

Divorce and the Experience of Australian Men

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma, except where due reference is made in the text. To the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another except where due reference is made in the text. I declare that the ethical principles of the Australian Psychological Society and the codes, guidelines and principles of Swinburne University of Technology in relation to research have been adhered to during the course of this research project.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

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This project was inspired by and is dedicated to the memory of Darcey Freeman.

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Abstract

Divorce is a major event, requiring individuals to make important adjustments to their lives and relationships whilst simultaneously experiencing heightened levels of distress. Despite extensive research into divorce over recent decades, there has been little focus on the unique experience of divorced Australian men, both with and without children at the end of the relationship. The current study investigated the adaptation to divorce of Australian men and relationships between divorce adjustment and a range of previously associated factors including gender based traits, gender role identity, sources of support, spousal conflict and child custody satisfaction. A mixed method study utilising quantitative and qualitative data was conducted to broadly investigate divorce adaptation, but also explore the individual narratives of divorced Australian men. A sample of 134 self-selecting Australian men aged 18 to 60 years ($M = 48.15$; $SD = 7.48$) were recruited, with all participants having experienced the breakdown of a formal or common law marriage. Results from the study were mixed, with some findings supporting previous research while others offered new perspectives on men's adjustment to divorce. Of particular note were the strong positive associations between levels of the stereotypically masculine gender based trait of instrumentality and all facets of adjustment including overall adaptation to divorce ($r = .52$). Other findings suggested that although divorced fathers reported a qualitatively different experience of divorce, quantitative measures of adaptation did not differ between men based on the presence or absence of children. Additionally, the role of individual counselling and informal social support in promoting positive adjustment, particularly for divorced fathers, was also identified. The current study provides a comprehensive assessment of Australian men's experiences of separation, divorce, post-divorce parenting and general divorce adaptation, but should be viewed as a starting point for ongoing research aimed at better understanding and assisting Australian men's adjustment to divorce.

CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

In 2012, 49,917 divorces were granted in Australia with 48.4% involving children (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). Marital separation and divorce involves a major life transition requiring individuals to undergo both a personal adjustment to new circumstances and a redefinition of social roles (Fry & Corfield, 1983). Though both men and women undergoing divorce and family re-organisation commonly experience an elevated level of distress, women are more likely to seek and receive professional help or support from family and friends (Smith, Braunack-Mayer, Wittert, & Warin, 2008). In contrast, the experiences common to men and the emotional trauma they may experience is often unsupported by others and unacknowledged by both themselves and others, sometimes with tragic consequences.

Though research into divorce and outcomes for both spouses and children is relatively extensive, there has been less of a focus on the unique experience of men and factors that are associated with successful or unsuccessful adaptation to post-divorce life and fathering. However, the degree to which a man identifies with stereotypically masculine gender traits alone or has a more Androgynous gender role identity has been significantly associated with post-divorce adjustment (Alain & Lussier, 1988). Other research into male specific divorce adaptation has identified a range of additional factors associated with levels of adjustment including utilisation of professional or social sources of support (Deutsch, 2008; Oygard & Hardeng, 2001; Oygard, Thuen, & Solvang, 2000; Sauber, Beiner, & Meddoff, 1995), the health of ongoing relationships with an ex-spouse (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006; Emery & Dillon, 1994) and other ex-family-in-law members (Gerstel, 1988), the experience of pre-divorce and post-divorce spousal conflict (Malcore, Windell, Seyuin, & Hill, 2010) and, where children

are present, reported satisfaction with child custody and access arrangements (Hawthorne & Lennings, 2008; Vassiliou & Cartwright, 2001; Wilbur & Wilbur, 1988). Finally, the active involvement in organisations promoting fathers' rights has also been associated with levels of adjustment to changed life circumstances for men emerging from divorce (Collier, 2009; Flood, 2010)

1.2 Aims and rationale of the study

The overall aim of this study was to assess the relationships between a range of factors and the adaptation of Australian men to divorce both in situations where children were present and not present at the end of the marriage. Though the relationship between gender role identity and adaptation to divorce was the primary focus of the study, additional factors hypothetically linked to post-divorce adjustment were also assessed. Through use of a mixed method research design, quantitative analysis allowed for specific measurement of relationships between variables while qualitative analysis of participant narratives allowed for a deeper understanding of Australian men's experiences of separation, divorce, post-divorce parenting and general adaptation.

The study was undertaken to provide an important insight into the experience of divorced Australian men, an area in which relatively limited research has been conducted to date. Additionally, information and results from this study were anticipated to assist in the development of programs and services to support men struggling to adapt to post-divorce parenting, relationships and other life circumstances. It was also suggested that participation in the study could allow men to reflect on ways in which they have adjusted to post-divorce life while information provided within questionnaires about support services available may have assisted those struggling with issues arising from the end of their marriage to seek help, potentially leading to

improvements in relationships, communication, co-operative parenting and helping to avert serious consequences for both them and their family.

1.3 Definitions and distinctions

Within the study, the term *de-facto* relationship is taken to mean a relationship viewed as a valid marriage by the partners, but not formally registered with either state or religious authorities. In contrast, the terms *married* or *formal marriage* indicates that the relationship was formally registered by state authorities and possibly a religious institution or body. The term *divorce* is used interchangeably to describe the end of either a formal marriage or a de-facto relationship, with the exception of sections where adaptation outcomes and experiences between these two groups are assessed, at which point distinctions were made using alternative terms. Children under 18 at the time of a divorce are referred to as *children* throughout the study, while children produced by the relationship who were over the age of 18 at the time of divorce are identified using the term *adult children*.

1.4 Organisation of the study

The current research project comprised a single study conducted over a twelve month period from November 2011 to November 2012 with Australian men who self-identified as having experienced divorce or the breakdown of a de-facto relationship at some stage in their lives. The four introductory chapters include a broad literature review focussing on reasons for and the process of divorce in Australia, factors associated with positive and negative adaptation to divorce and the manner in which gender role identity is posited to impact on adjustment to divorce. This is followed by

chapters outlining the methodology of the study and both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The final chapter integrates findings from the project with existing literature, discusses clinical implications of these results, identifies potential limitations within the study and suggests directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: DIVORCE

2.1 Divorce in Australia

To provide a general overview of demographic and other trends in marriage and divorce in Australia, information was sourced from two publications produced by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2004; Weston & Qu, 2013).

Though the population of Australia has increased six-fold from 1901 to 2011 (3.77 million to 21.5 million), the number of registered marriages during this period has only increased by a factor of four (27,750 to 121,750). Historically, factors including the great depression, other recessionary economic periods, wars and gender imbalances have influenced the marriage rate at any one time. Recent crude marriage rates (being the number of marriages per 1000 members of resident population in a year) have been between 5.3 and 5.5, the lowest on record, with the highest rates recorded between 1940 and 1942 (between 10.6 and 12.0). Three key reasons are noted for the decline in registered marriage; an increase in the average age at first marriage, greater work and life opportunities for young adults (particularly women) than were available for previous generations and the rise in cohabitation without entering into formal marriage.

In contrast, the rate of formal divorce has increased markedly over the same period. Despite the relatively low rate of marriage (given registered marriage is a prerequisite for formal divorce), recent crude divorce rates have remained historically high at between 2.2 and 2.3. The peak crude divorce rate was 4.6 in 1975, prompted by legislative change allowing for no-fault divorce. As a result, many registered marriages which had ended in separation some years earlier became formally dissolved at this time (Weston & Qu, 2013). The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013) reported that 49,917

divorces were granted during the 2012 calendar year which can be considered to be a historically high number.

As at 2011, the median age for men and women at divorce was 45 and 42 years old respectively. This reflects a continuing increase over recent decades (e.g. 1990 ages were 38 and 35 years old respectively) due to delayed ages of marriage for both men and women. The age at which people marry in Australia has been associated with their risk of divorce (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2004) with those who marry in their teens most likely to divorce within a five to nine year period after marriage. Of teenage adults who married between 1989 and 1990, over 65 per cent were divorced within ten years.

With regard to the length of marriages ending in divorce, a decline in shorter term marriages (less than ten years) has been matched by an increase in the number of longer term (more than 20 years) marriages ending in divorce while little change has been noted in the divorce rate of medium term marriages (between 10 and 19 years). However, across these three durations of marriage, divorces occurring after fewer than ten years of marriage remain the most common.

An association between levels of completed education and divorce in Australia has also been reported. Utilising data from the 2001 census, the Australian Institute of Family Studies (2004) reported that 10.7 per cent of individuals with a tertiary education, 15 per cent of those with a diploma or certificate qualification and 17.4 per cent of adults with no higher qualifications were divorced on census date. However, it was unclear from these findings whether educational status protects an individual against divorce (through later marriage, increased income or other factors) or increases the chances of remarrying after divorce, leading to a reduction in the divorced status for groups with higher levels of educational achievement.

Similarly, analysis of divorce rates between occupational categories found that 10.3 per cent of men in white collar occupations such as managers, administrators and professionals identified as divorced in 2001 compared with 18.6 per cent of men engaged in labouring professions at the same time (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2004). As with educational level, the relationship between employment category and divorce is not entirely clear. However, the report's authors suggested two potential factors; marriages involving financially secure partners are more likely to survive, or that men who are financially secure find it easier to re-partner after divorce.

The proportion of divorces involving children has declined since the early 1970's from 68 per cent to just over 48 per cent in 2012 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). This has been attributed to factors including adults marrying later in life and the wider availability of reliable contraception. Despite this decline, between 47,000 and 55,000 children experienced parental divorce over the last decade in Australia (Weston & Qu, 2013). The Australian Institute of Family Studies (2004) reported that children experiencing the divorce of their parents were most likely to be between 5 and 9 years old (36.6 per cent of cases) or between 0 and 4 (26.2 per cent of cases) with children in the age range of 15 to 17 comprising the smallest group (11.8 per cent of cases).

2.2 Reasons for divorce

Divorce is a complex event with a range of factors often attributed to the breakdown of a marriage. In a working paper developed for the Australian Institute of Family Studies, Wolcott and Hughes (1999) utilised data from 650 divorced Australian adults collected during a random national telephone survey in late 1997 to investigate the reasons men and women provided for the breakdown of their relationship. Participants were asked to nominate the predominant factor in their divorce from a list

of options across three dimensions, commonly identified in prior research into divorce (Gigy & Kelly, 1992; Kitson & Holmes, 1992); being affective reasons, abusive behaviours and external pressures. Additional factors nominated by participants not fitting these categories were recorded as “other reasons”.

Affective reasons were the most prevalent across the study with 27 per cent of all participants nominating communication problems between them and their ex-spouse and 21 per cent identifying a sense of incompatibility or “drifting apart” as the main reasons for their divorce with communication problems the most cited primary reason by men (33 per cent). Wolcott and Hughes (1999) noted that this reason seemed to be used as short-hand for a wide array of emotional problems within the relationship including feeling like one’s needs are not being met, loss of affection or companionship and feeling lonely or unappreciated. Incompatibility or drifting apart covered a range of issues including a lack of common interests between spouses, loss of love, diminution of trust and changed values, lifestyles or desires. Though sexual incompatibility was only nominated by two per cent of participants, sexual or emotional unfaithfulness was perceived as the main reason for divorce by 20 per cent of both men and women, with a sizeable majority reporting an ex-spouses infidelity as the main precipitating factor in the end of their marriage. The authors noted that the predominance of affective reasons for divorce offers support for the contemporary definition of a successful marriage being primarily based on emotional closeness and companionship.

The category abusive behaviours encompassed reasons for divorce including alcohol and drug use, gambling, jealousy, dominance, physical and emotional violence and mental illness. Within the study, eleven per cent of women and three per cent of men reported drug or alcohol abuse as the main reason for divorce, though participants did not identify if they, their spouse or both partners experienced substance abuse

problems. Six per cent nominated physical abuse with all but one of the thirty five respondents being women; however participants were only able to identify physical violence directed towards them or children, preventing men from nominating their own violent behaviours as a reason for divorce. In contrast, two per cent of participants cited verbal or emotional abuse as the main cause for their divorce. While physical, verbal or emotional abuse by a current or former spouse is commonly reported by both Australian men and women, research has found that this factor is less commonly identified as the predominant reason for divorce (Wolcott & Hughes, 1999).

External pressures included mental and physical health problems, financial strains, work commitments and interference in the relationship by members of a spouse's family. Five per cent of both male and female respondents nominated mental and physical health problems as the main reason for their divorce with previous research reporting that while the experience of major illness can help solidify a marriage, it can also increase stress, diminish sexual intimacy and create difficulties both in caring responsibilities and the division of labour (Schmaling & Sher, 1997). Financial pressures were identified by five per cent of participants while only three per cent noted that problems managing a balance between work and family life were the main reason for their divorce. The minimal importance of financial strain was contrary to findings within a large scale North American study by Terling-Watt (2001) in which both female and male divorced adults noted this factor as one of the most important reasons for the end of their marriage. Wolcott and Hughes (1999) speculated that while financial and work pressures may not have been the foremost reasons identified by divorced men and women, these factors can exert substantial influence on the more commonly identified reasons including communication problems and incompatibility. Similarly, the authors noted that 63 per cent of female participants were actively employed at the time of their

separation and disagreements over roles, independence within the relationship and the division of both work and family tasks all have been significantly associated with an increased risk of divorce (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003; Sanchez & Gager, 2000; South, 1995).

Other factors were found to be of minimal importance to participants.

Interference from family members of a spouse was only cited by less than one per cent as the main reason for divorce while only two per cent nominated problems relating to raising children as the main reason for the end of their marriage. However, it is possible that disagreements relating to parenting styles were included in affective reasons such as poor communication and general incompatibility. International research into the relationship between parenting and divorce is mixed with some studies relating that the intensive years of child raising is significantly associated with increased marital dissatisfaction (Ellis, 2000; Glenn, 1998), while Devine (1996) reported no child-related factors in predicting divorce amongst 140 North American families, a finding supported by Hewitt (2009) in an assessment of data from 9118 Australian families.

It is important to note that many couples experience the type of difficulties identified by Walcott and Hughes (1999) such as communication problems, sexual infidelity and abusive behaviours, without the relationship ending in divorce. However, the ABCX model of family stress and adaptation developed by Hill (1958) and expanded by McCubbin and Patterson (1983) helps explain how such problems can result in divorce. The model posits that stress experienced by the family (“A”) is attempted to be managed using individual, familial or external adaptive resources (“B”) with meanings attributed by the family to both the stressor and adaptive resources interacting (“C”) with both, all resulting in how the family adjusts to the situation (“X”). As noted by Lavee, McCubbin and Patterson (1985), stressors experienced by a family

system rarely relate to a single isolated event, and are more likely to involve a “pile up” of demands and difficulties over an extended period, with an event then precipitating the need for adjustment. In situations where the stress is too great, adaptive resources are absent or inadequate and the meaning attributed to the situation does not facilitate adjustment lead to maladaptive adjustment characterised by poorer individual and systemic senses of well-being, negative impacts on both physical and psychological health and a deterioration of the integrity of the family unit, all potentially leading to divorce.

2.3 The process of separation and divorce

Divorce involves three key steps; the psychological and social task of distancing oneself from a failing relationship, preparing for life outside the marriage and finally, formal processes within the family law system, particularly in situations where children are present and custody and access decisions are not successfully negotiated between divorcing parents.

As is the case with most Western societies (Bodenmann et al., 2006), Australian divorce law has been based on a “no fault” principle since the 1975 legislation of the Family Law Act. As a result, the only relevant information assessed by the Family Court of Australia in the granting of a divorce is if the marriage has irretrievably broken down, meaning there is no reasonable likelihood that the relationship between spouses can be restored. Additional practical requirements include the couple having been married for longer than two years, separated for at least twelve months plus one day and, if children are involved, that proper arrangements have been made for their ongoing care. Should a couple wish to divorce having been married for less than two

years, counselling with an approved professional is first required unless permission for a divorce has been granted by the court. Under Australian law, few grounds exist for an individual to oppose a divorce application lodged by their spouse where pre-conditions for this application exist. Once lodged, processing of a divorce application usually takes at least four months before being finalised. In the case of de-facto relationships, the Family Court of Australia only becomes involved in a separation where disputes exist between partners on financial matters or the ongoing care of children, particularly those concerning custody, access and financial support between parents.

Though previous research has explored reasons for divorce, investigation into the societal and psychological experiences of divorcing adults has been relatively limited. However, two key studies have explored common thoughts and feelings experienced by individuals when preparing to leave a marriage. Socially based attractors and barriers to divorce were investigated by Bodenmann et al (2006) by utilising data from 711 divorced adults from Germany, Italy and Switzerland. Though four broad social influences of religious beliefs, modernisation, economic security and attitudes to divorce were posited as potential attractors or barriers depending on country of origin, the authors found that individual factors including emotional alienation from a partner (attractor) and both the presence of children and potential loss of self-esteem (barriers) were found to be the main factors in the decision to either divorce or remain in a marriage.

Once divorce is being considered by one or both spouses, a number of psychological processes have been proposed which allow an individual to firstly conceptualise, and then bring about the end of a marriage. In a qualitative study conducted with 11 Swedish couples of which at least one partner was seriously considering divorce, Willén and Montgomery (2006) identified three intrapsychic

processes commonly experienced by individuals contemplating separation: being cognitive, interactional and preparatory processes.

Cognitive processes were used to place a positive or negative connotation to strains in the relationship depending on the individual's predisposition to divorce. Those hoping for the marriage to continue engaged in processes such as focussing only on positive aspects of the union and de-emphasising the importance of negative elements. In contrast, participants who were moving towards separation tended to engage in cognitive strategies including inflating the importance of negative elements of the relationship and mentally exploring alternate possibilities or fantasising about a different life. Interactional strategies for those wishing to save the relationship tended towards overt investment in the coupling, including buying a new house or having a child. However, blaming, criticising and provocation behaviours combined with emotional distancing were common themes for individuals wanting to push themselves or their partner towards divorce. Finally, preparatory processes included actions such as connecting with new intimate partners, gathering information about separation and divorce and, in what appeared to be a key process, nurturing an individual sense of self separate to the failing relationship.

Overall, Willén and Montgomery (2006) noted that the processes engaged in by participants wishing to leave the relationship were geared towards three outcomes; making the threatening aspects of divorce less intimidating, devaluing the existing relationship and developing a new independent identity. These outcomes offered support for earlier findings by Thompson and Spanier (1983) who, in a study conducted with 205 recently separated North American adults, identified acceptance of marriage termination to be highest among those who initiated the divorce and were able to

successfully emotionally disengage from their spouse, thereby achieving an independent sense of self unrelated to the marriage.

2.4 Pre-divorce and post-divorce conflict

As noted by Clarke-Stewart and Brentano (2006), a major contributing factor in as many as half of all divorces is conflict between spouses. However, the existence of conflict within a relationship is not necessarily predictive of divorce given all marriages involve some level of discord relating to everyday issues such as child rearing, financial matters and social activities. Rather, the ability of couples to work through problems, communicate effectively and regulate conflict is positively associated with healthier marriages (Gottman, 1994). In contrast, the presence of “nonregulated” conflict where disagreements do not facilitate problem solving or relationship strengthening, but serve to escalate tension and distress, has been significantly associated with long-term damage to family relationships and the increased likelihood of divorce (Ellis, 2000; Emery, 1982; Gottman, 1994; Noller, Feeney, Sheehan, Darlington, & Rogers, 2008).

The majority of research into pre-divorce and post-divorce conflict has centred on cases where children were present at the end of the marriage. Studies have consistently reported that high levels of marital conflict have negative consequences for children with increased levels of emotional and behavioural problems and lower levels of self-esteem regularly reported (Ahrons, 2007; Bonach, 2005; Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006; Forehand, Neighbors, Devine, & Armistead, 1994; Jaffe, Poisson, Cunningham, Graham-Bermann, & Edleson, 2001). A common concern for spouses engaged in a high conflict relationship is whether children are most adversely affected by partners remaining together or choosing to divorce. Clarke-Stewart and Brentano

(2006) reported that although there are some discrepancies between individual studies, North American research suggests that outcomes for children are improved if parents engaged in a high conflict relationship divorce, then experience a subsequent abatement of conflict as a result of this separation. Malcore, Windell, Seyuin and Hill (2010) noted that although issues leading to conflict are normally resolved between divorcing couples within one year of the relationship ending, approximately one quarter of North American divorces involve high levels of continuing conflict between ex-spouses. Three key factors were identified by the authors with greater satisfaction with financial arrangements, better custody and access outcomes for parents and less “defensive” personality styles of divorced spouses all associated with lower levels of post-divorce conflict.

In a study involving 227 North American adolescents, 103 of which came from families experiencing divorce less than twelve months prior to commencement of the study, Forehand, Neighbours, Devine and Armistead (1994) assessed the effect of marital status and parental conflict on adolescent adjustment over a four year period. Though divorce was found to be associated with lower levels of adolescent functioning in the first year after family re-organisation, higher levels of conflict irrespective of family structure were associated with poorer functioning for a period extending to between two and three years after divorce. These findings support the proposition that children of divorced families are at greater risk of longer term negative outcomes where divorce fails to resolve conflict between parents. In a complementary study, Yu, Pettit, Lansford, Dodge and Bates (2010) measured levels of family conflict for 467 North American children between the ages of five to seventeen, and then at twenty two years old, assessed their current relationships with both parents. Intact parental relationships involving a high degree of conflict were associated with poorer current adult child -

parent relationships, while for adult children from divorced families; earlier marital conflict was not associated with the health of current family relationships. Yu et al (2010) suggested that these findings supported the view that divorce may ameliorate some of the negative effects of parental conflict on children in cases where family reorganisation allows children to “escape” a high-conflict environment.

2.5 Custody and co-parenting

The major task of post-divorce family reorganisation centres on parents negotiating custody and access arrangements for children and interacting in a way to support both effective co-parenting and maintain strong parent - child relationships (Ahrons & Tanner, 2003; Clingempeel & Reppucci, 1982; Felner, 1985; Graham, 1997; Qu, Weston, Moloney, Kaspiw, & Dunstan, 2014). For the purpose of the current study, it is helpful to briefly review three broad aspects of custody, access and co-parenting; being legal processes, post-divorce co-parenting and ongoing relationships between fathers and children.

Though the granting of a divorce in Australia is technically separate from issues of child custody and access, the Family Court may withhold the finalisation of a divorce until ongoing arrangements for the care of children is decided between parents. The law differentiates between legal custody, being shared parental rights and responsibilities and physical custody denoting the physical guardianship of a child. Though the concept of shared legal custody is well established and a starting position for the Family Court in determining custody outcomes, shared physical custody is rarely ordered by the court or practical in application. The Family Court may make a parenting order to formalise custody arrangements based on either an agreement between parents, or as determined by the court after hearings or a trial where disagreements between

parents remain. Ex-spouses are required to make reasonable attempts to resolve disagreements through the use of family dispute resolution services prior to making an application for the Family Court to rule on child custody and access arrangements. A range of penalties may be applied to individuals who fail to comply with a parenting order including variation of the parenting order, paying legal costs of the other parent and in extreme circumstances, imprisonment.

Though the majority of child custody and access arrangements are decided between parents without recourse to Family Court rulings, the adversarial nature of the family law system has been criticised both within Australia and internationally for failing to encourage positive communication and cooperation between divorcing parents (Emery, 1995; Emery, Laumann-Billings, Waldron, Sbarra, & Dillon, 2001; Emery & Wyer, 1987). In a study assessing outcomes for separated North American families with custody arrangements between parents, Keoughan, Joanning and Sudak-Allison (2001) identified a number of problematic themes in the ongoing management of these agreements including individuals outside the parental dyad interfering with arrangements between ex-spouses, changes in the residential or employment circumstances of parents, inconsistency in timing of non-custodial access and, most importantly, ineffective communication and ongoing hostility between ex-partners. Keoughan, Joanning and Sudak-Allison (2001) noted that a wide range of what should be routine adjustments to child custody and access arrangements between parents is poorly supported within an adversarial family law system, leading individuals to make arbitrary and discretionary changes, resulting in both further conflict and poorer co-operative parenting.

In an extensive review of divorce research between 2000 and 2005, Kruk (2005) identified that the adversarial framework of family law fosters a “winner take all” and

“ownership” attitude amongst parents that serves to harm all members of a divorcing family. Kruk was particularly critical of the “best interests of the child test” which is the overriding concern for Family Court judges when determining parenting orders. It has been suggested that this test is often applied without reference to the individual perspective of the child and their level of development, resulting in poor child, parent and co-parenting outcomes (Emery & Wyer, 1987; Kruk, 2005). Dissatisfaction with adversarial family law processes was also investigated by Sheets and Braver (1996) utilising data from 400 divorced North American men and women. Although men in the study identified significantly lower satisfaction with contentious child custody and financial outcomes than women, the main cause for dissatisfaction was the perception of inequitable processes and systematic bias against men when working through family law systems as opposed to the final custody and access rulings themselves.

As noted by Wilbur and Wilbur (1988) “divorce never eliminates a parent, but only changes family structure” (p. 434). However, in changing a family structure, previously agreed parenting roles between ex-spouses can become unclear and a potential source of conflict, particularly when individuals have been unable to redefine their role from a pre-divorce to a post-divorce parent. (Bokker, 2006; Hardesty, Khaw, Chung, & Martin, 2008; Haynes, 1988; Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2002; Scott, Booth, King, & Johnson, 2007). Research suggests that difficulties in post-divorce parenting are particularly common for men, given that although parents may share legal custody, physical custody of children often remains with the mother while the father either accepts or is awarded access rights alone. Such a situation can leave fathers experiencing or continuing to experience self-doubt, ambivalence about their parental role and feeling both devalued and discounted in making joint decisions for their children (Hawthorne & Lennings, 2008); Moloney (2002); (Vassiliou & Cartwright,

2001; Wilbur & Wilbur, 1988) resulting in a significant drop in their involvement with their child or children (Bronstein, Stoll, Clauson, Abrams, & Briones, 1994; Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006; Coiro & Emery, 1998; DeGarmo, Patras, & Eap, 2008). This in turn removes an important source of immediate support and impacts on the development of later emotionally beneficial relationships between fathers and their adult children (Ahrons & Tanner, 2003; Rezac, 2007).

Research conducted by Olmstead, Futris and Pasley (2009) with North American fathers identified a number of self-described roles men associated with fathering and the way in which divorce impacted on them fulfilling these roles. Divorced men overwhelmingly identified their role as a “financial provider” for their children as their most important function, whilst simultaneously expressing disappointment and animosity at the lack of recognition they received for fulfilling this function. These men also viewed the role of “protector” as important, particularly in shielding children from ongoing conflict with their ex-partner. Fathering roles seen by participants as being negatively impacted by divorce included those of “teacher”, “supporter” and “caretaker” with their lack of physical presence in their child’s life and struggles to maintain co-operative co-parenting relationships with ex-partners key to their diminished sense of fatherhood. These findings are consistent with Australian research suggesting that male self-worth is commonly and intimately associated with success in the workplace and the ability to adequately provide for their family (Moloney, 2002).

An additional difficulty faced by men in becoming post-divorce fathers is the way in which an attempt to change their parenting role and attitudes previously embedded within the marital relationship may threaten an ex-partner’s self-concept as a parent. In UK based studies with parents from both intact and divorced families, Gatrell

(2007) found a clear majority of fathers desired a strong one-on-one relationship with their children independent of their co-parent. However, a common theme among female participants was their sense of “primary importance” to the child over the father and a desire to mediate the relationship between children and their co-parent (Gatrell, 2006, 2007). In cases where such a desire exists, divorced fathers without primary physical custody may have their fathering role blocked by an ex-partner (Bokker, 2006) or find their involvement to be contingent on meeting a co-parents expectations, particularly on issues such as timing of child access (Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2002) and financial arrangements (Laakso, 2004; Lin & McLanahan, 2007; Wilbur & Wilbur, 1988). However, Gatrell (2007) also identified that men’s stated desires for an unmediated relationship often did not extend to equal parenting roles, with fathers largely endorsing traditional divisions of labour within both intact and divorced families in which women would undertake more routine parenting tasks while men focussed on the relationship with their children. Such a perspective can not only entrench conflict between co-parents, leading to poorer long term parent - child relationships (Ahrons & Tanner, 2003) but also prevent men from developing post-divorce fatherhood roles beyond those of a “financial provider” or “protector” alone.

CHAPTER 3: ADAPTATION TO DIVORCE

3.1 The aftermath of divorce and facets of successful adaptation

Once divorce has been finalised and the initial pain has dissipated, individuals face the task of adjusting to their new post-divorce life including shifts and losses in social networks, adjustment to new individual and family roles, financial pressures and the potential for continuing psychological distress (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006). How long it takes for an individual to adjust to divorce depends on a range of individual factors, though Clarke-Stewart and Brentano (2006) suggested that the first two years of divorce is often the most difficult with adjustment not fully stabilising until five years after divorce with minimal improvement in adaptation past this point.

The manner in which divorce adaptation is conceptualised and measured has been the subject of extensive research over recent decades. However, studies have tended to focus on seven facets of divorce adaptation (Fisher & Alberti, 1981); the adjustment of emotional boundaries between ex-partners, resolution of grief and loss stemming from the divorce, resolution of anger and the experience of self-worth across three domains; individual self-worth, social self-worth and self-worth associated with entering into new intimate relationships.

3.2 Boundary adjustment and ambiguity

Though divorce is commonly viewed as the end of a relationship between partners, it is more accurate to conceptualise divorce as the commencement of a process of change that may extend over a long period of time (Emery & Dillon, 1994). Though the most obvious continuation of ex-spousal relationships involve divorces where children were present, even ex-partners who ended their relationship without having

children often experience some form of ongoing emotional connection. Regardless of the presence or absence of children, both partners are required to work through a process of boundary adjustment to effectively adapt to post-divorce life (Carroll, Olson, & Buckmiller, 2007; Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006; Cole & Cole, 1999; Ramisch, McVicker, & Sahin, 2009; White & Bloom, 1981). This process is a key step for a family system to move from a nuclear to a “bi-nuclear” structure with the timeframe for reorganisation commonly taking up to five years after divorce (Graham, 1997). Failure to adequately accomplish this task can lead to ambiguous ongoing relationships between ex-partners, termed “boundary ambiguity” and the persistence of emotional entanglement, negatively impacting on other tasks of divorce adjustment, causing and maintaining poor relational, social and mental health functioning (Pasley & Ihinger-Tallman, 1989; Ramisch et al., 2009) and, in cases where children are present, poor co-parenting outcomes (Madden-Derdich, Leonard, & Christopher, 1999; Petersen, 2003).

Investigating boundary adjustment utilising a family systems perspective, Emery and Dillon (1994) suggested that this process relates to both implicit and explicit expectations of spouses across two broad domains; adjustment of boundaries related to intimacy and those related to power. Where a marriage ends without children present, the redrawing of boundaries related to intimacy is the main task while for divorcing couples with children, both intimacy and power boundaries are required to be adjusted for the new family dynamic to succeed. Though separation changes the nature of intimacy between former partners, it does not automatically redefine it. In cases where the divorce is not mutually agreed, the partner initiating the separation may be ambivalent about future contact or even wish to transition the relationship to a friendship. In contrast, the other partner may either want the romantic relationship to

continue or to become enemies with their ex-spouse, but often not friends (Emery & Dillon, 1994).

Additionally, the redefinition of boundaries relating to intimacy is often complicated not only by the absence of a mutually agreed separation, but also due to the experience of both painful emotions and the presence of divided family and social loyalties. In a North American study involving 60 men and 99 women divorced for at least two years, Peterson and Christensen (2002) found that although only five per cent of respondents reported high levels of boundary ambiguity in their post-divorce relationships with ex-spouses, 38 per cent reported at least a moderate level of boundary ambiguity. For men, stressful life events were associated with greater boundary ambiguity, while both remarriage and self-esteem were related to lower levels of boundary ambiguity. As such, men who have been unable to form new supportive relationships after divorce seem to remain disproportionately dependent on emotional support from their ex-spouse contributing to poor adaptation to divorce.

The development of an emotionally supportive post-divorce relationship with an ex-spouse is not necessarily predictive of poorer divorce adaptation for men (Masheter, 1991). However, in a North American study involving 156 women and 111 men who had been divorced for between two and three years, Masheter (1997) found that those who maintained a high level of preoccupation with their ex-spouse were more likely to deliberately maintain ambiguous boundaries within the post-divorce relationship and experience higher levels of depression compared to those who developed relationships characterised by a low level of preoccupation. Interestingly in the same study, 63 per cent of respondents whose divorces did not involve children reported that they continued to have at least occasional contact with their ex-partner, even after over two years of separation.

In contrast, to boundaries of intimacy, those related to power involve forms of authority held by individuals within a family system. Emery and Dillon (1994) note that boundaries related to power tend to be resolved quicker than those of intimacy within divorce, given that central issues of financial and child custody arrangements are negotiated with recourse to the family law system. However, day-to-day questions of parental authority including child discipline across households, attendance at child related events and limits of individual parental autonomy still require clear and regular boundary negotiations between partners. Emery and Dillon (1994) noted that in adapting to intimacy and power boundaries, ex-partners are required to disentangle their marital and parental roles and unsuccessful achievement of this task can lead to intractable conflict and emotional entanglement within a bi-nuclear family.

3.3 Grief and loss

Separation and divorce involves many losses for both partners, usually accompanied by a protracted period of pain, sorrow and grief (Barsky, 1993; Baum, 2003; Harvey & Miller, 1998; Huber, 1983). Fisher and Alberti (1981) identified that many individuals emerging from long-term relationships are unaware at the outset that grief and mourning is such a significant part of the divorce process. This difficult experience can be exacerbated by the fact that there is no prescribed ritual for the experience of loss associated with divorce, aside from legal discussions and court hearings, and that the grief associated with the end of a relationship is often not fully acknowledged or accepted by others (Seagull & Seagull, 1977). Grief and the process of mourning has traditionally been conceptualised as a “human” experience with an assumption that men and women experience loss in similar ways. However, more recent research has focussed on unique factors associated male grief (Nutt, Englar-Carlson, &

Stevens, 2006) with Baum (2003) having investigated the experience of grief and loss by divorced men across three domains; when they grieve, what they grieve and how they grieve.

The commencement of the divorce grieving process is difficult to pinpoint and is dependent on the particular circumstances leading to the breakdown of the marriage. However, Baum (2003) noted that empirical studies comparing stress and adjustment in divorce between the sexes commonly report that women commence mourning the end of the marriage earlier than men. In a sample of 500 North American adults who had experienced divorce, Albrecht (1980) identified that female respondents specified the period just prior to making the decision to divorce as the most difficult time during the entire process while men experienced the greatest distress after the decision to separate or divorce had been made. This has been attributed to a belief that one partner will reach a “reality phase” about the poor or declining health of the relationship, commence grieving and then initiate divorce while their spouse is still unaware of the severity of the problem (Baum, 2003). In a study involving 144 divorced North American men and women, Pettit and Bloom (1984) offered some support for this proposition finding that although there were no significant differences in post-divorce stress or marital dissatisfaction between those who initiated the divorce and those who did not, initiators were found to perceive greater benefits arising out of the separation.

Though the incidence of partners making a joint decision to divorce has grown over recent years, when the decision to divorce is taken by one partner in the marriage, it is significantly more likely that a woman will initiate proceedings (Black, Eastwood, Sprenkle, & Smith, 1991; Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006). Utilising data collected by the Australian Institute of Family Studies from 650 divorced Australian men and women, Wolcott and Hughes (1999) reported that 64 per cent of female respondents

reported themselves to have been the primary initiator of the divorce compared with only 21 per cent of men while 16 per cent of women and 26 per cent on men stated that the decision was jointly made. Though Baum (2004) reported that while women are more likely to have commenced the process of mourning prior to divorce, men may be unaware or unwilling to accept that the relationship is in trouble and only start grieving once the relationship is over and divorce has been finalised.

Baum (2003) and Spillman, Deschamps and Crews (2004) related that divorced fathers are significantly more likely to report mourning the loss of their children, home, family life and routine than the loss of their spouse. Riessman (1990) noted in interviews with over 100 North American divorced men and women that although women were more likely to mourn the loss of the marital relationship, men tended to focus on the loss of the family as a whole. As noted, physical custody of children is most commonly awarded to mothers, with men commensurately suffering the real loss of physical and potentially emotional contact with their children. However, Baum (2004) suggested that there is a greater acceptability in Western societies for men, particularly those who adhere to a strong masculine identity, to mourn the loss of their children or family structure rather than the loss of intimacy and their closest companion. This perspective is supported by Wexler (2009) who noted that men commonly experience difficulty in admitting how emotionally dependent they are on their partners and can react with defensiveness and anger to avoid feelings associated with losing this support. In Western societies, a “you must be strong” attitude teaches men not to be weak, vulnerable and incompetent whilst simultaneously placing a premium on them taking care of their families in a rational and practical manner (Baum, 2003, 2004). Men experiencing divorce, particularly when initiated by their partner, often turn to these rational and practical means to try to keep their family together or at least manage the

process of separation in a self-sufficient and problem-solving way whilst simultaneously being unaware or fearful of overwhelmingly intense negative emotions related to their loss.

Significant differences have been noted in how men grieve the loss of a marriage in comparison to women. Baum (2003) noted that across a range of studies, men tend to respond to the loss of a relationship with increased activity, somatisation and, in many cases, self-medication with alcohol and drugs. McKenry and Price (1991) suggested that men often replace their spouse with a new sexual partner relatively quickly and engage in “frantic social activity” after divorce. In a detailed qualitative study of North American divorcing and divorced adults, Riessman (1990) identified that men are also more likely than women to cope with the stress and loss inherent in divorce by throwing themselves into their work, while 20 per cent of men stated that they used alcohol as a major method of stress relief after divorce (compared to ten per cent of female participants). Riessman noted that not only does the use of alcohol offer men a way to manage difficult emotions associated with the loss of their relationship, but public drinking can be a method of developing and sustaining social relationships immediately after divorce. Within the study, men reported that drinking “gave them something to do” and an instant network of new friends or, at least, immediate social contact. Both Baum (2003) and Copenhaver (2000) interpreted findings across a range of studies by highlighting the common factor of divorced men engaging in a means of escape and distancing themselves from emotions that are not culturally approved or easily understood by others.

