganization
- (S.W. Encyclopedia, p. 206)

Other theorists, such as Wortman and Silver (1993) criticize stage models of grief purporting that the bereaved do not always go through stages sequentially, and that this view keeps the client in a passive versus active role in the grief process. In contrast, the task model, identified by J.W. Worden

(1991), empowers the one who grieves. Following are the four tasks he identifies as necessary to fully grieve:

- 1) Accepting the reality of the loss
- 2) Working through the pain of the grief
- 3) Adjusting to the environment in which the deceased (divorced) person is missing
- 4) Withdrawing emotional energy from the grieving process and reinvesting it into another relationship. (S.W. Encyclopedia, p. 287)

Whether a stage model or a task-oriented approach is embraced by the professional, awareness of grief/divorce recovery theories is essential. Divorce has serious negative economic and social consequences for older women and helping them cope with this crisis is an important mental health challenge and a privilege for the therapist or helping professional.

Factors affecting outcome

Effective grief work usually results in a resolution of the loss, with a satisfactory adjustment and a reintegration into life with new and satisfying attachments. However, if there is unresolved loss, various pathological patterns may result (Barsky, 1993). What is known about factors affecting outcome?

Raphael (1983) suggests that the factors affecting outcome can be understood by asking a series of questions.

- What was the nature of the preexisting relationship? The more ambivalent and/or dependent the relationship, the more complicated the mourning and the greater probability of a poor outcome.
- Was the separation/filing sudden and unexpected or was it anticipated, thereby allowing for better preparation for the transition?
- What was the response of the family and social network? Poor

outcomes are more likely if the individuals perceive that family and friends are not supportive.

- Are there other concurrent stressors? Many losses may use up one's psychological resources therein diminishing the present coping abilities.
- Were there previous unresolved losses? These too will increase the risk of faulty resolution.
- Are there special sociodemographic factors such as age, gender, religion, culture, occupation, and economic position that may influence a grieving outcome? There may be a distinct difference in how an elderly, retired person faces a divorce versus a younger, economically secure individual.

Pedder (1982) suggests that personality also will have a large role to play in how one copes with the loss of a marriage. Those who have socio-emotional vulnerabilities may fair much worse than those who have been the recipients of loving homes and have successfully internalized positive attributes.

William Worden (1982) outlines four objectives common to grief resolution. He offers these to the grieving individual and his/her family so a positive outcome is more assured:

- 1) The family should acknowledge the reality of the loss with the use of clear, noneuphemistic information and open communication with full participation in any appropriate rites and rituals.
- 2) The family should share the experience of the pain of grief. This includes talking about pain, expressing mutual understanding of feelings, and showing acceptance of a range of emotions, such as

disappointment, helplessness, relief, guilt, and anger.

- 3) The family system should be reorganized, with a realignment of relationships, delegation of new role functions, and ability for coping with disorganization and a 'no-rules' atmosphere.
- 4) The family's relationships and goals should be reinvested and redirected with the need for a full four seasons or one full year of adaptation, openness and flexibility of the family system, and incorporation of important ethnic and cultural considerations.

(Barsky, 1993, p. 48-49)

Natchez (1990), a divorcee herself and a therapist, states that during times of crisis, people need to talk about their problems with others. Therapists, religious leaders, social workers and other understanding people are available to listen so that grief can be softened and healed. She discovered that the more grieving people released their anger and sadness, the more they recovered.

Brown et al. (1980) concur. Citing their 1980 study on attachment, they indicate that "the availability of an intimate may be a potent force in diminishing distress" (p. 315). Interestingly, the findings of their study also raise the possibility that divorced women with children have diminished stress levels due to the day-to-day caretaking responsibilities which allow them to process their divorce in bits and pieces rather than all at once (Brown et al., 1980).

Results of an exploratory study by Wijnberg and Holmes (1992) of 30 female, heads of household indicated two significant factors affect the way a woman adapts to being a single parent and how she comes to terms with the post-divorce life. These two factors are the meaning and value a divorced woman attaches to the mothering component of her role as well as the comfort she feels in accepting a work identity.

Jackson and Donovan (1988) believe that post divorce adjustment is directly related to the degree to which the divorcing individuals can achieve emotional resolution. This may be next to impossible when children are involved where some sense of attachment may remain long after the legal and social resolution has taken place.

Conclusion

Although divorce may be a reasonable and even preferable solution to some marriages, it is not without stress. As such, it necessitates enormous adaptive skills by the divorcing couple, the children and extended family and friends (Storn & Sprenkle, 1981). Some theorists even believe that if the divorce is properly orchestrated by the mental health and legal systems, it can be a liberating experience and less conflictual than a life of continuous angst.

Each of the aforementioned authors has a vision of the stages, behaviors or events one must go through on the pathway of divorce. Because of the unique experience of each divorcee, it is beneficial to have many perspectives. An array of divorce recovery models have been included for review here, with Bohannan's being particularly useful because it accounts for the multi-dimensional process of divorce including the cognitive, emotional and behavioral aspects. Although helpful in understanding divorce as a whole, naming stages such as Krantzlers' three stages of divorce (shock, restoration of equilibrium and mourning) are vague and leaves the divorcee with a sense of being trapped in her grief forever.

On the other hand, Bohannan (1970) theorizes that a successful divorce is one that begins with the realization by two people that they no longer have a constructive future. This is recognition of the emotional divorce. The two people then proceed through the legal channels as they undo their life together,

dividing up property and arranging for support and visitation. It involves informing and teaching the children about everyone's new roles and more than anything reassuring them of love and provision forever. It involves finding a new community and finally, it involves finding out who you are as a separate individual and personality apart from your spouse.

The literature has left the reader guessing how women operationalize these events. What is it that helps them cope and move on? What was the most important thing they learned during the divorce recovery process that they would like to pass on to other mid-life divorcees? What is it, they think, social workers ought to know? This research study gives voice to the women who tell us their own story. These women tell us how social workers might assist them. They tell us where they have been and how far they have come.

Clearly those who work with the divorcing have a formidable task as they help each member in the family sort out their "work" as it were to gain a new identity and become a new family system.

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research method is an exploratory study using qualitative methods. The researcher has chosen the standardized, open-ended interview schedule for collecting data with probes used as appropriate. Face-to-face interviews were used to study the following research questions:

What are the losses expressed by women as a result of divorcing in mid-life as they relate to Bohannan's six stations of divorce?

What factors proved beneficial in coping with these losses as related to Bohannan's six stations of divorce?

Sample Selection/Study Population

The study population and units of analysis consist of women who have divorced between the ages of 35-55 and who have been or are presently receiving divorce-related therapeutic intervention by a professional.

