

DIVORCE AND SEPARATION: Group Interventions that Attempt  
to Heal the Pain

by

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### Abstract

This study examined the effects of a group intervention on the lives of adults recently experiencing separation or divorce. Forty-three adults participated in one of two treatment groups offered at the Divorce Lifeline, a divorce counselling agency located in Victoria, British Columbia. Eighteen men and women participated in the regular group program provided by the agency. The remaining twenty-five individuals were given the added opportunity to complete self-esteem exercises throughout the duration of the eight-week program. A control group was established by enlisting the participation of ten individuals from the community. The control group members had been managing the rigours of divorce or separation without any treatment intervention. All clients completed the Beck Depression Inventory, the State-Trait Anxiety Scale, the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, and the Personal Orientation Inventory. These tests were administered at the beginning and end of the eight-week study and measured depression, anxiety, time competence, self-esteem and locus of control.

No significant differences were found on any of the variables across the three groups. However, post-hoc analysis revealed that participating members of the Self-Esteem Group (SEG) (ie. those who had completed at least four self-esteem exercises), made significant improvements on locus of control, time competence, and

anxiety. The percentage of improvement across all dependent variables was greatest for the Self-Esteem Group (SEG), followed by the Regular Divorce Lifeline Group (RDLG), followed by the Control Group (CG).

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background to the Problem

In Canada, 77,020 marriages terminated in divorce in 1991 (Statistics Canada Year-book, 1992). In fact, the divorce rate in Canada has increased dramatically since revisions to the Divorce Act (in 1968 and then again in 1986), which made it easier to obtain a divorce in this country. Between 1968 and 1978 for example, the divorce rate nearly increased by a factor of five, changing from 54.4/100,000 to 234.4/100,000 in population (Ambert, 1980). Canada's divorce rate now stands at 294 per 100,000 in population. Moreover, Canada along with the U.S.A., Great Britain, and the former U.S.S.R., represent countries having the highest divorce rates in the world (Gawthorne & Hardy, 1981).

The number of divorces in Greater Victoria between 1989 and 1992 has averaged 1,357 per year (Court Services, Province of British Columbia). There are approximately 122 divorces per month, or about 1,459 divorces estimated for Victoria in 1994. The Province of British Columbia has experienced a steady increase in the number of divorces for the last ten years. In 1983, there were 10,061 divorces, and this number is estimated to be 13,374 for 1994.

Divorce on this scale has profoundly impacted society. Hundreds of thousands of lives have been dramatically altered by the socio-economic consequences of divorce.

Between 1971 and 1987 for instance, single-parent families in Canada, increased from 9.4% of all families to 13% of all families. More significantly, in 1990 the poverty rate for female-headed families (ie. those usually awarded custody), was 44.1% compared to 8% of all families for coupled families (Gunderson, Muszynski, & Keck, 1990:18). In fact, estimates for Canada in 1992 indicate there will be 113,000 single-parent families headed by males, and a further 720,000 single-parent families headed by females. Most alarmingly of all, is the fact that approximately 16.4% and 47.8% of these respective family totals will be living below the poverty line. The consequent implications regarding housing and mobility, as well as a host of other socio-economic factors, is obvious. Individually, or in combination, these factors undoubtedly correlate highly with post-divorce adjustment.

The personal cost of divorce is often high and includes psychological, emotional and physical distress. In fact, marital breakdown has been cited as one of the top three life stresses, next to the death of a parent or sibling (Krantzler, 1973). Divorce is often accompanied by feelings of loss, helplessness, depression, fear, rejection, anger, and anxiety. Further, divorce contributes to a reduced sense of self-worth and leaves many people experiencing a sense of abandonment and powerlessness (Heatherington & Cox, 1978; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Weiss, 1979). In response, local communities have attempted to support the needs of an

increasing population of post-divorcees. Agencies such as Divorce Lifeline, Parents in Crisis, and the Single Parent Resource Centre, have all attempted to provide emotional support to people experiencing this kind of relationship crisis.