Finally, Baum (2004) proposed that mourning is not an automatic process; it requires legitimisation, validation and presence. While this support are often received by women from family, close friends and social connections, they are often absent for

men. Baum posited that for men to successfully move through the process of mourning, they need to be supported by people who can both recognise their losses and acknowledge these losses as real. A range of emotions, particularly anger, may be communicated during this process and men expressing their grief in this manner need validation that their anger is not an inappropriate response to their situation. Baum (2004) also noted that at some stage, it is critical for grieving men to be able to move from a purely cognitive understanding of their loss and connect with an underlying emotional realisation, with resultant pain and sadness able to be expressed and accepted. Successful movement through this grieving process is critical in achieving positive adjustment to divorce (Fisher & Alberti, 1981). Where this does not occur, men can be left in a state of “failed mourning”, which has been significantly associated with a wide range of poor post-divorce adjustment outcomes including ongoing spousal conflict, disengagement from children, an inability to redefine both individual and relational roles and behaviours including alcohol and substance misuse (Baum, 2003, 2006)

3.4 Anger

Though related to post-divorce spousal conflict and grief, the experience of anger by both men and women emerging from divorce is a common occurrence. Though angry feelings towards an ex-spouse or third parties involved in the divorce may actually assist an individual to manage the upheaval and emotional turmoil during stressful situations (Novaco, 1977; Robins & Novaco, 1999) including divorce (Somary & Emery, 1991), a longer-term inability to resolve angry feelings related to the end of marriage can significantly impact on successful adaptation to divorce (Rye, Folck, Heim, Olszewski, & Traina, 2004).

Robins and Novaco (1999) conceptualised anger as “a negatively toned emotion, subjectively experienced as an aroused state of antagonism towards someone or something perceived to be the source of an aversive event” (p. 327). The presentation and degree of anger experienced is determined by cognitive, somatic-affective and behavioural variables specific to the individual (Novaco, 1977). At the cognitive level, anger is seen as a function of appraisals, attributions and expectations within a provocative situation. Somatic-affective aspects of anger include the way in which anger is both primed and exacerbated by factors including physical tension and agitation. Finally, actions such as withdrawal and antagonism by the individual contribute to the behavioural aspect of anger with antagonism leading to an escalation in an individual’s sense of provocation while withdrawal leaves the factors instigating the angry response unchanged.

Though anger is often viewed as specific to a particular situation, Robins and Novaco (1999) posited that an individual’s disposition to anger is embedded in a network of interpersonal and environmental systems, allowing an individual to achieve a sense of equilibrium within this system over time. This view of anger as involving longer term adaptation to a particular relationship provides an important insight into how anger can manifest for both parties during and in the aftermath of divorce, and how resentment, antagonism and in extreme cases, rage can arise as the system previously providing equilibrium dissipates and increased agitation, tension and stress is experienced as the emotional and practical tasks of divorce take place.

Somary and Emery (1991) separated the experience of anger arising from divorce into two broad categories; rational and irrational anger. Rational anger is a reaction to the real and threatening outcomes that an individual may face when working through divorce. Examples include concerns about the health of ongoing relationships

with children, disagreements about child custody arrangements or anxiety about post-divorce finances. Though this type of anger can be seen as an understandable reaction to real-world concerns, it can be exacerbated by mistrust between ex-spouses during divorce proceedings.

In contrast, irrational or emotional anger is characterised by hostility not directly related to practical aspects of the divorce. Emotional anger arises from three sources (Somary & Emery, 1991). Firstly, divorce can be conceptualised as a disappointment for one or both spouses, with individuals often seeking to blame their ex-spouse and holding them accountable for the loss of an expected future together (Bonach, Sales, & Koeske, 2005; Grebe, 1985). In a study exploring the experiences of 188 divorced North American adults, Kitson and Zyzanski (1987) reported that two of the three most prominent contributors to post-divorce anger were feelings of being “cheated by the separation” (68 per cent of respondents) and “not deserving what was happening to them” (77 per cent of respondents). Secondly, anger can arise in cases where individuals feel that their ex-spouse is deliberately inflicting pain on them and they, in turn reflexively strike back. Grebe (1985) noted that this cycle of feeling pained and inflicting pain in response can be long standing and destructive to effective post-divorce adjustment. Finally, emotional anger can be a response to lingering emotional attachments persisting between ex-spouses after divorce. As noted by Somary and Emery (1991), divorce often involves a degree of ambivalence for one or both spouses and it is common for ex-partners to move between feelings of contempt and affection for each other. This source of emotional anger can be exacerbated by a pattern of separation and reunion that often precedes the final end of a marriage. In a study exploring the divorce experiences of 209 North American adults, Kitson (1982)

reported that 42 per cent of couples had separated and reunited at least once prior to their divorce.

The experience of emotional anger within divorce is a common experience for both men and women (Kitson, 1982; Parkes, 1988) and, though the experience of such anger has been associated with greater distress during divorce (Kitson & Zyzanski, 1987; Lemay, Overall, & Clark, 2012), anger has also been suggested as potentially adaptive for individuals during divorce. Intrapsychic benefits of anger may include warding off depression that often accompanies the experience of grief at the end of the relationship (Grebe, 1985; Somary & Emery, 1991) or allowing a divorcing individual to use their experience of anger to “take control” of their circumstances. Additionally, irrational anger can motivate an individual to put a greater emotional distance between themselves and an ex-spouse, potentially facilitating the process of boundary adjustment (Isaacs & Leon, 1988; Somary & Emery, 1991).

However, the experience of emotional anger can significantly impact on the manner in which divorce decisions are settled by clouding the objectivity of former spouses and focussing them on inflicting pain on their ex-partner rather than reaching a reasonable outcome, particularly where children are present. Outcomes from research into adaptive or maladaptive aspects of anger in divorce has been mixed with some studies suggesting that the expression of anger can help facilitate adjustment to divorce for ex-spouses where children are present (Emery, 1999; Isaacs & Leon, 1988), while other research has found that higher levels of anger and associated conflict are significantly related to poorer adjustment for divorced parents (Isaacs & Leon, 1988; Kitson & Zyzanski, 1987; Parkes, 1988).

3.5 Self-worth and social adaptation

Self-worth can be defined as an enduring perception of competence or value an individual holds of themselves (McFarlin & Blascovich, 1981) with high levels of self-worth having been consistently associated with positive adjustment to a wide range of situational demands (Blankstein, Dunkley, & Wilson, 2008). Though extensive research has been conducted into the relationship between self-worth and adjustment to lifetime challenges, few studies have investigated the specific association between self-worth and adaptation to divorce, with the vast majority of self-worth related divorce research focussing on outcomes for children of separated families.

As an example of studies that have been undertaken into self-worth and divorce, qualitative research conducted by Riessman (1990) with 104 divorced North American adults allowed for the identification of a number of feelings and experiences associated with self-worth that differed between men and women. While divorced women reported focussing on individual achievements after their marriage ended, a common narrative among men was feeling like a “failure” for their divorce and that divorce offered public “proof” that they had not succeeded in their private lives. These feelings were also associated with a belief that they had failed to live up to stereotypically male attributes of being competent in personal relationships. Additionally, men commonly reported a sense of isolation and loneliness after the end of their marriage. While some respondents noted that this isolation prompted them to develop greater self-reliance and viewed it as a challenge to be overcome, 25% of men identified that their divorce and separation from wife and family had resulted in a lessened sense of self.

However, not all features of divorce have been found to negatively affect self-worth with a range of positive aspects commonly reported by men. Both Riessman (1990) and Bevvino and Sharkin (2003) reported that men commonly report that

divorce allows them to embark on a “growth” phase of their lives and with “constraining” aspects of their marriages removed, they are able to develop greater meaning, independence and competence in everyday challenges including jobs, sports and hobbies. These findings were supported by Clarke-Stewart and Brentano (2006) in an extensive review of divorce literature and Rossiter (1991) focussing on divorced adults recovering self-esteem partly through reflecting on positive gains emerging from the end of the relationship.

A consistent finding in divorce research is that men report greater instances of socialising, dating and regaining “sexual freedom” after their separation (Anderson & Greene, 2005; Anderson et al., 2004; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1976), particularly in comparison to divorced women (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006; Riessman, 1990). Australian specific research conducted by Skew (2009) supports this finding with a significantly greater rate of re-partnering reported by divorced men compared to women. However, a common theme identified by Riessman (1990) was that men came to view post-divorce sexual conquests as a “poor substitute” for a committed relationship and their minds tended to turn back to the loss of intimacy with their ex-spouse and family structure for those with children. This finding is consistent with previous research reporting that individuals emerging from divorce express a greater need for social acceptance and express a strong desire to be seen as socially attractive (Fry & Corfield, 1983). It should be noted that successful re-partnering requires a weighing up of the concerns of any children from the previous marriage and the impact becoming involved in a new intimate relationship may have on their role as a post-divorce parent (Anderson & Greene, 2011; Wade & Delamater, 2002). Failure to accomplish this task can result in poor co-parenting outcomes and the development of difficulties within the newly formed relationship.

CHAPTER 4: POST-DIVORCE SUPPORT

4.1 Seeking help

Given the difficulties faced by men during and after divorce, the manner in which they support themselves, seek support from other sources and the perceived helpfulness of this support is particularly important in understanding how they are able to successfully or unsuccessfully adapt to divorce.

Research has consistently found that men living in Western societies avoid or delay seeking help for physical and mental health problems, resulting in both impaired well-being and poorer life expectancy in comparison to women (Baum, 2004; Mansfield, Addis, & Courtenay, 2005; Smith et al., 2008). The historically assumed reason as to why men avoid or delay seeking help centres on the conflict between an ideal of masculinity emphasising independence and stoicism, and help seeking, viewed as a weakness and offending traditional expectations that men should manage problems alone (Möller-Leimkühler, 2002). However, Fletcher and St George (2010) suggested that this “deficit” model of men’s help-seeking behaviours has found little support in research and instead argued in favour of a more adaptive perspective of male help-seeking. They noted that men are likely to recognise difficulties they are experiencing and try to manage such situations relying on internal resources while drawing on external emotional, informational and practical sources of support to augment their own abilities and strengths. As such, poor male help seeking behaviour can be attributed to the existence of barriers preventing men from accessing the type of support that will best help them to help themselves. Examples of these barriers include a lack of information about support services, few male health care providers, practitioner disinterest, gender-biased diagnoses and rigid work conditions limiting the time and

scope to access support (Fletcher & StGeorge, 2010). When men do make use of formal or informal support during and after divorce, these sources of help tend to fall within three broad categories; individual counselling or therapeutic help, voluntary and court ordered mediation between divorcing partners and finally, support from family and social networks.

4.2 Individual and group counselling

Though individual and group counselling can be an important source of support during and after divorce, men are consistently reluctant to utilise this form of help. In a study assessing the use of mental health support services in North America, McCarthy (2004) identified that while one in three women access therapeutic support at some stage of their life, only one in seven men will do the same. A number of reasons have been suggested as to why men make lesser use of professional help than women with Fletcher and George (2010) suggesting a major barrier to men utilising professional counselling support to be “the paradox of talking”. Closely linked to stereotypical Western concepts of masculinity, men can simultaneously feel a strong desire to open up and talk about their emotional vulnerabilities while believing that to do so would burden others with their problems and threaten their sense of competence in managing their own problems (Deering & Gannon, 2005). As such, independence and self-reliance, potentially the greatest strengths a man can have in managing divorce, can prevent them from utilising individual or group counselling support (Möller-Leimkühler, 2002; Robertson, 2005; Spector, 2006).

The majority of research investigating on the relationship between divorce adaptation and counselling has neglected the effect of individual psychotherapy and

instead focussed on the role of divorce support groups. In assessing benefits of Norwegian based support groups, Oygard, Thuen and Solvang (2001; 2000) reported that the main benefits identified by participants were the sense of “universality” in the divorce experiences of members, the ability to express hostility and anger in a safe and accepting environment and engaging in interpersonal learning, particularly the development of greater self-awareness through interactions with others. However, men seemed to demonstrate better adaptation outcomes within small groups of fewer than eight members and that their greatest perceived benefits came from exposure to problem solving skills provided by group leaders rather than receiving emotional support from others in the group.

These findings were consistent with both Cookston’s (2007) and Frieman’s (2002) reviews of outcomes for North American men participating in divorce support groups, with the ability for men to vent their frustrations without “burdening” friends and family, learning problem solving skills and developing greater understanding of themselves as the factors associated with better post-group adaptation to divorce. However, the degree to which support groups bring about lasting positive change for men, particularly in maintaining and developing their role as post-divorce fathers is less clear with Douglas (2004) reporting no significant change in various measures of father involvement for 205 North American divorced fathers who participated in an intensive and long term divorce education and support program.

4.3 Mediation

The use of either voluntary or court-ordered mediation between ex-spouses to arrive at a mutually agreed outcome has demonstrated significantly improved outcomes

for both men and women in comparison to family court rulings alone (Deutsch, 2008; Sauber et al., 1995; Sbarra & Emery, 2008). As noted by Emery et al (2001), mediation is predicated on an assumption of co-operative negotiation between the parties with the express goal of arriving at mutually beneficial outcomes. Engaging in such a process is posited to help establish a pattern of polite, topic specific and emotionally appropriate communication between former spouses (Arbuthnot & Kramer, 1998; Katz, 2007; Lebow & Rekart, 2007). As such, the post-divorce relationship of ex-spouses can be positively influenced through this process leading to better co-parenting outcomes and lessening the experience of anger, grief and ongoing emotional boundary ambiguity.

In a North American study conducted over two years, Kelly (1989) reported on the post-divorce outcomes for 225 individuals who resolved issues relating to their divorce through the family law system (including 47 couples) compared to 212 individuals (including 106 couples) who reached agreement through mediation alone. Findings supported the proposition that where practicable, mediation is a superior method for the resolution of disputes arising out of divorce that an adversarial legal process. Respondents who took part in mediation demonstrated a range of significantly better outcomes including a better ability to control angry feelings arising from the divorce, greater satisfaction with negotiated financial outcomes, greater confidence in effectively managing potential future disagreements with their ex-spouse and greater satisfaction with overall outcomes from the process. In contrast, participants who worked within the family law system alone reported significantly lesser confidence in professional support (lawyer) than the mediational group (professional mediator) and significantly greater deterioration in communication with their ex-spouse. Though there were no differences in the experience of anger between the groups, participants engaged in mediation reported experiencing lesser conflict and greater co-operation with their

ex-spouse. Though a criticism often levelled at the mediation process by the legal profession is that individuals are unprepared and lacking in power to negotiate effective outcomes, Kelly (1989) found no difference between groups on participant perceptions of the degree to which they were informed, protected and able to be heard as a result of either the mediation or legal processes. Although a limitation of this study was the use of self-selecting participants, findings support the view that mediation offers superior post-divorce outcomes for both partners compared with processes and rulings within the adversarial family law system.

4.4 Social support

A major consequence of divorce is the loss of friendships and other social supports that were maintained by the relationship. As noted by Clarke-Stewart and Brentano (2006), it is common within a marriage, particularly in a more traditional union, for the woman to maintain social contacts on behalf of the couple. As such, men can become isolated from individual social contacts leaving them lacking significant social support after divorce (Plummer & Koch-Hattem, 1986; Spector, 2006; White & Bloom, 1981). In such a situation, the support of kin including parents, siblings and broader family members can fulfil an important role in providing practical and emotional support to divorced men.

In a study conducted with 52 male participants from the North-Eastern region of the United States of America, Gerstel (1988) found evidence for both the prevalence and extent of support offered by kin networks to recently divorced men. Participants reported that practical support was received from at least one relative in the form of money (62 per cent of respondents) and assistance in household chores (33 per cent of

respondents). Emotional support was also provided by family members with 54 per cent of participants noting that they socialised with at least one family member after their divorce and 40 per cent reporting “emotional talk” with at least one person within their family network. The presence of children in the divorce was also found to be significantly associated with men making greater use of emotional support from their immediate and extended family. Gerstel (1988) also reported that support received from family decreased over time, suggesting that although men initially turned to family in the aftermath of divorce, they diversified their support networks as they gradually adjusted to changed circumstances.

4.5 Fathers’ rights groups

Though counselling, mediation, family and friends can all provide effective support for men during the process of separation and divorce, recent decades have seen some men turn towards organisations that can be categorised as “fathers’ rights groups”. The fathers’ rights movement has been characterised by Flood (2010) as groups who assert that “fathers are deprived of their ‘rights’ and subjected to systematic discrimination ... in a system biased towards women and dominated by feminists” (p. 328). Fathers’ rights groups have been prominent in influencing the direction of family law reform in a number of countries (Jordan, 2009), and are particularly focussed on formal legal equality for partners, the “right of the child” to have a relationship with both parents and, as suggested by Collier (2009), endorsing a wider social, cultural and legal reaction against feminism and advocating for a specific model of the private heterosexual family.

Collier (2009) and Rosen (2009) suggested that fathers' rights groups serve to embed the concept that a father has a right to a direct, vertical relationship with their child, unmediated by the mother, while simultaneously endorsing traditional gender stereotyped parenting roles. In a qualitative study involving interviews with men aligned with the UK based Fathers4Justice group, Jordan (2009) identified that although a "50:50" commitment to legal custody and access underpinned the views of men involved with this group, this view did not translate into one that parenting roles should be similarly shared with a prevalent belief that a mother should be expected to assume primary responsibility for day-to-day childcare after divorce.

Though such groups operate independently across a number of Western countries, Australian based organisations have been particularly prominent in public debate about parenting, family law and the rights of fathers since the 1990's. Flood (2010) noted that many men who become involved with Australian fathers' rights groups have experienced deeply painful marriage break-ups and high-conflict child custody battles. It is suggested that such men join these groups to receive advice to better manage child support and custody issues as well as to gain emotional support for unresolved anger and grief associated with divorce. However, Flood (2007, 2008) posited that involvement with such groups stifles these men's adaptation to divorce and negatively impacts on both their own and their children's wellbeing.

Flood (2010) suggested that the positions and policies of the fathers' rights movement offer distressed men an identity centred on victimhood coupled with a sense of unrelenting blame and hostility towards the legal system and their ex-partners. Such a perspective can hold men in positions of anger and hostility rather than helping them to heal. Additionally, some fathers' rights groups can be criticised for prioritising formal principles of equity over constructive co-parenting, the wellbeing of women and the

best interests of the child (Flood, 2010). As such, their focus centres on re-establishing the fathers' authority and control over the family system, with little emphasis on positive parenting or actual involvement with children. This criticism of fathers' rights groups has been mirrored overseas with both Collier (2009) and Jordan (2009) noting that post-divorce dissatisfaction with parenting is more likely to be associated with poorer pre-divorce parental involvement with children, and that not only do fathers' rights groups largely fail to assist men in alleviating feelings of anger and grief, they are often silent on the promotion of positive forms of post-divorce co-parenting.

CHAPTER 5: GENDER ROLE IDENTITY AND ADAPTATION TO DIVORCE

5.1 Gender and gender role identity

The development of a gendered sense of self is a critical step in the formation of individual identities and significantly influences the way in which people relate to themselves, intimate relationships with others and the social world in general (Woodhill & Samuels, 2003). Recent decades have seen a marked increase in research based on changing conceptualisations of gender, gender role identity and the way in which gendered traits and behaviours are associated with both the adaptive and maladaptive psychological and interpersonal health of men and women (Burnett, Anderson, & Heppner, 1995).

As summarised by Woodhill and Samuels (2003), the generally accepted conceptualisations of sex and gender is that “sex” refers to underlying biological differences formed during initial human development and are, for all intents and purposes, immutable while “gender” relates to socially and psychologically based differences between men and women. Gender can be said to encompass a pattern of behaviours formed through the process of socialisation and as such, are related to socially constructed and endorsed differences between men and women (Ashley, 2003; Burnett et al., 1995; Moloney, 2002; Petersen, 2003; Storms, 1979; Wexler, 2009; Woodhill & Samuels, 2003). As noted by Kimmel (2000), gender can be seen as “something we do” rather than “something we are”, with “doing” gender involving an individual taking part in gendered acts socially perceived as reflecting the behavioural aspects of being a man or a woman. In this sense, no behavioural trait is intrinsically masculine or feminine, but is socially constructed and then interpreted as being so

(Connell, 2005; Woodhill & Samuels, 2003). This last point is particularly important when considering gender based theories and constructs. As noted by Petersen (2003), research into gender has often failed to acknowledge both similarities shared by men and women and gendered differences that exist within the sexes. Though Thompson and Pleck (1992) acknowledged that a trait based approach can be helpful when considering gender as a psychological construct, a normative approach considering values, beliefs and attitudes held by men about masculinity provides an alternate way to assess gender. Such a perspective rejects the view of masculinity as a unitary concept and instead serves to explore multiple masculinities that may be endorsed or rejected by individual men (Connell, 2005; Petersen, 2003). Though the trait approach is most commonly utilised within psychological research, Petersen (2003) suggests that concepts of masculinity are “historically contingent, constantly in flux and open to contestation” (p. 64) and as noted by MacInnes (1998), gender based traits are best viewed as “tendencies and possibilities men may have more or less access to at different points in time” (p. 15).

Within gender research, two broad categories of traits have been identified and investigated based on socially learned gendered behaviours for men and women; being “instrumental” and “expressive” traits (Spence, 1991). Instrumental traits are closely associated with traditional Western views of masculinity (Moore & Stuart, 2005; O'Neil, 1986) and include concepts such as self-competence, independence, decisiveness and the ability to see tasks through to completion. In contrast, expressive traits are viewed as traditionally feminine (Butler, Giordano, & Neren, 1985; O'Neil, 1986) and consist of behaviours including emotional self-expression, care for others, communication and nurturance.

The theoretical basis on which masculine and feminine traits or behaviours connect with a person's sense of gender forms the basis of "gender role identity" (Edwards & Spence, 1987). Gender role identity has traditionally been defined as an underlying but unarticulated sense of one's own maleness or femaleness acquired early in life which is relatively invulnerable to change (Green, 1975). Spence (1984) theorised that a young child's emerging sense of gender identity initially stimulates them to adopt gender-stereotypical behaviours and beliefs. However, once an individual's gender role identity is established, other factors including the influence of parental modelling, both family and societal expectations and sex role attitudes exert a greater influence on guiding identity and associated traits and behaviours. Spence (1984) posited that instead of gender role identity leading to the development of stereotypical gender based qualities, the specific traits and behaviours an individual develops serve to protect and confirm their sense of gender.

In more traditional social settings, individuals understand that if a person is female, they should behave in a feminine manner while a biological male should behave in a way adhering to expectations of masculinity. As such, historical theories of gender were based on the assumption that masculinity and femininity were unitary concepts that lay at either end of a bipolar continuum (Edwards & Spence, 1987; J. A. Kelly & Worell, 1977; Major, Carnevale, & Deaux, 1981; O'Grady, Freda, & Mikulka, 1979; Orlofsky & Stake, 1981) where men who demonstrated fewer masculine appropriate behaviours were seen as more "feminine" and the converse for women. This traditional view of gender role identity resulted from differing socially expected roles of the two sexes; being the child-bearing role of women and provider role of men (Moloney, 2002; Woodhill & Samuels, 2003). Correspondingly, a central tenant of this perspective was that such sex-typing (masculinity for men and femininity for women) was adaptive for

mental health while cross-sex typing was viewed as maladaptive (Major et al., 1981). By conflating sex and gender and stipulating rigid behavioural characteristics to men and women, such theories allowed for the promotion of a range of assumed differences between the sexes including concepts such as “women are not capable of being resourceful and assertive” and “men are neither vulnerable nor capable of compassion” (Woodhill & Samuels, 2003).

However, the advent of the feminist movement and other interrelated shifts in Western societies across recent decades have allowed for a critiquing of appropriate attitudes, behaviours and personality characteristics for the sexes, resulting in major redefinitions of gender roles and gender identity (Burnett et al., 1995; Strough, Leszczynski, Neely, Flinn, & Margrett, 2007; Twenge, 1997). A major focus for gender research became investigating whether stereotypically masculine and feminine behaviours and traits were bi-polar points on a single continuum, or whether these attributes are more appropriately conceptualised as dualistic traits with traditionally masculine instrumental behaviours and stereotypically feminine expressiveness being independent from one another (Macdonald, Ebert, & Mason, 1987; Major et al., 1981; Marsh, Antill, & Cunningham, 1989; Orlofsky & Stake, 1981). Subsequently, a number of key theorists began to challenge the view that instrumental or expressive behaviours and traits were exclusive to one particular sex and instead posited that these stereotypically held aspects of masculinity and femininity instead represent two sets of behavioural skills and interpersonal competencies which all individuals, regardless of sex, could adaptively use to interact with their environment (J. A. Kelly & Worell, 1977).

Scales developed to reflect this change and assess gendered behaviours and traits included the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Sandra L. Bem, 1975) and the Personal

Attributes Questionnaire (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975) with both demonstrating that masculinity and femininity, operationalised by the socially desirable traits of instrumentality and expressiveness, are conceptually and empirically independent (Major et al., 1981). Additionally, with the increased research focus generated due to the use of these measures (J. A. Kelly & Worell, 1977), interest turned towards behaviours and traits of individuals who recorded scores within these inventories that did not fit within traditional sex-typed roles (Major et al., 1981). Those who were found to endorse a high degree of both instrumental and expressive gender characteristics became to be termed Androgynous, while those who recorded low degrees of both instrumental and expressive traits became categorised as Undifferentiated. These two gender role groups were added to the established categories of Masculine (those who endorse instrumental characteristics to a high degree, but expressiveness to a low degree) and Feminine (high expressiveness and low instrumentality) (Alain & Lussier, 1988)

5.2 Associations of gender role identity with well-being

Over recent decades, a wide range of studies have assessed differences in adaptive and maladaptive social, psychological and interpersonal relationship outcomes between the four gender role categories. Earliest studies were conducted by Bem (1975) to identify differences in behaviours between gender role groups across a range of tasks. In a number of studies involving North American undergraduate university students, Bem reported that both male and female participants who were categorised as Androgynous displayed significantly better adaptation across trials involving high levels of the stereotypically masculine trait of independence and the stereotypical feminine trait of engagement (operationalised as playfulness) compared with other groups. Sex

typed participants were found to demonstrate high levels of aptitude in situations where the task at hand reflected their gender role category; that is Masculine men performed less well when engagement was required while Feminine men demonstrated significantly poorer achievement in tasks requiring independence

Later, Bem (1977) reported that Androgynous participants were able to display adaption in behaviours across situations, engaging in whatever behaviour seemed appropriate for the task at hand, regardless of sex stereotypical norms. These general findings were replicated by Orlofsky and Stake (1981) where 97 male and 79 female participants from a North American university were categorised into gender role groups using the Personal Attributes Questionnaire, and assessed using measures of personal functioning in both achievement focussed and interpersonal domains. It was reported that gender role differences within sex categories far outweighed differences between the sexes across scores in both domains with individual differences in Masculinity positively related to achievement motivation, task performance and general self-esteem while individual differences in Femininity were positively associated with poise and pleasure in interpersonal situations and the need for social acceptance. As such, regardless of an individual's biological sex, levels of instrumentality and expressiveness were found to be positively related to levels of success in different domains.

Self-esteem has been consistently associated with gender based traits in studies involving both males and females. In a study of 90 male and 146 female students at a North American university, Burnett, Anderson and Heppner (1995) reported that higher levels of stereotypically masculine gender traits as measured by the Personal Attributes Questionnaire were predictive of greater levels of psychological health and particularly self-esteem among both male and female participants. In contrast, levels of stereotypically feminine traits were found to be unrelated to reported self-esteem. These

findings supported those of previous studies (Adams & Sherer, 1985; Antill & Cunningham, 1979; Macdonald et al., 1987; Marsh, Antill, & Cunningham, 1987; Orr & Ben-Eliahu, 1993; Sharpe, Heppner, & Dixon, 1995; Silvern & Ryan, 1979; Waelde, Silvern, & Hodges, 1994) and were consistent with a meta-analysis conducted by Whitley (1983) of 35 studies investigating the relationship between gender based traits and varying measures of self-worth.

Results from these studies were posited as offering support for the “Masculinity model” of well-being (Cook, 1987) which suggests that stereotypically masculine traits such as goal directedness, high achievement, competitiveness and assertiveness are highly valued within Western culture, with high levels of masculine characteristics promoting greater opportunities for success and respect from others, ultimately resulting in higher self-esteem. Burnett, Anderson and Heppner (1995) reported that both men and women who reported low levels of instrumental gender traits could not only be at risk of experiencing lower self-esteem, but also poorer overall psychological well-being. However, low levels of expressive traits have been associated with lesser help seeking in times of distress (Butler et al., 1985) suggesting that while traditionally masculine characteristics may provide some protection against psychological distress, high levels of traditionally feminine traits may orient individuals towards seeking support during difficult times (Stevens & Englar-Carlson, 2006).

Recent research has predominantly focussed on the relationship between psychological well-being and gender based traits for individuals who fall into the Androgynous and Undifferentiated gender role categories and the basis on which complementary levels of instrumental and expressive traits might be associated with psychological health. In a study assessing gender role identity and depression, Sanfilippo (1994) utilised a psychoanalytic object-relations based framework to categorise the

subjective experience depression as either Anaclitic involving feelings of helplessness, loss, weakness and abandonment or Introjective depression characterised by feelings of guilt, self-criticism, failure, unworthiness and inferiority. 63 men and 77 women from a North American University were categorised as Masculine, Feminine or Androgynous using responses on the Personal Attributes Questionnaire and completed two self-rating scales to measure their current experience of depression and the subjective experience of depressed mood. Gender role characteristics were significantly related to feelings of depression, with high masculinity associated with greater reported self-efficacy, fewer depressive symptoms and the lesser experience of anaclitic depression for both male and female participants. Though masculine gender traits were reported as being unrelated to the experience of Introjective depression, greater femininity was associated with higher levels of Anaclitic depression in both men and women, while greater self-efficacy and lower levels of Introjective depression were only weakly related to greater endorsement of stereotypically feminine gender based traits.

Sanfilipo (1994) interpreted these results as suggesting that individualistic traits inherent in stereotypically masculine gender characteristics may insulate an individual from depressive experiences involving loss, abandonment and hopelessness while higher levels of femininity may predispose an individual to these subjective depressive experiences. These findings were consistent with Whitley's (1985) meta-analytic review of 32 previous studies suggesting that greater levels of masculine gender traits are associated with lower levels of depression. However, Sanfillipo reported that individuals categorised as Androgynous reported greater feelings of self-efficacy than both Masculine and Feminine participants and the lowest levels of Introjective depression of any gender role category, suggesting that high levels of both instrumental

and expressive gender traits is related to better overall psychological health than high levels of masculine traits alone.

In a study conducted by Woodhill and Samuels (2003), 196 adult Australian participants (38 male and 154 female) recruited through a variety of sources were administered an extended version of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire and a range of measures assessing psychological health including self-esteem, social-esteem and general happiness. Significant differences were reported between measures of psychological well-being between gender role categories with Androgynous individuals recording higher scores on all measures of psychological health compared to Undifferentiated participants. Compared with individuals categorised as either Masculine or Feminine, Androgynous individuals recorded higher mean scores on measures of self-esteem, social esteem and general well-being, though scores between these three groups were not found to be significantly different.

5.3 Associations of gender role identity with marriage and adaptation to divorce

Though the relationship between gender role identity and psychological well-being have been a focus of investigation over recent decades, the association between gender role identity and relationship satisfaction has been less prominently studied. Additionally, direct research into the holding of instrumental and expressive traits, gender role identity and the relationship with divorce adaptation has been largely neglected.

Early beliefs that marital satisfaction was positively associated with a couples being sex-typed in which men demonstrate high stereotypically masculine traits and low

feminine traits and a female partner holds a converse position (Atkinson & Huston, 1984; Rogers & Amato, 2000) has not been supported by empirical research. Instead, the majority of studies into gender role identity and marital adjustment have suggested that couples benefit from male partners demonstrating greater levels of stereotypically feminine traits with low expressiveness in men commonly associated with poor relationship and marital outcomes (Land, Rochlen, & Vaughn, 2010). In an investigation of marital satisfaction and adjustment with 44 North American married couples Baucom and Aiken (1984) reported that although both masculine and feminine traits were significantly positively associated with marital satisfaction for both sexes, expressiveness demonstrated a stronger relationship with marital satisfaction than instrumentality. Similarly, in an investigation of marital satisfaction with 46 Canadian couples, Aube and Koestner (1995) reported that while attitudes towards traditional roles within marriage was positively related to marital satisfaction, levels of expressiveness reported by male spouses was positively associated with marital fulfilment. In a study of 137 female and 170 male North American college students, Burn and Zachary Ward (2005) found that men's conformity to traditional masculine norms emphasising instrumentality and rejecting expressiveness was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction for both male and female participants. Finally, Lamke (1989) addressed a demographic limitation of previous research by investigating the role of expressiveness in marital satisfaction with 46 North American rurally based married couples. Levels of expressiveness held by men was reported as being the sole predictor of marital adjustment for both partners with higher levels of behaviours including communication and emotional self-expression associated with better adjustment to married life.

However, some research has also supported the proposition that a high level of both instrumental and expressive traits held by a couple is predictive of better marital relationships. Murstein and Williams (1983) reported that couples categorised as Androgynous, where both partners demonstrated higher levels of both instrumental and expressive traits, reported greater marital satisfaction than sex-typed couples. Additionally, Peterson, Baucom, Elliot and Farr (1989), who assessed marital satisfaction with 144 distressed and 138 non-distressed North American couples, identified that those categorised as Undifferentiated, where partners scored low on both masculine and feminine gender traits, reported the lowest levels of marital satisfaction while also finding that higher levels of instrumentality and expressiveness were each positively associated with marital adjustment regardless of sex.

In general, it can be stated that adjustment to and satisfaction with marriage are most strongly associated with spouses, particularly men, holding more expressive stereotypically feminine gender traits. Though Androgyny has been reported as the “ideal” gender role identity associated with relationship satisfaction (Murstein & Williams, 1983, 1985), levels of stereotypically masculine traits alone seem not to be associated with improved relationship outcomes. The implication is that expressive gender traits are of primary importance within marriage, potentially encouraging greater emotional engagement between partners, allowing them to express their individual feelings and in return, acknowledge and accept the feelings of their spouse. However, Baucom and Aiken (1984) and Peterson, Baucom, Elliot and Farr’s (1989) findings that masculine traits were also positively associated with marital satisfaction provides some evidence that instrumentality has a role to play in the creation and sustenance of intimate relationships.

Research into the association between the gendered traits of instrumentality and expressiveness, corresponding gender role identity and adaptation to divorce is surprisingly limited. The most directly relevant study was conducted by Alain and Lussier (1988) in Quebec, Canada with 30 male and 94 female divorced adults. The study was designed to compare two competing theories of divorce adaptation; the Masculinity model and the Androgyny model. The Masculinity model proposes that instrumental traits and behaviours promote more successful adaptation to divorce by providing independence and autonomy necessary for moving through the divorce process with expressive traits not influencing adjustment outcomes (Macdonald et al., 1987). In contrast, the Androgyny model posits that individuals who possess higher levels of both stereotypically masculine and feminine traits will adapt better to divorce, given they hold high instrumentality, but also high expressiveness assisting them to develop new post-marital roles and better engage with social contacts to help cope with the end of their marriage. Alain and Lussier (1988) found that amongst male participants, those categorised as Androgynous reported the highest level of psychological and social adaptation, followed closely by those categorised as Masculine. Though the difference between these groups was not significant, both recorded significantly higher adaptation scores than men categorised as either Feminine or Undifferentiated. Alain and Lussier (1988) suggested that although overall results supported the Androgyny model of adaptation, the Masculinity model was also partly supported and it was likely that high levels of instrumental traits are most important in the promotion of the social and psychological well-being of recently divorced adults.

However, a major limitation of this study was that the presence of children in the divorce and the relationship between the demands of post-divorce parenting and divorce adaptation were not assessed. Olmstead, Futris and Pasley (2009) reported that men

categorised as Androgynous adapted significantly better to post-divorce fathering and more effectively managed the adjustment in their roles as a post-divorce parent and ex-spouse than those with a Masculine self-concept. It is therefore possible that in situations where there is a need to maintain an ongoing parental relationship with an ex-spouse, adaptation to divorce is positively related to a man holding an Androgynous gender role identity incorporating high levels of both instrumental and expressive traits. However, in situations where children were not present at the time of divorce, men with higher levels of instrumental traits could experience significantly better adaptation, with stereotypically feminine characteristics unrelated to divorce adjustment.

5.4 Limitations of previous research into male adaptation to divorce

Aside from the general lack of investigation into the association between gender role identity and divorce adaptation, a number of other limitations have been identified in divorce research which the current study aims to address.

Firstly, the majority of divorce adaptation research has utilised measures of general psychological and social functioning to assess how effectively individuals have adjusted to divorce. While such measures could be argued to provide reasonable estimates of adjustment, the use of a reliable and valid scale measuring individual facets of divorce adaptation that have been identified by previous research would be beneficial to better understand how individuals adapt to the end of a relationship.

Secondly, concepts of gender and commensurate identities, traits and behaviours deemed appropriate for women and men are formed through a process of socialisation and the internalisation of socially constructed beliefs (Ashley, 2003; Burnett et al., 1995). Research into gender role identity and associations with both well-being and the

management of major life stressors was most prominent between the late 1970's and the mid 1990's. Accordingly, results and interpretations of such research may not be as applicable in the early 21st century after significant social shifts in Western societies, particularly in attitudes and expectations towards marriage, divorce, parenthood and the roles of men and women in relationships (Addis, Mansfield, & Syzdek, 2010). Thirdly, research investigating gender based traits and gender role identity is often impacted by small numbers of male participants, particularly when drawn from the general population. A male specific study, focussed on recruiting an appropriate number of participants from this difficult to reach demographic would give a rare and potentially useful insight into the experiences of this group.

Most importantly, the manner in which Australian men experience the end of marriage and subsequent adaptation to post-divorce life is an area of research that has been largely overlooked. In recent times, men's adjustment to divorce has become a major public focus, with a number of tragic cases associated with difficulties in adapting to the end of marriage and particularly on-going conflict centred on child custody and access disagreements. Despite this increased focus, it can be argued that a lack of understanding of the unique experiences of men after divorce hampers the development of effective public policy and support services to alleviate stress and potentially avert catastrophic outcomes for men and their families. Research that focusses specifically on divorced men, seeks to identify factors associated with positive adjustment after the end of marriage, and allows them to express their own unique perspectives on their divorce and subsequent life would be extremely beneficial for both them and Australian society as a whole.