The purposive sample of 37 women who divorced between the ages of 35-55 was developed through contacts with four LICSW's in private practice in the seven county metro area. Each therapist agreed to review their client-base in search of women who matched the above mentioned criteria. Snowball sampling was used to gain the names of therapists who might be willing to support this research if contacted.

Measurement Instrument Design

The measurement instrument design is a standardized, open-ended interview schedule (see Appendix D). The questions were developed to

explore the two research questions stated above. Although there is only one interviewer, it is important to have the questions standardized to maximize the consistency of questions asked each subject. Open-ended questions are used in order to obtain meaningful, qualitative responses as well as allowing the interviewer to probe certain responses. The qualitative nature of the research as well as the sensitivity of the topic requires personal interviews.

Pre-Test

The interview schedule was pre-tested with two individuals who met the same criteria as the actual respondents. These interviews were arranged upon notification from the Institutional Review Board indicating this project could proceed. This pre-test was beneficial for several reasons. First, it helped to become more familiar with the instrument and weed out any inconsistencies. Second, it provided information on the time necessary for the interview. Each interview took approximately one to one and a half hours. Knowing a more precise time was helpful information to have available when contacting study subjects to set up the actual interviews. Third, pre-testing helped to know which questions were more likely to require probes.

Data Collection/Contact of Subjects

Potential subjects were contacted via a cover letter (see Appendix A) with a consent form (see Appendix C) attached. The letter described how they were chosen to receive the mailing as well as information regarding the study. Once consent forms were returned to Augsburg Box #401, participants were contacted by phone to arrange for a personal interview.

Data was collected by one researcher who was also the interviewer via the open-ended, standardized interview schedule. The interviewer took extensive notes during the interview as well as tape recorded each session, if

allowed to do so by the participant. Immediately upon completion of each interview, the researcher processed her notes and elaborated as necessary while memory of the session was fresh. Additionally, the taped interviews were transcribed and compared with the notes taken during the interview. The interviews were conducted in a quiet, non-threatening environment chosen by the interviewee. The subject was asked to choose a time and location that would allow for one and a half hours of uninterrupted time.

Of the 37 consent forms mailed out, ten were returned as a result of the first mailing and one returned as a result of the second mailing. One person was ineligible for the study due to not meeting the mid-life age criteria. This resulted in an overall return rate of 29.7% and a return rate of 27% for those who met the criteria for the research project. The ten who met the criteria did participate and answered all the questions on the interview schedule. Of the ten, seven agreed to be audiotaped with two of these tapes ending up blank. Extensive notes were taken during all interviews.

As data was collected, the researcher began to take note of similarities and differences as well as universal comments. Once some emerging themes presented themselves, the researcher took the master of the interview field notes and made several copies in order to organize and analyze as needed.

Data Analysis

Throughout the research, a notebook was kept to document decisions made regarding the research process, data collection, and analysis in order to maintain consistency.

The purpose of data analysis is to organize responses so that comparisons can be made as well as cite universal comments. A file was set up for each of the five questions asked and the field notes copied and placed in

each file according to number. When comparisons were complete in this venue; response category files were set up and comparisons made again. The collected data was in the form of qualitative responses and is presented in a narrative format. No statistical tests were used on this data.

Human Subject Protection

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Augsburg College (IRB #96-17-3). (See Appendix E for approval letter)

Participation in this interview was completely voluntary. Agencies used to procure respondents to interview, contacted their clients via a consent form designed by the researcher to explain the nature of the study and the risk involved if they chose to participate. The risk involved the discussion of their divorce experience which may have brought up issues that had been dormant for a time and may have caused some discomfort as they spoke of them. They may have felt some coercion to participate knowing their therapist identified them as a possible participant. The respondent was assured, in the consent form, that their participation or decision not to participate would in no way affect their current or future relationship with their therapist or Augsburg College. They were also assured that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Confidentiality of their identity in results was promised.

Limitations

While this research study has many potential uses, it is necessary to examine the limitations as well. With a mailing of consent forms to 37 individuals resulting in an N of 10, the results of this research study are not generalizable. In fact, according to Rubin and Babbie (1993), this return rate (27%) is less than chance. As a rule of thumb, a fifty percent response rate is considered adequate. Those who chose to participate are a self-select group,

may have been more likely to be open to questions regarding their divorce, and may be the better functioning of the potential participants. Possibly this same group felt a sense of coercion since their therapist recommended them for this study. The women ended up to be all Caucasian, so it is not a group that is representative of minority women in this age bracket. Potentially, social-class bias resulted due to seeking the sample from private therapists rather than from County Social Service agencies.

Another limitation is that only women who had divorced in mid-life were interviewed. Men, ages 35-55, may have quite a different perspective regarding divorce in the mid-later life years.

CHAPTER IV. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

In this chapter, the findings of this research study, based on the standardized, open-ended interview schedule, will be presented in narrative form with tables that represent the following research questions:

- 1) What are the losses expressed by women as a result of divorcing in mid-life as they relate to Bohannan's six stations of divorce?

- 2) What factors proved beneficial in coping with these losses as related to Bohannan's six stations of divorce?

Questions on the interview schedule related to losses experienced by women who had a mid-life divorce as well as the coping strategies they used to manage their losses. Additionally, participants were asked what their response and advice would be for friends thinking about divorcing, what they found to be important during divorce recovery and what social workers need to know about working with divorcing women. See Appendix D for a copy of the interview guide. It is noted here that questions #2 and #4 on the interview schedule did not yield any usable data and will therefore not be presented.

Initially, background information and demographics regarding the study population will be presented. Then, divorce as loss, divorce as grief and factors affecting outcome will be presented in table format with participant's own words to inform the reader. Finally, the respondent's process to divorce recovery is discussed.

Background information on study participants

Potential participants were chosen for this study by four LICSW's in private practice who agreed to review their client-base in search of women who

had divorced between the ages of 35-55. Thirty seven were chosen based on the Institutional Review Board's criteria that the interviewees be far enough along in their divorce recovery to withstand the interview without suffering serious trauma. Eleven returned the consent form (29.7% return rate) with ten qualifying and participating (27% return rate). Table 1 reflects the demographics of this population. Interestingly, at the time of the interview, 40% (4 of 10) of the participants were 41-45 years of age and 40% (4 of 10) were 51-55 years of age at the time of their divorce. The number of anniversaries celebrated by the study population varied widely with 30% married 1-5 years and 40% married 20+ years. This self-selected sample was one-half (50%) college graduates and (50%) were at least high school graduates. Also notable is that 80% of this population is presently employed full-time. Seven out of ten women have 1-2 children and the same proportion have never been divorced before. However, it is significant that 40% of the women who eventually separated (4 of 9) expressed that their marriage had been over anywhere from 2-5 years prior to the separation. Interestingly, 30% (3 of 9) were divorced within 1-6 months of separation but it took 13 months - 2 years for another 30% to move to the final decree.