The alarming consequences of, and increasing trend toward divorce, have underscored the importance of effective counselling interventions. These interventions are vital in helping people adjust to the emotional rigours of a post-divorce world. Hence, an important question concerns what strategies are most efficacious in facilitating life adjustment for this burgeoning post-divorce population.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of two group intervention strategies employed at the Divorce Lifeline. In particular, the proposed study will try to determine whether varying the self-esteem component of a divorce counselling program will improve the therapeutic outcome for its participants.

In this study therapeutic outcome refers to positive changes in depression, anxiety, locus of control (ie. independence, empowerment or choice), and self-esteem (ie. one's attitudes toward oneself). In effect, therapeutic outcome will reflect what impact intervention strategies are having on the aforementioned dependent variables.

Two questions are apparent within this framework: first, what, if any, significant change in therapeutic outcome has taken place subsequent to counselling; and two, is there a significant difference in therapeutic outcome among the three groups in the study.

### **Rationale for the Study**

The motivation for conducting this study is predicated on the following: a) to date there have been only a handful of outcome evaluation studies on post-divorce interventions, b) conversely, self-esteem has been the primary focus in numerous psycho/educational interventions (thus suggesting the leverage self-esteem may have in facilitating emotional adjustment), c) reduction in self-worth has been identified as being one of the most emotionally debilitating results of divorce, d) the emotional, psychological, economic, and social costs associated with divorce are staggering.

It is hoped that the results of the study will point to possible improvements to, and/or problems with the particular intervention strategies utilized. Ultimately, the study's findings may contribute to better allocation of community resources and to improved accommodation of participant needs. In essence, a more effective intervention will facilitate personal growth, and hence, contribute positively to the overall health of the community.

## Hypotheses

Since the intervention strategies used in this study are intended to assist in post-divorce adjustment (ie. affect positive changes in depression, self-esteem, anxiety, and locus of control), the study will address the following hypotheses:

1. The mean post-test, Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI), scores for both experimental groups will be significantly higher than the mean post-test scores for the control group.
2. The mean post-test, CSEI scores for the Self-Esteem experimental group (SEG), will be significantly higher than mean post-test scores for both the control group (CG), and the regular Divorce Lifeline treatment group (RDLG).
3. The mean post-test, State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) scores for the experimental groups will be significantly lower than the mean post-test scores for the CG.
4. The mean post-test, Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) scores for the experimental groups will be significantly lower than the mean post-test scores for the CG.

5. The mean post-test, Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) scores for the experimental groups will be significantly better than the corresponding scores for the CG.

### **Definition of Terms**

This study examines the effects on post-divorce adjustment produced by alternative treatment interventions. Several variables have been observed across eight weeks as indicators of life-adjustment to this kind of relationship crisis. These variables are defined as follows:

1. State Anxiety: is defined as a temporary emotional condition, characterized by feelings of apprehension, tension, worry, and nervousness. Spielberger (1983, p.1), describes state anxiety as a reaction unique to a given time and in response to a specific situation or state.

2. Trait Anxiety: refers to a relatively stable inclination toward anxiety. In effect, individuals vary in their anxiety-proneness. State anxiety varies between people. This variation reflects differing tendencies to perceive an event or an experience as dangerous or threatening. Consequently, high trait anxiety correlates with high levels of state anxiety since there is a tendency toward viewing more situations as intimidating.

3. Time Competence (Tc): indicates an individual's proclivity toward living life in either the past, present or

future. There is a tendency for self-actualizing individuals to focus on the present (ie. they are Tc). In other words, Tc individuals tend to be more efficacious in their lives because they use the past and future in ways which support their present life circumstances. Conversely, Time incompetent (Ti), individuals are less influential in their present life because they are preoccupied with concerns about the past and/or future. Hence, a high Tc score indicates a "here and now" orientation to life. Tc and Ti are subscores measured by the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI).

4. Outer Directed (O) and Inner Directed (I): are also subscores measured by the POI. A high outer score reflects a person's tendency to be more affected by outside influences (eg. the opinions of family and friends). A high inner score reflects a person's tendency to base decisions on personal experience and judgement.