5.5 Summary, research questions and hypotheses of the study

This study employed a survey design structured to combine factors previously reported to be associated with male adaptation to divorce including levels of both instrumental and expressive gender traits, gender role identity, the utilisation of post-divorce support, the health of ongoing relationships, levels of pre-divorce and post-divorce spousal conflict, satisfaction with child custody and access arrangements and involvement with Australian based fathers' rights groups. Additionally, the study was designed to address limitations in research into the relationship between gender role identity and adaptation to divorce as outlined in Chapter 5.4. A central motivation for conducting this research was to gain an important insight into the post-divorce experience of Australian men, an area in which relatively little research has been conducted to date, and factors related to their successful or unsuccessful adaptation to divorce.

Aim 1: The first aim of the study was to assess differences in both gender based traits and adaptation to divorce between different demographic categories of Australian men.

RQ₁: Do significant differences exist in levels of gender based traits and adaptation to divorce between Australian men categorised according to current age, level of completed education, current employment status and current annual income.

Aim 2: The second aim of the study was to assess differences in adaptation to divorce between Australian men categorised by type of relationship and other details relating to their divorce.

RQ₂: Do significant differences exist in adaptation to divorce between Australian men categorised according to relationship type (formal or de-facto marriage), age at commencement of the relationship, length of the relationship, time elapsed since divorce and the presence of children at the time of divorce.

H₁: As suggested by Graham (1997), it was hypothesised that men who have been divorced for greater than five years would demonstrate significantly better adaptation to divorce, particularly in resolving feelings of grief arising from the end of the marriage, than men who have been divorced for less than five years.

Aim 3: The third aim of the study was to investigate the relationship between both gender based traits and gender role identity with adaptation to divorce by Australian men.

RQ₃: Does a relationship exist between levels of gender based traits and adaptation to divorce by Australian men, both in total and uniquely for men reporting the presence of children at the time of divorce.

RQ₄: Do significant differences exist in adaptation to divorce between Australian men categorised according to gender role identity, both in

total and uniquely for men reporting the presence of children at the time of divorce.

H₂: Consistent with Alain and Lussier (1988), it was hypothesised that across all participants, men categorised as either Masculine or Androgynous would demonstrate significantly better adaptation to divorce than those categorised as Feminine or Undifferentiated.

H₃: As suggested by Olmstead, Futris and Pasley (2009), it was hypothesised that amongst participants reporting the presence of children at the time of divorce, men categorised as Androgynous would demonstrate significantly better adaptation to divorce than those categorised as Masculine, Feminine or Undifferentiated.

Aim 4: The fourth aim of the study was to investigate the relationship between both the perceived helpfulness of various sources of post-divorce support and the current health of relationships with their ex-spouse and members of their ex-spouses family with the adaptation to divorce by Australian men.

RQ₅: Does a relationship exist between the perceived helpfulness of various sources of post-divorce support and adaptation to divorce by Australian men, both in total and uniquely for men reporting the presence of children at the time of divorce.

H₄: It was hypothesised that across all participants, a significant positive relationship would be identified between the perceived helpfulness of sources of post-divorce support and adaptation to divorce with more

positive assessments of professional, family and social support associated with higher levels of post-divorce adjustment.

RQ₆: Do significant differences exist in the perceived helpfulness of various sources of post-divorce support between Australian men categorised according to gender role identity both in total and uniquely for men reporting the presence of children at the time of divorce.

RQ₇: Does a relationship exist between the current health of relationships with an ex-spouse and ex-family-in-law members and adaptation to divorce by Australian men both in total and uniquely for men reporting the presence of children at the time of divorce.

RQ₈: Are there significant differences in the current health of relationships with their ex-spouse and ex-family-in-law members between Australian men categorised according to gender role identity both in total and uniquely for men reporting the presence of children at the time of divorce.

Aim 5: The fifth aim of the study was to investigate the relationship between levels of pre and post-divorce spousal conflict and adaptation to divorce by Australian men.

RQ₉: Does a relationship exist between levels of pre and post-divorce spousal conflict and adaptation to divorce by Australian men both in total and uniquely for men reporting the presence of children at the time of divorce.

- H₅: It was hypothesised that a significant negative relationship would be identified between levels of post-divorce spousal conflict and adaptation to divorce with higher levels of ongoing conflict with an ex-partner associated with lower levels of reported adaptation to divorce.
- RQ₁₀: Are there significant differences in levels of pre and post-divorce spousal conflict between Australian men categorised according to gender role identity both in total and uniquely for men reporting the presence of children at the time of divorce.
- RQ₁₁: Does a relationship exist between the presence of children at the time of divorce and changes in levels of pre-divorce and post-divorce spousal conflict.

Aim 6: The sixth aim of the study was to investigate the relationship between satisfaction with post-divorce child custody and access arrangements and adaptation to divorce by Australian men who reported the presence of children at the time of divorce.

- RQ₁₂: Does a relationship exist between reported satisfaction with post-divorce child custody and access arrangements with adaptation to divorce by Australian men who reported the presence of children at the time of divorce.
- RQ₁₃: Are there significant differences in reported satisfaction with post-divorce child custody and access arrangements between Australian men who reported the presence of children at the time of divorce categorised according to gender role identity.

RQ₁₄: Does a relationship exist between both the perceived helpfulness of sources of post-divorce support and the current health of relationships with an ex-spouse and ex-family-in-law members and satisfaction with post-divorce child custody and access arrangements.

H₆: As suggested by Malcore, Windell, Seyuin and Hill (2010), it was hypothesised that a significant negative relationship would be identified between levels of post-divorce spousal conflict and satisfaction with custody and access arrangements, with higher levels of ongoing conflict with an ex-partner associated with lower levels of satisfaction with post-divorce parenting arrangements.

Aim 7: The seventh and final aim of the study was to investigate the relationships between post-divorce involvement with Australian fathers' rights groups with adaptation to divorce and a range of other pre and post-divorce outcomes reported by Australian men who reported the presence of children at the time of divorce.

RQ₁₅: Does a relationship exist between involvement with fathers' rights groups and both gender based traits and adaptation to divorce by Australian men who reported the presence of children at the time of divorce.

H₇: As posited by Flood (2007), it was hypothesised that men who became involved with fathers' rights groups after divorce would report significantly lower levels of adaptation to divorce than those who did not become involved with such organisations.

- RQ₁₆: Does a relationship exist between involvement with fathers' rights groups and both the perceived helpfulness of various sources of post-divorce support and the current health of relationships with an ex-spouse and ex-family-in-law members by Australian men who reported the presence of children at the time of divorce.
- RQ₁₇: Does a relationship exist between involvement with fathers' rights groups and levels of pre and post-divorce spousal conflict experienced by Australian men who reported the presence of children at the time of divorce.
- RQ₁₈: Does a relationship exist between involvement with fathers' rights groups and satisfaction with post-divorce child custody and access arrangements by Australian men who reported the presence of children at the time of divorce.

CHAPTER 6: METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

6.1 Ethical considerations

An Application for Ethics Approval of a Research Protocol form was completed and submitted to the Swinburne University Human Research Ethics Committee for review. In addition to the standard form, full printed copies of the online questionnaire to be completed by participants and proposed interview questions for additional data collection was submitted for approval. Given the potentially confronting and distressing nature of the subject matter, review was conducted by the full Swinburne University Ethics Committee in September 2011.

A number of ethical considerations were made in the study to minimise the potential for the experience of distress by participants. The questionnaire provided participants with full information about the type of questions that were to be asked, informed them that they were free to leave the study at any time and contact numbers for Lifeline, MensLine and the Swinburne University Psychology Clinic were provided on each page of the questionnaire that included items with the potential to cause distress or discomfort.

Additionally, anonymity of participants was confirmed by only gathering broad demographic data and not recording participant names or other specific contact details. In cases where participants volunteered to provide qualitative data relating to the end of their relationship, any aspect of this data that could compromise anonymity of a participant or third party was de-identified by the researcher during initial data screening.

Approval for the research project was duly received and confirmation of approval is displayed in Appendix B. Data collection continued for eleven months and during this period, applications for three minor modifications to the research project

were submitted for further approval relating to promotion of the study and included the addition of three items assessing participant involvement in fathers' rights groups after divorce.

6.2 Participants in the study

Participants in the study consisted of a self-selected sample of 142 adult males between the ages of 18 and 60 years and who had experienced divorce at some stage of their life. Data from a further five participants were deleted as they were identified as being outside the age range for the study. Individuals were recruited through a number of techniques and across a variety of locations with a wide range of ages, backgrounds and life experiences. Participants included men with varying levels of education, income, employment status and nation of birth.

Respondents were restricted to those between 18 and 60 years with the mean age being 48.15 years ($SD = 7.48$) with 75.40 per cent of participants identifying that children were present at the end of the marriage, 14.90 per cent reporting the presence of adult children and 9.70 per cent noting the absence of any children from the relationship. Respondents born in Australia made up 69.40 per cent of the sample with 30.60 per cent born in countries other than Australia. Of the sample, 27.60 per cent had completed a tertiary post-graduate degree, 26.10 per cent had completed an undergraduate degree, 29.10 per cent reported completing some form of vocational training including TAFE, an apprenticeship or similar, 8.20 per cent identified their highest level of completed education was VCE while 9.00 per cent reported having attended, but not formally completed secondary schooling.

Of the sample, 59.70 per cent were currently in full time employment, 11.20 per cent in part-time employment, 16.40 per cent in casual or contract work, 8.20 per cent were unemployed and 4.50 per cent were retired. 17.90 per cent of participants disclosed their annual income to be between \$0 and \$20,000, 17.20 per cent between \$20,000 and \$50,000, 18.70 per cent between \$50,000 and \$80,000, 23.90 per cent between \$80,000 and \$120,000 and finally, 22.40 per cent of respondents reported an annual income of greater than \$120,000.

6.3 Procedures

Respondents were recruited through a range of methods. Over 250 ‘flyers’ advertising the study were posted in both public places and private businesses across metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria. Locations where ‘flyers’ were displayed included libraries, community centres, police stations, liquor stores, take-away food outlets, hardware and farm equipment businesses and convenience stores. Copies of this ‘flyer’ and information relating to the study were sent to a range of online male and fathering support services including Dads in Distress, Dads Club Parenting Support, The Lone Fathers’ Association of Australia, The Fatherhood Foundation and the Men’s Sheds organisation. This package of information was also sent to organisations that could be reasonably considered to fall within the “fathers’ rights” movement. Finally, paid advertisements were placed through Google’s Ad-Words service and Facebook.com to reach Australian men outside Victoria and who were not involved with internet based fathers’ or men’s’ organisations.

6.4 Measures

6.4.1 The Personal Attributes Questionnaire

To assess levels of instrumental and expressive emotions and categorise participants by gender role identity, the short form Personal Attributes Questionnaire developed by Spence, Helmreich and Stapp (1975) was utilised. The scale consists of 24 items with eight assessing instrumental traits stereotypically regarded as Masculine (M), eight items assessing expressive traits stereotypically regarded as Feminine (F) and eight items assessing masculinity and femininity on a continuum (M-F). Although items within the M and F subscales assess stereotypical gender related instrumental and expressive traits respectively, these traits can be viewed as socially desirable to some degree in both men and women (Helmreich, Spence, & Wilhelm, 1981; Hoffman, 2001; Yoder, Rice, Adams, & Priest, 1982). In contrast, the M-F scale consists of traits viewed as normatively desirable for either women or men, but not both (Antill & Cunningham, 1982). Contemporary gender research typically utilises the M and F scales alone, with use of M-F scale largely ceasing due to a wide range of theoretical and interpretation issues (Burnett et al., 1995; S. A. Hill, Fekken, & Bond, 2000; Orlofsky & Stake, 1981). As such, items comprising the M-F subscale were excluded from this study and assessment of respondents' levels of gender based traits and gender role identity was conducted using the M and F subscales alone.

Each item is rated on a five-point scale that juxtaposes an adjective at one end with its theoretical opposite at the other end (e.g. not at all active-very active) or a negation at the opposite pole (e.g. not at all independent-very independent). A copy of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire completed by participants is included within the Questionnaire Battery (Appendix A). The process of gender role categorisation using the Personal Attributes Questionnaire assumes the independence of the instrumental and

expressive dimensions of personality (Antill & Cunningham, 1982). Median scores are calculated across all respondents, with individuals then categorised according to their individual M and F subscale scores in comparison to the median. The four defined sex-role categories are Masculine (subjects scoring above the Masculine median but below the Feminine median), Androgynous (above both medians), Feminine (above the Feminine median but below the Masculine median) and Undifferentiated (below both medians).

Though developed in 1975, the Personal Attributes Questionnaire continues to be widely utilised for assessing levels of gender based traits and categorising an individual's gender role identity (Ward, Thorn, Clements, Dixon, & Sanford, 2006). Factor analyses have consistently found that not only that instrumentality and expressiveness are the two most prominent factors assessed by the scale, but that these factors are independent from one another (Antill & Cunningham, 1982; S. A. Hill et al., 2000). Helmreich, Spence & Wilhelm (1981) reported consistent and good internal reliability coefficients for the Personal Attributes Questionnaire with Cronbach's (1951) coefficients for both male and female young adults identified as .76 for the M scale and .73 for the F scale. With older males, Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .78 for the M scale and .77 for the F scale were reported while for older females, .80 for the M scale and .79 for the F scale were also identified.

Similar internal reliability coefficients were found by Antill & Cunningham (1982) when the Personal Attributes Questionnaire was administered to 104 male and 133 female Australian under-graduate university students. Both Helmreich et al (1981) and Klein and Willerman (1979) reported evidence supporting the construct and predictive validity of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire in the measurement of stereotypically gender based traits while results reported by Hill, Fekken and Bond

(2000) offered support for the predictive validity (conceptualised as gender differences) of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire when administered to English speaking participants from Western societies. However, the authors noted that results from non-Western, non-English speaking populations should be interpreted cautiously.

6.4.2 The Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale

To measure respondents' adaptation to divorce, the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale was utilised. The Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale was developed by Dr Bruce Fisher in 1976 before being revised and statistically improved in 1978 (Fisher & Alberti, 1981). The scale was initially designed to be administered to participants in divorce seminars conducted by Dr Fisher to gauge how well individuals had adapted to post-divorce life (Bokker, Farley, & Bailey, 2006). The Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale is rare in providing a reliable and well-validated measure of adaptation to divorce and has been used extensively in the study of how well individuals adjust to relationship dissolution (Koenig Kellas & Manusov, 2003; Quinney & Fouts, 2003). The scale consists of 100 items with each assessed using a 5-point measure ranging from 1 (almost always) to 5 (almost never) with results across the entire scale summed to provide a score of total divorce adaptation. Additionally, the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale provides a measure of adaptation to divorce across six domains corresponding to facets of successful adjustment identified in divorce research. A copy of the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale completed by participants is included within the Questionnaire Battery (Appendix A).

Fisher (1981) reported a Cronbach's (1951) alpha internal reliability for the total measure of adaptation of .98 with sub-test score reliability ranges between .87 to .95.

Koenig Kellas and Manusov (2003) reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the entire scale of .94 and for individual subscales; .94 for Emotional Disentanglement, .87 for Resolution of Grief, .81 for Self-Worth and .71 for Resolution of Anger. The Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale has also demonstrated cross-cultural reliability with a study conducted by Yilmaz and Fisiloglu (2006) utilising the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale translated into Turkish and administered to 129 divorced parents. The authors reported a Cronbach's (1951) alpha coefficient of .97 for the entire translated scale and Guttman split-half reliability for the total scale as .96.

Assessing the validity of the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale is somewhat problematic given that there has been little agreement by researchers in the field of how to individually confirm adjustment to divorce (Bokker, Farley, & Denny, 2006). However, Yilmaz and Fisiloglu (2006) reported a high positive correlation of $r = .72$ ($p < .001$) between the total score for the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale and the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI), a 53 item checklist related to various aspects of psychological distress. The BSI was elected by the authors to assess the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale' concurrent validity using a theoretical basis that levels of poor post-divorce adjustment would be associated with a higher level of psychological distress. The authors also reported a smaller, but significant negative relationship between the total score for the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) a 12 item scale measuring the adequacy of social support from three sources; family, friends and a significant other. The observed correlation of $r = -.47$ ($p < .001$) offers support for the proposition that high levels of poor post-divorce adjustment are associated with lower levels of perceived social support.

The following provides short summaries of the six facets of divorce adaptation measured by the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale.

6.4.2.1 Self-Worth. Feelings of Self-Worth related to divorce adaptation are measured utilising 25 items the scale with 16 items scored in the reverse. Examples of items include “There are many things about my personality I would like to change” and “I feel capable of facing and dealing with my problems” (R). Scores for the Self-Worth subscale range from a minimum of 25 and a maximum of 125 with higher scores indicating a more positive sense of self as an individual emerges from the divorce process.

6.4.2.2 Emotional Disentanglement. The Emotional Disentanglement dimension of divorce adaptation relates to the degree of emotional connectedness with sex-partners that remain for divorced individuals and their adjustment to post-divorce boundaries. This facet is assessed utilising 22 items from the scale with 5 items scored in the reverse. Examples of items include “I find myself making excuses to see and talk to my former romantic partner” and “I believe it was best for all concerned to have our romantic relationship end” (R). Scores for the Emotional Disentanglement subscale range from a minimum of 22 and a maximum of 110 with higher score indicating a lesser degree of continuing boundary ambiguity between ex-spouses.

6.4.2.3 Resolution of Anger. Resolution of Anger is assessed utilising 14 items from the scale with 2 items scored in the reverse. Examples of items include “I hope my former romantic partner is feeling as much or more emotional pain than I am” and “I can communicate with my former romantic partner in a calm and rational manner” (R).

Scores for the Resolution of Anger subscale range between a minimum of 12 and a maximum of 60 with higher scores indicating the lesser continuing experience of anger relating to the divorce.

6.4.2.4 Resolution of Grief. Resolution of Grief is measured using 24 items with one item scored in the reverse. Examples of items include “I feel as though I am the only single person in a couples-only society” and “It is easy for me to organise my daily routine of living” (R). Scores for the Resolution of Grief subscale range from a minimum of 24 and a maximum of 120 with a higher score indicating that the individual has more successfully worked through feelings of grief and loss associated with the end of the relationship.

6.4.2.5 Rebuilding Social Trust. The degree to which an individual has been able to re-establish feelings of social trust is measured utilising 8 items with 2 items scored in the reverse. Examples of items include “I am afraid to trust people who might become romantic partners” and “I feel adequate as a male romantic partner” (R). Scores for the Rebuilding Social Trust subscale range between a minimum of 8 and a maximum of 40 with higher score representing a greater willingness to enter into an intimate relationship with a new romantic partner.

6.4.2.6 Social Self-Worth. Social Self-Worth is measured utilising 9 items with 5 items scored in the reverse. Examples of items include “I feel rejected by many of the friends I had when I was in the romantic relationship” and “I am relating and interacting in many new ways with people since my separation” (R). Scores for the Social Self-Worth subscale range from a minimum of 9 and a maximum of 45 with higher scores

indicating that the respondent holds a greater level of comfort in talking about their separation and engaging in social activities.

6.4.3 Individual circumstances of divorce

To gain information about individual experiences of divorce, a number of items were developed and presented to participants with a copy of these items assessing divorce circumstances is included as part of the Questionnaire Battery (Appendix A).

Respondents were first asked to nominate whether their now ended relationship was a formal marriage or a de-facto relationship, for how many years they were in the relationship and how many years ago the relationship ended. Men were then asked whether either adopted or naturally born children were present during the divorce and whether the oldest of these children was under the age of 18 years at this time. Finally, participants were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with child custody or access arrangements if children were present. Scores assessing custody satisfaction ranged from 1 (Very unsatisfied) to 5 (Very satisfied).

Subsequently, levels of pre-divorce and post-divorce conflict and the quality of relationships between respondents and ex-family-in-law members were assessed. Each item was measured on a 5-point scale. With items one and two in this section, scores ranged from 1 (Very low conflict) to 5 (Very high conflict). In items three, four and five, score ranged from of 1 (Very poor relationship) to 5 (Very good relationship). Within items four and five, respondents could also indicate an absence of a relationship with ex-parents-in-law or ex-siblings-in-law by selecting “N/A”.

Finally, respondents’ use of post-divorce support and how helpful they perceived such support to have been was measured with an additional nine items, each

measured on a 5-point scale. Items one to eight measured the helpfulness of individual counselling, relationship counselling, mediation services, legal advice, support from parents, siblings, ex-partners family and finally, support from friends and other social contacts. Within these items, scores ranged from 1 (Not at all helpful) to 5 (Extremely helpful). Respondents could also indicate that they did not make use of this source of support or service by selecting “N/A”. The final item in this section asked respondents to select the most helpful source of support from friends or social contacts from a list comprising of extended family, friends, work colleagues, pastoral or religious care and other sources. Respondents could indicate that they did not make use of any additional source of help by leaving this item blank.

6.4.6 Involvement in fathers’ rights groups

To determine if the participant had become involved in fathers’ rights groups after the end of the relationship, a single item comprising the question “Since your divorce or separation, have you become involved with any group that actively campaigns for the rights of divorced men or fathers?” was included in the questionnaire. Participants were required to answer either “yes” or “no” to this question.

6.4.7 Individual experiences of divorce

Following the presentation of items relating to respondents’ gender role identity, adaptation to divorce, individual circumstances of divorce, relationship health and conflict, and post-divorce support, an open ended question developed by the author was asked. This question was designed to elicit participant’s autobiographical memories and current experiences of divorce and subsequent adaptation to post-divorce life. A copy of

this question and associated details are included in the Questionnaire Battery (Appendix A).

Respondents were also offered the option to take part in a follow up interview with the investigator by way of the statement; “If you would be prepared to take part in a brief follow-up interview, please leave your first name only and a contact phone number below”.

Although 90 men indicated their willingness to engage in a face-to-face or telephone based follow up interview, an unexpectedly large amount of qualitative data was gathered through the online questionnaire and a large overlap was identified between men leaving this information and those willing to be interviewed. On review, it was determined that data already provided by participants was sufficient for qualitative analysis and as such, follow up interviews were not conducted as part of the current research project.

CHAPTER 7: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

7.1 Introduction to quantitative analysis and results

Quantitative data was downloaded from the Opinio website (<http://opinio.online.swin.edu.au>) and the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Windows Version 20 (SPSS) was used to conduct all statistical analyses. As the survey employed a fixed response algorithm requiring participants to answer all items before proceeding, the dataset contained no missing or out of range values. Data was screened in accordance with procedures recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) with box plots generated to detect univariate outliers on the study's continuous independent variables (Personal Attributes Questionnaire M and F scales) and dependent variables (Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale facet scores and Total Adaptation to Divorce). A total of eight extreme outlying cases (defined as greater than $3 \times \text{IQR}$) were identified and, given the relatively large remaining sample size, these participants were excluded from subsequent analysis.

Consistent with good levels of internal reliability previously reported for the Personal Attributes Scale (Helmreich et al., 1981), Cronbach's (1951) alpha coefficients in the current study were identified as .78 for the M scale and .82 for the F scale. Similarly, all but one facet of the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale demonstrated good to excellent levels of internal reliability with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .91 for Self-Worth, .89 for Emotional Disentanglement, .83 for Resolution of Anger, .94 for Resolution of Grief and .87 for Rebuilding Social Trust. In contrast, the facet Social Self-Worth recorded a lower, but still acceptable coefficient of .64. Overall, The Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale demonstrated an excellent internal reliability with a

Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .96, replicating previously reported results for this scale (Fisher & Alberti, 1981; Koenig Kellas & Manusov, 2003; Yilmaz & Fişiloğlu, 2006).

Means and standard deviations for continuous independent variables (Personal Attributes Questionnaire M and F scales) and continuous dependent variables (Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale facet scores and Total Adaptation to Divorce) across all participants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations for Gender Traits and Divorce Adaptation

	M	SD
<i>Personal Attributes Questionnaire</i>		
M Scale	20.95	5.09
F Scale	23.22	4.74
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>		
Self-Worth	95.57	17.03
Emotional Disentanglement	91.49	14.28
Resolution of Anger	46.84	11.06
Resolution of Grief	89.50	19.89
Rebuilding Social Trust	28.85	7.96
Social Self-Worth	33.37	5.82
Total Adaptation	377.68	57.78
N = 134		

A preliminary review of histograms found distributions of all continuous variables, with the exception of the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale facet Resolution of Anger, to be moderately negatively skewed. As recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), it was decided to convert data in each of these variable categories by use of a reflected square root transformation.

Subsequent review demonstrated a notable improvement of the normal distribution of these items, with results from Shapiro-Wilk tests allowing for the assumption of normality across most continuous variables. However, two items within the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale continued to fail the test of normality; Emotional Disentanglement (skewness = .359, *SE* skewness = .209; kurtosis = -.672, *SE* kurtosis = .416) and Rebuilding Social Trust (skewness = .042, *SE* skewness = .209; kurtosis = -.877, *SE* kurtosis = .416).

However, as noted by Gravetter & Wallnau (2004), parametric tests comparing groups are robust to violations of normality and homogeneity of variance when the categories contain large numbers of participants (e.g. 30+) and relatively equal sample sizes (e.g. largest/smallest = 1.5). Accordingly, where comparisons were made between groups meeting these conditions, parametric testing was conducted utilising both original untransformed data and transformed data to screen for differences in results. Throughout the analysis, results were identified as equivalent between both sets of data and consequentially, results from untransformed data were reported within the study. Where comparisons were made between groups with small or unequal sample sizes, non-parametric techniques were utilised. All other independent variables within the study were measured on five-point Likert scales providing ordinal values. As such, non-parametric tests were used to answer research questions and hypotheses with original scores for all continuous variables utilised within these tests.

Where appropriate, post-hoc tests were conducted using Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference test due to its widespread use in psychological research (Gravetter, 2004), relative conservatism and reduction of Type-I error while maintaining reasonable power when making pairwise comparisons.

7.2 Correlations between independent variables

Before investigating associations between the dependent variables (Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale facet scores and Total Adaptation to Divorce), relationships between independent variables (instrumentality and expressiveness measured by the Personal Attributes Questionnaire M and F Scales, levels of pre-divorce and post-divorce spousal conflict, current health of the relationship with ex-partner and ex-family-in-law and the perceived helpfulness of sources of post-divorce support) were assessed. With the exception of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire scales, each independent variable was measured using a five-point Likert scale, providing ordinal values. As such, Spearman rank order correlation coefficients were computed to assess relationships between independent variables while a Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to assess the relationship between the Personal Attributes Questionnaire M and F scales.

7.2.1 Relationship between instrumental and expressive gender traits

The relationship between the Personal Attributes Questionnaire M and F scales was investigated using a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. No significant relationship was identified between the two variables, $r(N = 134) = .09, p = .30$ with levels of instrumental traits unrelated to levels of expressive traits.

7.2.2 Relationships between gender traits and independent variables

Relationships between gender traits and other independent variables are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: Spearman's Rank Order Correlations between Gender Traits and Independent Variables

	<i>Personal Attributes Questionnaire</i>	
	M Scale	F Scale
Pre-Divorce Conflict	-.03	.14
Post-Divorce Conflict	.03	-.02
<i>Current Health of Post-Divorce Relationships</i>		
Relationship with Ex-Spouse (<i>n</i> = 134)	-.01	.09
Relationship with Ex-Parents-In-Law (<i>n</i> = 105)	-.03	.01
Relationship with Ex-Siblings-In-Law (<i>n</i> = 111)	.02	-.01
<i>Perceived Help from Post-Divorce Support</i>		
Individual Counselling (<i>n</i> = 96)	.03	.28**
Relationship Counselling (<i>n</i> = 71)	-.10	.02
Mediation (<i>n</i> = 85)	-.02	.05
Legal (<i>n</i> = 113)	.21*	.12
Parental (<i>n</i> = 102)	.07	.07
Sibling (<i>n</i> = 106)	-.01	.05
Ex-Family-In-Law (<i>n</i> = 52)	-.04	-.15
Other (<i>n</i> = 122)	.11	.19*
N = 134		

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

As shown in Table 2, a significant positive relationship was identified between the Personal Attributes Questionnaire M scale and the perceived usefulness of legal support, with higher levels of instrumental gender traits associated with better perception of the usefulness of legal counsel during divorce. In contrast, a significant positive relationship was found between the Personal Attributes Questionnaire F scale and both the perceived usefulness of individual counselling and support from other sources, with higher levels of expressive gender traits associated with a better perception of the assistance provided through both individual psychotherapy and other

sources of support including extended family, work colleagues, friends, pastoral support or support from a new romantic partner.

7.2.3 Relationships between conflict and independent variables

Relationships between levels of both pre-divorce and post-divorce conflict with other independent variables are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3: Spearman's Rank Order Correlations between Spousal Conflict and Independent Variables

	Pre-Divorce Conflict	Post-Divorce Conflict
Post-Divorce Conflict	.16	
<i>Health of Post-Divorce Relationships</i>		
Relationship with Ex-Spouse ($n = 134$)	-.13	-.48**
Relationship with Ex-Parents-In-Law ($n = 105$)	-.11	-.50**
Relationship with Ex-Siblings-In-Law ($n = 111$)	-.18	-.44**
<i>Perceived Help from Post-Divorce Support</i>		
Individual Counselling ($n = 96$)	-.11	.03
Relationship Counselling ($n = 71$)	.03	.07
Mediation ($n = 85$)	-.07	-.07
Legal ($n = 113$)	.01	-.23*
Parental ($n = 102$)	.13	.16
Sibling ($n = 106$)	.01	.13
Ex-Family-In-Law ($n = 52$)	-.11	-.44**
Other ($n = 122$)	.08	-.20*
N = 134		

*Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$*

As shown in Table 3, a significant relationship was not identified between levels of pre-divorce and post-divorce conflict. Additionally, no significant relationships were found between levels of pre-divorce spousal conflict and other independent variables. However, levels of post-divorce spousal conflict were found to be significantly

negatively associated with the health of the current relationship with an ex-spouse, ex-parents-in-law and ex-siblings-in-law with higher levels of post-divorce conflict associated with poorer post-divorce relationships with an ex-partner and members of their family.

Levels of post-divorce spousal conflict were also found to be significantly negatively related to the perceived helpfulness of legal support, ex-family-in-law support and support from other sources with higher levels of post-divorce conflict with an ex-partner associated with poorer assessment of the helpfulness of legal counsel, support from ex-family and support from sources including extended family, work colleagues, friends, pastoral support or support from a new romantic partner.

7.2.4 Relationships between ex-family relationships and independent variables

Associations between the current health of relationships with ex-family-in-law members and other independent variables are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4: Spearman's Rank Order Correlations between Current Health of Ex-Family-In-Law Relationships and Independent Variables

	Current Health of Relationships		
	Ex-Spouse	Ex-Parents-In-Law	Ex-Siblings-In-Law
<i>Health of Post-Divorce Relationships</i>			
Relationship with Ex-Spouse ($n = 134$)	-	-	-
Relationship with Ex-Parents-In-Law ($n = 105$)	.41**	-	-
Relationship with Ex-Siblings-In-Law ($n = 111$)	.48**	.70**	-
<i>Perceived Help from Post-Divorce Support</i>			
Individual Counselling ($n = 96$)	.05	.02	.10
Relationship Counselling ($n = 71$)	-.05	-.01	.06
Mediation ($n = 85$)	.12	-.13	.05
Legal ($n = 113$)	.15	.04	.17
Parental ($n = 102$)	-.08	-.15	-.07
Sibling ($n = 106$)	.02	-.01	.01
Ex-Family-In-Law ($n = 52$)	.24	.62**	.58**
Other ($n = 122$)	.18*	.19	.12
N = 134			

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

As shown in Table 4, significant positive relationships were identified between the current health of the relationship with an ex-spouse and the health of current relationships with both ex-parents-in-law and ex-siblings-in-law with a better relationship with an ex-partner associated with better relationships with other members of an ex-spouse's family. Similarly, a significant positive relationship was identified between the current health of relationships with ex-parents-in-law and ex-siblings-in-law.

A significant positive relationship was also found between the health of the current relationship with an ex-partner and the perceived helpfulness of post-divorce support from other sources with a better post-divorce ex-spousal relationship associated

with better perception of post-divorce support from sources including extended family, work colleagues, friends, pastoral support or support from a new romantic partner.

Finally, a significant positive relationship was identified between the perceived helpfulness of ex-family-in-law support and both the health of current relationships with ex-parents-in-law and the current health of relationships with ex-siblings-in-law. As such, better post-divorce relationships with family members of an ex-spouse were associated with greater perceived helpfulness of post-divorce support from this source when utilised.

7.2.5 Relationships between sources of post-divorce support

Associations between the perceived helpfulness of various sources of post-divorce support are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5: Spearman's Rank Order Correlations between Perceived Helpfulness of Sources of Post-Divorce Support

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Individual Counselling	r_s	-	.31*	.27*	.36*	.17	.31**	-.03	.34**
	n	-	63	70	81	77	79	38	92
2. Relationship Counselling	r_s		-	.77**	.26*	.13	.21	.04	.12
	n		-	54	63	58	60	32	67
3. Mediation	r_s			-	.51**	-.03	.13	-.15	.08
	n			-	81	72	75	35	80
4. Legal	r_s				-	.23*	.13	.22	.27**
	n				-	89	95	43	105
5. Parental	r_s					-	.70**	.15	.35**
	n					-	89	45	98
6. Sibling	r_s						-	.02	.35**
	n						-	45	99
7. Ex-Family-in-Law	r_s							-	.16
	n							-	49
8. Other	r_s								-
	n								-
N = 134									

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

As shown in Table 5, a significant positive association was found between the perceived helpfulness of individual counselling with the perceived helpfulness of relationship counselling, mediation, legal support, support from siblings and support from other sources indicating that a greater perception of the helpfulness of individual counselling is associated with a greater perception of the helpfulness from a range of other sources of support.

The perceived helpfulness of relationship counselling was found to be significantly positively associated with the perceived helpfulness of both mediation and legal support indicating that the more helpful relationship counselling was adjudged to have been, the more helpful mediation and legal assistance was also viewed by divorced men. A significant positive relationship was also identified between mediation and legal support suggesting that the more helpful mediation was seen to be, the greater the perception of help provided by legal counsel. Additionally, a significant positive relationship was found between the perceived helpfulness of legal support and both parental support and other sources of support with better perceptions of the use of legal support associated with better assessment of help from these additional sources.

Amongst sources of support from family and friends, significant positive relationships were identified between the perceived helpfulness of parental support and both support from siblings and other sources indicating that greater perceived assistance received from parents was associated with greater sense of help from both siblings and other sources including extended family and friends.

Finally, the perceived helpfulness of post-divorce support from siblings was significantly positively related to perceived helpfulness of support from other sources suggesting that men who reported receiving more helpful assistance from siblings also identified better levels of help received from other sources.

7.3 Demographic information and adaptation to divorce

All 134 participants provided complete demographic information consisting of current age, level of completed education, current employment status and current annual income. For the purposes of analysis, the age of participants was collapsed into three categories; ages 29 to 39, ages 40 to 49 and ages 50 to 60. Means and standard deviations for scores on the Personal Attributes Questionnaire and Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale for each demographic category are displayed in Appendix C.

Due to the large disparity in group sizes in the demographic categories for age, level of completed education and current employment status, non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis tests were utilised to assess differences in scores on the M and F scales of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire and Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale facet and Total Adaptation to Divorce scores. In contrast, the relatively equal group sizes for the demographic category current annual income allowed for a one way between groups analysis of variance to be conducted.

7.3.1 Age, gender traits and adaptation to divorce

Differences in scores on the Personal Attributes Questionnaire and the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale between age groups were assessed utilising a Kruskal-Wallis test. As shown in Table 6, no Kruskal-Wallis values were found to be significant ($p \leq .05$) on either the Personal Attributes Questionnaire M and F scales or Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale facet scores and Total Adaptation to Divorce, indicating that levels of instrumental and expressive gender traits and adaptation to divorce do not significantly differ on the basis of age.

Table 6: Kruskal-Wallis Test Statistics for Gender Traits and Divorce Adaptation as a Function of Age

	χ^2	<i>p</i>
<i>Personal Attributes Questionnaire</i>		
M Scale	2.04	.56
F Scale	.04	.99
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>		
Self-Worth	6.42	.09
Emotional Disentanglement	3.40	.33
Resolution of Anger	1.24	.74
Resolution of Grief	3.37	.34
Rebuilding Social Trust	4.99	.17
Social Self-Worth	1.42	.70
Total Adaptation	2.21	.53
N = 134		

Note: *df* = 3

7.3.2 Education, gender traits and adaptation to divorce

Differences in scores on the Personal Attributes Questionnaire and the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale between participants categorised by level of completed education were assessed utilising a Kruskal-Wallis test. As shown in Table 7, the Kruskal-Wallis values were significant ($p \leq .05$) for the Personal Attributes Questionnaire M scale, Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale facet scores for Self-Worth, Emotional Disentanglement, Resolution of Grief, Rebuilding Social Trust and Total Adaptation to Divorce.

Table 7: Kruskal-Wallis Test Statistics for Gender Traits and Divorce Adaptation as a Function of Completed Education

	χ^2	p
<i>Personal Attributes Questionnaire</i>		
M Scale	14.58	.01
F Scale	2.63	.62
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>		
Self-Worth	10.97	.03
Emotional Disentanglement	10.79	.03
Resolution of Anger	4.20	.38
Resolution of Grief	10.22	.04
Rebuilding Social Trust	17.97	.01
Social Self-Worth	5.39	.25
Total Adaptation	10.62	.03
N = 134		

Note: $df = 3$

An examination of the mean ranks indicated that participants who had completed a post-graduate degree displayed the highest mean rank for the Personal Attributes Questionnaire M Scale (82.73) and the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale facets of Self-Worth (77.00), Emotional Disentanglement (81.85), Resolution of Grief (76.07) and Total Adaptation to Divorce (76.27). However, individuals who reported their highest completed level of education as an undergraduate degree displayed the highest mean rank for the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale facet Rebuilding Social Trust (80.87) with those having completed a post-graduate degree also recording a high mean rank on this facet (77.03).