Research Question #1

What are the losses expressed by women as a result of divorcing in mid-life as they relate to Bohannan's six stations of divorce?

Divorce as loss

Questioning participants about losses they may have incurred (in six categories) as a result of divorcing in mid-life yielded a number of themes which included anger, sadness, grief and fear. Each participant offered several

Table 1: Respondents (R) Demographic Characteristics (N=10)

Age, years now	n	%
35-40	1	10
41-45	4	40
46-50	1	10
51-55	4	40
Age, years at divorce		
35-40	4	40
41-45	2	20
46-50	1	10
51-55	3	30
Length of marriage in years		
1-5	3	30
6-10	1	10
11-15	1	10
16-20	1	10
20 +	4	40
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	10	100

(table continues)

Table 1 continued...Respondents (R) Demographic Characteristics

Education	n	%
GED	1	10
H.S. Diploma	2	20
Vocational/Technical	1	10
Some college	1	10
College graduate	4	40
M.D.	1	10
 Employment		
Homemaker	1	10
Employed part-time out of the home	1	10
Employed full-time out of the home	8	80
 Number of children this marriage		
None	2	20
1-2	7	70
3-4	1	10
 Previous divorces		
None	7	70
One	2	20
Two or more	1	10

(table continues)

Table 1 continued...Respondents (R) Demographic Characteristics

Length of time from irreparable breakdown to separation	n	%
No separation	1	10
0-1 years	3	30
2-5 years	4	40
6-10 years	2	20
Length of separation to divorce		
No separation	1	10
1-6 months	3	30
7 months - 1 year	1	10
13 months - 2 years	3	30
25 months - 3 years	2	20

answers to this initial question about mid-life divorce and Table 2 presents an aggregate number of responses given by each participant in the categories of emotional, legal, economic, co-parental, community and psychic losses. More specifically, Tables 3-8 express the particular losses and comments by participants around these issues. In Table 2, the most responses (indicated by bold numbers) by a participant to a category fell in the emotional area with the least number of responses (indicated by underlining) occurring in the coparental and legal arenas.

As Table 3 indicates, the most prevalent responses in the emotional loss category relate to the loss of companionship (7 out of 10) and loss of self-esteem (6 out of 10). Only 10% felt a loss of commitment, a sense of stability and a physical relationship. Following are some quotes from women which reflect and illustrate their feelings:

Companionship

I felt like the lone shoe on 35W (R10)

I missed out on the great love of my life, a soul mate (R2)

I lost my right God damn arm (R3)

Self-esteem

I felt like a failure, so I tried harder (R7)

He wanted to divorce me because...I gained so much weight. Of course, that hit me harder than anything because I thought there couldn't have been any love there at all. If he cared for me, he would have cared for me whether I was overweight or not. (R5)

Table 2: Total Number of Responses for Respondents Experiencing Loss During Mid-Life Divorce (N=10)

	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10
Emotional	5	6	5	4	6	4	2	3	2	6
Legal	5	4	7	<u>1</u>	2	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	5
Economic	4	6	2	3	3	3	4	7	<u>1</u>	1
Coparental	4	<u>3</u>	5	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	3	<u>1</u>	3	3	<u>1</u>
Community	7	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>	2	6	3	3	5	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
Psychic	<u>3</u>	4	4	2	4	4	3	3	<u>1</u>	9

A darkened number indicates the highest response category per respondent

An underlined number indicates the lowest response category per respondent

Table 3: Responses for Respondents Experiencing EMOTIONAL Loss as a Result of Divorcing in Mid-Life (N=10)

	n	%
Loss of a companion/other half	7	70
Loss of self-respect/self-esteem	6	60
Loss of emotional self-control	4	40
Loss of trust	3	30
Loss of a sense of family	2	20
Loss of a dream	2	20
Loss of commitment	1	10
Loss of a sense of stability	1	10
Loss of physical relationship	1	10

Table 4 lists the legal losses the interviewees expressed. The area most often mentioned by the participants (4 out of 10) was that the legal divorce process took too long. With reference to Table 1, 50% (5 of 10) of the divorces took from 13 months to 3 years after separation to finalize. One participant mentioned:

It was the War of the Roses. It took three years to settle what could've been settled in three hours. (R10)

Others referred to lengthy lawyer meetings and court processes:

For two years he fought me for custody of the girls (R3)

My husband's lawyer, he was the one who would sit and yack and make it kind of social and stretched out the time. I was just like let's get this over and get it done. (R2)

Table 5 represents economic losses experienced by ten respondents. Clearly the most reported loss was related to legal fees (7 out of 10) with the loss of one's home (5 out of 10) and retirement income (5 out of 10) close seconds. Loss of child support and alimony was the least documented answer in this category. Several participants express their economic loss as follows:

I am so deep in debt that I'll never get out in my lifetime. (R1)

When I had to move from the lake, that was almost a bigger loss than the divorce. (R2)

I was making \$12,000 per year and my legal fees were approximately \$7,000. (R3)

Table 4: Responses for Respondents Experiencing LEGAL Loss as a Result of Divorcing in Mid-Life (N=10)

	n	%
Process dragged on too long	4	40
Concessions made by lawyer without my agreement	3	30
Lost faith in legal system	3	30
Lawyer not familiar with divorce law	3	30

Table 5: Responses for Respondents Experiencing ECONOMIC Loss as a Result of Divorcing in Mid-Life (N=10)

	n	%
Loss of \$ due to legal fees	7	70
Loss of my home	5	50
Loss of ex's retirement funds	5	50
Loss of financial security	4	40
Incurred huge debt in divorce decree	4	40
Loss of dual income	4	40
Loss of child support/alimony	2	20

Table 6 illustrates that 40% (4 out of 10) of the women in this study lost physical custody of their children to their ex-husbands. Thirty percent (3 out of 10) also experienced their children being turned against them by their former spouse. Only 1 in 10 (10%) mentioned a fear of her children being abused by their father and 20% stated they had no losses in this category. Following are some excerpts from interviews that illuminate the strong feelings of anger that the women have regarding the loss of relationship with their children.