5. Depression: is characterized by a noticeable decline in both pleasure from and interest in former activities. There is a general tendency to view oneself as undesirable or worthless, to interpret one's current experience negatively, and to project an unrewarding future fraught with continued difficulty (Beck, Rush, Shaw and Emery, 1979, p. 11). The American Psychiatric Association

(1982, p. 137), cites hopelessness, sadness, and irritability as feelings characteristic of depression.

6. Self-esteem: refers to one's attitudes toward oneself. Unlike other animals, humans have an awareness of self. They have the capacity to form an identity to which a value can be attached (Fanning, McKay, 1987, p. 1). A person's judgement regarding the acceptability or worthiness of self can dramatically affect the risks he or she takes. Hence, it can also affect a person's ability to cope with changing life circumstances.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Alternative Interventions

Throughout the years, there has been a veritable proliferation of attempts to facilitate post-divorce adjustment. Like most areas of counselling, these interventions have ranged from being purely psychotherapeutic in nature, to those being more educational in focus. Although well intentioned, most of these attempts have not been evaluated for their efficacy. Still, they have represented important sources of information for both those trying to understand the divorce process, and for those offering support in its wake. A brief examination of some of these interventions serves to contextualize the approach selected in this study.

In 1977, Wallerstein and Kelly reported on a community service which they provided to families in the midst of divorce. Their particular approach was child-centred (ie. the intervention championed the interests of the children), was preventive (ie. attempted to stabilize the disequilibrium caused by divorce), and was planning-oriented (ie. attempted to alleviate present impasses and develop contingencies for future complications).

The initial phase of counselling was used to map out the current circumstances facing each parent. Although this included economic and legal information, more emphasis was

focused on the present conflict, the divorce process, parent-child relationships, and on parental expectations and future plans. Counsellors played more of an advisory role, providing educational information regarding the parent-child relationship. They did however, provide a psychotherapeutic focus in addressing psychological change within the parent. Further, a relationship-centered intervention was used to facilitate effective responses between parents, and between parents and children.

The researchers commented on the program's ineffectiveness with certain parents. In particular, the intervention failed to effect much change in parents who were unable to perceive their children's needs as psychologically separate from their own (eg. in long-standing, highly dependent parent-child relationships). The program was also ineffective with parents who had entrenched themselves in an adversarial stance. This tended to include parents with a paranoid character structure or suffering with psychosis with paranoid features. It also included parents whose continuing rage and acting-out, prevented any reasonable progress being made (eg. poisoning of household pets, kidnapping of children, burglary, vandalism, and brandishing of weapons).

Other important observations made by Wallerstein and Kelly concern the impact this work had on the therapists participating in the program. The authors describe how clients directed their anger and jealousy toward clinicians.

They refer to the subsequent guilt clinicians felt, and parallel these feelings to the survivor guilt often felt by those who work with the bereaved. In addition, the authors discuss the anxiety that developed for many clinicians regarding the stability of their own marriages. They speculate that the probability of this countertransference response, would increase whenever there was greater social and psychological similarity between the clinician and the client. Given the work was found to be intermittently depressing, draining and anxiety-provoking, the staff found it necessary to establish a mutual support system. Comment was made on the fact that judges and attorneys, who are subject to similar pressures, may not have the safeguard of psychological training to help them manage these stresses.

An alternate strategy (ie. conjoint family therapy), was employed by Baideme, Hill and Serritella in 1978. In this particular approach, the absent biological parent and new spouses, if any, were included in the counselling process. This particular intervention was thought to be quite strategic, since many subsequent problems originated from unfinished business between the divorced parents. It was hoped that an intervention which considered the primary conflicted parties, would result in ameliorated relations between ex-spouses. Naturally, this expected improvement would translate into enhanced co-parenting, and thus, benefit the children of the divorce.

The efficacy of conjoint therapy is fully supported by the work of Suarez, Weston, Hartstein (1978). The particular intervention used, attempted to help individuals accept and implement court rulings pertaining to their divorce. It also involved trying to protect children from the psychological damage that could be incurred by their parents' anger toward one another.

Initially, two therapists were used to interview parents separately. It was thought that this would reduce problems with transference and counter-transference (often so prevalent in the counselling process), would offer counsellors mutual support, and would help provide additional alternatives to alleviate the conflict. The heart of the intervention was to assist parents to negotiate respectfully with one another, and to work through their current anger. Emphasis was placed on issues that had brought the couple in, and care was taken to focus primarily on resolution.