Individuals who did not complete secondary schooling displayed the lowest mean rank on the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale facet Emotional Disentanglement

(46.63), while those who completed secondary school displayed the lowest mean rank on the Personal Attributes Questionnaire M Scale (39.32) and the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale facets Self-Worth (35.68), Resolution of Grief (43.55), Rebuilding Social Trust (34.14) and Total Adaptation to Divorce (40.14).

As such, it can be confidently stated that individuals who reported having completed a more advanced level of education reported higher levels of instrumental gender traits and better adaptation to divorce than those with either an incomplete or complete secondary school education alone.

7.3.3 Employment status, gender traits and adaptation to divorce

Differences in scores on the Personal Attributes Questionnaire and the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale between participants categorised by employment status were assessed utilising a Kruskal-Wallis test. As shown in Table 8, a Kruskal-Wallis value was significant ($p \leq .05$) for the Personal Attributes Questionnaire M scale alone with the Personal Attributes F scale and the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale facet and Total Adaptation to Divorce scores demonstrating no significant differences between men categorised by employment status.

Table 8: Kruskal-Wallis Test Statistics for Gender Traits and Divorce Adaptation as a Function of Employment Status

	χ^2	<i>p</i>
<i>Personal Attributes Questionnaire</i>		
M Scale	9.52	.05
F Scale	3.49	.48
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>		
Self-Worth	4.26	.37
Emotional Disentanglement	2.91	.57
Resolution of Anger	2.05	.73
Resolution of Grief	6.02	.20
Rebuilding Social Trust	3.80	.43
Social Self-Worth	1.45	.84
Total Adaptation	3.82	.43
N = 134		

Note: *df* = 3

An examination of the mean ranks indicated that participants who reported being in full-time employment displayed the highest mean rank for the Personal Attributes Questionnaire M Scale (74.72) with men who were retired (47.75) or unemployed (43.18) reporting the lowest mean ranks. As such, it can be suggested that men engaged in full-time employment hold higher levels of instrumental gender traits than those men not working due to unemployment or retirement.

7.3.4 Annual income, gender traits and adaptation to divorce

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore differences between income categories of participants on the Personal Attributes Questionnaire Scale M and F scores and Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale scores for

individual facets and Total Adaptation to Divorce. Results from analysis are displayed in Table 9.

Table 9: ANOVA Summary for Gender Traits and Divorce Adaptation as a Function of Income

	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
<i>Personal Attributes Questionnaire</i>			
M Scale	4.62	.01	.13
F Scale	1.97	.10	.06
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>			
Self-Worth	2.11	.08	.07
Emotional Disentanglement	.70	.60	.02
Resolution of Anger	.34	.85	.01
Resolution of Grief	3.05	.02	.09
Rebuilding Social Trust	3.10	.02	.09
Social Self-Worth	.49	.74	.01
Total Adaptation	2.12	.08	.06
N = 134			

Note: df Between = 4, Within = 129

As shown in Table 9, statistically significant differences in scores between income groups were identified on the Personal Attributes Questionnaire M scale and the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale facets Resolution of Grief and Rebuilding Social Trust.

Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey Honest Significant Difference test indicated a significant difference ($p \leq .05$) in levels of instrumental gender traits between the participants with a reported income of less than \$20,000 ($M = 17.46$, $SD = 5.77$) and both those reporting an income of between \$80,000 and \$120,000 ($M = 21.63$, $SD = 5.01$) and those with an income greater than \$120,000 ($M = 22.70$, $SD = 4.20$).

Similarly, a significant difference ($p \leq .05$) in scores for Resolution of Grief was identified between men with a reported income of less than \$20,000 ($M = 78.54$, $SD = 22.13$) and those with an income of between \$80,000 and \$120,000 ($M = 96.13$, $SD = 16.86$). Finally, a significant difference ($p \leq .05$) in scores for Rebuilding Social Trust was identified between men in the less than \$20,000 income category ($M = 24.58$, $SD = 9.17$) and both those reporting an income of between \$80,000 and \$120,000 ($M = 30.41$, $SD = 6.73$) and those with an income greater than \$120,000 ($M = 31.43$, $SD = 6.27$).

Overall, it can be stated that levels of instrumental gender traits, the resolution of grief relating to the divorce and the ability to enter into new intimate relationships are significantly better for men earning higher incomes compared to those within the lowest income category.

7.4 Divorce information and adaptation to divorce

All participants provided information about their previous marriage including the type of relationship (formal or de-facto marriage), their age at the commencement of the marriage, the length of the relationship, time elapsed since divorce and the presence of children at the time of divorce.

Congruent with research indicating that the process of working through individual grief and loss of the relationship and, where children are present, reorganisation of family into a bi-nuclear structure can take up to five years post-divorce (Graham, 1997), participants were divided into two categories; those divorced for less than five years and those divorced for five years or greater. Means and standard deviations for scores on the Personal Attributes Questionnaire and Fisher Divorce

Adjustment Scale by both type of relationship and time elapsed since the end of marriage are displayed in Table 10.

Table 10: Means and Standard Deviations of Gender Traits and Divorce Adaptation by Type of Relationship and Time Elapsed Since Divorce

	Type of Relationship				Time Since Divorce				
	Married (n = 114)		De-Facto (n = 20)		Less Than 5 Years (n = 66)		5 Years or Greater (n = 68)		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Age (Years)	48.30	7.49	47.30	7.35	45.71	7.74	50.51	6.35	
<i>Personal Attributes Questionnaire</i>									
M Scale	21.09	5.01	20.15	5.60	20.24	5.46	21.63	4.64	
F Scale	22.96	4.83	24.65	3.98	24.26	4.23	22.21	5.02	
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>									
Self-Worth	95.23	17.23	97.55	16.08	94.61	16.37	96.51	17.72	
Emotional Disentanglement	91.09	14.22	93.75	14.80	87.94	15.11	94.93	12.61	
Resolution of Anger	46.88	11.15	46.65	10.79	44.52	10.90	49.10	10.82	
Resolution of Grief	89.19	20.04	91.25	19.40	85.29	21.45	93.59	17.44	
Rebuilding Social Trust	28.74	7.98	29.50	7.99	29.17	7.71	28.54	8.24	
Social Self-Worth	33.29	5.87	33.80	5.67	33.80	6.19	32.94	5.46	
Total Adaptation	376.52	58.54	384.30	54.08	367.97	59.15	387.10	55.21	

7.4.1 Relationship between marriage information and adaptation to divorce

As participant age at commencement of the relationship, the reported length of the marriage and time elapsed since divorce all violated the assumptions of linearity and normality, the relationship between these variables and the facets of adaptation to divorce and Total Adaptation to Divorce were investigated by calculating Spearman rank order correlation coefficients.

Across all participants, the age at which individuals commenced the relationship was significantly negatively associated with levels of the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale facets of Self-Worth, $r_s (N = 134) = -.19, p = .03$, Rebuilding Social Trust, $r_s (N = 134) = -.23, p = .01$ and Total Adaptation to Divorce, $r_s (N = 134) = -.18, p = .04$, suggesting that men who entered either formal or de-facto marriages at younger ages reported lower individual self-worth coming out of the relationship, greater difficulties in entering into new intimate relationships and poorer overall adaptation to divorce. In contrast, the length of time spent in the relationship was found to not be significantly associated with any facet of adaptation nor Total Adaptation to Divorce.

Finally, the time elapsed since the end of the relationship was significantly positively associated with scores on three facets of the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale; Emotional Disentanglement, $r_s (N = 134) = .20, p = .02$, Resolution of Anger, $r_s (N = 134) = .19, p = .03$, Resolution of Grief, $r_s (N = 134) = .25, p < .01$ as well as Total Adaptation to Divorce, $r_s (N = 134) = .19, p = .03$, indicating that the experience of boundary ambiguity, anger and grief related to the end of the marriage all diminish while overall divorce adaptation improves as time passes since the end of the relationship.

7.4.2 Type of relationship, elapsed time and adaptation to divorce

A Mann-Whitney U test was utilised to explore differences in Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale facet scores and Total Adaptation to Divorce between men who reported having been formally married ($n = 114$) and those who were in de-facto relationships ($n = 20$). As shown in Table 11, no significant differences were identified between the groups suggesting that levels of divorce adaptation do not differ between men who entered into formal marriage and those who experienced the end of a de-facto relationship.

Table 11: Mann-Whitney U Test Statistics for Adaptation to Divorce as a Function of Type of Relationship

	<i>U</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>			
Self-Worth	1059.50	-.50	.61
Emotional Disentanglement	982.50	-.98	.33
Resolution of Anger	1111.00	-.18	.86
Resolution of Grief	1070.50	-.43	.66
Rebuilding Social Trust	1087.00	-.33	.74
Social Self-Worth	1078.50	-.39	.70
Total Adaptation	1043.00	-.61	.55
N = 134			

Note: df = 3

To assess differences in adaptation to divorce between participants based on time elapsed since divorce, an independent measures t-test was conducted to compare Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale facet scores and Total Adaptation to

Divorce for participants divorced for less than five years ($n = 66$) and those who had been divorced for five years or more ($n = 68$). A statistically significant difference between the groups was observed for mean scores on three facets of The Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale.

Participants who had been divorced for five years or more reported significantly better Emotional Disentanglement ($M = 94.93$, $SD = 12.61$) than those more recently divorced ($M = 87.94$, $SD = 15.11$, $t(132) = -2.90$, $p < .01$) with a moderate difference between the groups ($\eta^2 = .06$). Additionally, men who had been divorced for five years or more reported significantly better Resolution of Anger ($M = 49.10$, $SD = 10.82$) than those more recently divorced ($M = 44.52$, $SD = 10.90$, $t(132) = -2.45$, $p = .06$) with a small magnitude of difference between the groups ($\eta^2 = .05$). Finally, significantly better Resolution of Grief was reported by those divorced for five years or more ($M = 93.59$, $SD = 17.44$) compared to participants whose relationships ended less than five years ago ($M = 85.29$, $SD = 21.45$, $t(132) = -2.45$, $p = .02$) with a small magnitude of difference between the groups ($\eta^2 = .04$).

However, differences in levels of Total Adaptation to Divorce just failed to reach significance at a .05 level between those divorced for five or more years ($M = 387.10$, $SD = 55.21$) and those divorced for less than five years ($M = 367.97$, $SD = 55.15$, $t(132) = 1.94$, $p = .06$). Similarly, there were no significant differences identified on levels of Self-Worth, Rebuilding Social Trust or Social Self-Worth between the groups.

7.4.3 The presence of children and adaptation to divorce

Given the large disparity in numbers of participants between those with children under the age of 18 at the time of divorce ($n = 101$) and participants with adult children or no children from the relationship ($n = 33$), a Mann-Whitney U test was utilised to explore differences in Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale facet scores and Total Adaptation to Divorce between these groups. As shown in Table 12, no significant differences were identified between the categories. As such, it can be confidently stated that levels of divorce adaptation do not differ between men based on the presence of children at the time of divorce.

Table 12: Mann-Whitney U Test Statistics for Adaptation to Divorce as a Function of the Presence of Children

	<i>U</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>			
Self-Worth	1537.00	-.67	.50
Emotional Disentanglement	1653.50	-.07	.95
Resolution of Anger	1527.00	-.72	.47
Resolution of Grief	1367.50	-.154	.12
Rebuilding Social Trust	1333.00	-1.73	.09
Social Self-Worth	1480.00	-.97	.33
Total Adaptation	1452.00	-1.11	.27

N = 134

Note: $df = 3$

7.5 Gender role identity

7.5.1 Relationship between gender traits and adaptation to divorce

The relationship between scores on the Personal Attributes Questionnaire M and F scales with scores on Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale facets and Total Adaptation to Divorce was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Table 13 displays the strength and direction of relationships between each measure.

Table 13: Pearson's Correlations between Gender Traits and Divorce Adaptation

	<i>Personal Attributes Questionnaire</i>	
	M Scale	F Scale
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>		
Self-Worth	.54**	.19*
Emotional Disentanglement	.34**	.03
Resolution of Anger	.23**	.12
Resolution of Grief	.50**	.05
Rebuilding Social Trust	.42**	.20*
Social Self-Worth	.29**	.12
Total Adaptation	.52**	.14

N = 134

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

As shown in Table 13, significant positive relationships were identified between the Personal Attributes Questionnaire M scale and all facets of divorce adaptation in addition to Total Adaptation to Divorce. As such, higher levels of instrumental gender traits are significantly associated with better self-worth,

improved emotional disentanglement from an ex-partner, better resolution of anger and grief, a greater ability to enter into post-divorce intimate relationships, better engagement in post-divorce social activities and more positive overall adaptation to divorce.

In contrast, the Personal Attributes Questionnaire F scale was only significantly positively associated with the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale facets of Self-Worth and Rebuilding Social Trust, indicating that higher levels of expressive gender traits were associated with better individual self-worth coming out of the divorce and a greater ability to enter into new emotionally intimate post-divorce relationships.

7.5.2 Relationship between gender traits and adaptation to divorce (children present)

The relationship between scores on the Personal Attributes Questionnaire M and F scales with scores on Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale facets and Total Adaptation to Divorce for men who reported having children at the time of divorce was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Table 14 displays the strength and direction of relationships between each measure.

Table 14: Pearson's Correlations between Gender Traits and Divorce Adaptation (Children Present)

	<i>Personal Attributes Questionnaire</i>	
	M Scale	F Scale
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>		
Self-Worth	.58**	.27**
Emotional Disentanglement	.30**	.03
Resolution of Anger	.14	.08
Resolution of Grief	.47**	.10
Rebuilding Social Trust	.42**	.23*
Social Self-Worth	.18	.15
Total Adaptation	.50**	.18
N = 101		

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

As shown in Table 14, with the exception of Resolution of Anger and Social Self-Worth, significant positive relationships were identified between the Personal Attributes Questionnaire M scale and all facets of divorce adaptation in addition to Total Adaptation to Divorce. As such, higher levels of instrumental gender traits were associated with better individual self-worth, greater emotional disentanglement from an ex-spouse, better resolution of grief, a greater ability to enter into post-divorce intimate relationships and higher levels of overall divorce adaptation in cases where children were present during divorce.

In contrast, the Personal Attributes Questionnaire F scale was only significantly positively associated with the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale facets of Self-Worth and Rebuilding Social Trust, suggesting that higher levels of expressive gender traits are related to both higher levels of individual self-worth

and a greater ability to enter into new emotionally intimate post-divorce relationships for divorced fathers.

7.5.3 Gender role identity categorisation

Participants ($N = 134$) were divided into four groups according to their scores on both the Personal Attributes Questionnaire M and F scales relative to median scores on these scales for all participants. The Masculine group ($n = 32$) consisted of men who scored above the median on the M scale and below the median on the F scale. Androgynous participants ($n = 34$) were those men who scored above the median on both M and F scales. The Feminine group ($n = 31$) consisted of men who scored below the median on the M scale but above the median on the F scale. Finally, the Undifferentiated group ($n = 37$) were made up of men who scored below the median on both the M and F scales.

Means and standard deviations for scores on the Personal Attributes Questionnaire and the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale in addition to general demographic information by gender role category are shown in Table 15.

Table 15: Means and Standard Deviations of Demographic Information, Gender Traits and Divorce Adaptation by Gender Role Category

	Masculine (n = 32)		Androgynous (n = 34)		Feminine (n = 31)		Undifferentiated (n = 37)		Total (N = 134)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Age (Years)	48.34	7.56	47.91	7.69	48.61	7.31	47.81	7.53	48.15	7.45
Time Since Divorce (Years)	7.00	5.28	5.03	3.67	5.52	5.00	5.43	4.75	5.72	4.70
<i>Personal Attributes Questionnaire</i>										
M Scale	24.97	2.10	25.15	2.49	16.84	4.04	17.05	3.40	20.95	5.09
F Scale	20.16	2.54	27.21	2.03	26.81	1.74	19.19	4.48	23.22	4.74
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>										
Self-Worth	99.84	14.73	106.47	10.74	87.65	16.23	88.51	18.04	95.57	17.03
Emotional Disentanglement	93.78	13.67	97.24	9.24	86.48	14.87	88.41	16.22	91.49	14.28
Resolution of Anger	48.38	11.72	50.29	10.03	46.13	10.90	42.95	10.63	46.84	11.06
Resolution of Grief	98.09	14.96	98.09	16.76	79.16	19.55	82.84	20.49	89.50	19.89
Rebuilding Social Trust	29.91	7.42	32.44	6.82	27.55	7.97	25.73	8.15	28.85	7.96
Social Self-Worth	33.25	6.20	36.06	4.43	31.61	5.20	32.46	6.47	33.37	5.83
Total Adaptation	394.63	49.68	412.09	38.48	351.55	56.11	353.30	60.43	377.68	57.77

7.5.4 Gender role identity and adaptation to divorce

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore differences between gender role identity categories on scores for individual facets and Total Adaptation to Divorce as measured by the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale. Results from this analysis are presented in Table 16.

Table 16: ANOVA Summary for Divorce Adaptation by Gender Role Category

	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>			
Self-Worth	12.09	.01	.22
Emotional Disentanglement	4.24	.01	.09
Resolution of Anger	3.01	.03	.06
Resolution of Grief	9.96	.01	.19
Rebuilding Social Trust	5.10	.01	.11
Social Self-Worth	3.90	.01	.08
Total Adaptation	11.42	.01	.21
N = 134			

Note: df Between = 3, Within = 130

As shown in Table 16, statistically significant differences were identified between gender role categories across all facets of the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale and Total Adaptation to Divorce. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey Honestly Significant Difference were conducted to explore significant differences ($p \leq .05$) in divorce adaptation between categories.

On the facet of Self-Worth, Masculine and Androgynous participants reported significantly higher mean scores compared to men categorised as either

Feminine or Undifferentiated. On the facet Emotional Disentanglement, Androgynous men identified significantly better emotional disconnection from their ex-spouse than participants within the Feminine and Undifferentiated groups. Similarly, mean scores on the facet Resolution of Anger were found to be significantly higher for Androgynous men in comparison to participants in the Undifferentiated group.

On the facet Resolution of Grief, both Masculine and Androgynous participants reported significantly higher mean scores compared to men categorised as Feminine or Undifferentiated. On the facet Rebuilding Social Trust, the Androgynous group reported a significantly better ability to enter into new intimate relationships compared with men in the Undifferentiated category. Levels of Social Self-Worth were also found to be significantly higher for Androgynous men in comparison to Feminine or Undifferentiated participants.

Finally, men categorised as Masculine or Androgynous reported significantly better overall adaptation to divorce compared with participants assessed as holding either a Feminine or Undifferentiated gender role identity.

7.5.5 Gender role identity and adaptation to divorce (children present)

For participants reporting the presence of children at the time of divorce, means and standard deviations for scores on the Personal Attributes Questionnaire and the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale in addition to general demographic information by gender role category were calculated and are shown in Table 17.

Table 17: Means and Standard Deviations of Demographic Information, Gender Traits and Divorce Adaptation by Gender Role Category (Children Present)

	Masculine (n = 23)		Androgynous (n = 25)		Feminine (n = 22)		Undifferentiated (n = 31)		Total (N = 101)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Age (Years)	49.30	5.66	47.32	6.18	47.45	6.58	46.16	6.98	47.45	6.42
Time Since Divorce (Years)	7.87	5.76	5.60	4.06	5.50	4.83	5.29	4.80	6.00	4.91
<i>Personal Attributes Questionnaire</i>										
M Scale	24.78	2.00	25.08	2.47	17.09	4.20	16.87	3.55	20.75	5.08
F Scale	20.22	2.80	27.24	2.19	26.86	1.78	18.61	4.67	22.91	5.06
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>										
Self-Worth	96.57	15.48	108.24	9.09	89.27	14.68	87.26	18.57	95.01	17.07
Emotional Disentanglement	92.65	14.84	96.92	9.80	88.14	12.90	89.10	16.00	91.63	13.97
Resolution of Anger	49.04	12.39	48.52	9.77	47.45	10.55	45.03	9.79	47.34	10.56
Resolution of Grief	95.78	15.58	98.20	14.53	79.95	18.64	80.84	19.55	88.35	19.01
Rebuilding Social Trust	28.39	7.89	32.12	6.92	27.45	7.96	25.45	7.96	28.21	7.99
Social Self-Worth	32.30	6.62	35.56	4.55	31.82	5.47	32.19	6.97	32.97	6.14
Total Adaptation	386.30	52.11	411.20	35.28	357.05	46.18	352.35	60.92	375.67	55.17

Subsequently, a one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore differences in the individual facets and Total Adaptation to Divorce measured by the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale between gender role identity categories for men reporting the presence of children at the time of divorce. Results are shown in Table 18.

Table 18: ANOVA Summary for Divorce Adaptation by Gender Role Category (Children Present)

	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>			
Self-Worth	10.25	.01	.24
Emotional Disentanglement	2.10	.11	.06
Resolution of Anger	.79	.50	.02
Resolution of Grief	7.76	.01	.19
Rebuilding Social Trust	3.55	.02	.10
Social Self-Worth	2.06	.11	.06
Total Adaptation	7.72	.01	.19

N = 101

Note: df Between = 3, Within = 97

As shown in Table 18, statistically significant differences in scores between gender role categories were identified within the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale facets of Self-Worth, Resolution of Grief, Rebuilding Social Trust and Total Adaptation to Divorce. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey Honestly Significant Difference were conducted to explore significant differences ($p \leq .05$) in divorce adaptation between categories.

Androgynous men reported significantly higher levels of Self-Worth compared to participants categorised as Masculine, Feminine or Undifferentiated. On the facet Resolution of Grief, both Masculine and Androgynous participants reported significantly higher mean scores in comparison to men categorised as either Feminine or Undifferentiated. The Androgynous group also reported significantly higher scores for Rebuilding Social Trust compared to men in the Undifferentiated category.

Finally, men categorised as Masculine demonstrated significantly better overall adaptation to divorce compared with participants identified as Undifferentiated. Those categorised as Androgynous were also found to report significantly better overall adaptation to divorce in comparison to those assessed as having either a Feminine or Undifferentiated gender role identity.

7.6 Post-divorce support

7.6.1 Sources of support and relationship with adaptation to divorce

The relationship between the perceived helpfulness of sources of post-divorce support and both individual facets of adaptation to divorce and Total Adaptation to Divorce was investigated using Spearman's Rank Order correlation coefficient. Table 19 displays the strength and direction of relationships between each measure.

Table 19: Spearman's Rank Order Correlations between Perceived Helpfulness of Post-Divorce Support and Divorce Adaptation

	Individual Counselling (<i>n</i> = 96)	Relationship Counselling (<i>n</i> = 71)	Mediation (<i>n</i> = 85)	Legal (<i>n</i> = 113)	Parental (<i>n</i> = 102)	Sibling (<i>n</i> = 106)	Ex-Family (<i>n</i> = 52)	Other (<i>n</i> = 122)
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>								
Self-Worth	.17	.04	.03	.07	.08	.14	-.02	.20*
Emotional Disentanglement	-.11	-.02	.10	.06	-.03	-.13	-.23	.01
Resolution of Anger	-.02	-.05	-.03	.06	-.05	.03	-.03	.07
Resolution of Grief	.03	-.01	.02	-.05	-.09	-.05	-.05	.04
Rebuilding Social Trust	.09	.17	.10	.00	-.01	.04	.02	.01
Social Self-Worth	.29**	.11	.06	.05	.08	.19*	.03	.31**
Total Adaptation	.08	.01	.03	.02	-.03	.02	-.08	.10

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

As shown in Table 19, with only two exceptions, no facet of adaptation to divorce nor Total Adaptation to Divorce as measured by the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale was found to be significantly associated with the perceived helpfulness of the different types of post-divorce support.

However, significant positive relationships were identified with higher levels of Social Self-Worth associated with greater perception of the help provided by individual counselling, support from siblings and support from other sources (including extended family, friends, work colleagues, pastoral help or support from a new romantic partner). Additionally, Self-Worth was found to be significantly positively associated with the perceived benefit of help received from the other sources of support category, with a better perception of help from extended family, social and related sources associated with a greater sense of individual self-worth on emerging from divorce.

7.6.2 Sources of support and relationship with adaptation to divorce (children present)

The relationship between the perceived helpfulness of sources of post-divorce support and both individual facets of adaptation to divorce and Total Adaptation to Divorce for men reporting the presence of children at the time of divorce was investigated using Spearman's rank order correlation coefficient. Table 20 displays the strength and direction of relationships between each measure.

Table 20: Spearman's Rank Order Correlations between Perceived Helpfulness of Post-Divorce Support and Divorce Adaptation (Children Present)

	Individual Counselling (n = 75)	Relationship Counselling (n = 57)	Mediation (n = 74)	Legal (n = 88)	Parental (n = 79)	Sibling (n = 77)	Ex-Family (n = 39)	Other (n = 91)
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>								
Self-Worth	.35**	.05	.17	.14	.11	.17	-.00	.22*
Emotional Disentanglement	.05	.02	.31**	.22*	.05	-.09	-.23	.05
Resolution of Anger	-.00	-.02	.12	.13	-.02	.06	.03	.15
Resolution of Grief	.15	.04	.20	-.03	-.03	.05	-.01	.09
Rebuilding Social Trust	.18	.15	.23	.01	.01	.11	.10	-.03
Social Self-Worth	.37**	.04	.09	.02	.04	.19	.03	.28**
Total Adaptation	.23*	.04	.22	.08	.02	.08	-.03	.14

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

As shown in Table 20, a significant positive relationship was identified between feelings of self-worth coming out of the relationship with the perceived helpfulness of both individual counselling and support from other sources (including extended family, friends, work colleagues, pastoral help or support from a new romantic partner). A significant positive relationship was also found between Emotional Disentanglement and the perceived helpfulness of mediation and legal support with men who found these sources of support more helpful reporting better emotional separation from their ex-partner.

Additionally, higher levels of Social Self-Worth were significantly positively associated with the reported helpfulness of both individual counselling and support from other sources. Finally, a significant positive relationship was found between Total Adaptation to Divorce and the perceived helpfulness of individual counselling with better overall adaptation to divorce associated with a greater sense of the help provided by individual counselling when utilised by divorced fathers.

7.6.3 Gender role identity and support

Differences between gender-role categories of the perceived helpfulness of each source of post-divorce support were analysed using a Kruskal-Wallis test. As shown in Table 21, no significant ($p \leq .05$) difference in the perceived helpfulness of sources of support was identified between men categorised by gender role identity.

Table 21: Kruskal-Wallis Test Statistics for Perceived Helpfulness of Post-Divorce Support as a Function of Gender Role Identity

	<i>n</i>	χ^2	p
Individual Counselling	96	5.11	.16
Relationship Counselling	71	.53	.91
Mediation	85	2.37	.50
Legal Support	113	6.95	.07
Parental Support	102	.77	.86
Sibling Support	106	3.73	.29
Ex-Family-in-Law Support	52	1.66	.65
Other Support	122	6.26	.09

Note: df = 3

7.6.4 Gender role identity and support (children present)

Differences between gender-role categories of the perceived helpfulness of each utilised source of post-divorce support for men reporting the presence of children at the time of divorce was analysed using a Kruskal-Wallis test. As shown in Table 22, no significant Kruskal-Wallis values ($p \leq .05$) were identified with perceived help provided by various sources of support not significantly differing on the basis gender role identity where children were present at the time of the divorce

Table 22: Kruskal-Wallis Test Statistics for Perceived Helpfulness of Post-Divorce Support as a Function of Gender Role Identity (Children Present)

	<i>n</i>	χ^2	<i>p</i>
Individual Counselling	75	3.63	.31
Relationship Counselling	57	.30	.96
Mediation	74	5.61	.13
Legal Support	88	6.52	.09
Parental Support	79	2.69	.44
Sibling Support	77	5.53	.14
Ex-Family-in-Law Support	39	1.74	.63
Other Support	91	6.91	.08

Note: df = 3

7.7 Ex-family relationships

7.7.1 Post divorce ex-family and relationship with adaptation to divorce

The association between the current health of relationships with ex-family-in-law members and both individual facets of adaptation to divorce and Total Adaptation to Divorce as measured by the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale was investigated using Spearman's rank order correlation coefficient. Table 23 displays the strength and direction of relationships between each measure.

Table 23: Spearman's Rank Order Correlations between Current Health of Ex-Family Relationships and Divorce Adaptation

	Ex-Spouse Relationship (<i>n</i> = 134)	Ex-Parents Relationship (<i>n</i> = 105)	Ex-Sibling Relationship (<i>n</i> = 111)
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>			
Self-Worth	.09	.03	.06
Emotional Disentanglement	-.13	-.16	-.15
Resolution of Anger	.43**	.23*	.29**
Resolution of Grief	.10	.09	.18
Rebuilding Social Trust	-.08	-.06	-.14
Social Self-Worth	.12	.04	.02
Total Adaptation	.11	.05	.08

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

As shown in Table 23, with only one exception, no significant associations were identified between the health of the current relationship with ex-family-in-law members and either individual facet scores or Total Adaptation to Divorce. However, significant positive associations were found between Resolution of Anger and current relationships with ex-family, with a better resolution of angry feelings stemming from the end of the relationship related to more positive ongoing relationships with an ex-spouse, ex parents-in-law and ex-siblings in law.

7.7.2 Ex-family and relationship with adaptation to divorce (children present)

In cases where children were present at the time of divorce, the current health of relationships with ex-family-in-law members and both individual facets

of adaptation to divorce and Total Adaptation to Divorce measured by the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale was investigated using Spearman's rank order correlation coefficient. Table 24 displays the strength and direction of relationships between each measure.

Table 24: Spearman's Rank Order Correlations between Current Health of Ex-Family Relationships and Divorce Adaptation (Children Present)

	Ex-Spouse Relationship (<i>n</i> = 101)	Ex-Parents Relationship (<i>n</i> = 83)	Ex-Sibling Relationship (<i>n</i> = 88)
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>			
Self-Worth	.03	-.04	-.02
Emotional Disentanglement	-.21*	-.19	-.19
Resolution of Anger	.46**	.30**	.34**
Resolution of Grief	.10	.09	.12
Rebuilding Social Trust	-.14	-.07	-.16
Social Self-Worth	.11	.02	-.03
Total Adaptation	.06	.03	.03

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

As shown in Table 24, with only two exceptions, no significant associations were identified between the current health of relationships with ex-family-in-law members and either individual facet scores or Total Adaptation to Divorce.

However, significant positive associations were found between Resolution of Anger and the health of current relationships with ex-family, with better resolution of angry feelings about the end of the relationship related to more

positive ongoing relationships with an ex-spouse, ex parents-in-law and ex-siblings in law where these relationships exist. Additionally, scores within the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale facet Emotional Disentanglement was found to be significantly negatively associated with the health of the current relationship with ex-spouse indicating that where a connection with an ex-partner continues to exist, poorer adjustment to post-divorce emotional boundaries is associated with a better ongoing relationship with an ex-spouse.

7.7.3 Gender role identity and ex-family relationships

Differences between gender-role categories of the current relationship with ex-family-in-law members was analysed using a Kruskal-Wallis test. No significant differences were identified between gender-role categories on the current health of relationships with an ex-partner ($H(3, n = 134) = 1.24, p = .74$), ex-parents-in-law ($H(3, n = 105) = .18, p = .98$) or ex-siblings-in-law ($H(3, n = 111) = .89, p = .83$) where these relationships existed. As such, the post-divorce health of relationships with a former partner and ex-family-in-law members do not significantly differ on the basis gender role identity.

7.7.4 Gender role identity and ex-family relationships (children present)

Differences between gender-role categories of the current relationship with ex-family-in-law members where children were present during the divorce was analysed using a Kruskal-Wallis test. No significant differences were identified between gender-role categories on the current health of relationships with an ex-

partner ($H(3, n = 101) = 1.24, p = .74$), ex-parents-in-law ($H(3, n = 83) = .68, p = .88$) or ex-siblings-in-law ($H(3, n = 88) = .71, p = .87$) where these relationships existed. As such, in cases where children were present at the time of the divorce, the current health of relationships with a former partner and ex-family-in-law members do not significantly differ on the basis gender role identity.

7.8 Spousal conflict

7.8.1 Spousal conflict and adaptation to divorce

The relationship between both pre-divorce and post-divorce conflict between spouses and both individual facets of adaptation to divorce and Total Adaptation to Divorce measured by the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale was investigated using Spearman's rank order correlation co-efficient. Table 25 displays the strength and direction of relationships between each measure.

Table 25: Spearman's Rank Order Correlations between Levels of Pre-Divorce and Post-Divorce Conflict and Divorce Adaptation

	Pre-Divorce Conflict	Post-Divorce Conflict
Post-Divorce Conflict	.16	
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>		
Self-Worth	-.04	-.01
Emotional Disentanglement	.08	.10
Resolution of Anger	-.25**	-.37**
Resolution of Grief	-.08	-.04
Rebuilding Social Trust	.12	.19*
Social Self-Worth	-.17*	-.08
Total Adaptation	-.07	-.05
N = 134		

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

As shown in Table 25, no significant relationship was found between levels of pre-divorce and post-divorce conflict. With regard to relationships between conflict and adaptation to divorce, a significant negative relationship was identified between pre-divorce spousal conflict and Resolution of Anger. Similarly, a significant negative relationship was identified between post-divorce spousal conflict and Resolution of Anger. As such, greater instances of both pre-divorce and post-divorce discord were associated with poorer resolution of angry feelings after divorce.

A significant negative relationship was also found between levels of pre-divorce conflict and Social Self-Worth indicating that higher levels of pre-divorce spousal conflict is associated with a poorer post-divorce sense of social comfort. Finally, a significant positive relationship was identified between reported levels

of post-divorce spousal conflict and the facet Rebuilding Social Trust suggesting that high levels of ongoing post-divorce conflict is associated with a greater ability to enter into new emotionally intimate relationships.

7.8.2 Spousal conflict and adaptation to divorce (children present)

The relationship between both pre-divorce and post-divorce spousal conflict and both individual facets of adaptation to divorce and Total Adaptation to Divorce measured by the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale for men reporting the presence of children at the time of the end of the relationship was investigated using Spearman's rank order correlation co-efficient. Table 26 displays the strength and direction of relationships between each measure.

Table 26: Spearman's Rank Order Correlations between Levels of Pre-Divorce and Post-Divorce Conflict and Divorce Adaptation (Children Present)

	Pre-Divorce Conflict	Post-Divorce Conflict
Post-Divorce Conflict	.14	
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>		
Self-Worth	-.12	.01
Emotional Disentanglement	-.04	.06
Resolution of Anger	-.33**	-.52**
Resolution of Grief	-.23*	-.06
Rebuilding Social Trust	.01	.21*
Social Self-Worth	-.26*	-.08
Total Adaptation	-.21*	-.07

N = 101

*Note: * p < .05, ** p < .01*

As shown in Table 26, no significant relationship was identified between levels of pre-divorce and post-divorce spousal conflict for those men with children at the time of divorce.

With regard to the relationships between pre-divorce conflict and adaptation to divorce for fathers, a significant negative relationship was identified between both pre-divorce and post-divorce spousal conflict with Resolution of Anger, indicating that men experiencing higher levels of pre-divorce and post-divorce discord experienced a lesser ability to resolve angry feelings related to the divorce.

Pre-divorce levels of conflict were also found to be significantly negatively related to Resolution of Grief, Social Self-Worth and Total Adaptation to Divorce. As such, a high level of discord prior to divorce was associated with poorer resolution of grief, lesser feelings of comfort in social situations and poorer overall adaptation to divorce. Finally, a significant positive relationship was identified between levels of post-divorce conflict with Rebuilding Social Trust, suggesting that higher levels of ongoing conflict with an ex-partner is associated with a better ability to enter into new emotionally intimate relationships.

7.8.3 Gender role identity and spousal conflict

Differences between gender-role categories and reported levels of both pre-divorce and post-divorce spousal conflict was analysed using a Kruskal-Wallis test. No significant difference were identified between gender-role categories on levels of either pre-divorce conflict ($H(3, N = 134) = 2.95, p = .40$)

or post-divorce conflict, ($H(3, N = 134) = 4.28, p = .23$) suggesting that the experience of conflict before and after divorce does not significantly differ on the basis gender role identity.

7.8.4 Gender role identity and spousal conflict (children present)

Differences between gender-role categories and reported levels of pre-divorce and post-divorce spousal conflict where children were present during the divorce was analysed using a Kruskal-Wallis test. No significant differences were identified between gender-role categories on levels of either pre-divorce conflict ($H(3, N = 101) = 3.37, p = .34$) or post-divorce conflict, ($H(3, N = 101) = 1.89, p = .60$) suggesting that where children were present at the time of divorce, the experience of conflict before and after divorce does not significantly differ on the basis gender role identity.

7.8.5 The presence of children and changes in conflict.

A Wilcoxon Signed Rank test was conducted to measure the change in reported levels of pre-divorce and post-divorce spousal conflict both where children were present in the divorce ($n = 101$) and in cases where either adult children or no children were present at the end of the relationship ($n = 33$).

Where no children or adult children were present, a significant decrease in reported levels from pre-divorce conflict to post-divorce conflict was identified ($Z = -2.40, p = .02, r = .41$). However, where children were present at the time of divorce, no significant change in levels of spousal conflict was reported by

divorced fathers from pre-divorce and post-divorce periods ($Z = -1.51, p = .13, r = .15$).

7.9 Child custody satisfaction

7.9.1 Child custody satisfaction and adaptation to divorce

The relationship between satisfaction with child custody arrangements for men who reported having children at the time of divorce and both individual facets of adaptation to divorce and Total Adaptation to Divorce measured by the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale was investigated using Spearman's rank order correlation coefficient. Table 27 displays the strength and direction of relationships between each measure.