My ex tried to turn the kids against me, and he still does. He has vicariously lived through our oldest son and the two boys try to please their father and so forth due to the tirades. My youngest just told me on Saturday that he is going to be spending a lot more time with his Dad. All he ever wanted was recognition from his father. (R1)

My ex told me when I left him that if I divorced him, he would fight for custody of those girls because I didn't deserve them. No one ever got to the place that they understood that this was just about anger, this isn't about the kids or anything, it was about getting back at me. I mean he didn't even know how to change a diaper or anything. (R3)

Our son was talked into it by promises of fishing and stuff, which of course hasn't happened. (R5)

Table 6: Responses for Respondents Experiencing CO-PARENTAL Loss as a Result of Divorcing in Mid-Life (N=10)

	n	%
No children/none from this marriage	2	20
Lost physical custody of children	4	40
Ex turned children against me	3	30
Must have contact re children	2	20
Fear of children being abused	1	10
No problems	2	20

Table 7 indicates that women were most affected (6 of 10) by family and friends distancing themselves and the loss of other relationships (5 of 10). Twenty percent stated that they felt no community loss and in fact gained friends after the divorce. Here are some comments that illustrate the emotion surrounding this issue.

People feel like they have to choose one or the other.
You bump into them and they pretend not to see you.
(R1)

I felt like I had to explain myself to everyone. Like I'm not leaving to find someone else, I'm leaving because it doesn't work. (R6)

One woman said that since I married a divorced man I was no better than Bathsheba; I was a whore. I haven't spoken to that couple since and that's a tragic loss because her husband was like a brother to me. (R7)

Men wanted to help me out but I felt like a piece of meat in a tiger's cage because they all wanted something in return. This especially came from those we had associated with which made it all the more disgusting. (R8)

His friends had become my friends; now they only tolerate me. (R10)

Table 7: Responses for Respondents Experiencing COMMUNITY Loss as a Result of Divorcing in Mid-Life (N=10)

	n	%
Friends/Family distanced themselves	6	60
Loss of relationships	5	50
Labeled divorcee/broken home	3	30
Stigma	3	30
Felt like a failure	3	30
Discrimination	2	20
No community loss	2	20

In the area of psychic loss (Table 8), there was a fairly equal reporting of negative and positive attachment, as well as attachment, neither positive nor negative, because of the children. Twenty percent stated they had no loss in this area since they had no children as a result of this marriage. Some comments that express attachment follow:

My ex still very much wants to be married to me. He's done a lot of emotional work to get some of his issues resolved so he looks more appealing to me today. So, maybe in the long term, marriage to him would be more attractive. (R4)

There's the loss of a partner; there's a void there. There's an intimacy that never goes away. You know that person inside out. (R6)

I still have a strong attachment to my ex. I can look across the room at him and know what he's thinking. (R8)

Another woman expressed her attachment more as co-dependence:

I was fine if I didn't see him but when he was down and out, he'd be so sweet and caring so I'd take him back with open arms or he'd threaten suicide and I'd come to his rescue. (R7)

Still another was quite angry, yet attached:

I've been very angry. I saw him for the first time in over a year and I couldn't understand why we couldn't communicate. (R10)

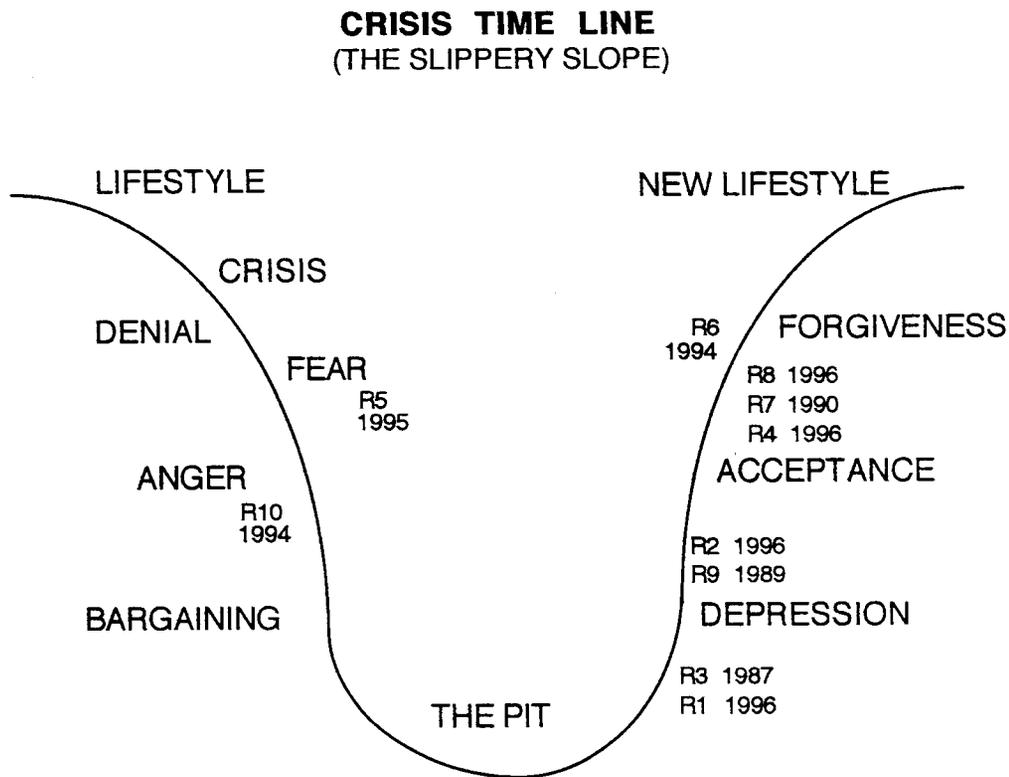
Table 8: Responses for Respondents Experiencing PSYCHIC Loss as a Result of Divorcing in Mid-Life (N=10)

	n	%
Positive strong attachment	3	30
Negative strong attachment	3	30
Attachment due to children	3	30
No psychic loss	2	20
Open to remarriage	1	10

Divorce as Grief

Emotions in the recovery process typically go down and then up. Following is a representation of where the ten participants of this study might fall on the Crisis Time Line, otherwise known as the Slippery Slope (Burns & Whiteman, 1992).

Figure 1. Crisis Time Line "Slippery Slope"



There is no right or wrong place to be on the graph. Divorce recovery, like grief recovery, is a process. The graph does illustrate that 80% of the women in this study have moved from "The Pit" toward a new lifestyle, although only 40% have moved beyond acceptance of their divorce toward a deeper healing.

Research Question #2

What factors proved beneficial in coping with these losses as related to Bohannan's six stations of divorce?