New spouses were often included in the exchange, given the pivotal role they were recognized to play in the divorced family dynamic. Children were included in the sessions once respectful relations were established between parents. When this was not possible, work was done with the children and each parent separately. Short-term individual or long-term group therapy was also available for children. Parents refusing to work together, were also encouraged to avail themselves of a support group option. It was thought

that the support group might afford these particular parents the insight, time, and space necessary to eventually allow them to work conjointly.

The study recommended that a high priority be given to interdisciplinary education and training, especially for lawyers. This particular emphasis had to do with the recognition that attorneys hold tremendous power for either aiding or obstructing resolution of the family's struggle. Suarez, Weston and Hartstein join Wallerstein and Kelly in recognizing the importance of supporting judges and attorneys, who in turn, can be deeply affected by their exposure to the volatility often associated with divorce.

Mediation has been another approach taken to reduce the acrimony often left between divorcing couples. In 1978, Haynes described this process as an attempt to lessen the pain and frustration frequently exacerbated by the adversarial legal process of divorce. It was envisioned that mediation could help a couple dissolve their marriage while maintaining their individual dignity. In this process, an attempt is made to separate the economic issues from the emotional upheaval still plaguing the divorcing couple. The goal is to achieve an equitable settlement, and this is facilitated by the mediator's commitment to neutrality, acceptance (ie. being nonjudgmental), and to defining the conflict as explicitly as possible. An attempt is made to assist the couple with residual emotional issues. It is believed that some resolution of the issues that

caused the divorce is essential if either party is to move forward in their life. It was thought that this would allow each party to concentrate on an independent future, which in turn, would assist the children of the divorce to adjust to the transition.

Mumma (1984), and Parsons (1991) also outline the efficacy of using mediation to quell the conflict so ubiquitous in the divorce process. Like Haynes, they saw this intervention being best facilitated by those having a social work background. Again, mediation is described as being highly effective in resolving custody disputes, in exacting fair settlements, and in mitigating parent-child conflicts, as well as general family disputes.

Mumma draws an analogy between this model of intervention and other models of brief family-oriented therapies. From his perspective, the program attempted to divert families from continued litigation, and tried to provide a model of conflict resolution. It was thought that having a way to resolve current and future disputes, would allow parents and children to disengage from the melee and get on with their lives.

Chandler (1987) describes an alternative mediation strategy, which utilizes trained volunteers instead of mental health professionals to facilitate the process of divorce. An important differentiation between this particular intervention strategy and most forms of mediation, is the fact that the volunteer mediators were

independent of the court system. This arms-length approach to mediation seemed to be an effective method of settling disputes. The intervention focussed on redressing power imbalances between divorcing couples. This contrasts with therapeutic interventions, which use the process of divorce to gain insights into existing and potential conflicts between former partners.

Schwebel, Gately, Milburn and Renner (1993) describe an approach named, Psychological/Mediation Intervention - Divorce Mediation (PMI-DM). A key component of this intervention was its emphasis on resolving interpersonal issues, before ex-spouses were allowed to negotiate an agreement. A six-step procedure was followed and included: 1) explaining the PMI-DM; 2) encouraging spouses to voice their concerns about the process; 3) helping participants to write an agenda to guide the process; 4) allowing participants to express their feelings; 5) developing an agreement; and 6) assessing what had been achieved.

Goldmeier (1980) presents an interesting case for using open-ended treatment contracts to facilitate post-divorce adjustment. He draws on family stress theory to describe a longitudinal process, by which individuals progress on a continuum from divorce to family reconstruction. He maintains that time-focused interventions are necessary to effectively address the on-going stresses facing an individual at different stages of this process. He notes the path of this adjustment can start with family

disruption, and then be followed by divorce, return to single life or single parenthood, and finally, family reconstitution.

A family stress framework conceptualizes that family conflict is not confined to distinct periods of crisis, but rather is on-going. Goldmeier notes the ineffectiveness of regular weekly appointments in meeting the needs of clients during the protracted phases of adjustment. He offers alternative frequency schedules, which are designed to target variable circumstances arising throughout the divorce to family reconstitution continuum.