Table 27: Spearman's Rank Order Correlations between Child Custody Satisfaction and Divorce Adaptation

	Child Custody Satisfaction
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>	
Self-Worth	-.03
Emotional Disentanglement	-.09
Resolution of Anger	.33**
Resolution of Grief	.04
Rebuilding Social Trust	.02
Social Self-Worth	-.10
Total Adaptation	.03
N = 101	

*Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$*

As shown in Table 27, a significant positive relationship was identified between levels of child custody satisfaction and the facet Resolution of Anger with higher levels of satisfaction with post-divorce child custody arrangements associated with better resolution of anger relating to the divorce. In contrast, no significant relationships were identified between child custody satisfaction and any other facet of adaptation or Total Adaptation to Divorce.

7.9.2 Gender role identity and child custody satisfaction

Differences in child custody satisfaction between divorced fathers categorised by gender role identity were assessed utilising a Kruskal-Wallis test. A significant difference was found between the gender role categories ($H(3, N = 101) = 7.98, p = .04$) with the mean rank of participants categorised as Masculine reporting the greatest satisfaction with custody arrangements (58.70) followed by those categorised as Feminine (55.14) with Androgynous men (54.64) ranked third. Though men in these three gender role categories reported similar levels of custody satisfaction, Undifferentiated participants (39.56) were identified as reporting a far lower mean rank score in comparison to men assessed as Masculine, Androgynous or Feminine.

7.9.3 Child custody satisfaction and post-divorce support

The relationship between reported child custody satisfaction and the perceived help from various sources of support for divorced fathers was

investigated using Spearman's rank order correlation co-efficient. Table 28 displays the strength and direction of relationships between each measure.

Table 28: Spearman's Rank Order Correlations between Child Custody Satisfaction and Perceived Helpfulness of Post-Divorce Support

	<i>n</i>	Child Custody Satisfaction
Individual Counselling	75	.15
Relationship Counselling	57	-.09
Mediation	74	.12
Legal Support	88	.33**
Parental Support	79	-.13
Sibling Support	77	-.10
Ex-Family-in-Law Support	39	.16
Other Support	91	.17
N = 101		

*Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$*

As shown in Table 28, with one exception, the perceived helpfulness of various sources of post-divorce support were not found to be significantly associated with reported satisfaction with child custody arrangements. The exception was the perceived helpfulness of legal support which was found to be significantly positively associated with child custody satisfaction. As such, better perceptions of the helpfulness of legal counsel and representation during the process of divorce was found to be associated with greater satisfaction in child custody outcomes by Australian fathers.

7.9.4 Child custody satisfaction and ex-family relationships

The relationship between child custody satisfaction and the health of current relationships with ex-family-in-law members was investigated using Spearman's rank order correlation co-efficient. Significant relationships were found between satisfaction with post-divorce child custody arrangements and the health of the current relationships with an ex-partner, $r_s (n = 101) = .45, p < .01$, ex-parents-in-law, $r_s (n = 83) = .31, p < .01$ and ex-siblings-in-law, $r_s (n = 88) = .28, p < .01$) indicating greater satisfaction with child custody is associated with better post-divorce relationships with an ex-partner and ex-family-in-law members.

7.9.5 Child custody satisfaction and conflict

The relationship between levels of reported satisfaction with child custody arrangements and levels of pre-divorce and post-divorce spousal conflict was investigated using Spearman's rank order correlation coefficient. No significant relationship between levels of pre-divorce conflict and child custody satisfaction was identified, $r_s (n = 101) = -.07, p = .51$. However, a significant negative relationship was found between child custody satisfaction and levels of post-divorce conflict, $r_s (n = 101) = -.42, p < .01$ with lesser satisfaction with custody arrangements associated with higher levels of post-divorce conflict.

7.10 Involvement with fathers' rights groups

7.10.1 Fathers' rights groups and relationship with adaptation to divorce

Participants provided a yes or no answer to the question "Since your divorce or separation, have you become involved with any group that actively campaigns for the rights of divorced men or fathers?" Participants with no children at the time of the divorce were excluded from this phase of analysis, though individuals reporting the presence of adult children during divorce were included.

Means and standard deviations for the age of participants and scores on the Personal Attributes Questionnaire and Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale by type of relationship time elapsed since the end of the relationship is displayed in Table 29.

Table 29: Means and Standard Deviations by Involvement with Fathers' Rights Groups

	Involved in Rights Groups (<i>n</i> = 59)		Not Involved (<i>n</i> = 62)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Age	48.78	6.67	48.52	6.75
Time In Relationship (Years)	10.73	6.68	14.58	7.49
Time Since Divorce (Years)	6.24	4.78	5.52	4.78
<i>Personal Attributes Questionnaire</i>				
M Scale	21.69	4.69	20.24	5.04
F Scale	23.78	4.49	22.60	5.04
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>				
Self-Worth	99.22	15.27	92.66	17.66
Emotional Disentanglement	95.88	10.83	88.32	15.17
Resolution of Anger	46.56	10.73	47.53	11.72
Resolution of Grief	92.63	18.29	86.63	20.45
Rebuilding Social Trust	29.02	8.34	28.50	7.67
Social Self-Worth	34.63	4.80	32.13	6.47
Total Adaptation	389.81	49.07	368.02	60.35

Differences between groups on levels of instrumental and expressive traits as measured by the Personal Attributes Questionnaire and scores within individual facets and Total Adaptation to Divorce as measured by the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale were explored through use of independent samples t-tests.

No differences were identified between the two groups on mean scores in either the Personal Attributes Questionnaire M scale ($t(119) = -1.64, p = .10$) or F scale ($t(119) = -1.36, p = .18$), suggesting that levels instrumental and expressive gender traits do not differ on the basis of involvement with fathers' rights organisations. Additionally, significant differences were not identified between

the groups on mean scores for Resolution of Anger ($t(119) = .48, p = .64$), Resolution of Grief ($t(119) = -1.70, p = .09$) or Rebuilding Social Trust ($t(119) = -.36, p = .72$).

However, men who reported becoming involved in rights groups were found to have significantly higher mean scores on Self-Worth ($t(119) = -2.18, p = .03$) compared to men who did not become involved with such groups with a relatively small difference between the categories ($\eta^2 = .04$). Additionally, participants involved in rights groups reported both significantly better Emotional Disentanglement ($t(119) = -3.17, p < .01$) and higher Social Self-Worth ($t(119) = -2.42, p = .02$) with a moderate difference between the groups ($\eta^2 = .08$) for disentanglement and a relatively small difference between the groups ($\eta^2 = .05$) for self-worth in social settings. Finally, men involved in rights groups reported significantly better overall adaptation to divorce than those who did not become involved ($t(119) = -2.17, p = .03$) with a relatively small difference between the groups ($\eta^2 = .04$).

7.10.2 Fathers' rights groups and post-divorce support

Differences between men who reported becoming involved with fathers' rights groups and those who did not on the perceived helpfulness of various sources of post-divorce support were assessed using a Mann-Whitney U Test. As shown in Table 30, one significant difference ($p < .05$) was found between the groups with men who did not become involved with fathers' rights groups

perceiving legal support to have been significantly more helpful than those who did become involved.

Table 30: Mann-Whitney U Test Statistics for Perceived Helpfulness of Post-Divorce Support as a Function of Involvement in Fathers' Rights Groups

	<i>n</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>
Individual Counselling	90	847.00	-1.23	.22
Relationship Counselling	68	481.50	-1.30	.19
Mediation	84	679.00	-1.62	.11
Legal Support	103	754.00	-3.86	.00
Parental Support	92	962.00	-.79	.43
Sibling Support	96	1147.00	-.02	.98
Ex-Family-in-Law Support	47	196.00	-1.97	.05
Other Support	110	1477.50	-.21	.83

Note: df = 3

7.10.3 Fathers' rights groups and ex-family relationships

Differences in the health of current relationships with ex-family-in-law members between participants categorised by involvement with fathers' rights groups was explored utilising Mann-Whitney U tests. No significant difference in the current health of a relationship with an ex-spouse was identified between those who became involved with rights group and those who did not ($N = 121$, $U = 1502.50$, $Z = -1.92$, $p = .06$).

However significant differences were identified when assessing the current health of relationships with members of an ex-partners family, with men who did

not become involved with rights groups reporting significantly better current relationships with both their ex-parents-in-law ($n = 97$, $U = 897.50$, $Z = -2.34$, $p = .02$) and ex-siblings-in-law ($n = 105$, $U = 1041.50$, $Z = -2.35$, $p = .02$) than those who became involved with rights groups after divorce.

7.10.4 Fathers' rights groups and spousal conflict

A Mann-Whitney U Test was conducted to explore differences in reported levels of pre-divorce and post-divorce spousal conflict between men who became involved in fathers' rights groups after divorce and those who did not. No significant difference was found between groups on reported levels of pre-divorce conflict ($N = 121$, $U = 1712.00$, $Z = -.62$, $p = .54$). However, a significant difference was identified between the groups on levels of post-divorce conflict with participants not involved in rights groups reporting significantly lower levels of post-divorce conflict than participants who became actively involved with fathers' rights groups after the breakup of their marriage ($N = 121$, $U = 1349.00$, $Z = -.258$, $p = .01$).

7.10.5 Fathers' rights groups and child custody satisfaction

A Mann-Whitney U Test was conducted to explore differences in reported levels of child custody satisfaction between men with children at the time of divorce who became involved in fathers' rights groups after their divorce and those who did not. A significant difference was identified between the groups on levels of child custody satisfaction with participants who did not become involved

with rights groups reporting significantly greater satisfaction with custody arrangements than men who became actively involved with rights groups after divorce ($N = 101$, $U = 753.50$, $Z = -3.77$, $p < .01$).

CHAPTER 8: QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

8.1 Researcher positionality

As noted by Marecek (2003), “Decisions about the conduct of research are not solely a matter of dispassionate scientific judgement; they are also shaped by researchers’ personal histories and social locations.” (p. 62). Marecek suggests that qualitative researchers conduct a reflexive analysis into their individually held values, commitments and personal history to assess how these views may influence the outcomes of a research project. As such, I have provided detail about my own background, experiences and perspectives that had the potential to influence my interpretation of qualitative data provided by participants.

I am a Caucasian, Australian heterosexual male who is currently 40 years old. I grew up in Melbourne and have lived in the inner-southern suburbs for the majority of my life. My family environment was relatively stable and middle-class with my parents having relocated to Melbourne after spending their childhood and adolescence in rural Victoria. My father originated from a culturally Catholic family while my mother was born into an Anglican household; though neither my maternal nor paternal families were religiously observant.

I attended a state government primary school, followed by a single-sex private high school. Subsequently, I completed a Bachelor of Commerce degree and commenced work in a Melbourne based sales and marketing business. A long-standing interest in psychology resulted in me commencing a part-time graduate diploma in psychology in 2002 and a full-time post-graduate diploma (fourth year) in 2008. I then commenced by post-graduate studies, transitioning to a professional doctorate of psychology (Counselling) in 2010. I have been a

provisionally registered psychologist from 2010 and since this time I have worked clinically in several areas including low-cost public counselling, university based student counselling and psychiatric in-patient and out-patient treatment and relapse prevention programs. During this time, I have developed a particular interest in working with problems commonly experienced by male clients including relationship difficulties, divorce, gender role strain, masculine self-concept and emotional regulation difficulties particularly in the experience of anger.

During the data collection and analysis phase of this research project, I actively reflected on how my own and involvement with other people's relationships have influenced my beliefs about marriage and divorce. Though my immediate and extended family experience involved some degree of spousal conflict, divorce as an event was largely absent from my life, with grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles (with only one exception), all becoming formally married and remaining with their partners. My present relationship commenced in 2000 and my partner and I were together for ten years before formally marrying in a small, non-religious ceremony with only immediate family present.

Though I recognise the benefit of marriage as a formal and socially sanctioned institution and the critical elements of commitment, trust, partnership and love, I believe that the way in which a relationship is created, conducted, and if necessary, ended, is the exclusive business of the partners involved. I view the traditional social stigma placed on relationship dissolution as unhelpful and potentially dangerous to the well-being of individuals who find themselves in this position. Additionally, though I believe intimate and extended family can provide

great support to a couple both during a marriage and after separation, over-investment in other's relationships by kin can lead to the experience of intense and potentially destructive feelings of shame, guilt, anger and isolation by spouses during and after divorce.

Through involvement with friends and clinical clients, I believe that although both women and men can experience severe distress during and after the end of a relationship, my view is that the manner in which men experience this event can be qualitatively different to that of women. The potential for social isolation, lack of emotional insight and a sense of failure as a man and a father brought about by not being able to "fix" the marriage can leave men in a state of distress that, while not necessarily greater than that of their ex-partner, has components that are unique to the experience of males.

8.2 Participants in the qualitative component of the study

Of the 134 individuals who participated in the overall study, 90 respondents chose to provide some autobiographical information relating to their experiences of divorce and subsequent adaptation to post-divorce life.

As with the overall participant group, these 90 individuals were between the ages of 18 and 60 years and had experienced the breakdown of a formal marriage or de-facto relationship. The mean age of respondents was 48.39 years (SD = 7.01) and of the 90 individuals, 85.60 per cent identified as having been formally married while the remaining 14.40 per cent having experienced the end of a de-facto relationship. Additionally, 86.70 per cent of participants identified that children were present at the end of the marriage, with 10.00 per cent reporting

the presence of adult children and only 3.30 per cent noting the absence of children from the relationship. Of the 90 participants, 56.70 per cent reported that they had become involved with fathers' rights groups while 43.30 per cent had not. Of the 78 men who had children at the time of divorce, 60.30 per cent reported becoming involved with fathers' rights groups after divorce while the remaining 39.70 per cent not involved with such organisations.

Respondents born in Australia made up 64.40 per cent of the sample with 35.60 per cent born in other countries. Of the sample, 28.90 per cent had completed a tertiary post-graduate degree, 22.20 per cent completed an undergraduate degree, 28.90 per cent reported having completed vocational training including TAFE, an apprenticeship or similar, 10.00 per cent noted their highest level of completed education was VCE while 10.00 per cent attended but did not complete secondary schooling.

56.70 per cent of the sample was in full time employment, 10.00 per cent were in part-time employment, 16.70 per cent performing casual or contract work, 12.20 per cent identified as unemployed at the time of data collection and 4.40 per cent were retired. 20.00 per cent of participants disclosed their annual income to be between \$0 and \$20,000, 20.00 per cent between \$20,000 and \$50,000, 16.70 per cent between \$50,000 and \$80,000, 20.00 per cent between \$80,000 and \$120,000 and finally, 23.30 per cent of respondents reported an annual income of greater than \$120,000.

8.3 Qualitative methodology

Participants were encouraged to provide information about their divorce and related feeling with the statement “If you would like to share any other aspect of your experiences related to the end of your relationship, please feel free to comment below”. It is posited that the 90 men who took this opportunity did so in order to express their thoughts, feelings and experiences related to the end of their marriage and post-divorce life. As such, a simple narrative approach was used for qualitative analysis which, as noted by Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011), allows for the identification of a “core story” and the description of issues influencing this story which may vary depending on different types of participants.

Qualitative data was downloaded from the Opinio website (<http://opinio.online.swin.edu.au>) and initially screened in using Microsoft Word 2010. Obvious spelling and punctuation errors were corrected, though text was left unaltered where participants used colloquial terms, grammatically incorrect but comprehensible phrasing or excessive punctuation to stress an argument. QSR NVivo Version 10 was then used for all qualitative analysis. Established themes from previous research into divorce adaptation and topics that emerged from participant narratives in this study were both used to code and subsequently analyse qualitative information. These major themes were subsequently validated by re-coding of the data and a comparison of outcomes between the two steps was conducted. Finally, each major theme was individually assessed and sub-themes identified under each topic for analysis and reporting.

Throughout reporting of qualitative outcomes, participant identity numbers automatically generated at the time of response by Opinio are included after

quotations to track each individual's contribution to the analysis. These identifiers were randomly assigned and as such, participant anonymity was not compromised by their use. Additionally, given the large number of respondents providing qualitative data, basic but important individual details are included with the participant identifier throughout reporting. Table 31 displays the details included and the meaning of each code.

Table 31: Summary of Coding for Individual Participant Information

	Code 1	Code 2
Participant Age at Time of Responding	Numeric	
Participant Previous Marital Status	M (Married)	DF (De-facto)
Presence of Children at Time of Divorce	C (Yes)	NC (No)
Involvement with Fathers' Rights Groups	F (Yes)	NF (No)
In a New Relationship	R (Yes)	NR (No)

As such, the participant allocated the identifier number 763598 who was 52 when completing the questionnaire, had been formally married, did not have children under 18 at the time of divorce, was not involved with fathers' rights groups and was now in a new relationship would be reported in the analysis as (P_763598_52_M_NC_NF_R).

Finally, direct participant quotations used within the analysis were abridged where no loss of meaning or content would result from doing so. Sections edited are indicated within the quotation by use of an ellipsis (...) indicating text preceding, proceeding and within the narrative has been removed.

8.4 Theme 1: The end of the relationship

“I came home one day to these words from my ex-wife; I don’t want to live with you anymore. There are other things I want to do with my life.”

(P_833030_52_M_C_F_NR)

Information provided by participants about the end of their relationship was relatively common with 31 instances of this theme identified across all men. However, information provided tended to focus on the experience of men prior to and immediately after separation or the actions of their now ex-partner in bringing about the end of the relationship. Only in cases where the divorce was perceived as a consequence of partners falling out of love or not finding ways to manage long-term conflict was there a suggestion of sole or joint responsibility on the part of the man for the end of the relationship.

A broad range of sub-themes emerged from analysis, each with fewer than ten instances identified. The most prominent sub-theme was that of the participant being unaware that their partner wanted to end the relationship. Responses ranged from simple statements such as “My ex-wife initiated the separation” (P_797890_57_M_C_F_NR) and “My marriage ended quite suddenly and very swiftly shifted to the Court” (P_804597_43_M_C_F_NR) to narratives of disbelief and even anger such as:

“But, how someone can just turn around one day out of the blue and say they don't want to be married any more, is totally unforgiveable to myself and kids without any cause or reason. Bloody insult, no respect, so selfish”

(P_878481_54_M_C_NF_NR).

Infidelity was the next most common sub-theme with four participants explicitly stating that unfaithfulness led to the end of their marriage. However, in all four cases, it was the unfaithfulness of a spouse that was singled out as the cause for divorce. As with situations where men seemed unaware the marriage was in trouble, responses ranged from statements of fact such as “I got divorced because of my ex-wife's infidelity ...” (P_805567_43_M_C_F_R) and ““My ex was cheating on me ...” (P_904747_50_M_C_NF_NR) to those tinged with anger, grief and resentment including:

“My ex-wife fucked her best friend's husband on a school excursion on which she and he were parent supervisors ... the pain and damage she caused was horrendous” (P_899080_60_M_C_NF_R)

and:

“My marriage ended as a result of my former wife starting a relationship with a female friend and work colleague this has had a devastating impact on me as a father for my 3 year old daughter” (P_886727_40_M_C_F_NR).

Nowhere within information provided by participants was there an explicit mention of them engaging in extra-marital emotional or sexual relationships that contributed to the end of their marriage, though one participant could have alluded to their own infidelity by stating:

“As a dad of three, I cannot seem to rid myself of the guilt I feel for

abandoning my children that I failed as a husband, man and father”

(P_885743_46_M_C_NF_NR)

Stressors, including physical and mental health issues and the perceived interference of family members in the marriage, were identified by seven men as the cause of their divorce. Three instances of physical health problems were identified with participants noting “My relationship ended 3 years after a motor vehicle accident ...” (P_832619_45_M_C_F_NR) and “Having bowel cancer has had a lot to do with break up ...” (P_907251_56_M_NC_NF_NR). One participant left a short, direct statement that “Marriage ended after a period of successfully fighting childhood cancer” (P_801312_45_M_C_F_NR) which, in spite of the limited information, offered an important insight into the strain that can be exerted on a marriage when facing such a situation and how this can lead to separation instead of strengthening emotional bonds between spouses. Mental health issues were noted by two men, though both identified their ex-partner as having been the holder of these problems. Finally, two participants identified their former mother-in-law as a key protagonist in the end of their marriage with the statements: “Our marriage failed due the psychopathic personality of the mother...” (P_911561_58_M_C_F_NR) and:

“My ex has refused mediation or discussion about the end of our marriage, she has moved back in with her mother who has a controlling influence over her” (P_914726_41_M_C_F_NR).

Though both mental health issues and the role of current and ex-family members

were prominent in the post-divorce experiences of participants, it was observed that these issues were much less common when men provided information about the reasons for their divorce.

Several men also spoke of the loss of love within the relationship, with one noting simply “My ex-wife and I separated because we did not love each other anymore” (P_933906_41_M_C_NF_NR) while another related that:

“I miss the close intimacy of a relationship, having someone to cuddle in bed, go out to dinner together, sex. These things were already missing in the last 2-3 years of our relationship” (P_832816_58_DF_C_F_NR).

Finally, one participant spoke of his inability to resolve long-term marital conflict, stating:

“I tried everything I knew to negotiate a new way together over the 35 years of our marriage but my ex-wife and I could not resolve our conflicts ... mine was an Edwardian marriage, one you stuck to regardless. We married terribly young 20 & 19 after dating for a couple of years. These days it would have only been a 3 to 4 month fling (P_917446_59_M_NC_NF_R).

This experience, although stated by only one respondent, provides an important insight into the importance men can place on an ideal of marriage rather than focussing on love for their partner. Though the balance of men in the study did not explicitly declare such a perspective, it did seem to be an important underlying principle particularly co-occurring with beliefs about family cohesion associated

with gender role identity.

8.5 Theme 2: Gender role identity and divorce

“Divorce is the 'trendy thing to do'. Men have a use by date, all Dinosaurs. We like to be needed but females do not need men.” (P_878481_54_M_C_NF_NR)

The manner in which male gender role identity and roles interact with experiences separation and post-divorce adaptation was a key theme with 71 instances noted across all participants. Not surprisingly, though gender as an overall category was only the fourth most prominent theme out of the seven identified, it co-occurred with all other themes, particularly those relating to children, the family law system, sources of support and facets of divorce adaptation. In this sense, beliefs about gender can be seen as having influenced participant responses to a range of other topics including perceptions of institutional bias against men, what it means to be a man, husband or father and the way in which men respond to divorce in gendered ways to make sense of and/or take control of the situation. As such, where information about gender was embedded in other major topics, gendered issues are discussed within sections dealing with these individual themes.

Gender specific issues largely centred on perceived bias against men during and after divorce. This perception was prominent amongst participants with 45 instances identified across all men. Not surprisingly, responses falling into this category were overwhelmingly contributed by men who had children at the time of divorce and many of whom had subsequently become involved in

fathers' rights groups. As a result, information categorised in this sub-theme had a large overlap with experiences relating to experiences within the family law system, the perceived helpfulness of legal counsel during divorce and child custody or co-parenting matters. Prominent within gendered information was what could be considered a traditional masculine stereotype of "the good provider". That is, many men reported that in their view, they had fulfilled this role by monetarily providing for their families while their partner, by virtue of the divorce, had neither appreciated nor reciprocated this effort. Examples of this perspective included:

"I was married for nearly 20 years, and in this time I worked ... to provide for my family ... 20 years of hard labour did not count for anything in this society's eyes ..." (P_797850_45_M_C_NF_NR)

and:

"... it's clear that there's an anti-male bias in the system that seriously needs correction, or our sons will grow up with a very warped view of what it means to be a man and most importantly, a father ... or 'walking wallet,' as the case is now." (P_808743_48_DF_C_F_R).

A range of other statements were made by men about perceived anti-male bias, with a particular focus on the family court with examples being "Magistrates are biased towards women" (P_804760_49_M_C_F_R) and "... the Family Law system can be one of inordinate bias towards mothers."

(P_804882_50_DF_C_NF_NR). Other groups identified include "phoney researchers", the police, government agencies and in particular, "the sisterhood"

or “feminists” with one participant relating his view that:

“ ... being a bloke is difficult I feel, as there are too many policies and legalities geared up primarily in favour for feminist proponents ... a hidden hierarchy exists that I suspect regulates Lawyers, Judges and even Politicians. The Feminist left exploit the political process only to advance the status of women, and women’s rights ...” (P_804612_48_M_C_F_NR).

In addition to perceptions of bias against men, four participants made note of exerting some form of instrumental or controlling actions during their divorce. Though limited in number, these narratives were particularly interesting in contrast to the more passive statements of perceived anti-male bias made by other respondents. Examples of these actions included the statements:

“ ... I was focused at the time on directing legal advisers (solicitors) to achieve my goals - I maintained control and got solicitors to use tactics that I knew would contribute to desired outcomes (given my knowledge of ex).”
(P_797745_55_M_C_F_R)

and:

“Because I refuse to accept the theft of my children I have not worked for 15 years. This has cost the Australian taxpayer over \$700,000 in lost taxation revenue and Centrelink payments.” (P_797890_57_M_C_F_NR).

Though such tactics are clearly negative and are unlikely to have helped resolve ongoing conflict with ex-partners, they were seen as the clearest expressions of

men taking command of a situation and attempting to influence outcomes to arrive at a “just” result.

8.6 Theme 3: Male adaptation to divorce

“It has taken all my emotional energy to build a new life for myself, and maintain meaningful relationships with my children.” (P_804588_53_M_C_F_R)

Information about various facets of divorce adaptation was the second most common theme with 88 instances identified within participant narratives. Perspectives provided by men were able to be coded relatively easily and fell into established conceptualisations of adaptation identified in previous divorce research. These sub-themes were emotional disentanglement, anger, grief and self-worth. Additionally, two other sub-themes emerged from participant experiences; being general physical and psychological health and financial adaptation. Narratives relating to divorce adaptation were found to co-occur across most other themes in the study, but particularly within those relating to the end of the relationship, gender role identity and the theme of children and the family law system. It should also be noted that a large degree of cross over between sub-themes was identified within the overall topic of adaptation to divorce.

8.6.1 Emotional disentanglement

The experience of continuing close emotional ties with an ex-partner or ambiguity surrounding emotional boundaries after divorce was only explicitly spoken of by six men within the study. However, it is possible that although many more men might have been experiencing continuing emotional enmeshment with their ex-partner, these feelings were hidden behind more immediate emotions such as anger or grief. As such, instances of boundary ambiguity may have been underreported within participant narratives.

Of the participants who spoke directly about emotional disentanglement, four seemed to relate a lack of post-divorce emotional connection with their ex-spouse with one man noting a complete lack of concern stating “I have no care for what my ex-wife does with her time, if she is happy or sad etc.”

(P_810072_38_M_C_F_R) while the other three participants spoke more positively about their emotional distance, with comments including:

“I enjoy the freedom of being single, being able to travel and do the things I want to do without having to consider the needs of a partner ... I would not want to get back together again even given the chance because I felt I have moved on.” (P_832816_58_DF_C_F_NR)

and:

“... the decision to separate was hers ... I've been told that she is sorry for her decision but I still don't hold out waiting for any kind of reconciliation as I'm moving forward with my life trying to attain goals that I've set.”

(P_918314_47_M_C_NF_NR).

In contrast, information provided by the other two participants suggested some degree of continuing emotional entanglement with their ex-partner. One individual identified that though his relationship ended three years ago, he and his ex-spouse are “living in the same house for benefit of the children ...” and that his “ex-partner is also my carer because of my injuries from a motor vehicle accident” (P_832619_45_M_C_F_NR). The other identified that “I try to be understanding and still have romantic feelings for my former wife ...” (P_886727_40_M_C_F_NR).

8.6.2 Anger

Post-divorce experience of anger was a common sub-theme identified within participant narratives and feelings of anger tended to be expressed in conjunction with family law processes and outcomes. As such, where the main focus of a participant’s narrative was on the family law system with implied anger present, this information was coded and analysed within the theme relating to children and the family law system. Analysis of the experience of anger in this section was limited to explicit statements of the experience of anger by men within the study.

Overall, among the 20 instances that were identified where participants spoke directly about their anger, several discussed their past or continuing anger directed at an ex-spouse. Three of these men had experienced disputes over child custody, and reflected on their feelings with statements such as “I lived through rage/anger/hatred ... I think the term used is poor little rich bitch.” (P_833030_52_M_C_F_NR) and “Bloody insult, no respect, so selfish ...”

(P_878481_54_M_C_NF_NR) with the final participant ending his narrative with the statement; “I say bring back the cat o nine and public whipping.”

(P_812285_60_M_C_F_NR). The expression of anger towards an ex-partner was largely absent from narratives provided by men without children from the relationship, with only one respondent from this group making reference to anger, stating:

“I have ended my relationship 4 months ago. I have had a really tough period during this time. I had also problems controlling my anger and I have been quite aggressive. I have gone to my ex-partners place and threatened her managers and have been arrested by police and gone to jail for two weeks and I am waiting for the court at the moment.”

(P_931610_30_DF_NC_NF_NR).

This disclosure was also the only specific mention made by a participant of directly physically threatening an ex-partner.

An additional six men wrote explicitly about experiencing anger as a consequence of family law processes and outcomes. Three men expressed clear anger at their ex-partners for putting them through this process, stating:

“I am very angry with my ex-wife who dragged me through the legal system where there is no justice for men.” (P_804760_49_M_C_F_R)

and:

“... it has taken a lot of effort to let go of the anger towards my ex-wife for the way she pursued this through the courts which only increased the acrimony.” (P_838688_50_M_C_F_R).

An additional three men spoke of the family law process with anger, though they seemed to absolve their ex-partner from blame, suggesting instead that lawyers, judges or other advisors (in their view) encouraged their ex-spouse to manipulate the family law system to their detriment. Statements from these men included:

“... she was instructed on how to use the family law-domestic violence system to persecute and financially abuse me for years ... I am angry that this system encourages and rewards this type of behaviour.”

(P_804351_50_DF_C_F_NR)

and:

“The court prevented me from seeing my child more than three times a year. I am very angry about this outcome not so much at my ex but at the Australian Government for allowing this to occur.”

(P_832662_36_DF_C_F_R).

Finally, it should be noted that although anger was commonly found in narratives involving high levels of pre-divorce and post-divorce conflict and family law processes, those men who reported being on relatively good terms with their ex-partners and who largely avoided the family law system were more balanced and conciliatory towards their ex-spouse. As such, it could be posited that high levels of continuing anger might indicate an attempt to maintain focus

and exert control over a situation in which they feel blamed, criticised, unfairly and unjustly treated by an ex-partner or the family law system. In contrast, there would seem to be little instrumental benefit in maintaining a high degree of anger where child custody and access outcomes were viewed as fair and satisfactory.

8.6.3 Grief and loss

Similar to anger, information provided by participants containing the sub-theme of grief and loss was relatively prominent with 19 instances identified across all men. Though some expressions of anger were found within narratives of grief and loss, themes relating to children and the family law system and psychological health most commonly co-occurred with this facet of divorce adaptation.

General feelings of grief were expressed by two men, with one noting the all-encompassing experience of loss many men feel stating:

“... I lost my health, my job, myself, my trusted mate/partner/wife, my kids, my family, my home, super, my reason to breathe, to belong, everything.”
(P_878481_54_M_C_NF_NR).

The other identified the way in which men seem to struggle with grief more than women, commenting that:

“It seems to have a greater impact on men than on women, who with the assistance of a peer support group and a far greater capacity to discuss matters openly, seem to be able to cope better with the grief, etc.”
(P_832788_56_M_NC_F_R).

However, the expression of grief and loss was most commonly expressed by men through narratives relating to post-divorce relationships with children and lamenting the loss of their family life. Examples included:

“I have just given up and know so many men like me, who have lost the greatest and loving relationships they had with their kids.”

(P_904838_48_M_C_NF_NR)

and:

“My children are no longer in touch with me ... the feelings one gets from this is if the child has been stolen or lost and you suffer the consequences ...” (P_921724_60_M_NC_F_R).

Interpreting such narratives, it seems that fathers within the study looked to their children to provide them with support and love after the end of the marriage. Where this was not possible or actively denied, the sense of grief and loss appears to be focussed on and maintained within these missing relationships.

Grief and loss was also associated with a sense that the children were the ones primarily suffering from the end of the marriage and it was the fathers' responsibility to mourn on their behalf. Examples of this perspective included statements such as:

“I struggle to make sense of the whole experience and I feel devastated for my daughter who needs her mum and her dad in life.”

(P_886727_40_M_C_F_NR)

and:

“Now I mostly just feel sad for the kids that they have been caught in the middle, and now I just want to be the best dad I can be for them.”

(P_910177_35_M_C_NF_NR).

One man, who had a continuing relationship with his children, was able to express the reliance men have on emotional support from their children, stating “... the love for my children kept me strong” and that he “still suffers an emotional numbness that only my kids get through.” (P_833030_52_M_C_F_NR).

Of other narratives referencing grief and loss, guilt associated with the end of the marriage appeared in the accounts of two men with both seeming to express grief through a sense of failure with the statements:

“I cannot seem to rid myself of the guilt I feel for abandoning my children; that I failed as a husband, man and father.” (P_885743_46_M_C_NF_NR)

and:

“I found that due to their (*sic*) being children guilt was present and still is today ... feel like I fail because I don't throw away my career and life to be closer to my kids.” (P_910588_46_M_C_NF_NR).

Though only these two participants expressed a sense of failure, it would be surprising if many other men with children from the relationship had not experienced similar feelings. To regain a sense of control or justice, this guilt may have been masked by the expression of anger and resentment towards their ex-

partner or the family law system, potentially absolving them from an underlying and enduring sense of self-blame.

8.6.4 Psychological health and self-worth

With 36 instances of participants identifying issues of psychological health and self-worth relating to their divorce, this sub-theme was prominent across all facets of post-divorce adaptation. Narratives provided most commonly co-occurred with the theme children and the family law system while the topic of post-divorce support also overlapped with this sub-theme. Responses within this category related to one of three key issues; mental health problems, psychological health and the process of divorce and finally, resilience or longer term benefits from divorce.

A number of men made specific mention of mental health problems associated with the breakdown of their relationship. Most prominent among these comments was the experience of both anxiety and depression with examples such as “I have just given up and know so many men like me ... I feel so worthless and sad and depressed.” (P_904838_48_M_C_NF_NR) and most seriously:

“... I have had the symptoms of severe depression and anxiety, racing thoughts, wanting to run and cry, disruptive sleep, suicide thoughts, tremor and lack of concentration.” (P_931610_30_DF_NC_NF_NR).

Participants who made specific mention of anxiety included one who stated:

“Trivial issues seem insurmountable to me. I have developed avoidant behaviours; don’t answer phone ... don't have any social life at all (completed isolated), and distrust everyone.” (P_804801_50_M_C_F_NR)

While another made explicit statements of his anxiety and fear of an ex-partner’s behaviour, stating:

“I currently live with the fear of what she may do to me next, which has flow on implications to my sense of self.” (P_810072_38_M_C_F_R).

The process of involvement in the family law system was identified as a related factor to poor psychological adaptation for several men. Six participants made specific mention of this issue, with one noting:

“... an important and instrumental issue in the adaptability of men to a family break-up (is) the emotional and psychological effects of having a ... Judge or Magistrate decide what is in the children’s best interest.”
(P_804765_54_DF_C_F_NR)

while another stated “You live your life feeling the whole system is stacked against you and no-one believes a word you say.” (P_888196_43_M_C_F_R). Of particular interest was one individual’s narrative relating to mental health and family law processes, who wrote:

“Throughout the past 4 years, in dealing with the anti-male allegiance of Family Court, custody ... the political system of so called equality has finally destroyed me ... last week was the final death blow, and as a consequence of staying strong for too long, (I) have subsequently been referred to a Psychiatrist.” (P_804612_48_M_C_F_NR).

This account represented a common premise that men need to “stay strong” throughout the process of divorce and it was particularly notable that men who expressed enduring anger towards their ex-partners or the family law system were less likely to also admit to adverse psychological health outcomes as a result of their divorce.

Though statements relating to post-divorce psychological health were largely negative, some men were able to reflect on positive outcomes from their experience of divorce. Several individuals noted that they had developed their self-esteem and found meaning through assisting other men struggling with separation with the most poignant example being:

“... my work with Dads in Distress helps me to help others. ... if I can stop one dad from self-harm or hurting one of his babies then all the pain and suffering I went through won't have gone to waste.”

(P_833030_52_M_C_F_NR).

Such work while rewarding, can seem to lead to additional problems if embarked upon too soon after divorce, with one participant noting:

“... I became an advocate for awareness and policy change ... this may have given me needed 'purpose' at the time but also lead to further exhaustion.”

(P_797745_55_M_C_F_R).

However, men's experiences of assisting others during divorce seem to have not only given them a sense of “meaning”, but also a perspective on their own recovery and strength as they emerge from post-divorce difficulties.

8.6.5 Financial adaptation

The sub-theme of financial adaptation emerged during analysis with narratives from 17 individuals including some mention of negative financial outcomes from the end of their relationship. Information provided on this topic co-occurred most prominently with the theme relating to children and the family law system with financial issues largely related to outcomes from these processes. As such, general information provided about post-divorce financial adaptation is briefly discussed within this section while financial issues specific to child support are analysed under the theme children and the family law system.

A common issue among men who commented on post-divorce financial adaptation was that they were left without “security” as a consequence of their separation. It seemed that these participants saw the possibility of them rebuilding their lives and remaining fathers to their children as impossible without a sound financial base to rebuild from. Examples of this perspective included:

“As a man after 28 years of marriage I don't have the financial means or my youth to start again ... my future is bleak and I foresee that I will be in the workforce until I die. “ (P_805050_57_M_C_F_NR)

and:

“Financially ruined & depressed as I cannot afford another home after ours sold ... forced into bankruptcy thus destroying financial security.”

(P_910588_46_M_C_NF_NR).

One man summed up the negative financial consequences for both him and his ex-partner stating:

“I guess you do feel like a loser. You have to sell your house that you've worked hard for to pay out your partner and then both of you struggle to make ends meet...” (P_922041_39_DF_C_NF_NR).

The second general topic related to financial adaptation was the effect of emotional and psychological stress after divorce on men's financial health. For some participants, the strain of separation, conflict and finalising financial settlements with ex-partners seem to have left them unable to start again. One participant noted:

“The stress of the Legal proceedings and denial of access to my own children led to my loss of work, and then the repossession of the house.”

(P_911561_58_M_C_F_NR)

while another wrote:

“We managed to run a successful transport business for nearly 17 years ... I could no longer go anywhere near trucks because of my emotional state; I have no house, no income, and no future!” (P_797850_45_M_C_NF_NR).