Factors Affecting Outcome

The women, in this study, not only had losses but they had strategies and strengths that helped them move toward a more positive outcome. Question three on the interview guide answers Research Question #2. Tables 9-15 will help visualize what the participants see as important coping strategies.

Beginning with Table 9, we see an aggregate number of responses for each of the six categories addressed in this question about coping strategies (emotional, legal, economic, coparental, community and psychic). Similar to Table 1, the highest number of coping strategies were reported in the emotional category with the least number in the legal arena.

Table 10 is a representation of what women believe helped them cope through their emotional losses. Having the support of friends was reported as the most significant (6 of 10 = 60%) factor in alleviating emotional pain. Forty percent (4 of 10) of women reported family support was crucial as well. Anti-depressants and counseling also appear to aid another 30% of individuals. While keeping busy placed last on the list (1 of 10), it was critical to one individual. Here are some comments in support of these findings:

The biggest helper I had was my therapist. In any session I had with her, she always pushed me to a new realization; to a new idea that I hadn't explored or hadn't realized how it was influencing me. She was really great. (R1)

Table 9: Total Number of Responses for Respondents Reporting Coping Strategies to Manage Losses as a Result of Mid-life Divorce (N=10)

	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10
Emotional	5	4	<u>1</u>	2	6	5	4	4	3	2
Legal	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>								
Economic	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	2	3	5	3	2	5	<u>1</u>
Coparental	<u>2</u>	6	2	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	2	2	3
Community	<u>2</u>	5	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	2	3	<u>1</u>	3	2	<u>1</u>
Psychic	3	2	4	2	2	3	<u>1</u>	6	3	4

A darkened number indicates the highest response category per respondent

An underlined number indicates the lowest response category per respondent

Table 10: Coping Strategies Reported by Respondents Experiencing Mid-life Divorce (N=10)

<i>EMOTIONAL</i>	n	%
Friends	6	60
Family	4	40
Anti-depressants	3	30
My children	3	30
Counseling	3	30
Believing in myself	3	30
My job	2	20
God/Spirituality	2	20
Support groups	2	20
Keeping busy	1	10

Oh, my one sister. She helped just by being there. I could cry my eyes out, I could yell and scream at her, you know. I knew she would always be there. (R3)

My best friend. She wouldn't leave me alone. I never called her; ever called her, she always called me and said, 'Come on, we're going to get together.' And that's what saved me. (R5)

Alanon helped me a great deal; gave me strength. (R7)

In the legal arena (Table 11), two individuals (2 of 10) felt that there was nothing or no one that could help, they just needed to get through it. However, those who stated they had a good lawyer (3 of 10) believed this was the best way through the legal divorce.

Even though my lawyer got frustrated with me that I didn't ask for more money, she was supportive and pushed me along because I have great difficulty making decisions. (R5)

My lawyer told me I wasn't the one with the problem and I didn't have to be responsible for any more of his debt. (R7)

Table 12 shows us that 40% (4 of 10) of the women in this study had parents who were willing to give or lend their daughters' money. Thirty percent (3 of 10) got additional jobs and budgeted very carefully. Less often (1 of 10 /10%) did someone borrow money from friends. Two women told about their parents concerns:

Table 11: Coping Strategies Reported by Respondents Experiencing Mid-Life Divorce (N=10)

<i>LEGAL</i>	n	%
Good lawyer	3	30
Nothing helped	2	20
Books	1	10
Talked to other divorcees	1	10
Court advocate	1	10
Support group	1	10
Friends	1	10

Table 12: Coping Strategies Reported by Respondents Experiencing Mid-Life Divorce (N=10)

<i>ECONOMIC</i>	n	%
Parents offered money	4	40
Got another job(s)	3	30
Budgeting carefully	3	30
AFDC/Food Stamps	2	20
Friends loaned money	1	10
Financial advisor	1	10

My car was falling apart and they were very concerned about their child and grandchildren driving around in a jalopy so they bought me a car and said I'd just get less inheritance. (R3)

He went through my savings of \$25,000 in 2 years and 6 months. When that was gone, so was he. My parents gave me the money for the divorce, paid off all my bills and paid off the loan on the brand new pickup truck he took when he left. They were concerned that I have a good credit rating. (R7)

Table 13 indicates that 60% (6 of 10) of the women in this study depended on friends and family in order to cope with coparental loss. Other strategies include sharing parenting techniques with these friends and family, and reminding oneself that the divorce decision was the right decision. Twenty percent were comforted by knowing the children had a good father and another 20% stated no coping strategies were needed since no children were involved. However, fifty percent of the participants indicated that their own children were a huge support.

My son has a very sweet spirit and once I knew he wouldn't desert me, I was fine. (R5)

I just remember that when my son comes home, he's coming home to me. (R10)

Table 13: Coping Strategies Reported by Respondents Experiencing Mid-Life Divorce (N=10)

<i>COPARENTAL</i>	n	%
Friend/Family Support	6	60
Children	5	50
Sharing parenting techniques	3	30
Believing in my decision	2	20
Knowing kids have a good Dad	2	20
No coping strategies needed	2	20

After he was gone, we (the children and I) enjoyed laughter together for the first time in years. (R1)

I had to keep telling myself I needed to be healthy for the kids; they didn't deserve me going under. (R6)

Table 14 reinforces Tables 10 and 13. Each indicates that family and friends are reported most often as an aid to coping with mid-life divorce loss (60%). Support groups are also suggested by 30% of the women as a tool for healing. Ten percent reported that moving, dating, having a job and learning that divorce is not uncommon were coping strategies during community divorce. Following is what interviewees had to say regarding community coping.

You find out, I suppose, who your most intimates are; who you feel most comfortable with; who doesn't tire of listening to the same stuff; that they trust you'll get through it and they don't hang up and go, 'Oh my God!' Because it's so awful to go through with all the changes and everything that you need a few people to really sit down and talk with. (R2)

My friends were there with smiles and hugs...just going to Baker's Square for a piece of pie...they treated. (R7)

I just realized that the ones I lost didn't count and I just made a lot more new friends. (R10)

Table 14: Coping Strategies Reported by Respondents Experiencing Mid-life Divorce (N=10)

<i>COMMUNITY</i>	n	%
Friends/Family support	6	60
Support groups	3	30
Making new friends	2	20
Meeting other divorcees	2	20
My job	1	10
Moving	1	10
Dating	1	10
Learning divorce is not uncommon	1	10

Table 15 demonstrates that 50% (5 of 10) of women report that believing in themselves and accepting themselves helped them cope with psychic divorce. In conjunction with this, 30% of the women in the study (3 of 10) stated that accomplishing things also helped. Ten percent thought journaling, counseling and meditation were also useful.