Goldmeier also describes three types of interventions, (ie. reflexive, contextual, and substantive), which he maintains are strategically more effective during certain phases of adjustment. Reflexive interventions are primarily intended to facilitate relationship building (eg. using supportive statements and questions to establish trust). Goldmeier also comments on using reflexive interventions to elicit diagnostic information pertaining to the client's situation. Contextual interventions are designed to aid the resolution of feelings and to clarify the client's predicament (eg. shifting the focus of discussion from other to self). Substantive interventions focus on the acquisition of practical skills (eg. enhancing communication skills). Goldmeier identifies guilt, loneliness, and fear as common impediments to coping in the cycle, and delineates

how these interventions can be useful in neutralizing their impact.

The import of Goldmeier's message is that counselling need not be confined to the divorce crisis, but rather, that it should also be oriented to the restorative work that is necessary subsequent to this phase. Hence, he purports a more flexible view regarding types of interventions and their timing.

Thweatt (1980) describes the use of crisis intervention as a specific time-limited approach to facilitating post-divorce adjustment. Thweatt parallels the emotional upheaval of divorce with bereavement, and notes that many behaviours related to these life crises are predictive in nature. He draws on attachment theory to describe this predictiveness and to guide the timing, intensity and direction of the intervention.

Attachment theory holds that humans have an innate propensity to develop affectional bonds and a specific pattern of distress emerges when they are disrupted. Thweatt maintains that this pattern of distress has four phases: denial, protest, despair, and detachment. Denial, characterized by a sense of numbness and an unwillingness to accept the imminence of divorce, can be respected initially. In effect, denial serves as an emotional buffer in warding off the full impact of relationship loss. Thweatt suggests that gentle confrontation works best at this stage to limit the damage when denial is protracted.

Protest is characterized by an individual's desire to re-establish the relationship with their former partner. At this stage, an individual will often become preoccupied with past memories. Anger, tension, and deep sorrow are characteristic indicators in this phase of adjustment. Individuals often act-out, threatening suicide, abusing alcohol, and being violent toward their ex-spouse. In these ways, they hope to coerce their former partners into reconsidering the decision to leave. Thweatt suggests that individual and conjoint sessions are affective means in diffusing this hostility, and in clearly defining the respective intentions of each party.

Despair is earmarked by a sense of aimlessness and an inability to find purpose in life. There is usually a marked decline in usual interests, and a general disorganization of an individual's normal life pattern. Sometimes apathy turns to depression, as an individual initiates less and withdraws more from social contact and from normal day-to-day activities. Thweatt recommends a proactive stance in preparing divorcees to deal with lost responsibilities (eg. the on-going care of children), and in assuming new roles (eg. a single parent). Thweatt notes how a therapist can play an important role as a temporary attachment figure, but sites how vital it is to rebuild the client's social network during this stage of adjustment.

Detachment is often characterized by less preoccupation with a former partner, by greater optimism for the future,

and by renewed interest in life. Thweatt describes the tremendous opportunity presented by this phase, to review and gain insight regarding the factors which contributed to the dissolution of the relationship. He encourages clinicians to maintain an emphasis on helping clients reconnect with other community supports (eg. family, friends, support groups). Thweatt also sees this phase as an excellent opportunity to discuss the inadvisability of forming impulsive relationships to compensate for the loss being experienced by the divorcee.

Beal (1985) applied a systems view to divorce intervention strategies. In this conceptualization, the family is seen as an interactive, interdependent and dynamic system. Divorce is seen as a major disruption to the pre-established emotional, psychological, social and economic equilibrium in the family. Major crises such as divorce, as well as other stresses, tend to activate compensatory mechanisms (eg. shifts in family roles and responsibilities), to re-establish psychosocial equilibrium in the family system.

Beal refers to the important emotional attachments that occur within the family network, and describes how these attachments can become dysfunctional. He maintains that the more emotionally fused the marital relationship has become (ie. the more one person's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour are influenced by the other), the more difficult

post-divorce adjustment will be. Thus, a systems approach to divorce intervention requires working with the family as a unit. This allows for a more global management of relationships, attachments, and symptoms (eg. emotional fusion).