It is worth noting that the issue of financial security seemed to affect men who had been married for less than ten years, while those relating to emotional and psychological strain impacting on financial health seemed to be limited to those who were in the relationship for 10 years or longer. As such, difficulties in financial adaptation to divorce may affect men differently based on age. Younger men may not yet be financially established and feel the monetary impact more while older divorced men, though likely to be more financially secure, may be less able to adapt to changing roles including employment, family financial structure and, where present, family run businesses.

8.7 Theme 4: Divorce, children and the family law system

“Feeling of powerlessness in that I had no say in when or how often I saw my children ... You live your life feeling the whole system is stacked against you and no-one believes a word you say.” (P_888196_43_M_C_F_R)

The most prominent theme within the study involved narratives of the family law system with 96 instances identified. Though largely interrelated, four key sub-themes emerged and responses were coded to properly analyse the way in

which the family law system impacted on participants' experiences of divorce. These sub-themes were labelled family law processes and outcomes, child support and the CSA, child custody and access arrangements and finally, post-divorce parenting and co-parenting experiences. Participant narratives relating to the family law system were found to co-occur across almost all other themes in the study, with those relating to gender role identity, both divorce adaptation facets of anger and grief, and conflict the most clearly co-occurring themes and sub-themes with family law information.

8.7.1 Family law processes and outcomes

Narratives centred on men's experiences of family law processes and outcomes was the most prominent sub-theme within this category with 41 instances identified of participants discussing procedural matters and 30 making explicit reference to outcomes from family court processes. Experiences of procedural aspects of the family law system tended to concentrate on five key issues being bias against fathers, speed of proceedings, impact on parenting and children, psychologist reports and critiques of the adversarial nature of the family law system.

Though participant perceptions of bias against men and fathers during divorce was notable within a number of themes, several men commented directly on their experience of unfair treatment during the family law process. A common view was that the starting position for magistrates and the family law system as a whole was the favouring of a mother's interests and testimony over that of father's with comments such as:

“... I feel the institution is totally inadequate in all areas but the most alarming aspect is the acceptance to make decisions on assumptions and not proven facts ... I have found that in almost all cases the male is at a clear disadvantage.” (P_804626_45_DF_C_F_R)

and:

“My sense is that Courts and Child Support Agencies' starting position is to take the side of the mother and that it takes a lot of effort to get these agencies to take a balanced view.” (P_834011_45_M_C_NF_NR).

The same participant noted that there seemed to be a lack of repercussions for ex-partners when allegations made against them are found to be unsubstantiated stating:

“... no repercussions for the former partner to make false allegations and this encourages her to continue to make allegations with the objective of reducing the time I have with the children.” (P_834011_45_M_C_NF_NR)

Men additionally made note of both the slow progress of family court hearings supported by statements such as “I have found the court excruciatingly slow to do anything that benefits me as a father ...” (P_797954_39_M_C_NF_NR) and:

“It is only now coming to a hearing in the Family Court after 4 years and up to this point I feel the institution is totally inadequate in all areas.”
(P_804626_45_DF_C_F_R).

A total of nine instances of participants noting poor outcomes for children as a consequence of family court processes were identified with several also commenting on the negative impact psychologist reports exerted on the process. The stated impact on children during divorce ranged from allegations of mothers deliberately alienating children from fathers such as:

“... where the wife is also alienating the children from you, and you have to climb 10 Himalayas just to get any equitable and reasonable contact with the children.” (P_804770_40_M_C_F_NR)

to comments on how the legal process impacted on parent child relationships, with one man stating simply “Everybody associated with the process seemed hell bent on hurting me and my daughter.” (P_874261_50_M_C_F_NR). The role of psychologist reports within proceedings was specifically mentioned by three men with one respondent alleging that his child was “coached” by his ex-partner to provide answers beneficial to her claim (P_799869_56_M_C_NF_R) while another criticised the manner in which the court managed expert reports stating:

“Legal system seemed totally unfair, and unable to cope with complex cases ... court ordered 3 independent Psychologist Family Reports, because ex-wife disputed first report” (P_920700_57_M_C_F_R).

The other participant spoke of his anger at how the psychologist report was conducted and relied on by the court, stating:

“I am angry about court appointed psychology report being given so much weight in decision; it was based on a single brief interview at a time of dramatic change to the relationship. I gave an honest and factual account of the marriage ... The psychologist presented her report as middle ground and made no attempt to uncover fact making the basis of her recommendations flawed.” (P_928838_44_M_C_NF_NR).

The balance of men commenting on family law processes spoke in more general terms about negative outcomes and the adversarial nature of proceedings. Twelve instances of such narratives were identified with the behaviour of lawyers within the system specifically mentioned. Examples of participant comments included “Lawyers for my ex engaged in practices of relentless intimidation, accusations and allegations” (P_804597_43_M_C_F_NR) and:

“The opposition lawyer also employed more unethical tactics by, for example, preparing a false affidavit in the name of my older daughter's grade 5 teacher and then forwarding me a copy, UNSIGNED...”
(P_806295_50_M_C_F_NR).

Other men noted that though the system purports to act in the best interests of the children, their view was that family law processes exacerbated existing tensions between ex-partners to the detriment of the children. One man stated:

“I think that the present Family Law system demagogically claims to have at heart the best for the children while instead it produces the conditions for more litigations (*sic*) by imposing unequal conditions for the two parents.”

(P_806524_50_M_C_F_NR)

While another noted:

“The family court system actively encourages the legal representation to broker a deal before a decision is handed down by a magistrate. This results in 'what's in the best interests of the children' becoming degraded into bargaining chip fought out by barristers.” (P_928838_44_M_C_NF_NR).

Finally, the shift in the relationship between ex-partners when engaged in the family court was also mentioned with one man relating that:

“During separation we spoke with each other, but since the divorce notification was given to my former wife, she stopped all communication.” (P_904920_51_M_C_NF_NR)

while another stated “... the post-separation relationship was done irreparable harm by the legal framework around divorce ...” (P_888254_49_M_C_F_NR).

Assessments of outcomes from family court proceedings were almost uniformly negative with all accounts provided by men referring to an absence of justice and fairness in family court rulings. As anticipated, unhappiness with outcomes tended to centre on child custody and access with a number of men

speaking of decisions that appeared biased against them as fathers. Examples included:

“(I) find the whole family law system very supportive of the ex-partners objective to deny a relationship with the children. As the family law judge stated 'happy mum means happy kids'.” (P_806280_48_M_C_NF_NR)

and:

“I believe my ex-wife is completely dysfunctional. She has had breast cancer since our divorce and this had led to her depression. The family court thought these were good reasons why our children should spend more time with their mother.” (P_838688_50_M_C_F_R).

Other participants spoke of frustration with the court process when their ex-partner refused to adhere to rulings and prevented subsequent access with one man noting:

“I have to go to court ... to make her do what the court orders say, even then she then just refuses to comply. I have no rights or say in my children's lives.” (P_804262_50_DF_C_F_R)

while another stated:

“... my wife would not let me see my kids, despite court orders. She resisted all attempts over a three year legal battle ending in criminal charges against her.” (P_923068_56_M_C_F_R).

Of all the accounts relating to family court outcomes, one participants' experience summed up the feelings of a number of fathers particularly well:

“...the judgement focussed on the short term care needs only thus leaving long term care remaining in dispute. The Court had the opportunity to order both parents but particularly the mother toward longer term counselling support to focus on our child and failed to do so. We are both are damaged by the Court processes and my child suffers the result of that.”

(P_804597_43_M_C_F_NR).

This perspective seemed to capture the frustration and despondency experienced by many men; namely that when the family court becomes involved in child custody and access decisions, process and outcomes seem likely to even further entrench conflict and disagreement. This seems to have left a number of fathers in the study attempting to co-parent within a continuing negative cycle of disagreement and recrimination with their ex-partner

8.7.2 Child support and the CSA

Though identified as part of the family law system, the Child Support Agency (CSA) was prominent in 20 participants' narrative of their post-divorce experience and as a consequence, was analysed separately to other aspects of the family law system. The CSA was a federal government agency created to calculate and enforce child support payments where an amicable agreement was

not reached between the parties in a divorce. Though its functions were incorporated into the Department of Human Services in 2011, the CSA system remained the focus of anger by many participants in the study. Participant criticism of the CSA system tended to be on four grounds; impact the system exerts on child access and care, bias against fathers, financial impact of CSA assessments and incompetence in the administration of child support payments.

As identified by a number of men, child payment assessments conducted and enforced through the CSA system allocate payments on the basis of the time a child spends in the care of each parent. Several participants alleged that this system provided a direct financial incentive for their ex-partners to limit the access a father has with his children for the mother's own monetary gain.

Examples of such perspectives included:

“... the mother was seeking to have it (50:50 split in residence) reduced from 5/14 to 2/14. Her motivation for doing so is unclear, but since 3 of the court matters were accompanied by concurrent CSA Change of Assessment applications seeking an increase in child support payable, I think logic provides the answer.” (P_888254_49_M_C_F_NR)

and:

“ ... (I) have been put through horrific stress ... ex preventing me from seeing the children, not only so she could get on the Centrelink/CSA gravy train.” (P_808743_48_DF_C_F_R).

Most directly, one man stated:

“... my ex claims I do not take care of my children at all so she can get max payments through CSA, which does not care what has been happening.”

(P_805567_43_M_C_F_R).

Specific statements of the CSA systems bias against fathers were made by three men, noting that “My engagement with government agencies such as the child support agency appears to be discriminatory against fathers.”

(P_937782_47_M_C_NF_R) and:

“Societal default seems to be the mother gets to make all those decisions ...

The way that Centrelink and CSA take anything the mother says as gospel, whereas the father has to provide evidence for everything.”

(P_888196_43_M_C_F_R).

The financial impact of CSA based assessments was noted by six participants with an example being:

“The CSA offered her a financial inducement to remove the older children from my care and to deny them the benefit of my involvement in their everyday lives. ... CSA based their assessment on a deemed income and created a debt being collected by taking 30% of my gross wages. I am now bankrupt with no assets.” (P_887958_58_M_C_F_NR)

Several other respondents spoke of an absence of animosity towards their ex-partner while blaming the CSA system for poor outcomes. One father stated

“My ill feeling is not to my ex but to the CSA that gives her power.”

(P_887958_58_M_C_F_NR).

Finally, the CSA system was criticised by several fathers on the basis of incorrect assessments and alleged incompetence in the administration of support payments. Examples of this perspective included the narratives:

“I’ve been called a deadbeat dad by my kids (who got it from the ex) because they forgot to send her money for six months ...”

(P_808743_48_DF_C_F_R)

and:

“At one stage the CSA took all the money from my account, immediately after I had received my pension payment for a fortnight. I then phoned to ask them what money I was expected to use to survive for the fortnight. The money was reinstated several days later.” (P_911561_58_M_C_F_NR).

8.7.3 Child custody and access arrangements

Information provided by men about their satisfaction with child custody and access was a prominent sub-theme with 41 instances identified across all participants. As anticipated, a large co-occurrence with the sub-theme family law processes and outcomes was identified. As a result, analysis within this sub-theme will concentrate on men’s feelings about outcomes of child custody decisions rather than the family court processes of how these rulings were made. Qualitative data provided by participants was further separated for analysis into three categories; perceptions of positive child custody outcomes, negative outcomes and thirdly, general comments about men and child custody.

Across those men providing information about child custody, eight individuals identified having a positive or neutral perception of outcomes. The circumstances under which these situations occurred tended to be where parents maintained a reasonable working relationship through the divorce or where men worked through the legal process to gain reasonable parenting rights. Examples of ex-partners amicably deciding on parenting time and access included statements such as:

“My ex-wife and I have a very good relationship as responsible parents ... I am free to see and talk to my son whenever I wish to.”

(P_918314_47_M_C_NF_NR)

and:

“My ex-wife and I have always had an amicable relationship ... access has never been a problem between us, nor has the question of maintenance ever been an issue.” (P_936233_49_M_C_NF_NR).

Of those men who worked through family law processes, narratives seemed to centre on achieving satisfactory outcomes despite the efforts of their ex-partner.

Examples of statements from this group included:

“The final upshot of those matters was that the Court decided to award a 50:50 split in residence, whilst the mother was seeking to have it reduced from 5/14 to 2/14.” (P_888254_49_M_C_F_NR)

and:

“... being told that you can't see your kids even 50% even though I changed work to allow the time to care for the kids was very hard. But I can say it is worth it if you can stand up and fight for it. I now have nearly 40% and will get 50% when the youngest starts school.” (P_915703_42_M_C_NF_NR).

A common theme amongst these participants was a willingness to persist in applications for custody and access despite the potentially lengthy, financially costly and emotionally draining nature of this process.

In contrast, the twelve participants who specifically expressed dissatisfaction with custody and access arrangements all appeared to have worked through the family law system and been involved in disputes with ex-spouses characterised by both acrimony and unwillingness to compromise. Examples included:

“... post-separation she became quite nasty and has succeeded in stopping me have any contact with my children through my exhaustion with the process ...” (P_810072_38_M_C_F_R)

and:

“She gradually eroded my time with the children until I was blocked completely. When I attempted to reverse this she got very nasty.”
(P_935047_43_M_C_F_R).

A common theme within these narratives was the conflation of the issue of child support payment with child custody and access with a number of men making

note of the involvement of the CSA in what they perceived as unfair or negative custody outcomes. An example of this was provided by one participant stating:

“There was close and unrestricted contact ... then the Child Support Agency stepped into the fragile family dynamics and completely stuffed things up. The CSA presented a formula that had the effect of a financial inducement for the mother to take the three older children from me and then restrict my contact with all of the children in order to protect her 'entitlements'.”
(P_797890_57_M_C_F_NR).

In addition to issues of child support, other men made comment of the use of both Domestic Violence Orders (DVO) and Apprehended Violence Orders (AVO) against them in court to limit their access to children and custody rights as fathers. One participant noted:

“My ex-partner was able to take out a malicious DVO against me by lying in court. Because of this I have had no contact with my 2 oldest children in 4 years.” (P_804262) while another wrote “I have gone through a fake AVO as well ... isolated me from my children 4 months. I spent \$9000 to defend myself from the AVO. Won the case. But I have no rights whatsoever on my children.” (P_805567_43_M_C_F_R).

The balance of individuals who made statements associated with child custody outcomes tended to comment on outcomes and the family law system as a

whole rather than making specific statements about their own circumstances.

Statements about the perceived bias of the family law system were noted, such as:

“I have found that in almost all cases the male is at a clear disadvantage when seeking meaningful time with their children. The Family Court system is in dire need of an overhaul.” (P_804626_45_DF_C_F_R)

and:

“(I) note that in the care and protection jurisdiction, the Department has no hesitation in separating a young child from its mother, yet in the Family Court it is the very rare case when overnight time is ordered between the father and a child under 3.” (P_896740_42_M_C_F_NR).

As with those commenting on negative custody outcomes, the conflation of child support with custody and access was also identified with one man stating directly “Fathers are forced to pay child support why are mothers not forced to let fathers have access to their children?????” (P_895359_47_DF_C_F_R). However, some men were able to reflect on the importance of minimising conflict and working towards a reasonable compromise when negotiating child custody arrangements. Statements supporting this perspective included “Only that two parents have to go forward for their children’s emotional, physical and psychological wellbeing ...” (P_808457_56_M_C_F_NR), though as one man noted:

“The only cases I have personally seen where 50/50 shared care has happened are the ones where the parents have mutually agreed on it, rather

than the court making an order for shared care.”

(P_797954_39_M_C_NF_NR).

8.7.4 Post-divorce parenting and co-parenting

A number of participants commented on parenting and co-parenting outcomes after divorce, with 44 men providing information about their experiences. Narratives focussing on parenting outcomes commonly co-occurred with information about post-divorce conflict with ex-spouses and experiences related to both custody and access outcomes and family law processes.

Among men commenting on post-divorce parenting, eleven individuals noted positive or at least acceptable involvement in fathering their children after divorce. A common theme amongst many of these individuals was the lack of involvement of family law processes. It appeared that where positive parenting outcomes occurred, it was due to either low levels of ongoing conflict or mothers and fathers “parenting separately” rather than focussing on co-parenting strategies. Examples of positive co-parenting between ex-spouses include statements such as “Ironically the one thing we did agree on was parenting and we raised 3 children very well together” (P_917446_59_M_NC_NF_R) and:

“My ex-wife and I have a very good relationship as responsible parents of our 12 year old son ... she is still being a good mother to my son.”

(P_918314_47_M_C_NF_NR).

In cases where ex-partners seemed to parent separately, a common occurrence was the mother “relinquishing” custody of children, leading to the father feeling more positive about his parenting role. An example from these men included:

“Our five children were aged between 6 months and 9 years at separation. I was the better parent. She left the three school age children with me.”

(P_887958_58_M_C_F_NR).

In contrast, more than twenty men reported poor parenting or co-parenting outcomes after divorce with these participants identifying a number of areas in which they felt marginalised as a father. A majority of these fathers reported feeling alienated from their children after divorce with their ex-partner alleged to have made implicit or overtly negative statements about them to the child. In a number of cases, this resulted in their child then expressing a sense of hatred or dislike towards them and seriously damaging ongoing father-child relationships. Examples of these experiences included comments such as “My ex spent the last 5-7 years of our marriage manipulating the children against their Dad” (P_797850_45_M_C_NF_NR) with another noting:

“... denying me access to our daughter and making allegations of child abuse against me in order to justify her behaviour. Losing contact with my daughter has been much more stressful and debilitating than the end of the relationship.” (P_914726_41_M_C_F_NR)

and:

“I have no rights whatsoever on my children. Last time I have met them at their school my elder daughter (10 years old) started hitting me and told me 'You're not our father anymore'.” (P_805567_43_M_C_F_R).

Several individuals also made note of their ex-spouse “withholding” information about their children, indicated by statements such as “My ex-partner refuses to tell me anything about my children.” (P_804262_50_DF_C_F_R) and:

“... because I work away I only get 'some' of the information from my partner and when I find out all the details its either too late to change plans or I've missed it. Every week I get surprises that cut you up.”
(P_922041_39_DF_C_NF_NR).

One participant noted that:

“There were issues with my step daughter and my ex-wife's lover, as a step parent I had no legal rights to prevent the abuse that eventually occurred.”
(P_799869_56_M_C_NF_R)

thus highlighting the potential difficulties step-fathers face in maintaining a relationship with children and protecting their interests and safety after divorce.

Finally, some men spoke of the limited time they have been able to spend with their children as an impediment to effective parenting, with two such men noting:

“I see my 2 daughters from our marriage only 4 days a fortnight. There is very little opportunity to parent my children ...” (P_838688_50_M_C_F_R)

and:

“I currently see my daughter every second weekend even though she desperately wants to spend equal time with her dad who loves her more than life itself.” (P_886727_40_M_C_F_NR).

These statements seem to reflect the importance to fathers of having a physical presence in their child’s life that cannot be easily substituted by telephone based or other means of communication and parenting.

8.8 Theme 5: Pre-divorce and post-divorce conflict

I tried everything I knew to negotiate a new way together ... but my ex-wife and I could not resolve our conflicts. (P_917446_59_M_NC_NF_R)

Information provided by participants about their experience of conflict both within their relationship and after divorce was notable with a total of 40 instances across all participants. Interestingly, very few men disclosed details about pre-divorce conflict with only six instances of such information being provided. In contrast, participants were much more open about post-divorce conflict, particularly where children were present in the divorce.

Though details about spousal conflict prior to separation were limited, one participant noted the presence of domestic violence perpetrated by their spouse against them stating:

“I was laughed at, and even threatened by Police when I reported violence ... I was subjected to physical violence throughout the marriage. I endured non-stop psychological attacks, put downs, belittling statements, and embarrassed in public all the time.” (P_804801_50_M_C_F_NR).

In contrast, the allegations of domestic violence perpetrated by men against their ex-partners were prominent in information provided, covering both the immediate time of separation and post-divorce proceedings. No participant explicitly admitted to engaging in such behaviours, with only one man alluding to the effect of abuse within marriages, noting:

“... females do not have to put any effort into their relationship/family to keep them together. However ... I believe common sense must prevail in some unworkable circumstances thus divorce is necessary if someone suffers from any type/s of harm &/or believe they live under the threat of harm. Everyone has the right to be safe, happy and respected.”
(P_878481_54_M_C_NF_NR).

Instead, men who identified allegations of abuse seemed to use their participation in the study to vehemently deny claims made against them. Examples of allegations of domestic violence against partners included statements such as “My ex-partner was able to take out a malicious DVO against me by lying in court.” (P_804262_50_DF_C_F_R), “I was guilty of domestic violence JUST because I was a male.” (P_804996_46_DF_C_F_R) and:

“... she subsequently vitriolically (*sic*) used two regional stations and two squads, SOCAU and prosecutions, to make my life hell....I fought all allegations. BECAUSE THEY WERE FALSE.”

(P_806295_50_M_C_F_NR).

Information provided about post-divorce conflict seemed to centre on family law processes and child custody and access disagreements. Though aspects of discord between ex-partners was explored within the theme relating to children and the family law system, it is important to identify the manner in which participants directly spoke about spousal conflict within post-divorce legal proceedings.

Unsurprisingly, experiences of post-divorce conflict were most prominently related by men who were fathers to children at the time of divorce. From information provided, it seems the children became to focus of rather than the cause of conflict after divorce and the family law system operated as an initial forum for on-going disputes between ex-partners. One example where children became central to conflict included “post-separation she became quite nasty and has succeeded in stopping me have any contact with my children ...”

(P_810072_38_M_C_F_R). Also identified were instances where men asserted they had been falsely accused of abuse of their children during the course of custody proceedings with one noting:

“During separation we spoke with each other, but since the divorce notification was given to my former wife, she stopped all communication ...

I wish not to see my children due to a complaint my former partner made to the police ... sexual misconduct with a child under 16 years made 1 week before my youngest 16th birthday. I have never done such a thing.”

(P_904920_51_M_C_NF_NR).

Similarly, another participant wrote:

“In the beginning of separation we tried counselling ... but when I refused to accept a 2 days in 14 child access proposal ... she falsely told her G.P. that I had molested our 10 y.o. daughter ...” (P_806295_50_M_C_F_NR).

The perception of this form of conflict was summed up by another man who noted he had been accused of abuse, stating:

“the plight of men on the receiving end of false allegations need to be highlighted as the effects & impact are highly debilitating & destructive, leaving your life (especially health) in a state of constant limbo ...”

(P_804770_40_M_C_F_NR).

In spite of participants’ experiences of conflict, several men wrote about the importance of setting conflict aside for the benefit of children and to encourage effective co-parenting after divorce. Examples of this perspective included:

“... two parents have to go forward for their children’s emotional, physical and psychological wellbeing ... anything outside of that is counterproductive, self-serving, and corruptly vested.”

(P_808457_56_M_C_F_NR)

and:

“it is the on-going conflictuality (*sic*) and litigations between the parents which is the most detrimental situation of all to the children.”

(P_806524_50_M_C_F_NR).

Several participants related the positive outcomes of managing conflict coming out of a marriage, including comments such as:

“My ex-wife and I have always had an amicable relationship, and have never quarrelled in front of the children, who are now 18 & 19. Access has never been a problem between us, nor has the question of maintenance ever been an issue. ...” (P_936233_49_M_C_NF_NR)

and:

“... many of the things which caused our problems are gone since we have lived apart, and now we are more comfortable with each other again.”

(P_832816_58_DF_C_F_NR).

Even in situations where heightened conflict has been present in the divorce, one man noted:

“I lived through rage/anger/hatred ... but I had 3 beautiful children who needed me and still some 6 or 7 years down the track they still do.”

(P_833030_52_M_C_F_NR).

It seems that while the presence of children has the potential to prolong and entrench conflict between ex-spouses, it could also serve to focus the minds of the divorced couple on minimising discord for the benefit of the children and effective co-parenting.

8.9 Theme 6: Post-divorce support

“It (divorce) seems to have a greater impact on men than on women, who with the assistance of a peer support group ... seem to be able to cope better with the grief ... I have met many men who state they do not possess friends etc. who could give responsible advice.” (P_832788_56_M_NC_F_R)

Though the perceived help received from sources of post-divorce support was a notable theme with 54 instances recorded across all participants, each source of support identified by men recorded six or fewer specific mentions. The exception was the perceived help of legal representation of which information was provided by thirteen participants. For the benefit of analysis, reflections on post-divorce support has been separated into four categories; counselling and mediation, legal representation, family and ex-family support and finally, friends and other sources of post-divorce assistance.

It was somewhat surprising that reflections on counselling and mediation support was only provided by six men, despite 96 individuals across the entire study having made use of counselling and 85 noting that they had participated in some form of mediation. However, given that all men had eventually divorced, their narratives seemed more centred on this outcome rather than what they might have seen as “unsuccessful” attempts to save the marriage through use of professional support. The few comments provided about counselling or mediation included concerns about the impact on legal proceedings such as “I can’t seek counselling as my ex's lawyer keeps subpoenaing medical records to prove I am an unfit father.” (P_806288_39_M_C_NF_NR) and frustration due to perceived bias:

“... the family relationship centre I have been trying to work with regarding mediation has been extremely frustrating with them siding with my former wife a very pro feminist.” (P_886727_40_M_C_F_NR).

Legal representation was only noted as a positive form of support by one man who related:

“... legal services were helpful to me during divorce and custody battle but should mention that I was focused at the time on directing legal advisers (solicitors) to achieve my goals ...” (P_797745_55_M_C_F_R).

However the balance of men who commented on legal support were either dismissive or hostile towards the perceived help of legal representation.

Comments supporting this view included “Lawyers make little difference to the end result so better representing yourself.” (P_804760_49_M_C_F_R), and, most directly, “Lawyers are evil!!!!!!” (P_832816_58_DF_C_F_NR). Participants commenting on legal representation predominantly viewed their own lawyer/s as operating as part of a system biased against men and working against the interests of the family rather than representing the best interests of a father and his children. Examples included:

“Two parents have to go on ... regardless of anyone else’s (extended families, judges, and particularly lawyers) opinions, or interfering mentalities.” (P_808457_56_M_C_F_NR)

and:

“ ... my experience as a McKenzie Friend has allowed me to see the emotional and psychological effects the Court and more-so the Lawyers have on parents where children are involved.”
(P_804765_54_DF_C_F_NR).

Despite a majority of men in the study having made use of support from parents or siblings, very little qualitative information about help from family was provided. Of the three participants who spoke about support from family, one man identified that:

“These friends, family and other people in your life are the ones that are there to help you out ... every man should use them.”
(P_910175_44_M_C_NF_R)

while another spoke about the difficulties faced when family is not present during divorce, noting "... it's been hard with no family here, but at least I get shared care ..." (P_910177_35_M_C_NF_NR). The only other individual who mentioned family as a source of support spoke of how complicated post-divorce family relationships can become, stating:

"... she was (to a greater or lesser extent) successful in persuading, some of my near and extended family and friends, that she was the victim. I was ... unsupported by my sister, but strongly supported by my former in-laws."
(P_930673_60_M_NC_NF_R).

When ex-partners or their family were mentioned, most men spoke quite differently about their ex-family. Post-divorce involvement of the family of an ex-partner was predominantly seen as unhelpful and even destructive. Examples included "The actions and interference of my ex-partners family were another factor in the relationship ending." (P_832619_45_M_C_F_NR) and:

"I believe that if her mother were not manipulating the situation then I could have an amicable co-parenting arrangement and be able to resolve the issues surrounding the failure of our marriage." (P_914726_41_M_C_F_NR).

Only two men identified receiving positive support from an ex-partner with both speaking of their ex-spouse providing care and emotional support and one of these

men noting that he and his ex-partner were still living in the same house "... for (the) benefit of the children." (P_832619_45_M_C_F_NR).

Six men made note of the importance of both friends and an active social life as support, particularly immediately after the divorce. Examples included:

"I found my closest friends were so understanding and supportive of my separation, and found amazing emotional support with them ..."

(P_910175_44_M_C_NF_R)

and:

"I am extremely shy ... so have been using this change to improve myself, and have found that making myself go out and meet people has been the best for me." (P_910177_35_M_C_NF_NR)

while another man summed up the importance of social contact writing that "Going out and being active is vital." (P_909830)_47_M_NC_NF_NR

In contrast, six men spoke of the isolation and lack of support experienced at the end of their relationship with examples such as "When separation and divorce came for me NO - ONE was there for me! Everybody abandoned me!"

(P_797850_45_M_C_NF_NR) and:

"the current support systems (legal, workplace, insurance and general support services) for men are inadequate and are in much need of a major overhaul." (P_832876_40_M_C_F_NR).

Religious faith was identified by four men as an important source of post-divorce support. While one participant identified receiving help through a faith based organisation, the other men seemed to utilise their faith to make sense of their divorce, stating "... I have to leave it to God for his justice and not seek it myself." (P_804760_49_M_C_F_R) and "I am a Christian and believe I should forgive her but this will take a long time." (P_838688_50_M_C_F_R). Most positively, the third participant stated:

"Reconnecting with my faith (Christian) was the most valued part of my married life ending, it helped me embrace the whole situation, be joyful in all things, note the difference between joy and happiness."

(P_934669_40_M_C_NF_NR).

Only one specific organisation was identified by participants as a source of help with 'Dads In Distress', a group focussed on supporting separated fathers, being positively spoken of by five men. Examples of these comments included "Dads In Distress (DIDs) was a big help for me in my darkest hours." (P_840628_38_M_C_NF_NR) and "Dads In Distress group helpful." (P_834177_48_M_C_F_NR). Three men who identified Dads In Distress also spoke of volunteering within the organisation to help other men noting "... my work with dads in distress helps me to help others." (P_833030_52_M_C_F_NR) and "I volunteer with Dads in Distress and have done so for a few years." (P_832788_56_M_NC_F_R), suggesting that men who are able to utilise their

knowledge and experience of divorce can find meaning in helping other's navigate the end of a relationship and post-divorce challenges.

8.10 Theme 7: Post-divorce relationships

“There is no way I would get involved with another, the price you pay is too much and you continue to pay in so many ways every minute of the day and night.” (P_878481_54_M_C_NF_NR)

Finally and although related to the theme of post-divorce support, information provided by men about entering into a new intimate relationship and associated emotions was important to separately consider. Of the 90 participants who provided some form of qualitative data, 29 noted that they had entered into a new intimate relationship. Overall, 14 men spoke of their thoughts about entering into a new relationship, with nine instances interpreted as positive while five individuals spoke of negative feelings about the possibility of entering into a new partnership.

Of those men who had entered into a new relationship and found it to be a positive experience, the provision of love, caring and support appeared to be most important factors in supporting their post-divorce adaptation. One man wrote “I have met someone who is amazing and could not be happier.”

(P_933906_41_M_C_NF_R). Other men stated:

“I also fell into a new relationship in a very short space of time (only weeks after separating!) with a wonderful woman who is unbelievably supportive, encouraging and loving.” (P_910175_44_M_C_NF_R)

and:

“The wonderful relationship I am in now makes me easily forgot the loneliness and lack of emotional support I felt in the marriage.”

(P_917446_59_M_NC_NF_R).

These three participants were unique compared to other men who wrote positively about a new relationship, in that the balance of their narrative was either compassionate or at least neutral towards their ex-partner. In contrast, other men seemed to contrast their positive current relationship experiences with ongoing bitterness and acrimony towards their ex-spouse. Examples included:

“I married somebody who turned out to be lazy, selfish and a slob ... on the plus side, for 4 years I have been married to a loving, caring, loyal, and very beautiful Filipina.” (P_935047_43_M_C_F_R)

and:

“... the pain and damage she caused was horrendous ... At 60 years of age I am now in a fabulous relationship with a woman who gets me, and whom I get.” (P_899080_60_M_C_NF_R).

Of men who spoke of entering into a post-divorce relationship, two reported becoming a father with this new partner, with one stating:

“I had a 5 year marriage and lost half my assets and see my 2 children only 4 days out of 14... I have a new life, new wife and 12 week old baby and so feel lucky to have a second chance.” (P_804760_49_M_C_F_R)

while the other wrote:

“Even though I have remarried and had a baby it has taken a lot of effort to let go of the anger towards my ex-wife for the way she pursued this through the courts which only increased the acrimony.” (P_838688_50_M_C_F_R).

In contrast, of the five men who spoke negatively about a new intimate relationship all but one seemed to communicate a sense of enduring hurt from their previous marriage and an avoidance to expose themselves once again to the possibility of loss. One participant identified:

“I have developed avoidant behaviours; I don’t answer phone (screen all calls), don’t check mail, don’t have any social life at all (completely isolated), and distrust everyone. I will never ever get into a relationship again. I have developed deep hatred of all women.” (P_804801_50_M_C_F_NR)

while another wrote “I am now 'retired' from relationships . . . never again will I allow one to develop.” (P_804882_50_DF_C_NF_NR). These four men spoke of their reluctance to enter into a new romantic relationship as part of a broader narrative including elements of anger, abandonment, financial loss and alienation from their children. However, the final individual who spoke of wanting to avoid

a future relationship seemed to approach this reluctance from a different perspective. He wrote:

“I enjoy the freedom of being single; being able to travel and do the things I want to do without having to consider the needs of a partner ... I don't want to start a new romantic relationship because I don't want to lose my freedom, but I really miss having sexual interaction with a woman.”

(P_832816_58_DF_C_F_NR).

An additional difference between this respondent and the others was that he identified that he and his ex-partner were still close and continued to provide each other with emotional support and friendship; demonstrating a notable lack of acrimony and anger prevalent in other men's narratives.

CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

9.1 Outcomes of hypothesis testing and evaluation of research questions

The current study investigated the adaptation to divorce by Australian men and a number of factors previously associated with divorce adjustment. Given the wide range of factors reviewed within this project, the following sections serve to consolidate quantitative and qualitative results, support for previous research and interpretations of outcomes in an integrated manner, providing a unified overview of each aim within the study. Overall, support for hypotheses were mixed, with some results clearly supporting findings within existing divorce research while other findings offered partial support for hypotheses or were contrary to anticipated outcomes.

Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected and analysed to test hypotheses and answer research questions as outlined in Chapter 5.5. As such, results from both quantitative and qualitative analysis are integrated as appropriate in the following sections to address the stated aims of the current study. The only exception is in Section 9.1.1 which provides an overview of individual facets of divorce adaptation as identified through analysis of participant narratives alone.

9.1.1 Introductory overview of divorce adaptation and individual facets

Analysis of qualitative data supported Fisher and Alberti's (1981) conceptualisation of divorce adjustment across a range of facets with statements relating to emotional disentanglement, anger, grief and various aspects of self-worth all clearly identified within participant narratives.

Though information relating to emotional entanglement and associated boundary ambiguity was identified, the majority of men in the study did not speak explicitly about ongoing emotional connections with an ex-spouse. This may have been due to a belief that overt expressions of emotional attachment could threaten feelings of self-reliance or resilience on emerging from divorce. Men within the study may have directed such feelings into expressions of other emotions including anger or grief, which could be seen as more individually and socially acceptable (Wexler, 2009). It is also possible that some participants were unaware of an ongoing emotional attachment with their ex-partner. Emery and Dillon (1994) noted that the redefinition of emotional boundaries between ex-spouses can take an extended period of time after divorce to finalise while Peterson and Christensen (2002) reported almost 40 per cent of divorced adults experienced at least moderate ongoing emotional connections up to two years after divorce. As such, the absence of explicit statements of ongoing emotional attachment should not necessarily be interpreted as evidence against men experiencing ongoing attachment to an ex-spouse after divorce.

The expression of anger was prominent within participant narratives and most closely associated with processes and outcomes of the family law system, particularly perceptions of disrespect, bias and a lack of justice in rulings relating to child custody and financial arrangements. These views appeared to provide a focus for ongoing feelings of resentment that persisted for men long after their divorces had been finalised. Elements of both rational and irrational anger as defined by Somary and Emery (1991) were noted and were particularly associated with lingering emotional attachments to an ex-partner. Consistent with previous

research, expressions of blame towards an ex-spouse for instigating the divorce, thereby sabotaging an anticipated future together were also clearly identified (Bonach et al., 2005; Grebe, 1985). It is difficult to conceptualise anger expressed by participants in the study as adaptive as suggested by both Grebe (1985) and Isaacs and Leon (1988), particularly in cases where ongoing disputes surrounding child custody and access were present. A discussion of the observed relationship between levels of post-divorce conflict and poor resolution of anger discussed in later sections support the view that the experience of ongoing anger is unlikely to assist men in adjusting to post-divorce life.

Statements of grief were found to be closely associated with those of anger with many men conveying a sense of loss, particularly relating to emotional and physical connections with children. Though only explicitly mentioned by a small number of men, there seemed to be a sense of shock and disbelief at the end of the relationship, supporting Baum's (2003, 2004) proposition that men often are unaware that a marriage is in serious trouble and as a consequence, experience the greatest sense of loss after divorce. A more general sense of grief surrounding the loss of family structure was also identified, supporting previous research into male experience of grief related to divorce (Baum, 2004). Though it is understandable and even healthy that individuals mourn the loss of marriage, the sense of a "continuing" loss was prevalent, potentially indicating that a number of men had failed to move through the grieving process, holding them in a position of "failed mourning" as previously suggested by Baum (2003, 2006). A connection was also found between concepts of masculinity and the experience of grief with the term "failure" identified a number of times within participant narratives. This was

consistent with Riessman's (1990) finding that men commonly feel that divorce offers public "proof" that they had not succeeded in their private lives and that they should have been more competent in managing their personal relationships. It seemed that some men within the study felt that it was their responsibility to "fix" their marriage and believe themselves to be "less of a man" as a consequence of not having done so.