Under all this bleak exterior was the woman I used to like. I no longer have to put out product every minute of my life to prove my worth. (R1)

I started telling myself, 'I can do this, I did it!' and I realized I'm a big person. Doing things reinforced my belief so I keep on doing things. Fixing things built my confidence...I conquered it. (R3)

I'm not the little lost girl anymore. I can fix a car, change oil, change a tire. Lack of money helps you tackle things more head on. (R8)

Respondent's Process to Divorce Recovery

Further factors of significance found to influence divorce recovery lie in the response most often reported to Question six of the interview schedule. Participants were asked: Is there anything you have found to be important in the divorce recovery process that we have not covered here today? The answer to this question revealed that five out of ten respondents (50%) reported a necessity to "take care of yourself."

Table 15: Coping Strategies Reported by Respondents Experiencing Mid-life Divorce (N=10)

<i>PSYCHIC</i>	n	%
Believing in self/accepting self	5	50
Friends/Family support	3	30
Accomplishing things	3	30
Staying friends with ex	2	20
Journalling	1	10
Counseling	1	10
Meditation	1	10

Take care of yourself. I believe women in general do not do this well. Get an extra hour of sleep, get your nails done, have a massage, read a good book, go to a movie with a friend. Whatever it is that makes you feel good, really schedule it and make it a priority. (R4)

Stop the way you used to live and consciously make changes to take care of yourself. (R2)

In the same theme, this respondent refers to high levels of stress and what she does to care for herself:

Well, I have discovered that...never taking care of yourself comes back in a physical way and you will, if you have not dealt with those stresses that you have put on yourself or others have put on you, and dealt with them psychologically, they will come out physically. Well, I got my divorce and started to get my life together and then my body fell apart on me and I have not recovered yet. So, I take baths with bubbles and candles. Instead of suppressing it, suppressing it, suppressing it, I allow the bad to be bad and feel bad about it and then I say, 'Okay I've dealt with it, now I can go on.' (R1)

Additionally, the participants reiterated the need for a support network, therapy, using the resources available and believing that ...

...we grow through all situations and become
stronger, better people able to help others and be
more understanding when people need it. (R7)

V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study explored the losses and coping strategies of women who divorced during the mid to late life years of 35-55. The specific research questions addressed were:

What are the losses expressed by women as a result of divorcing in mid-life as they relate to Bohannan's six stations of divorce?

What factors proved beneficial in coping with these losses as related to Bohannan's six stations of divorce?

In this chapter, key findings of this study and the implications of these findings for social work policy and practice will be discussed. Future research recommendations will conclude this chapter.

Discussion

The demographic characteristics of the population studied revealed Caucasian women who (60%) divorced on the lower end of the mid-life age range (35-45). The majority had been married 20+ years and only 30% of the total had been previously divorced. Ninety percent of the sample had at least a high school education, although half were college graduates. Thirty percent worked full-time at the time of the interview. Seventy percent of the population had one to two children.

Divorce as loss

When participants were asked about their losses in six categories (emotional, legal, economic, coparental, community, psychic), the highest

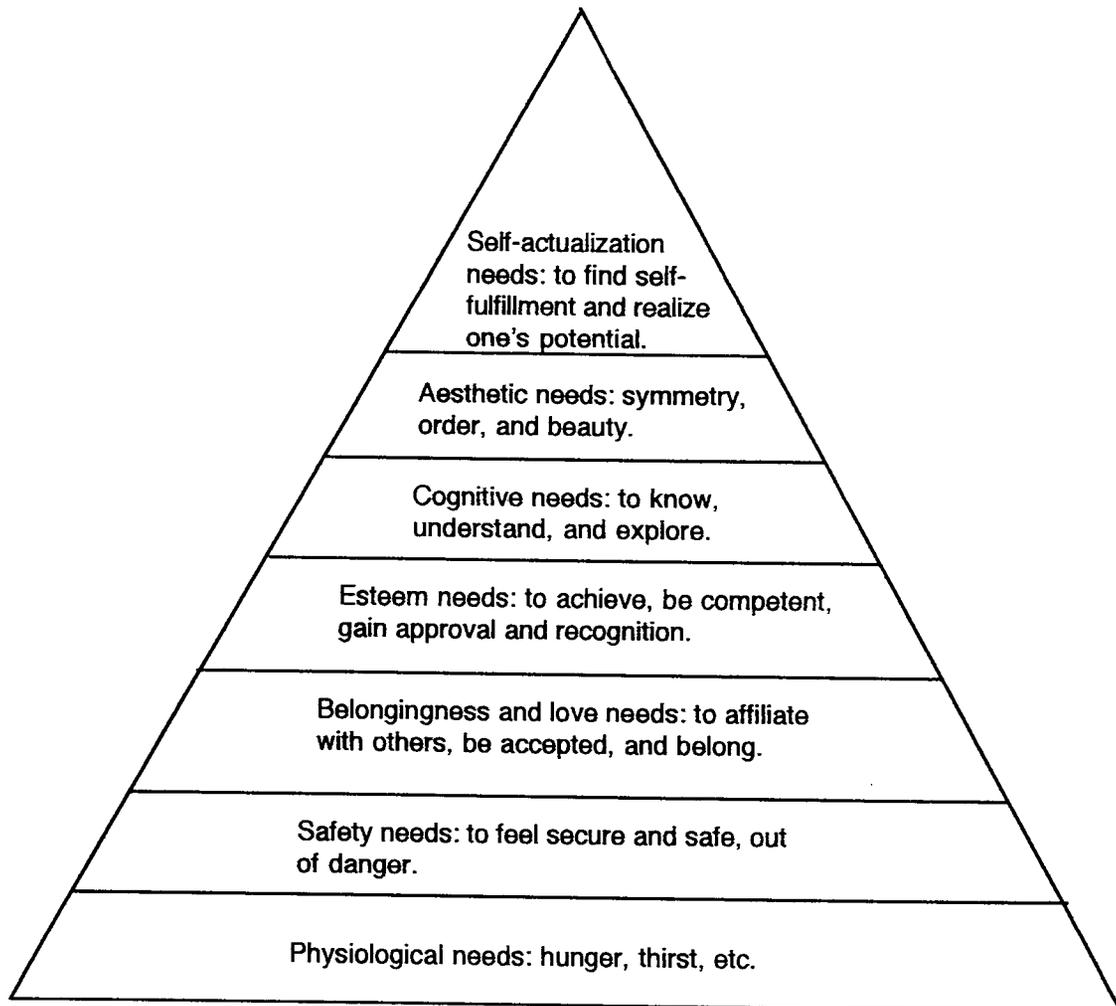
response category (40%) was in the area of emotional loss (Table 2). This finding concurs with Carter and McGoldrick (1989) who have indicated that the loss of a spouse to divorce is like losing one's identity; it requires the divorcee to ask the question, who am I now? I suspect that all women who divorce must ask themselves that question at some point in their recovery. One respondent's (R10) comment about feeling like "the lone shoe on 35W" is a powerful reminder of the intense loneliness that belies divorce.