Zimmelman, Steinman, and Knoblauch (1987) present an integrated approach for parents undergoing divorce and considering joint custody. Their program utilized several intervention strategies, including group treatment, child guidance, divorce counselling and mediation. Although the primary focus of their program was to advance the interests of the children, this was accomplished by working through much of the emotional distress still existing between parents.

An educational support group for parents helped sort out continuing responsibilities, facilitated greater understanding of common divorce responses, and provided an opportunity to express thoughts and feelings about the divorce experience. Some topics included, child custody planning, the co-parenting relationship, and the possible impact of major life transitions (eg. a major geographical move or remarriage). Participation provided mutual support, validation, and group problem solving opportunities.

Divorce counselling was provided in cases where the emotional reactions of parents were too debilitating to expect reasonable progress on joint-custody issues. Most of this work simply involved providing support and acceptance,

so parents could freely express their feelings about divorce. Counselling also provided encouragement for rational negotiation, and a forum for reality testing (ie. individuals could evaluate the reasonableness of their perceptions by hearing competing interpretations of events from their counsellor).

Child guidance involved a combination of assessment, education, and emotional support. The impact of divorce was evaluated according to where each child was functioning developmentally. Parents were informed about common childhood responses to divorce. In addition, parents, children, and clinicians worked together to sort out the ramifications of the new family structure.

Mediation was used to solve the custody dispute through a nonadversarial process. This goal was realized by trying to reduce conflict between the parents. Tensions were reduced by identifying common interests parents shared concerning their children. In effect, progress was made by showing parents how cooperation was supporting the developmental needs of their children.

Mandell (1988) applied cognitive therapy in trying to assist mothers with post-divorce adjustment. Mandell viewed this task in terms of resolving the emotional and practical problems an individual faces throughout the adjustment process. These challenges included: establishing an effective relationship with a former partner, developing new relationships and interests, contending with intense

negative emotions, working toward self-acceptance, assuming parental responsibilities, giving up the expectation of fairness, and resolving the on-going difficulties inherent in daily existence.

Mandell employed a rational-emotive therapy framework to explore dysfunctional patterns having an adverse effect on the adjustment process. This theoretical approach focused on exposing irrational thought patterns, which in general, tend to hamper an individual's sense of well-being. In effect, Mandell challenged clients to reconsider their interpretation of events (eg. challenging a belief that circumstances will never improve). This method was used to liberate individuals from self-defeating thought patterns, and hence, allow them to move forward in the adjustment process.

Beyers (1988) delineated how a therapeutic group can tap the psychological growth potential contained within the divorce process. She advanced that skilful, empathic, supportive counselling can prevent serious mental and physical illness for those experiencing divorce. Her particular focus was to preserve the mental health of people experiencing a life crisis for which they had not been prepared. This included: dealing with the emotional impact of divorce, understanding the process of and necessity for grieving, becoming knowledgeable about the various stages of adjustment, and developing coping skills to help negotiate the vicissitudes of life. She empathized the importance of

developing group cohesiveness in order to facilitate the foregoing objectives.

McKinnon and Wallerstein (1988) developed a preventative intervention program for parents and children, who were grappling with joint custody arrangements after divorce. The counselling service was longitudinal in nature. An initial comprehensive assessment was made and included: parental intent regarding joint custody, parental plans for the future, the parent-child relationship, the developmental status of the children, the adequacy and effect of child care, and the extent of social support outside the family. This initial phase was followed by a series of conferences designed to predict and resolve any issues thought to cause problems in the future. These problem-solving discussions centred on laying ground rules for joint custody, and addressed specific anxieties regarding parental expectations of each other. A monitoring phase extended for two years to provide on-going support, and to quell complications that had arisen between contacts.

This particular intervention recognized the tremendous vulnerability children have to the emotional crossfire shared between ex-spouses. It attempted to alleviate the hostility and veiled contempt so often the legacy of failed relationships. A key component of the intervention was the recognition of and responsiveness to the long-term nature of the adjustment process. The on-going monitoring of the families participating in the study, seemed effective in

addressing evolving concerns and hence, in facilitating post-divorce adjustment.