The adaptation facet of self-worth was identified during qualitative analysis as part of a broader theme of post-divorce psychological health. Participant narratives included experiences of anxiety, depression and feelings of low self-worth, with all these feelings most clearly associated with family law processes and child custody outcomes. A pervasive sense of men losing power and control as a consequence of others making judgements and decisions about their lives was identified, with a number of men seeming to have expected that their expectations and desires for a particular post-divorce life and associated relationships would be readily accommodated by others. This sense of "entitlement" is explored further in Sections 9.1.4 and 9.1.7. As previously noted in narratives related to grief and consistent with findings reported by Riessman (1990), a number of men reported that their sense of self-worth had been negatively impacted by a belief that they failed to save their marriage. However, a number also spoke of their divorce as providing an impetus for a growth and self-development phase in their lives, a finding with extensive support in previous divorce research (Bevino & Sharkin, 2003; Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006; Riessman, 1990). Possible factors associated with whether a man conceptualises

divorce as either a failure or a challenge and the associated impact on individual and social self-worth are explored in the following sections

Though not identified within Fisher and Alberti's (1981) conceptualisations of divorce adjustment, statements relating to the financial challenges of divorce were prominent in participant narratives. The manner in which financial issues impacted on divorce adjustment seemed in a large part to depend on the length of time men were married. Participants married for fewer than ten years seemed to have experienced lesser financial security after divorce while those who were married for greater than ten years tended to speak of difficulties in managing financial structures after divorce including joint property or family businesses. Though the relationships between income and established facets of divorce adaptation is further explored in Section 9.1.2, the financial adaptation of men after divorce would benefit from a closer investigation of how financial stability or instability after marriage affects the psychological and physical health of men and the manner in which these factors impact on divorce adaptation and the health of ongoing family relationships.

9.1.2 Demographics and adaptation to divorce

Aim 1 of the study was to assess differences in levels of gender based traits and adaptation to divorce between Australian men sorted according to a range of demographic categories. In answer to Research Question 1, although no differences were identified between men on the basis of age, a number of differences were found between groups when assessing other demographic categories.

Firstly, men who reported completing tertiary education to a graduate or post-graduate level demonstrated greater levels of instrumentality and better self-worth, emotional disentanglement, resolution of grief, ability to enter into new intimate relationships and superior overall divorce adaptation compared to those with either a complete or incomplete secondary education alone. This wide range of improved outcomes for more highly educated Australian men complements research indicating lower divorce rates for tertiary educated Australian men and women (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2004). The observed higher levels of instrumental traits is unsurprising, given that a higher level of educational attainment could both result from and reinforce a sense of achievement, independence and goal directedness all previously associated with stereotypically masculine gender traits (Burnett et al., 1995; Orlofsky & Stake, 1981).

Greater self-worth, reduced grief, better emotional disentanglement and an easier transition into new intimate relationships are all suggested as being indirectly linked to level of completed education. That is, aspects of an individual man's situation including intelligence, financial earning capacity, the ability to contest family law proceedings, a better understanding of the divorce process and greater social attractiveness could all be related to superior adaptation in conjunction with educational attainment. The suggestion that completed level of education may be associated with social attractiveness is further supported by the observation that 47% of highly educated men within the study reported having entered into a new post-divorce intimate relationship while only 12% of men with a complete or incomplete VCE education had re-partnered. Additionally, among men with a complete or incomplete VCE education, 84% reported children being

present at the time of divorce while for those with an undergraduate or postgraduate education, this percentage dropped to 72%. As noted by both Anderson and Greene (2011) and Wade and Delamater (2002), successful re-partnering requires a weighing up of the concerns of children from the previous marriage and the impact entering into a new intimate relationship may have on post-divorce co-parenting. The greater social status and individual self-worth associated with higher education, in conjunction with a lesser likelihood of children at the time of divorce could all support easier and more successful re-partnering by highly educated men. It could also be suggested that Australian men are more likely to enter into marriage with spouses who have similar levels of educational attainment. As such, it is possible that women who divorce highly educated men are themselves in possession of greater qualifications, financial independence, social attractiveness and even levels of instrumentality, thereby leading to superior adaptation and an interactional easing of the transition to post-divorce life for both partners.

Secondly, though men categorised by current employment status demonstrated no significant differences in expressive gender traits or any aspect of divorce adaptation, men who reported being in full-time employment recorded higher levels of instrumentality than those who were either unemployed or retired at the time of data collection. As noted in differences between men on levels of educational attainment, engagement in full-time employment could both result from and reinforce aspects of stereotypical masculine gender traits including self-competence and independence, particularly in contrast to men who are unemployed or have ceased employment. It should also be noted that within the

sample, 8.20 per cent of respondents reported being unemployed; notably higher than the Australian national rate of unemployment during data collection of 5.30 per cent (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012).

Finally, men who were categorised in the highest income bracket reported a superior ability to enter into new emotionally intimate relationships compared to men in the lowest income category, while those in the second highest income group were found to have resolved feelings of grief coming out of the divorce better than the lowest income participants. Additionally, men in the two highest income brackets reported higher instrumentality than those in the lowest group. As with observed differences between levels of completed education and employment status, differences between higher and low income groups on instrumentality are suggested to reflect feelings of self-competence and independence that may help motivate men to achieve success in higher earning occupations and reinforce such feelings once they succeed.

However, it was somewhat surprising given the wide disparity in divorce adaptation between high and low levels of educational attainment, that a similarly broad disparity was not observed between high income and low income men across other facets of divorce adaptation. However, the improved ability to enter into new emotionally intimate relationships for higher income earning men is consistent with previous Australian research suggesting that greater financial security is associated with easier re-partnering after divorce (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2004). Improved social attractiveness, easier resolution of financial issues arising from divorce and the greater potential earning capacity of

female partners within a high-income family are also suggested as potential reasons for this disparity.

Explanations for the observed differences in the resolution of grief between higher and lower income men are somewhat less clear, although a greater ability to manage financial disputes between ex-partners could assist men in being able to retain greater connection with children, leading to a lesser experience of continuing loss associated with this aspect of divorce. As levels of current income were unrelated to other facets of adaptation including Self-Worth, Emotional Disentanglement, Resolution of Anger and Social Self-Worth, it is posited that although financial security may act as a protective factor against greater and lasting grief and an inability to enter into a new intimate relationship, the broad experiences associated with post-divorce adaptation seem to be commonly experienced by Australian men regardless of earning capacity.

9.1.3 Relationship details, end of the marriage and adaptation to divorce

Aim 2 of the study was to investigate differences in divorce adaptation between men categorised according to relationship type and the individual details of their divorce. In answer to Research Question 2, no differences in adaptation to divorce were found between men who reported the end of a formal marriage compared with those who were in a de-facto relationship. This finding suggests that adaptation to divorce is associated with specific individual and couple related factors rather than whether the relationship was formally recognised by the state and possibly a religious body. Given the decline in marriage rates over recent

decades (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2004; Weston & Qu, 2013), this finding offers an important insight into the universality of the post-divorce experience of factors such as emotional entanglement, grief and anger, irrespective of social endorsement or whether implicit or explicit commitments were made by partners within the relationship. While the length of time spent in the marriage was also found not to be associated with adaptation to divorce, a number of differences were identified between men based on information about their marriage.

Firstly, men who entered into their relationship at younger ages were found to experience lower individual self-worth, a lesser ability to enter into new emotionally intimate relationships and poorer overall divorce adaptation than those who delayed marriage until later in life. This outcome adds to findings by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (2004) who reported that individuals who marry at younger ages are more likely to divorce than those who delay entering into marriage until they are older. It is possible that younger men find it harder to adjust to divorce due to experiencing the “failure” of a key relationship before fully developing other aspects of their personality including individual confidence, relational skills, work abilities and financial independence all of which could help protect them from lower individual self-worth and difficulties in entering into new intimate relationships after divorce.

Secondly, time elapsed since the end of the relationship was found to be positively associated with a range of adaptation measures including Emotional Disentanglement, Resolution of both Anger and Grief and overall divorce adaptation. This result was unsurprising, as it could be anticipated that as with any

major loss and subsequent need for personal adjustment, adaptation to divorce should improve over time as men grow more accustomed to post-divorce life.

Partial support was offered for Hypothesis 1 with men who had been divorced for greater than five years demonstrating superior emotional disengagement and resolution of both anger and grief compared to relatively newly divorced men. However, no significant differences between the groups were identified on levels of individual self-worth, entering into new intimate relationships, social self-worth or overall adaptation to divorce. Differences in boundary ambiguity, anger and grief are consistent with Clarke-Stewart and Brentano's (2006) assertion that levels of divorce adaptation tend to stabilise by five years after the end of the relationship. However, the finding that various conceptualisations of self-worth associated with the end of the marriage did not differ between these two groups or were related to time elapsed since divorce suggests that these facets of adaptation are associated more with individual traits rather than circumstances of the divorce. This possibility is explored further within following research questions, particularly in section 9.1.4.

Finally and most interestingly, no differences in any facet of divorce adaptation or overall adaptation to divorce were identified between men who reported children to be present at the time of divorce and those with either no children or adult children. Considering the different facets of adaptation, this offers support for the view that boundary ambiguity, anger, grief and various aspects of self-worth are unrelated to the family structure in place at the time of divorce. Baum (2004) and Riessman (1990) both posited that men are more likely to grieve the loss of children and associated family life than mourn the loss of

their partner while Graham (1997) noted the difficulty partners can experience in restructuring family boundaries where children are present during divorce. Results from this study suggest that adjustment to divorce is centred on the individual experiences and connection men had with their marriage rather than the structure or people involved in their relationship. In other words, fathers might mourn and be angry at the loss of their family structure and children, but not necessarily more than a man might experience grief and anger at the breakdown of a dyadic relationship. The lack of a significant difference in divorce adaptation between men categorised by the presence or absence of children and type of relationship speak to the universality of experience by men when adjusting to post-divorce life. Though differences between other groups were identified within the study, the broad commonality of male post-divorce experience is important to note, particularly in the development of support programs and interventions.

Although over a third of men participating in the qualitative part of the study provided some details about the end of their marriage, no participant spoke explicitly of their own role in the dissolution of the relationship. Men seemed to take the opportunity to express only “their side of the story” with joint responsibility for divorce only noted where partners had fallen out of love or an external event had impacted on their marriage. There was an absence of comments relating to abusive, destructive, unfaithful or alienating behaviours they may have engaged in and this suggests that a number of men could have experienced an ongoing shame, guilt or even unawareness of their role in the dissolution of their marriage.

However, primary reasons for divorce as identified by Wolcott and Hughes (1999) were relatively prevalent, with issues including partners emotionally drifting apart and the experience of external strains both identified, while several men spoke of their partner's infidelity as the main precipitating reason for the end of their marriage. The prevalence within the study of a partner's sexual unfaithfulness as the reason for divorce could be construed as supporting Willén and Montgomery's (2006) proposition that individuals instigating a divorce engage in intrapsychic processes allowing them to move away from the marriage, with seeking out of new sexual partners offering evidence for this shift. Both physical and mental health problems were also cited, supporting research suggesting that stress associated with the experience of health problems can seriously reduce intimacy between partners and negatively impact on a marriage (Schmaling & Sher, 1997).

However, no man mentioned problems with raising children or co-parenting issues as a factor in their divorce. This was contrary to some previous research, but supported Wolcott and Hughes' (1999) finding that only two per cent of divorces in Australia were caused by problems between parents in raising children. Similarly, and consistent with participant narratives in the current study, both Devine (1996) and Hewitt (2009) found no significant association between problems in co-parenting and the likelihood of divorce.

Overall, the loss of companionship and emotional closeness with their partner, family structure and where present, children, was most notable within statements related to the end of marriage. Men also seemed to separate the event of divorce from ongoing feelings associated with their post-relationship lives by

communicating an acceptance of the divorce, even if they did not necessarily agree with this eventual outcome.

9.1.4 Gender role identity and adaptation to divorce

Aim 3 and a key focus of the research project was to investigate the relationship between gender based traits and gender role identity with male adaptation to divorce. In answer to Research Question 3, though all facets of divorce adaptation and overall adjustment to divorce were found to be significantly positively associated with instrumentality, only individual self-worth and the ability to enter into new emotionally intimate relationships were found to be positively related to levels of expressive gender based traits. These relationships were largely maintained when men reporting the presence of children at the time of divorce were independently assessed with only the facets Resolution of Anger and Social Self-Worth ceasing to be related to levels of instrumentality, while feelings of individual self-worth and confidence in entering a new relationship both maintained their positive association with stereotypically expressiveness.

These results strongly support previous research consistently demonstrating positive associations between instrumentality and psychological health, particularly individual self-esteem (Adams & Sherer, 1985; Antill & Cunningham, 1979; Macdonald et al., 1987; Marsh et al., 1987; Orr & Ben-Eliahu, 1993; Sharpe et al., 1995; Silvern & Ryan, 1979; Waelde et al., 1994). It can be confidently asserted that men who hold higher levels of gender based traits

that encourage feelings of self-competence, independence, decisiveness and an ability to see tasks through to completion, experience superior adjustment to divorce. This finding however provides a particularly interesting contrast. As previously noted, levels of expressiveness in men has been consistently positively associated with marital satisfaction while instrumentality has demonstrated either an absent or negative association with relationship happiness (Aube & Koestner, 1995; Burn & Ward, 2005; Lamke, 1989). Integrating previous research with the results of this study, it can be suggested that gender based traits promoting a positive and satisfying marriage are the opposite of those promoting better adaptation to divorce.

The positive relationships between both individual and social self-worth with expressiveness was contrary to previous findings, with the majority of research suggesting an absence of such associations (Burnett et al., 1995). However, Orlofsky and Stake (1981) reported that levels of femininity were positively associated with pleasure in interpersonal situations and a greater desire for social acceptance, offering a possible explanation for this finding. In addition, higher levels of expressiveness could orient men towards sources of post-divorce support as suggested by Stevens and Englar-Carlson (2006), helping them to improve feelings of individual self-worth and foster new intimate relationships.

With regard to Research Question 4, categorisation of men into one of four groups allowed for the assessment of different levels of divorce adaptation based on gender role identity. Across all participants, Androgynous men were found to report superior levels of adaptation compared with Undifferentiated men on all facets of adjustment and better than those categorised as Feminine on all aspects

with the exception of Resolution of Anger and Rebuilding Social Trust. Similarly, men in the Masculine gender role category reported superior Self-Worth, Resolution of Grief and Total Adaptation than men holding either a Feminine or Undifferentiated gender role identity.

Although no difference was found in adaptation to divorce between men categorised as Masculine and Androgynous, those with high levels of both instrumentality and expressiveness demonstrated superior adjustment to divorce in all facets and superior overall adaption in comparison to Feminine and Undifferentiated men. In contrast, divorced men categorised as Masculine did not report experiencing any better resolution of emotional boundaries or anger, confidence in entering into a new intimate relationship or self-worth in social settings when compared to men assessed as either Feminine or Undifferentiated.

These findings offered strong support for Hypothesis 2, with Masculine and Androgynous men together demonstrating better adaptation to divorce than those categorised as Feminine or Undifferentiated across all adjustment facets and overall adaptation to divorce. These results are generally consistent with two of Alain and Lussier's (1988) key findings; that across all participants, no differences in divorce adaptation exist between Androgynous men and Masculine men and, although expressive traits are positively associated with some facets of divorce adaptation, it is in fact higher levels of instrumental traits that are most important in the promotion of the social and psychological well-being of recently divorced men. In summary, across all men experiencing divorce, results from the current study offer support for both the Masculinity and Androgyny models of divorce adaptation (Alain & Lussier, 1988; Macdonald et al., 1987) and are

consistent with broader findings associating Masculinity and Androgyny with superior outcomes across situations and with improved psychological health (Woodhill & Samuels, 2003). However, the clear differences between men categorised as Androgynous and those assessed as Feminine reinforces the view that levels of instrumentality are critical in the promotion of adaptation to divorce.

When divorced fathers were independently assessed, one difference was identified between Masculine and Androgynous men with Androgynous fathers reporting superior individual self-worth over those categorised as Masculine. This finding suggests that high levels of expressiveness are more important than high instrumentality alone for the maintenance of individual self-worth on emerging from divorce where children are involved. No differences were found between these two groups on any other measure and as such, Hypothesis 3 was only specifically supported within the facet of individual self-worth. However, fathers categorised as Androgynous demonstrated superior individual self-worth, grief resolution and overall adaptation to divorce compared with fathers assessed as Feminine or Undifferentiated, and an improved ability to enter into new intimate relationships compared to Undifferentiated fathers alone. Masculine fathers were only found to resolve feelings of grief better than those categorised as either Feminine or Undifferentiated and reported superior overall divorce adaptation than Undifferentiated fathers alone. As such, stronger support was offered for the Androgyny model of divorce adaptation than for the Masculine model where children were present during divorce. Notably, no differences between gender role identity groups were identified on scores within the divorce adaptation facets Emotional Disentanglement, Resolution of Anger or Social Self-Worth where

children were present at the time of divorce. Additionally, Androgynous fathers demonstrated no better Resolution of Grief than those categorised as Masculine.

Overall, these findings suggest that for fathers in particular, high levels of instrumental traits matched with high levels of expressiveness can serve to protect and bolster individual self-esteem arising from divorce better than any other combination of gender based traits. As such, aspects of divorce adaptation related to individual self-concept seem to be markedly improved for Androgynous fathers over all other gender role identity categories, while those relating to the restructuring of emotional relationships, anger arising from the divorce and feelings of self-worth in social situations are unaffected by gender role identity where children were present within the divorce.

Aspects of masculinity and associated traits, beliefs and behaviours were all identified during qualitative analysis with most statements associated with narratives pertaining to child custody and the family law system. Prominent within statements made by divorced fathers was the “good provider” aspect of fatherhood, supporting previous research suggesting that men view the provision of financial security to their wife and children as a key component of their role as both a man and a father (Moloney, 2002; Olmstead et al., 2009). However, a sense of entitlement was also noted among many men’s narratives with the idea that as a father, they had a natural and implicit right to an equal and unmediated post-divorce relationship with their children. In such cases, the expression of fatherly love and care for their children was recognised, but congruent with findings reported by Gatrell (2007), no mention was made of the desire to carry out equal parenting tasks or roles with an ex-spouse. It may be inferred from this absence

that many divorced fathers believe their fulfilment of stereotypically masculine roles such as providing financial security for their children entitle them to the relational and emotional benefits of fatherhood while actively eschewing other critical parenting tasks and roles.

An interesting finding in the study was that across all participants, the mean score for expressiveness was noticeably higher than the mean score for instrumentality. Whether this result would be replicated if a broader group of Australian men were sampled is unclear, but it does suggest a general tendency for divorced Australian men to hold traits that encourage emotional self-expression, care for others, communication and nurturance at a similar or greater level than those that support concepts such as independence and self-reliance. This supports Kimmel's (2000) suggestion that instrumental and expressive traits are not intrinsically associated with a particular sex and, given that gender-based traits and roles are socially learned (Ashley, 2003; Burnett et al., 1995; Storms, 1979; Woodhill & Samuels, 2003), shifts in the Australian social landscape over recent decades may have encouraged men to hold higher levels of what were traditionally considered to be stereotypically feminine attributes. However, the finding within the study that instrumentality is positively associated with all facets of divorce adaptation and the support found for both the Masculine and Androgyny models of adjustment all suggest that an intrapsychic sense of oneself as strong, independent, capable and self-reliant is most important for men to successfully adjust to post-divorce life.

9.1.5 Support, ex-family relationships and adaptation to divorce

The fourth aim of the study was to investigate associations between both the perceived helpfulness of various forms of post-divorce support and the current health of relationships with an ex-partner and ex-family-in-law members with adaptation to divorce. In answer to Research Question 5, across all participants, greater feelings of social self-worth were associated with greater perceptions of help received from individual counselling. Additionally, superior individual and social self-worth was found to be related to a more positive assessment of the help provided by other sources including extended family, friends, work colleagues, pastoral support or from a new romantic partner. No other form of support was found to be related to divorce adaptation for Australian men in general.

However, when the experience of fathers was independently assessed, a number of other relationships were identified. The perception of assistance received from both individual counselling and support from other sources were positively associated with the experience of both individual and social self-worth. Additionally, fathers who found mediation and legal support of greater help reported to have more successfully emotionally disentangled themselves from an ex-spouse. Finally, a positive association between individual counselling and overall divorce adaptation was identified with greater perceptions of help from this source related to better overall adjustment to post-divorce life for Australian fathers.

As such, partial support was offered for Hypothesis 4 with both individual and social self-worth seeming to be connected with the use and perceptions of individual counselling and informal sources of support while legal support and

mediation was associated with better adjustment of new emotional boundaries with an ex-partner where children were present at the time of divorce. However, no relationships were identified between the perceived help received through relationship counselling, parental and sibling support or assistance received from ex-family-in-law members with any facet of adjustment or overall adaptation to divorce.

The positive associations between self-worth and both individual counselling and social support across all men was a particularly interesting finding. It could have been expected that individual counselling would prove to be associated with individual self-worth rather than with social self-worth as was observed. However, it could be that individual counselling supports social self-worth by allowing divorced men to feel supported and validated by an objective professional, leading to improvements in their sense of social worth. In contrast, feelings of individual self-worth could both result from and be reinforced by engagement with a social network after divorce.

The observed positive associations between emotional disentanglement and both mediation and legal support for fathers could be interpreted as a bi-directional relationship. That is, fathers who successfully engaged in family law processes using mediation and legal support could have experienced lesser ongoing emotional preoccupation with an ex-spouse while fathers who experienced lesser boundary ambiguity on leaving the marriage may have been more open to mediation and legal processes as a way to resolve issues during the divorce. The positive relationship between the perceived help of individual counselling and overall divorce adaptation for fathers offers support for this form

of therapy in helping men with children achieve better overall adaptation to divorce, though notably not seeming to ameliorate feelings of ongoing boundary ambiguity, anger and grief.

The ability to resolve feelings of anger and grief related to the divorce was found to be unrelated to the perception of help received from any source of support. It is possible that these emotions are less likely to be explicitly shared by men with support sources due to an unawareness of the magnitude of these emotional experiences, societal expectations that men will “be strong” (Baum, 2004) and a lesser likelihood of men discussing emotional experiences with other men. Similarly, the absence of any relationship between support from parents or siblings and divorce adaptation was surprising given the prominence and importance of kin support provided to divorced men previously identified by Gerstel (1988). Parental disapproval of divorce, shame and guilt on the part of the divorcing man and the existence of broader family problems may all be factors contributing to this finding.

Unsurprisingly, relationship counselling was not associated with any form of adaptation with men likely to have viewed this form of support as unhelpful given that their marriage ultimately ended in divorce. However, if this limited view that relationship counselling should “save” a marriage is prevalent among divorcing men, it should be explored and if necessary challenged. Encouraging men to make positive use of relationship counselling to help bring about a “good” divorce could significantly benefit both their adjustment to post-divorce life and improve ongoing co-parenting relationships where children are present. Research Question 6 focussed on differences in the perceived helpfulness of support

between men categorised by gender role identity. No significant differences were identified between gender role groups on the perceived helpfulness of any source of post-divorce support. These findings were replicated when men reporting the presence of children during divorce were separately assessed.

Research Question 7 focussed on the potential relationship between adaptation to divorce and the health of current relationships with ex-family members. Across all participants, a positive association was only found between Resolution of Anger and the current health of relationships with an ex-spouse, ex-parents-in-law and ex-siblings-in-law indicating that better resolution of anger arising from divorce is associated with more positive continuing relationships with an ex-partner and members of their family. When men with children at the time of divorce were separately assessed, this result was replicated with an additional negative relationship identified, with a more positive ongoing relationship with an ex-spouse associated with a poorer ability to emotionally disentangle oneself from an ex-partner. Overall, the association between anger and ex-family relationships was unsurprising; with a bi-directional and reciprocal dynamic likely where anger leads to poorer ongoing relationships, which in turn keeps men and ex-family-in-law members in a state of ongoing relational anger.

The association between emotional disentanglement and health of a relationship with an ex-spouse suggests that more successful adjustment of emotional boundaries is promoted by lesser ongoing contact and poorer post-divorce relations between ex-partners. Though findings do not directly contradict Masheter's (1991) suggestion that emotionally supportive ex-spousal relationships can exist alongside positive adaptation to divorce, results from the current study

suggest that such a relationship could impede the re-drawing of emotional boundaries to the potential long-term detriment of both ex-partners.

Finally and in answer to Research Question 8, for all participants and for fathers alone, no significant differences were identified between gender role identity categories and the current health of relationships with ex-family-in-law members suggesting that combinations of instrumental and expressive traits forming gender role identity are unrelated to the experience of ongoing connections with an ex-partner or members of their family.

Statements relating to various sources of post-divorce support were common within participant narratives. However, such content seemed to not be a major focus of the detail provided by divorced Australian men. Though previous research has consistently reported the benefits of mediation during the divorce process (Arbuthnot & Kramer, 1998; Katz, 2007; Lebow & Rekart, 2007), narratives from men in this study seemed to focus on the “failure” of such processes to save the marriage from dissolution rather than an assessment of how useful these support sources were in helping with issues such as communication, grief, anger or co-parenting strategies once divorce was finalised. Consistent with quantitative findings, men seemed conceptualise outcomes from both relationship counselling and mediation as a failure given that their marriage ended in divorce. There was also a perception of “anti-male” bias expressed by several men when discussing their experiences of relationship counselling and mediation. This may have been an accurate perception of their experience, but it is likely other factors may have influenced this assessment including a sense of entitlement within the process that was not being met or discomfort with being expected to interact in an

unaccustomed manner within a therapeutic environment. However, given the negative assessments of the adversarial legal system provided by participants, Kelly's (1989) assertion that mediation is a superior method of resolving disputes in divorce is not contradicted by findings within the current study.

The observation that 71 per cent of men in the study utilised some form of individual counselling is inconsistent with McCarthy's (2004) finding in North America that only one in seven men will utilise therapeutic support at some stage of their lives. From this sample, it would appear that most Australian men recognise that divorce is a stressful experience and that seeking out professional help is a reasonable response. This finding in conjunction with quantitative results suggesting that individual counselling was the only form of professional therapeutic support associated with better divorce adaptation offers support for this form of intervention and suggests positive future engagement with this source of support by Australian men.

The perception of legal support was almost entirely negative, with men reporting good post-divorce outcomes noting that they had "directed" legal counsel, while those who were dissatisfied, particularly with financial and child custody arrangements, seemed to blame their current predicament on the system and their legal representation. Minimal information was provided about support from family and friends, though some men noted that social contacts and engagement in an active social life helped them manage the post-divorce transition. There was however a sense that many men were forced to be "self-reliant" and face post-divorce problems alone, while others noted that their family

and social contacts were simply not available for them after the end of their marriage.

Religious belief and associated community support was identified by several men as helpful, supporting quantitative results associating positive perceptions of broader social support with a superior individual and social sense of self-worth. Religious or culturally based connections would seem to offer divorced men a ready-made source of support, counselling, social activities and potentially new emotionally intimate relationships based on shared interests, values and history.

Finally, those men who spoke of entering into a new relationship were uniformly positive about the experience, though tending to either ignore or disparage their ex-spouse in comparison to their new partner. The emphasis on communication and emotional support within these new relationships stood in contrast to the sense of failed mourning, isolation and avoidance of intimacy inherent in the narratives of men who had actively avoided or not entered into a new relationship. This observation supports the view that men, while openly expressing grief over the loss of children and family structure, experience a deep and possibly hidden sense of loss over the emotional support and acceptance a marriage provides for them. Vulnerability, insecurity and confusion are all taboo aspects of traditional masculinity and as noted by Wexler (2009), an intimate relationship is one of the few places where men may feel able to express such forbidden emotions in a safe and accepting way.

The number of fathers entering into new intimate relationships was low with only 32 per cent having re-partnered at the time of data collection. Importantly, no substantial difference was identified in the time elapsed since divorce for fathers in a new relationship (average 5.45 years) compared with fathers who had not re-partnered (average 5.69 years). As such, the difficulties of integrating post-divorce parenting roles with entry into a new emotional relationship highlighted in previous research (Anderson & Greene, 2011; Wade & Delamater, 2002) seemed to be supported by the experience of divorced Australian fathers in the current study.

9.1.6 Conflict and adaptation to divorce

Aim 5 of the study focussed on the relationships between both pre-divorce and post-divorce spousal conflict and adaptation to divorce. Research Question 9 asked whether a relationship exists between levels of conflict and adaptation to divorce both for men in general and specifically for fathers of children under 18 at the time of divorce. Across all participants, greater pre-divorce conflict was found to be associated with poorer resolution of anger after divorce and lower levels of social self-worth. Although higher levels of post-divorce conflict were also related to poorer anger resolution, somewhat surprisingly, higher levels of post-divorce discord were found to be associated with a better ability to enter into a new emotionally intimate relationship.

A number of additional relationships were identified when divorced fathers were independently assessed. Higher levels of pre-divorce conflict were associated with poorer resolution of both anger and grief, lower social self-worth

and poorer overall adaptation to divorce while higher levels of post-divorce conflict was associated with poorer anger resolution. However, as with men in general, a higher level of ongoing conflict was associated with a greater ability to enter into a new intimate union in cases where children were present. Overall, support for Hypothesis 5 was limited to the association between post-divorce conflict and resolution of anger with ongoing discord found to be unrelated to all other facets and overall adaptation to divorce save for Rebuilding Social Trust, where a negative relationship was identified.

Across all participants and for divorced fathers alone, the observed associations between anger and both pre-divorce and post-divorce conflict was unsurprising. However, the connection between post-divorce conflict and an improved ability to enter into new intimate relationships was an unexpected finding. It is possible that this relationship is bi-directional, with greater post-divorce conflict potentially encouraging men to gain emotional support through a new relationship, or the involvement of a new intimate partner provoking ongoing discord between ex-spouses.

In assessing the experience of divorced fathers, the wider range of poorer divorce outcomes associated with high levels of pre-divorce conflict was a particularly important finding. Two potential reasons for the poorer resolution of grief and overall lower adaptation for this group are suggested. Firstly, by asking men to reflect and report on pre-divorce conflict, other feelings of loss and poor adjustment at the time of divorce may have been triggered. Secondly, the connection of grief with pre-divorce, but not post-divorce conflict may be due to men associating loss with the event of divorce and a heightened period of arguing

or fighting prior to and during separation rather than ongoing disagreements once divorce had been finalised.

In answer to Research Question 10, across all participants and independently for divorced fathers, no differences were identified in levels of pre-divorce and post-divorce conflict between men categorised by gender role identity. This finding is somewhat contrary to the observation within the current study that anger resolution is significantly better for men holding either a Masculine or Androgynous gender role identity in comparison to those categorised as Feminine or Undifferentiated. However, this finding was not found when assessing divorced fathers, who made up 75.40 per cent of participants within the current study. Additionally, it is possible that anger arising from the divorce and both pre-divorce and post-divorce conflict are independent experiences with both pre-divorce and post-divorce conflict associated with interactional factors between the couple and other family members, while anger is associated with intrapsychic factors including levels of gender based traits and an associated gender role identity.

Finally, Research Question 11 centred on whether levels of conflict change from pre-divorce to post-divorce periods depending on whether children were present in the relationship. While a notable decrease in conflict was identified for men who reported having either no children or adult children as they moved from marriage to divorce, no difference was found for divorced fathers with levels of conflict remaining unchanged. This is a key finding within the current study and contrary to previous research suggesting issues leading to

conflict are normally resolved within a year after divorce (Malcore et al., 2010). A number of factors are suggested for this observation.

Firstly, the need for divorced parents to have some physical interaction and ongoing communication as co-parents provides a continuing opportunity for unresolved conflict to endure after divorce. Furthermore, issues relating to children including parenting, custody, physical access and financial support may become the “battleground” for ongoing conflict between ex-spouses rather than the primary source of discord. As such, although these issues are unlikely to be the primary reason for divorce, given Walcott and Hughes’ (1999) finding that only two percent of divorced Australians nominated parenting disagreements as the main reason for their separation, post-divorce conflict seems to shift from the spousal relationship to child related issues. As noted by Forehand, Neighbours, Devine and Armistead (1994), not only does this dynamic impact negatively on the ex-partners, but significantly poorer outcomes for children have been consistently reported where high levels of conflict remain after divorce.

Little qualitative information was provided by men about their experience of pre-divorce conflict, though some participants did make allegations of domestic abuse and violence perpetrated by an ex-partner. However, it was notable that no man made explicit comment on abuse or violent behaviour they may have engaged in and, as with an absence of discussion about infidelities or other events that may have precipitated the end of the relationship, it is likely that these elements existed within the experience of some divorced men but through embarrassment or minimisation, they were excluded from narratives involving their divorce.

Statements relating to post-divorce conflict almost exclusively centred on children and issues of custody and co-parenting. In conjunction with the quantitative finding in the current study that where children are present, levels of pre-divorce and post-divorce conflict remain unchanged, this offers additional evidence that children and associated co-parenting issues have the potential to become a battleground for ex-partners after divorce rather than the primary source of conflict. The association between ongoing post-divorce conflict and personality styles noted by Malcore, Windell, Seyuin and Hill (2010) offers a partial explanation for this finding. In situations where fathers view the divorce and associated child custody and financial arrangements are unfair or inequitable, this perception could maintain them in a defensive position, precipitating and reinforcing continuing conflict with their ex-spouse.

Finally, as noted by Olmstead, Futris and Pasley (2009), a key role identified by divorced father is a “protector” actively shielding children from the exposure to ongoing conflict between parents. Though fulfilling such a role could help children adjust to divorce in the short term, maintaining such a stoical position could also prevent men from effectively addressing disagreements with their ex-spouse and actively working on improving communication, helping to bring about a long-term reduction in conflict for the benefit of all family members.

9.1.7 Family law outcomes, child-custody, co-parenting and adaptation to divorce

Aim 6 of the study was to investigate differences in divorce adaptation and other outcomes between fathers based on their satisfaction with child custody and access arrangements. In answer to Research Question 12, the only facet of adaptation to divorce associated with custody satisfaction was Resolution of Anger, with fathers who reported greater satisfaction with custody and access arrangements demonstrating superior levels of anger resolution. It is likely that this relationship is bi-directional, with better resolution of anger promoting more positive custody negotiations and outcomes, in turn reducing the experience of anger when subsequently communicating and co-parenting with an ex-spouse. As noted by Sheets and Braver (1996), men tend to express greatest dissatisfaction with the perception of inequitable processes and systematic bias within the family law system rather than with actual custody outcomes. As such, it is possible that where men reported lower levels of custody satisfaction, ongoing anger is directed more towards the system and associated individuals rather than towards their ex-partner. This possibility is further examined further when assessing participant narratives relating to child custody and co-parenting.

In answer to Research Question 13 which focussed on the relationship between custody satisfaction and gender role identity, though men categorised as Masculine reported slightly greater satisfaction with post-divorce parenting arrangements than those classified as Androgynous or Feminine, these three groups recorded relatively similar levels of contentment. However, fathers identified as Undifferentiated reported much lower satisfaction in custody and

access outcomes compared with men from the three other categories. The similar scores for fathers categorised as Masculine, Androgynous and Feminine suggest that both stereotypically masculine and feminine traits might be helpful, with high levels of instrumentality promoting greater strength and resilience during and after the custody negotiation process while greater expressiveness could assist with adjusting to the outcomes of negotiated or court mandated decisions. In contrast, the low levels of instrumentality and expressiveness reported by Undifferentiated men may leave them with fewer internal resources to draw on during and after co-parenting decisions are finalised.

Research Question 14 asked whether a relationship exists between custody satisfaction and both the perceived helpfulness of various divorce support services and the current health of relationships with an ex-partner and their family. The perceived assistance of legal support was the only form of help found to be positively associated with custody satisfaction, with men who reported greater contentment with child custody and access arrangements also reporting that legal support was more helpful during divorce. This finding appears to be outcome driven, with fathers interpreting more positive custody and access arrangements as partly due to better legal advice and representation. Not surprisingly, positive associations were also found between custody satisfaction and the current health of relationships with an ex-partner and ex-family-in-law members with greater satisfaction associated with the experience of better post-divorce relationships with these individuals. However, the way in which these relationships either remained or became more positive is not entirely clear. More satisfying custody outcomes could allow for the development of better post-divorce relationships

with an ex-spouse and their family, or that more “positive” divorces both where relationships are maintained and conflict is low, support mutually satisfactory post-divorce co-parenting arrangements.

Finally, support was offered for Hypothesis 7; though levels of pre-divorce conflict were found to be unrelated to subsequent custody and access satisfaction, a negative relationship was observed between post-divorce conflict and custody satisfaction with higher levels of contentment with co-parenting arrangements related to lower levels of ongoing discord between ex-partners. It is helpful to interpret this finding in conjunction with the observation that where children are present in the divorce, levels of conflict remain stable between the pre-divorce and post-divorce periods. It would seem that child custody and access arrangements provide an ongoing source of disagreement between divorced parents, potentially entrenching conflict and as suggested by Forehand, Neighbours, Devine and Armistead (1994), leading to poorer post-divorce outcomes for all parties.

Statements relating to family law processes, child custody outcomes and co-parenting after divorce were prominent within participant narratives, with a number of men using the study to express their ongoing dissatisfaction and anger with the family law system. Most notably, perceptions of systematic bias and a lack of influence over court proceedings were commonly identified. This was consistent with findings reported by Sheets and Braver (1996) that participants in family law proceedings focus more on perceived bias, unfairness and injustice rather than actual outcomes. Interestingly, the perception of bias against fathers was not limited to men who subsequently became involved in fathers’ rights

groups, with all fathers who worked through the family law system after divorce reporting some form of disillusionment and anger at the processes involved.

A particularly interesting subtext within participant narratives was the belief that the family law system had not provided them with justice or equity in custody hearings. In this sense, it is suggested that men were looking for the court to “validate” their role as a father by providing an outcome to which they felt entitled. Family Court judges, lawyers, court appointed psychologists, politicians, lobbyists and other professionals in the family law system were all blamed by many fathers for their experiences of pain and loss. Interestingly, ex-spouses were largely spared from criticism, with anger mainly directed at third parties. Though this may be due to men experiencing ongoing emotional attachments to ex-partners, it is also suggested that men may enter the family law system with a belief that although an ex-partner will be against them, the “referee” will be fair and balanced in deliberations and decisions relating to child custody and access. It seems from participant narratives that this expectation is often unfulfilled.

However, more than enough explicit and implicit perspectives were identified within participant statements to suggest that men were often not innocent victims of the family law system. Instances of attempting to control proceedings, using negative tactics to avoid paying child support and other actions leading to an entrenchment of conflict and poor co-parenting outcomes were all prominent. Though it is not assumed that fathers were wholly responsible for what they perceive to have been unjust co-parenting outcomes, it would be fair to suggest that responsibility should be broadly shared between partners and

individuals within the system for the negative assessments of the family law system so prevalent within the current study.