Economic loss was reported by this group as the second highest loss category (Table 2). However, when comparing the loss with coping strategies, it yields information that money was often available from family to assuage the many difficulties inherent in this category. One could speculate that were this group primarily minority women, poor or underemployed, the economic loss category would have been a more significant finding.

Interestingly, the third and fourth highest response categories were in community and psychic loss. Community loss relates to how relationships in the community have changed because of the divorce, and psychic loss relates to the attachment to a former spouse. These two categories could be considered emotional loss as well. Carter & McGoldrick (1990) have told us that generally, women define themselves within the context of human relationships, so it is not surprising how strongly the findings of this study support the literature in this area.

Incidentally, while people who are very poor might report a high degree of emotional loss as well, it is safe to say that they would be concerned more about basic needs. In Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Figure 2), it is suggested that it is necessary to have one's basic survival needs met in order to move up the rungs to self-actualization. The sample in this study came from a more

Figure 2. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



privileged class who had their basic needs met so were able to find loss on a higher plane. This is not meant to diminish the depth of their pain or loss in any way, but only to compare what might have been were the resources as unavailable to them as they are to some. Specht and Courtney (1994, p. 15) refer to this type of population (those who can seek psychotherapy) as the "worried well".

Divorce as grief

Figure 1, the Slippery Slope (refer to page 41), is a good indicator of where each individual was in the grief process at the time of the interview. Although a specific question was not asked to ascertain their perception of where they might lie on this crisis line, what they have stated throughout the interviews was drawn upon for placement. It was important for the women to express how far they had come.

At first glance, divorce recovery may appear to be a linear and progressive process. However, when reviewing the year of divorce associated with each respondent, it appears that length of time from divorce to the present, is not a good indicator of where an individual might be represented on the crisis time line. Rather, the process is one where emotions can recycle and the individual could travel the time line repeatedly or jump, for example, from anger to acceptance with the pit being less catastrophic each time it is traversed. Additionally, although the data is unclear, there is a possibility that those who are further along on the time line may have been the initiators of the divorce and with anticipatory grief were able to move quicker through the losses toward a new lifestyle. The diagram itself reflects a combination of several grief authors points of view on what one must move through in order to reach resolution, whether one believes in a stage or a task model.

Factors affecting outcome

In response to highly reported emotional losses, respondents also reported a high need for coping strategies in this area. Friends and family were the primary source of comfort. As reported earlier, the main coping strategy in the economic area came from family in the form of financial assistance. And, although community and psychic losses were also reported, coping was required primarily in the area of attachment (psychic). Attachment theory proposes that human beings have a propensity to form relational bonds that are extremely difficult to break even under the worst of circumstances. People need to feel a sense of personal security and identity which attachment offers. Therefore, when these bonds are threatened, an individual experiences extreme distress which then intensifies the need to feel attached. Specifically related to divorce, the loss of the relationship disrupts the emotional security and sense of identity associated with being attached to the spouse. This distress generates movement toward the departing partner. Hagemeyer (1986), believes attachment to be the most difficult aspect of divorce. He describes attachment as the feeling of belonging to one another; a reference point to relate one's daily experiences to. His perception is that attachment, especially when children are involved, lasts far into the future, in spite of the absence of love. Jackson and Donovan (1988) are not sure that emotional resolution of one's divorce can ever take place due to attachment.

Recommendations for Social Work Policy and Practice

Social workers in many settings are involved with the legal and political system. As such, it behooves them to continue pursuing legislation that undergirds the underprivileged, which often includes the mid-life divorced woman. One issue in particular is the continued pursuit of effective child

support laws.

In practice, it is the social worker's awareness of where the client is in the process of divorce recovery that will lend itself to the counseling of financial matters, the discipline and rearing of children, planning for visitation and custody and sources of social contact and support services.

Most important, however is the attitude conveyed about divorce by the social worker to the client. Like any other life crisis, divorce is to be avoided when possible, but when it occurs, it is important to convey that it is a "normal process with specific tasks to be mastered, recognizable stresses to be dealt with, and satisfactions and goals to be sought for" (Wiseman, 1975 p. 212).

In summary, participants clearly wanted helping professionals to know that it is imperative for divorcing women to be heard, whether by a social worker, family member or friend. They asked that social workers follow their lead during the recovery process and trust them to make good decisions and recover at a pace that is healthy for them. Finally, respondents wanted to remind us that grief is an individual and cyclical process and as such, will take as long as it takes. There may even be times they appear incredibly distraught, but given the support needed; someone to listen to them, tools and resources that are appropriate to divorce recovery (such as a divorce recovery workbook), assistance in normalizing the process and allowing for self-determination will go far in allowing women who divorce in mid-life to convert their losses into triumphs.

Conclusion

The results of this study overall indicate that divorce recovery is a process that is as unique to each individual as the circumstances behind each divorce. This study has confirmed that relationships are crucial to women and

that the loss of a partner is a significant one. However, with friends and family as well as other support systems, women rebound and see themselves as more fully alive once they move through the pit of despair toward a new lifestyle. Attachment to a former spouse may prove to be life-long but does not need to impede the process of recovery.

Future research needs to address the issues of men and mid-life divorce as they may have a very different perspective and very different issues. It would also be important to seek out the attitudes and experiences of the adult children of these mid-life divorcing couples.

In conclusion, it is clear that there is a need for a closer look at what happens in the course of divorce to those experiencing it. More important than looking at the reasons for divorce, we need to look at the process that takes place from the irreparable breakdown of the marriage through separation and resolution about the couple's continued relationship with each other, their children and the world. While divorce is a single legal event, the divorce process and divorce recovery consist of many stages, behaviors and events that lead those who divorce through grieving to healing (Spanier & Casto, 1979). The focus of this research was to give voice to women's unique experience and to expand the social worker's knowledge and understanding of this complex process called divorce.