In contrast, men who were able to negotiate custody outcomes with minimal recourse to the family law system reported lesser conflict, better communication and greater satisfaction with post-divorce co-parenting arrangements. This is consistent with previous research suggesting that adversarial family law systems fail to encourage positive communication between ex-spouses and can serve to entrench ongoing conflict (Emery, 1995; Emery et al., 2001; Emery & Wyer, 1987; Keoughan et al., 2001). In such circumstances, participants noted that minor adjustments to co-parenting issues including times of visitation, telephone calls between children and non-resident parents and holiday plans were all negotiated directly between co-parents with minimal conflict. In contrast, these ongoing issues seemed to elicit high levels of discord in situations where custody and access arrangements were decided through family court procedures. This observation complements Keoughan, Joanning and Sudak-Allison's (2001) findings that the adversarial family law system is generally a poor setting to resolve ongoing minor issues inherent within a bi-nuclear family structure.

Criticism of the CSA and the financial implications of custody outcomes were particularly prominent, with feelings of ongoing grief and a preoccupation with unjust outcomes clearly identified within participant narratives. Fathers who held a negative view of financial decisions tended to conceptualise the system as deliberately organised to increase financial burden of divorce on men while simultaneously reducing access to children. This was inconsistent with the traditional view that after divorce, men withhold money and women withhold

custody as “bargaining chips” (Kruk, 2005). This seems to have been replaced with a “zero-sum game” perspective, where success in gaining child custody is matched with financial reward through increased child payments. Interestingly, although dissatisfaction with child custody outcomes was noted across all fathers who engaged with the family law system, anger with the CSA was exclusively spoken of by men who had become involved with fathers’ rights groups. This observation is further explored in section 9.1.8.

9.1.8 Fathers’ rights groups and post-divorce outcomes

Aim 7 of the study was to investigate the relationships between involvement with fathers’ rights organisations and a range of post-divorce outcomes. In answer to Research Question 15, though no differences were identified in levels of gender based traits, a number of differences in scores on facets of divorce adaptation were identified between men who became involved with rights groups compared to those who did not. Men who became involved in rights groups were found to demonstrate better emotional disentanglement from an ex-partner, higher levels of both individual and social self-worth and better overall adaptation to divorce than divorced fathers who did not engage with such organisations. As such, Hypothesis 7 was not supported with men involved in rights groups not reporting poorer adaptation outcomes than men who did not become involved.

The reduced boundary ambiguity between ex-spouses was unsurprising with men who become involved with rights groups likely to have experienced

more distressing and conflict laden divorces (Flood, 2008, 2010) resulting in a lesser likelihood of them maintaining an emotionally intimate relationship with an ex-spouse. The higher levels of both individual and social self-worth experienced by men involved in rights groups was surprising, though Flood (2010) noted that as men often become involved with such organisations to gain advice and support, an interaction with other men who have experienced similar circumstances may promote better feelings of self-worth and social esteem.

The absence of differences between groups on other adaptation facets, particularly resolution of anger and grief is inconsistent with the criticism directed at fathers' rights organisations, namely that they serve to hold men in a negative emotional state rather than assisting them to adjust and heal (Collier, 2009; Flood, 2007; Jordan, 2009). However, men involved in fathers' rights groups did not report superior levels of adaptation across the remaining facets, suggesting that engagement with such organisations has no beneficial effect on these aspects of divorce adjustment. Additionally, though men involved in rights organisations reported better overall adaptation to divorce, the observed difference between the groups was relatively small, with specific areas of improved adjustment rather than broad improvement of across all facets of adaptation.

Research Question 16 asked whether a difference would be identified between men who did and did not become involved with fathers' rights groups on the perceived helpfulness of various sources of post-divorce support and the current health of relationships with an ex-partner and members of their family. With regard to post divorce support, unsurprisingly men who became involved in rights groups identified legal support as less helpful than men who did not become

involved in such organisations. No other differences between the groups on the perceived helpfulness of post-divorce support were identified. As noted by Flood (2010), men who join rights groups tend to have experienced deeply painful marriage break-ups and high conflict custody battles. As such, these fathers would be more likely to feel that family law processes and lawyers involved were not helpful in providing them with a positive outcome.

Interestingly, though men involved in rights' groups reported significantly poorer relationships with members of an ex-partner's family, no difference between the groups was identified for the current health of the relationship with an ex-spouse. Commensurate with narratives within the current study relating to family law processes and as suggested by Sheets and Braver (1996), it is possible that fathers often accept that their ex-partner will fight them in custody battles, but are disappointed and angry when others involved in the divorce process including ex-parents-in-law, ex-siblings-in-law and the family law system do not support their claims for custody or provide them with what they view as a just and equitable outcome.

In answer to Research Question 17, though no difference was found between the groups on levels of pre-divorce conflict, men involved with fathers' rights groups reported greater post-divorce conflict with an ex-spouse than men who did not join such organisations. Again, Flood's (2010) suggestion that men joining these groups have experienced high conflict custody battles supports this finding. Finally, in answer to Research Question 18, men who did not become involved in rights groups reported higher levels of satisfaction with child custody and access agreements compared to those who became involved in such

organisations. Though this result is unsurprising, post-divorce co-parenting is rarely based on a single decision or ruling and instead requires ongoing flexibility, adjustment and communication between ex-partners (Keoughan et al., 2001). It is possible that although lower satisfaction with co-parenting arrangements may prompt fathers to join rights groups, involvement in rights groups may also negatively impact on continuing dialogue between ex-partners, serving to entrench poorer ongoing child custody and access outcomes for these men. As noted within narratives relating to the CSA, men involved in rights groups were uniquely focussed on financial outcomes of divorce. It is possible that although fathers' rights groups may not hold men in fixed positions of grief and anger, they could serve to hold men in a position of "financial victimhood".

Though several men noted that engagement with men's support organisations, particularly "Dads in Distress" was extremely helpful, no mention of engagement with fathers' rights groups was cited within participant narratives. This was particularly interesting given quantitative results suggesting that fathers who became involved in these organisations reported superior individual and social self-worth, emotional disengagement and better overall divorce adjustment. It is possible that involvement with rights groups help to validate the feelings of distressed fathers and provide them with a sense that they are not alone within high conflict divorces, leading to better outcomes on some aspects of adjustment. Membership of a "community" of fathers who have experienced relationship breakdown and a sense of relational, parental and emotional disenfranchisement could allow men to feel understood and supported. This interpretation would offer support for the social aspect of fathers' rights organisations without speaking to

their role in public advocacy of changes to Australian family law statutes and processes.

9.2 Implications of the current study for the provision of post-divorce counselling and support

Though an in-depth assessment of how individual sources of support can best assist divorced men was not an explicit aim of the current study, results and analyses offer important insights into the experiences of divorced Australian men that may benefit practitioners working in this area.

The observed relationships between perceptions of help offered by support sources with facets of divorce adaptation identified the key roles both individual counselling and informal social support can play in assisting men adapt to post-divorce life. It is suggested that counsellors should be conscious of the importance of social support and help men develop strategies to engage with a broad range of informal contacts to help them develop new interpersonal roles and emotional connections after divorce. Although not initially included as a source of help within the study, a number of men related how helpful involvement with divorced men's support groups were in helping them to adjust to post-divorce life. A combination of individual and group support in conjunction with help from informal social contacts would appear to provide the most supportive environment for newly divorced men.

Findings within the current study speak to the universality of adaptation experiences for men regardless of some individual circumstances of their divorce.

No differences in adaptation were identified between fathers and men without children or between men who were either formally married or in a de-facto relationship. The key role of instrumentality in promoting divorce adjustment across almost all facets cannot be overstated, and it is suggested that men would benefit from a therapeutic approach that emphasises action, resilience and the development of practical solutions to problems, though not at the expense of the expression of difficult emotions associated with divorce. Overall, while individual circumstances and aspects of personality including gender role identity may influence the experience of adjustment, professionals should not underestimate the commonality of feelings and outcomes for men experiencing the breakdown of such a critical relationship.

The experience of grief and anger related to the end of marriage was particularly important within participant narratives. As noted by Wexler (2009), divorced men often react with defensiveness when considering the loss of affirmation they received as a man through their marital relationship. Though anger and rage expressed by male clients can be particularly difficult for therapists to acknowledge and manage, divorced men should feel supported in expressing any emotion in an open and unconstrained way. It is suggested that divorced men in individual therapy would benefit from this help and learn to better understand and regulate difficult emotions associated with their divorce.

Many men within the study expressed the belief that therapists and other professionals within the family law system demonstrate a clear “anti-male” bias. It is suggested that practitioners working with divorced men should be aware of this common perception and be prepared to empathically, but clearly challenge

expressions of this belief should they feel it is either unwarranted or an incomplete reason for negative outcomes experienced by a client. As reported, the seemingly negative assessment of the help provided by mediation and relationship counselling may have been due to a presumption that these processes could help save a relationship. It is suggested that men and women utilising these forms of support are assisted to hold realistic expectations for these processes and not disregard positive gains irrespective of whether the relationship continues or ends in divorce.

The experience of divorced fathers within the study requires separate mention. The finding that levels of conflict remain unchanged when these men move from marriage to divorce suggests that many couples fail to engage in effective and cooperative communication after marriage, with both partners and children likely to suffer as a result. Encouraging less aggressive and more assertive communication styles with a focus on desired outcomes and practical steps to bring these about would seem to be most helpful to divorced fathers. Additionally, the prominence of the “good provider” role of fatherhood within participant narratives suggests that men may be neglecting a range of other fathering roles both before and after divorce. Helping men to accommodate new, complementary fatherhood roles involving the provision of practical and emotional support for their children could assist them in developing an expanded sense of themselves as parents.

Finally, fathers within the study commonly reported experiencing an understandably intense grief and anger at the limited contact they have with their children after divorce. Though these feelings should receive appropriate empathic

understanding, men may benefit from focussing on the quality of their post-divorce fathering rather than only the quantity of time spent with their child. Similarly, helping fathers to see beyond current difficulties and conceptualise a positive unmediated future relationship with their adult child could help them put in place practical steps to gain more time and a closer connection later in life.

9.3 Limitations of the current study and directions for future research

The current study makes several important contributions to literature on divorce adaptation and factors related to male adjustment to this significant life event. However, several limitations were identified that should be considered both when interpreting findings from the project and in the development of further research.

Limitations. Though the final sample size of 134 participants was sufficient for quantitative analysis, over 40,000 divorces are finalised each year in Australia with many more de-facto relationships ending in the same period. Replication of the current study over a longer timeframe with a larger number of participants would assist in supporting answers to hypotheses, research questions and other findings. Additionally, respondents to the project were self-selecting and the subsequent categorisation of participants resulted in group sizes and proportions that are either known or suspected to be unrepresentative of the broader population of divorced Australian men. Prominent examples include fathers with children at the time of divorce making up 75.40 per cent of the sample while recent data suggests just under 50 per cent of divorces involve

children under 18 years of age (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). Similarly, the finding that 48.70 per cent of fathers of young or adult children within the sample had become involved with fathers' rights organisations after divorce suggests that this group was disproportionately large within the project. Though the use of appropriate statistical techniques and interpretation of data supports the validity of results within the current study, a more targeted process of participant recruitment would be beneficial for future divorce adaptation research.

The use of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire and the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale allowed for the assessment of important variables with scales consistently found to be both reliable and valid (Antill & Cunningham, 1982; Fisher & Alberti, 1981; Helmreich et al., 1981; S. A. Hill et al., 2000; Koenig Kellas & Manusov, 2003; Yilmaz & Fişiloğlu, 2006). However, other factors within the study including levels of conflict, perception of post-divorce support, the health of relationships with ex-family members and satisfaction with child custody arrangements were all measured utilising simple five-point Likert scales developed for the project. Though acceptable for the current study, identification and use of measures providing interval scale results for factors associated with divorce adjustment would allow for a greater depth of quantitative analysis, leading to the development of a more comprehensive understanding of how these factors interact and potentially mediate or moderate levels of adaptation to divorce.

Finally, although narratives were provided by a greater number of men than was initially anticipated, building on information in the current study through use of semi-structured interviews with a smaller number of participants would

allow for a deeper understanding of their specific experience of divorce. Finally, gathering of other information relating to divorce including which partner initiated the separation, ages of children where present, main reasons for the divorce, use of family law processes compared with direct negotiation, current access to children and current levels of contact with an ex-spouse could all have assisted in analysing and explaining results from the current study.

Directions for future research. In addition to research suggestions associated with limitations of the current study, continuing experimental research is required not only to validate the reported findings of this project, but to broaden and deepen the understanding of divorce adaptation and associated factors. The current study focussed exclusively on the experiences of Australian heterosexual men who had experienced formal divorce or de-facto relationship breakdown. Expanding the current study's design and assessment of factors to other groups including Australian heterosexual women both with and without children and individuals emerging from long-term same-sex partnerships could allow for a better understanding of both the universality of divorce experiences and differences between groups.

Additionally, use of a longitudinal research design assessing changes in divorce adaptation and associated factors over an extended period, particularly for the first five years of divorce, would be beneficial in assessing the changes and adjustment experienced by individuals. Similarly, taking into account broad social changes in relationships, marriage, parenting, divorce and the evolution of the legal framework surrounding family law within longitudinal research would allow

for the assessment of the impact of broader environmental factors impact on adaptation to divorce.

One of the most interesting findings within the current study was the superior divorce adjustment across several social facets and the better overall adaptation to divorce experienced by men who became involved in fathers' rights groups. An expanded focus into the makeup of these organisations, how they operate, the manner in which they engage with divorced fathers and an assessment of whether findings within the current study are able to be replicated would all be beneficial. Though specific criticisms of such organisations by researchers including Flood (2008, 2010), Collier (2009) and Jordan (2009) are not negated by findings within the current study, outcomes do offer some evidence for the proposition that rights organisations offer divorced fathers a form of support, assistance and connection with other men that promote improved outcomes within particular areas of divorce adaptation. In particular, a comparison between rights' groups and male organised and facilitated divorce support groups operating without a specific political or social agenda could help clarify results from the current study.

9.4 Contributions of the current study and conclusion

The major aim of this study was to offer a greater insight into the unique experience of divorced Australian men. Findings within the project offered validation for the associations between a wide range of variables and the experience of divorce adaptation. All factors investigated, including gender based

traits and associated gender role identity, assessments of post-divorce support, levels of conflict, ex-family relationships and satisfaction with post-divorce co-parenting arrangements were found to be in some way related to divorced men's experiences of emotional detachment, anger, grief, self-worth and overall adjustment to post-divorce life.

The positive associations between levels of instrumentality and adaptation to divorce in conjunction with support offered for both the Androgyny and Masculinity models of divorce adjustment replicated previous findings and provide a clear link between a positive gendered sense of self and the ability to more effectively adjust to the end of marriage. However, the absence of an association between instrumentality and a better ability to resolve anger for men with children matched with the observed relationships between anger and ex-family-in-law relationships suggests that for fathers, this key aspect of divorce sits within a relational rather than individual framework. As such, it seems that where children are present, an ongoing connection with an ex-spouse and particularly the way in which ex-partners communicate is a key continuing influence on the experience of this potentially debilitating and destructive emotion.

Similarly, the associations between anger and both levels of post-divorce conflict and child custody satisfaction provide an insight into the entrenched nature of discord between many ex-partners. Recent cases involving ex-spousal conflict centred on child custody issues with tragic endings sadly complement these findings. Additional research and a substantially improved focus on preventative measures are required to avert future catastrophic outcomes for children, women and men within high conflict divorces.

Narratives provided by participants offered validation for previous conceptualisations of post-divorce adaptation and moved between harrowing and heartening accounts of their experiences of relationship breakdown and ongoing challenges as divorced men and in many cases, divorced fathers. Most importantly, men seemed to appreciate and utilise the opportunity to disclose their experiences; an encouraging observation. It could be that societal expectations of men are indeed changing and the belief that men must “be strong” and face divorce on their own may be shifting towards an openness and willingness to engage with others, recognise their difficulties and seek assistance that helps reinforce and validate a positive sense of post-divorce masculinity.

The breadth of the current study offered a comprehensive assessment of Australian men’s experiences of separation, divorce, post-divorce parenting and general divorce adaptation. However, this project should be viewed as a starting point for the development of a better understanding of how Australian men adjust to divorce. Through the identification of key relationships between factors and facets of adaptation, further research should individually target these associations, testing outcomes from this project and offering both a deeper and more focused understanding of each aspect of divorce.

Conclusion. By its very nature, divorce forces men to undergo major individual and relational adjustments with associated experiences of heightened distress. By better understanding factors associated with adaptation to divorce, professionals within the family law system, policy makers, individuals within support services and the broader community can assist divorced men to better manage difficulties and challenges, and emerge with positive feelings about

themselves and their future. It is hoped that information provided by this project assists in some small way to help improve the lives of Australian men and their families after divorce.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire Battery

Adaptation to Divorce: A study into the post-divorce experience of Australian men

Researcher: S. Delaney (Swinburne student undertaking a Professional Doctorate in Psychology)

Supervisor: R. Cook

We are conducting a study into the adaptation of Australian men to life after divorce in cases where children were both present and not present in the relationship when it ended.

We are looking for Australian heterosexual men willing to take part in this study who are between the ages of 18 and 60 and who have experienced divorce or a common law (de-facto) relationship breakdown, particularly within the last five years.

If you choose to participate, you will be required to complete three questionnaires made up of items designed to assess your feelings and experiences after divorce, aspects of your self-concept and specific details about your marriage or de-facto relationship. Information about your age, work history and other general information will also be collected.

The measures will take approximately 30 minutes to complete and will be administered through an internet based questionnaire that you can undertake in your own time. It is critical that items are responded to honestly and though some questions may seem similar, every question needs to be answered.

All answers will be recorded anonymously and confidentiality of data will be maintained. Results of the study may be subsequently published in an academic journal, but only group data will be provided, not the results of any one individual.

At the end of this survey, you will be invited to leave contact details to participate in a follow up interview. **This section is completely voluntary and may be left blank.**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and your initial agreement to participate does not stop you from discontinuing participation as you are free to withdraw at any time. The online submission of your questionnaire will be taken as consent for your data to be used in the study,

Although unlikely, the questionnaires used in this study may raise some concerns for you due to your personal experiences or current stresses. If you would like to discuss these with a counsellor, we would encourage you to contact the **Swinburne University Psychology Clinic on 03 9214 8653, MensLine Australia on 1300 78 99 78 or Lifeline on 131 114.**

Your interest in this study is greatly appreciated

Shaun Delaney

This project has been approved by or on behalf of Swinburne's Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) in line with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*.

If you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of this project, you can contact:

Research Ethics Officer, Swinburne Research (H68),

Swinburne University of Technology,

P.O Box 218, HAWTHORN VIC 3122.

Tel (03) 9214 5218 or +61 3 9214 5218 or resethics@swin.edu.au

Instructions:

Shortly, you will be presented with three separate questionnaires in addition to some general items relating to your age and personal attributes.

The entire study is designed to take less than 30 minutes to complete.

Though some questions may seem similar, it is essential that you answer all items as honestly as possible.

Thanks for your involvement.

Questionnaire 1: Personal Attributes Questionnaire

The first questionnaire consists of 16 items, with two opposing statements.

For each item, please choose a point between the two statements that best describes how you see yourself.

After recording a response for each item, please click on the "Next" button in the bottom right hand corner to proceed.

1. Please choose where you fall on the scale.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all independent Very independent

2. Please choose where you fall on the scale.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all emotional Very emotional

3. Please choose where you fall on the scale.

1 2 3 4 5

Very passive Very active

4.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all able to devote self completely to others Able to devote self completely to others

5.

1 2 3 4 5

Very rough Very gentle

6.

1 2 3 4 5
 Not at all helpful to others Very helpful to others

7.

1 2 3 4 5
 Not at all competitive Very competitive

8.

1 2 3 4 5
 Not at all kind Very kind

9.

1 2 3 4 5
 Not at all aware of feelings of others Very aware of feelings of others

10.

1 2 3 4 5
 Can make decisions easily Has difficulty making decisions

11.

1 2 3 4 5
 Gives up very easily Never gives up easily

12.

1 2 3 4 5
 Not at all self-confident Very self-confident

13.

1 2 3 4 5
 Feels very inferior Feels very superior

14.

Not at all understanding of others 1 2 3 4 5 Very understanding of others

15.

Very cold in relations with others 1 2 3 4 5 Very warm in relations with others

16.

Goes to pieces under pressure 1 2 3 4 5 Stands up well under pressure

Questionnaire 2: Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale

The following questionnaire makes up the bulk of this survey. It consists of 100 questions that reflect the type of feelings and attitudes people frequently experience after divorce or the end of a de-facto relationship.

Keeping in mind your former relationship; please read each statement and identify how frequently this statement applies to your present feelings and attitudes.

If any statement is not appropriate for you in your present situation, please answer the way you might if that statement were appropriate.

After recording a response for each item, please click on the "Next" button in the bottom right hand corner to proceed.

Although unlikely, some of the following questions may raise concerns for you due to your personal experiences or current stresses.

If you would like to discuss these with a counsellor, we would encourage you to contact the **Swinburne University Psychology Clinic on 03 9214 8653, MensLine Australia on 1300 78 99 78 or Lifeline on 131 114.**

17. I am comfortable telling people I am separated from my romantic partner.

1 2 3 4 5

almost always almost never

18. I am physically and emotionally exhausted from morning until night.

1 2 3 4 5

almost always almost never

19. I am constantly thinking about my former romantic partner.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

20. I feel rejected by many of the friends I had when I was in the romantic relationship.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

21. I become upset when I think of my former romantic partner.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

22. I like being the person I am.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

23. I feel like crying because I feel so sad.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

24. I can communicate with my former romantic partner in a calm and rational manner.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

25. There are many things about my personality I would like to change.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

26. It is easy for me to accept my becoming a single person.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

27. I feel depressed.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

28. I feel emotionally separated from my former romantic partner.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

29. People would not like me if they got to know me.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

30. I feel comfortable seeing and talking to my former romantic partner.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

31. I feel like I am an attractive person.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

32. I feel as though I am in a daze and the world doesn't seem real.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

33. I find myself doing things just to please my former romantic partner.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

34. I feel lonely.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

35. There are many things about my body I would like to change.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

36. I have many plans and goals for the future.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

37. I feel I don't have much sex appeal.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

38. I am relating and interacting in many new ways with people since my separation.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

39. Joining a singles' group would make me feel I was a loser like them.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

40. It is easy for me to organise my daily routine of living.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

41. I find myself making excuses to see and talk to my former romantic partner.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

42. Because my romantic relationship failed, I must be a failure.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

43. I feel like unloading my feelings of anger and hurt upon my former romantic partner.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

44. I feel comfortable being with people.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

45. I have trouble concentrating.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

46. I think of my former romantic partner as related to me rather than as a separate person.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

47. I feel like an okay person.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

48. I hope my former romantic partner is feeling as much or more emotional pain than I am.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

49. I have close friends who know and understand me.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

50. I am unable to control my emotions.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

51. I feel capable of building a deep and meaningful romantic relationship.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

52. I have trouble sleeping.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

53. I easily become angry at my former romantic partner.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

54. I am afraid to trust people who might become romantic partners.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

55. Because my romantic relationship ended, I feel there must be something wrong with me.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

56. I either have no appetite or eat continuously which is unusual for me.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

57. I don't want to accept the fact that our romantic relationship has ended.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

58. I force myself to eat even though I'm not hungry.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

59. I have given up on the idea that my former romantic partner and I will get back together.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

60. I feel very frightened inside.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

61. It is important that my family, friends and associates be on my side rather than on my former romantic partner's side.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

62. I feel uncomfortable even thinking about dating.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

63. I feel capable of living the kind of life I would like to live.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

64. I have noticed my body weight changing a great deal.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

65. I believe if we had tried, my former romantic partner and I could have saved our relationship.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

66. My abdomen feels empty and hollow.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

67. I have feelings of romantic love for my former partner.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

68. I can make the decisions I need to because I know and trust my feelings.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

69. I would like to get even with my former romantic partner for hurting me.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

70. I avoid people even though I want and need friends.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

71. I have really made a mess of my life.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

72. I sigh a lot.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

73. I believe it was best for all concerned to have our romantic relationship end.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

74. I perform my daily activities in a mechanical and unfeeling manner.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

75. I become upset when I think about my former romantic partner having a relationship with someone else.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

76. I feel capable of facing and dealing with my problems.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

77. I blame my former romantic partner for the failure of our relationship.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

78. I am afraid of becoming sexually involved with another person.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

79. I feel adequate as a male romantic partner.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

80. It will only be a matter of time until my romantic partner and I get back together.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

81. I feel detached and removed from activities around me as though I were watching them on a movie.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

82. I would like to continue having a sexual relationship with my former romantic partner.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

83. Life is somehow passing me by.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

84. I feel comfortable going by myself to a public place such as a movie.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

85. It is good to feel alive again after having felt numb and emotionally dead.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

86. I feel I know and understand myself.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

87. I feel emotionally committed to my former romantic partner.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

88. I want to be with people, but feel emotionally distant from them.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

89. I am the type of person I would like to have as a friend.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

90. I am afraid of becoming emotionally close to another romantic partner.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

91. Even on the days when I am feeling good, I may suddenly become sad and start crying.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

92. I can't believe our romantic relationship is ending.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

93. I become upset when I think of my former romantic partner dating someone else.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

94. I have a normal amount of self-confidence.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

95. People seem to enjoy being with me.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

96. Morally and spiritually, I believe it was wrong for our romantic relationship to end.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

97. I wake up in the morning feeling there is no good reason to get out of bed.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

98. I find myself daydreaming about all the good times I had with my romantic partner.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

99. People want to have a romantic relationship with me because I feel like a lovable person.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

100. I want to hurt my former romantic partner by letting her know how much I hurt emotionally.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

101. I feel comfortable going to social events even though I am single.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

102. I feel guilty about my romantic relationship ending.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

103. I feel emotionally insecure.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

104. I feel uncomfortable even thinking about having a sexual relationship.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

105. I feel emotionally weak and helpless.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

106. I think about ending my life with suicide.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

107. I understand the reasons why our romantic relationship did not work out.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

108. I feel comfortable having my friends know our romantic relationship has ended.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

109. I am angry about the things my former romantic partner has been doing.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

110. I feel like I am going crazy.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

111. I am unable to perform sexually.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

112. I feel as though I am the only single person in a couples-only society.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

113. I feel like a single person rather than a married person.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

114. I feel my friends look at me as unstable now that I'm separated.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

115. I daydream about being with and talking to my former romantic partner.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

116. I need to improve my feelings of self-worth about being a man.

1 2 3 4 5
almost always almost never

Questionnaire 3: Individual Circumstances of Divorce

The following consists of 22 questions relating to your specific experiences about the end of your most recent marriage or de-facto relationship.

Although unlikely, some of the following questions may raise concerns for you due to your personal experiences or current stresses.

If you would like to discuss these with a counsellor, we would encourage you to contact the **Swinburne University Psychology Clinic on 03 9214 8653, MensLine Australia on 1300 78 99 78 or Lifeline on 131 114.**

After recording a response for each item, please click on the "Next" button in the bottom right hand corner to continue.

117. Were you married or in a de-facto relationship?

- Married
 De-Facto Relationship

118. For approximately how many years were you married or in the de-facto relationship?

years

119. Approximately how long ago did the marriage or de-facto relationship end?

years

120. In this marriage or de-facto relationship, did you and your partner adopt or have naturally born children?

- Yes
 No

121. If naturally born or adopted children were present in the marriage or de-facto relationship, was the oldest child under the age of 18 at the time of the separation or divorce? (please check N/A if children were not present in the relationship)

- Yes
 No
 N/A

122. If naturally born or adopted children were present in the marriage or de-facto relationship, how satisfied are you at present with child custody or access arrangements? (Please check N/A if children were not present in the relationship).

- 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
 Very unsatisfied Very satisfied

123. During the marriage or de-facto relationship, how would you characterise the level of conflict between you and your partner?

- 1 2 3 4 5
 Very low conflict Very high conflict

124. How would you characterise the present level of conflict between you and your ex-partner?

- 1 2 3 4 5
 Very low conflict Very high conflict

125. How would you characterise the quality of your present relationship with your ex-partner?

- 1 2 3 4 5
 Very poor relationship Very good relationship

126. How would you characterise the quality of your present relationship with the parents of your ex-partner, i.e. former parents in law? (please check N/A if such a relationship does not exist)

- 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
 Very poor relationship Very good relationship

127. How would you characterise the quality of your present relationship with the siblings of your ex-partner, i.e. former brothers or sisters in law? (please check N/A if such relationships do not exist)

- 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
 Very poor relationship Very good relationship

134. When your marriage or de-facto relationship ended, did you make use of personal support from your ex-partners family and if so, how helpful was this support? (please check N/A if such support was not used)

1 2 3 4 5 N/A
 Not at all helpful Extremely helpful

135. When your marriage or de-facto relationship ended, did you make use of personal support from friends or other social contacts and if so, how helpful was this support? (please check N/A if friends and social support was not used)

1 2 3 4 5 N/A
 Not at all helpful Extremely helpful

136. If you did make use of personal support from friends or other social contacts, please indicate the most helpful source of support (please leave blank if support from friends and other social contacts was not used)

- Extended Family
 Friends
 Work Colleagues
 Pastoral or Religious
 Other (Please Specify)

137. Are you currently in a new marriage or de-facto relationship?

- Yes
 No

138. If you are currently in a new marriage or de-facto relationship, for approximately how long have you been in this new relationship? (Please leave blank if you are not in a new relationship)

years

139. Since your divorce or separation, have you become involved with any group that actively campaigns for the rights of divorced men or fathers?

- Yes
 No

Personal Details:

In addition, please provide answers to the following items.

After recording a response for each item, please click on the "Next" button in the bottom right hand corner to proceed.

140. Please enter your current age.

years

141. Were you born in Australia?

- Yes
- No

142. If you were not born in Australia, please nominate the country in which you were born.

143. What is your highest level of completed education?

- Secondary School (Incomplete)
- Completed VCE
- Vocational Training (e.g. TAFE or Apprenticeship)
- University: Undergraduate Degree
- University: Postgraduate Degree

144. Please indicate your current employment status.

- Casual or Contract work
- Part-time Employment
- Full-time Employment
- Unemployed
- Retired

145. Please indicate your current annual income.

- \$0 - \$20,000
- \$20,000 - \$50,000
- \$50,000 - \$80,000
- \$80,000 - \$120,000
- \$120,000 or greater

Additional information:

Thank you for completing the questionnaire section of the survey.

If some of the questions contained within this survey have raised concerns for you and you would like to discuss these with a counsellor, we would encourage you to contact the **Swinburne University Psychology Clinic on 03 9214 8653, MensLine Australia on 1300 78 99 78 or Lifeline on 131 114.**

At this point, we would also like to give participants an opportunity to express any other details or experiences related to the end of their relationship.

Please note, the following section is completely voluntary.

146. If you would like to share any other aspect of your experiences related to the end of your relationship, please feel free to comment below. (maximum 255 characters)

Appendix B: Ethical Approval

Dear Roger and Shaun,

**SUHREC Project 2011/210 Divorce, child custody and the experience of Australian men
A/Prof R Cook, Mr Shaun Delaney FLSS
Approved duration: 12/10/2011 to 31/03/2013 [Adjusted]**

I refer to the ethical review of the above project protocol undertaken by Swinburne's Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC). Your responses to the review, as emailed on 10 October 2011, were put to a SUHREC delegate for consideration.

I am pleased to advise that, as submitted to date, the project has approval to proceed in line with standard on-going ethics clearance conditions here outlined.

- All human research activity undertaken under Swinburne auspices must conform to Swinburne and external regulatory standards, including the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and with respect to secure data use, retention and disposal.

- The named Swinburne Chief Investigator/Supervisor remains responsible for any personnel appointed to or associated with the project being made aware of ethics clearance conditions, including research and consent procedures or instruments approved. Any change in chief investigator/supervisor requires timely notification and SUHREC endorsement.

- The above project has been approved as submitted for ethical review by or on behalf of SUHREC. Amendments to approved procedures or instruments ordinarily require prior ethical appraisal/clearance. SUHREC must be notified immediately or as soon as possible thereafter of (a) any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants and any redress measures; (b) proposed changes in protocols; and (c) unforeseen events which might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

- At a minimum, an annual report on the progress of the project is required as well as at the conclusion (or abandonment) of the project.

- A duly authorised external or internal audit of the project may be undertaken at any time.

Please contact the Research Ethics Office if you have any queries about on-going ethics clearance, citing the SUHREC project number. Please retain a copy of this clearance email as part of project record-keeping.

Best wishes for the project.

Yours sincerely

**Ann Gaeth
for Keith Wilkins
Secretary, SUHREC**

Ann Gaeth, PhD
Administrative Officer (Research Ethics)
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Swinburne University of Technology
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Appendix C: General Demographic Information

Means and Standard Deviations by Age Group

	Age 29 to 39		Age 40 to 49		Age 50 to 60	
	(n = 16)		(n = 55)		(n = 63)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Age (Years)	35.38	3.65	44.49	3.05	54.59	3.40
<i>Personal Attributes Questionnaire</i>						
Instrumentality	20.63	3.44	23.13	5.29	23.17	4.57
Expressiveness	23.69	3.44	23.13	5.29	23.17	4.57
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>						
Self-Worth	91.69	18.71	99.07	15.27	93.51	17.76
Emotional Disentanglement	91.31	14.32	94.35	11.44	89.03	16.14
Resolution of Anger	46.69	7.52	46.58	9.37	47.11	13.12
Resolution of Grief	86.63	19.39	89.11	19.76	90.57	20.34
Rebuilding Social Trust	29.63	7.80	30.09	6.94	27.57	8.72
Social Self-Worth	33.56	8.24	33.78	5.56	32.95	5.40
Total Adaptation	371.38	59.86	385.24	49.46	372.68	63.84
N = 134						

Means and Standard Deviations by Level of Completed Education

	Secondary (Incomplete) (<i>n</i> = 12)		Secondary (Completed) (<i>n</i> = 11)		Vocational (TAFE etc.) (<i>n</i> = 39)		University (Under Graduate) (<i>n</i> = 35)		University (Post-Graduate) (<i>n</i> = 37)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
<i>Personal Attributes Questionnaire</i>										
Instrumentality	18.83	4.67	17.45	4.41	20.15	5.43	21.31	4.80	23.16	4.45
Expressiveness	24.17	4.37	23.45	5.47	21.92	5.68	23.43	4.05	24.00	4.07
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>										
Self-Worth	91.25	20.25	78.18	20.70	94.45	17.12	97.77	16.31	100.73	11.64
Emotional Disentanglement	83.92	16.56	83.64	17.97	91.13	13.82	91.49	14.00	96.65	11.31
Resolution of Anger	48.67	8.66	47.45	12.70	47.85	10.38	48.43	11.37	43.51	11.50
Resolution of Grief	78.17	21.68	77.27	20.30	88.77	20.93	93.66	17.25	93.65	18.34
Rebuilding Social Trust	25.42	8.33	20.73	9.54	27.64	7.99	31.77	6.06	30.89	6.87
Social Self-Worth	32.08	7.42	29.91	5.63	33.67	6.09	33.40	6.35	34.46	4.12
Total Adaptation	352.92	63.19	330.00	69.17	376.21	56.84	387.89	55.45	391.78	47.54
N = 134										

Means and Standard Deviations by Current Employment Status

	Unemployed (<i>n</i> = 11)		Casual or Contract (<i>n</i> = 22)		Part-Time (<i>n</i> = 15)		Full-Time (<i>n</i> = 80)		Retired (<i>n</i> = 6)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
<i>Personal Attributes Questionnaire</i>										
Instrumentality	17.27	6.13	20.05	4.70	20.40	5.87	21.95	4.77	19.00	3.35
Expressiveness	24.00	5.33	21.55	6.46	24.47	3.58	23.17	4.33	25.33	3.14
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>										
Self-Worth	86.64	17.44	94.59	17.24	94.93	18.03	96.90	16.82	99.50	15.83
Emotional Disentanglement	86.55	11.51	92.82	14.44	90.93	15.76	91.81	14.49	92.67	14.31
Resolution of Anger	45.45	13.14	46.36	10.65	50.53	10.13	46.45	10.63	47.17	17.59
Resolution of Grief	76.91	24.42	83.95	22.67	92.87	14.20	91.97	18.15	91.50	27.91
Rebuilding Social Trust	26.73	8.73	27.00	7.90	27.53	10.72	30.07	6.80	26.50	12.52
Social Self-Worth	33.27	7.95	33.68	5.81	32.40	5.34	33.34	5.82	35.17	3.37
Total Adaptation	348.18	68.02	370.95	60.27	381.13	53.04	382.41	55.61	384.67	70.53
N = 134										

Means and Standard Deviations by Current Annual Income

	\$0 to \$20,000 (n = 24)		\$20,000 to \$50,000 (n = 23)		\$50,000 to \$80,000 (n = 25)		\$80,000 to \$120,000 (n = 32)		\$120,000 + (n = 30)		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
<i>Personal Attributes Questionnaire</i>											
Instrumentality	17.46	5.77	20.30	4.59	21.92	4.55	21.63	5.01	22.70	4.20	
Expressiveness	22.71	6.01	25.35	3.19	23.40	3.49	21.84	4.91	23.30	5.00	
<i>Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale</i>											
Self-Worth	87.17	19.13	96.43	14.43	94.88	17.68	98.72	17.92	98.87	14.08	
Emotional Disentanglement	88.58	14.50	91.13	14.71	89.68	14.40	92.66	13.72	94.33	14.57	
Resolution of Anger	45.75	11.70	46.87	12.91	46.96	9.42	48.63	10.69	45.70	11.15	
Resolution of Grief	78.54	22.13	88.48	18.32	89.12	18.99	96.13	16.86	92.30	20.29	
Rebuilding Social Trust	24.58	9.17	27.83	8.49	28.80	8.21	30.41	6.73	31.43	6.30	
Social Self-Worth	32.83	6.70	34.39	5.67	33.44	6.52	33.87	6.05	32.40	4.35	
Total Adaptation	350.17	64.12	377.35	50.68	375.00	58.31	391.91	58.21	387.00	52.12	
N = 134											