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Appendix A

Cover Letter

December 30, 1996

Dear Prospective Participant:

I am a graduate student working toward a Master of Social Work degree at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, MN. For my thesis, I am researching the effects of divorce on women who went through this life transition between the ages of 35-55. You were selected as a possible participant because your therapist thought you might be interested in sharing your divorce experience. His/her office is mailing this packet to you so I do not know your identity. If you choose to participate, it will mean a commitment of approximately one and a half hours of your time in a face-to-face interview with me. Your therapist will never know if you choose to participate or not unless you decide to share that with him/her.

The information you share with me will be confidential, but in a summarized way, will be offered as education for social workers and therapists alike about the struggles and successes encountered by you and others in this same situation.

Please carefully review the consent form enclosed and feel free to call the numbers indicated on the form if you have any questions regarding this research project.

Sincerely,

Chris Kocinski, LSW

encl.

IRB #96-17-3

Appendix B

Follow-up cover letter

January 28, 1997

Dear Potential Participant:

I am a graduate student working toward a Master of Social Work degree at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, MN. Several weeks back your therapist mailed you a letter regarding my thesis research on the effects of divorce on women who went through this life transition between the ages of 35-55. **If you have already completed and returned a consent form or have chosen not to participate in this study, please disregard this follow-up letter requesting your participation.**

This research is being conducted to provide me with information for my Master of Social Work thesis and to provide you with an opportunity to report your experiences. Your experience and opinions are very important. If you choose to participate, it will mean a commitment of approximately one and a half hours of your time in a face-to-face interview with me. Your therapist will never know if you choose to participate unless you decide to share that with him/her.

The information you share with me will be confidential, but in a summarized way, will be offered as education for social workers and therapists alike about the struggles and successes encountered by you and others in the same situation.

Please carefully review the consent form enclosed and feel free to call the numbers indicated on the form if you have any questions regarding this research project. Thank you for reconsidering this research study.

Sincerely,

Chris Kocinski, LSW
Graduate Student and Principal Investigator

encl

Appendix C

Consent Form

Mid-life Divorce Losses and Triumphs

You are invited to be in a research study of women who have divorced during the mid-life years of 35-55. You were selected as a possible participant because your therapist indicated you might be interested in sharing your thoughts about your divorce experience. Your therapist will not know if you choose to participate or not, unless you decide to share this information with him/her. I ask that you read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by me as part of my master's thesis at Augsburg College.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to assist social workers in better understanding the struggles of women who divorce in mid-life and be better equipped to support them through the process.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things.

1) Please sign this form and return it in the stamped envelope addressed to me at Augsburg College by **February 15, 1997**

2) Begin to think of a location that would be convenient for us to meet for approximately 1 1/2 hours

Risks and benefits of being in the study

The only risk present in this study is that the discussion of your divorce experience may bring up issues that have been dormant for a time and may cause you some discomfort as you speak of them. Should this occur, your therapist has indicated his/her willingness to have a post-interview session with you if you feel the need to further discuss your divorce. However, payment for any such follow-up must be provided by you or your third party payer, if any, (such as health insurance).

If at any time during our interview you wish to end your participation in the study, you need only say so without affecting the relationship with myself, Augsburg College, your counselor or the agency for whom your counselor works.

Although no direct benefit (compensation) is available for your participation in this study, the indirect benefits may be improved services from social workers and therapists and improved services for divorced women because of the knowledge they gain as a result of this research.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept private. In any report I might publish or offer to you and your therapist, I will not include any information that would make it possible to identify you. Only I will have access to the raw data. Research records, such as my notes and tape recordings, will be kept in a locked, fire-proof box in my home until my thesis has final approval, at which time, the

notes will be shredded and the tapes erased.

Raw data will be destroyed by September 1, 1997.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Augsburg College or the agency where you have received counseling. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Chris Kocinski. The thesis advisor on this project is Dr. Rosemary Link. If you have any questions regarding this research before you sign this consent form, please feel free to contact either of the above named individuals. Their numbers are as follows:

Chris Kocinski 347-4347 (W)
Dr. Rosemary Link 330-1147 (W)

You will be given a copy of your signed consent form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions as needed and have received answers. I consent to participate in this study.

Signature _____ Phone # _____ Date _____

Signature of
researcher _____ Date _____

I also consent to have my interview audiotaped.

Signature _____ Date _____

I would like a summary of the findings of this research study. Yes No (Please circle one)

If you circled Yes, please provide your address for mailing the summary:

Appendix D

Interview Schedule

Women and Mid-Life Divorce Losses and Triumphs

Kocinski Divorce Research
Augsburg College
2211 Riverside Avenue
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Date: _____

1. Introduce myself and give a brief explanation of the project and the time frame we have available for the interview.
2. Read aloud the following introduction to the respondent.

In the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, divorce and its resulting struggles, received wide-spread attention in research and the media. However, little has been written on this topic in the 1990s; especially regarding the loss and adjustment of women who divorce in the middle adult years.

Various researchers look at the process of divorce differently. For the purpose of this research, I have chosen to focus on a model of divorce recovery by a theorist named Paul Bohannan. Mr. Bohannan believes that each of us who divorce go through six stations that I will name for you as we move into the actual interview. My hope is that you will feel comfortable sharing your experience with me today, in this confidential setting, knowing the ultimate goal of my research is to assist social workers to better understand the struggles of women who divorce in midlife and be better equipped to support them through the process.

Do you have any questions for me at this time? Please take your time in

answering the questions and feel free to ask for clarification as you need. Are you ready? Okay, let's begin.

Question 1: In the following categories, will you please tell me what you would consider losses experienced by you as a result of divorcing in mid-life?

Emotional: (problem of deteriorating marriage)

Legal: (based on grounds)

Economic: (money, property)

Coparental: (custody, single-parenting, visitation)

Community: (changes of friends & community)

Psychic (regaining autonomy, issues of attachment to ex):

Question 2: Is there a category of experience we haven't covered?

Question 3: In the following categories, what would you describe as the tools people, ideas or symbols of healing that helped you cope with the losses you just described?

Emotional:

Legal:

Economic:

Coparental:

Community:

Psychic:

Question 4: Again, is there a category we have left out?

Question 5: a) If your close friend came to you today and told you she was planning to divorce, what would your response be?

b) If you chose to offer advice to her, what would it be?

Question 6: Is there anything you have found to be important in the divorce recovery process that we have not covered here today?

Question 7: What should future social workers know about working with divorced women?

Question 8: Demographics

Age now

Age at divorce

Date of divorce

Length of marriage

Length of time from irreparable breakdown to separation

Length of time from separation to divorce

Ethnicity

Highest education completed

Employment (you)

Employment (former spouse)

Number of children from this marriage

Any previous divorces; separations

IRB #96-17-3