Kalafat, Underwood, Fiedler, and Neigher (1990) depict the use of workshops in managing the rigours of a post-divorce world. A community education program was developed when a local chapter of Parents Without Partners collaborated with a local mental health centre. Together, these principle parties produced ten workshops which addressed the impact of divorce. The workshops were highly attended (averaging over 100 people per session), and received considerable positive feedback from the participants. Requests for additional educational programs was an important outcome, considering the earlier finding that attendees were significantly distressed compared with the normative population.

Renouf (1991) describes a counselling/mediation intervention he used to negotiate through the emotional impasse often found between ex-spouses. He notes the importance of addressing the irrationality afflicting many separating spouses, who are engaged in protracted disputes over their children. His program consisted of two phases. First, a counsellor/mediator assessed the emotional impasse existing between the couple. Once the factors thought to have created the emotional deadlock were identified and resolved, an agreement could then be negotiated and implemented. The process was not purely sequential, but rather, required a combination of therapy, educational

counselling, and mediation, at various stages of the intervention.

McLeod and Vonk (1992) comment on a support group designed to assist single-parent graduate students and their children. This particular group was identified as a population with special needs and at risk for developing more significant problems because parents were also contending with stressful, challenging graduate programs. Parental needs included: stress management, social and academic support, and help with practical matters related to their children. Childrens' needs included: a safe place to explore feelings of loss and confusion about the divorce and especially about the absent parent, a sense of belonging (ie. that there were other children of single parents), and reassurance that parents were able to control and manage their personal lives, as well as the lives of their children.

A clinical psychologist met with parents once a week, while their children attended a separate support group. Subsequently, volunteer graduate student therapists from clinical psychology led the parent support group. A core group of four families continued the group for three years. Although participants reported that the group allowed them to discuss important, even intimate issues, their need for this type of support diminished as children aged and as parents neared the completion of their academic programs.

Blatter and Jacobsen (1993) describe a peer support intervention designed to help older women cope with divorce. Initially led by a therapist, this particular intervention attempted to restabilize the lives of participants, who were facing the uncertainty of being single much later in life. The six-session format included: getting acquainted, goal setting, identifying stages of grieving, building self-esteem, stress management, small-group sharing, and follow-up regarding goals. A monthly meeting was established beyond the initial program, and featured a specific topic for discussion (eg. communication skills).

The foregoing examination of intervention strategies serves to underscore the degree of complexity associated with post-divorce adjustment. The veritable tapestry of approaches described, illustrates the degree to which clinicians have been challenged in trying to facilitate this often enigmatic process.

### **Outcome Studies**

A thorough search of the literature revealed that surprisingly few outcome studies have been conducted to evaluate the effects of post-divorce counselling. They include studies by Fisher, 1976; Thiessen, Avery & Joanning, 1980; Fetsch & Surdham, 1981; Salts, 1983; Bloom, Hodges, Kern & McFaddin, 1985; and Graff, 1986. Although varied group interventions were evaluated by these researchers, all

reported that their programs effected positive therapeutic change. It is important to note however, that therapeutic change was broadly interpreted by these studies.

For instance, Fisher (1976) conducted a ten-week divorce adjustment seminar using a pre/post test design. He randomly assigned 30 clients to one of two groups, splitting the sample between the treatment group and the control group. The Personal Orientation Inventory, as well as the Fisher Divorce Adjustment and Tennessee Self Concept Scales, were used to identify any significant differences between the two groups. These first two instruments showed that over time, subjects were starting to disengage from their previous love relationships. Rebuilding social relationships appeared to assist in this emotional disentanglement. The treatment attempted to provide an understanding of divorce as a process, and evidence of greater acceptance of this life crisis, suggested the group's efficacy in this regard. The Tennessee Self Concept Scale also indicated a marked improvement in self-esteem over the course of the study. An interesting finding was the direct correlation Fisher discovered between self-actualization and divorce adjustment. Hence, it is not surprising that other clinicians have attempted to enhance self-esteem as a way to expedite post-divorce adjustment.

Although both a standardized treatment and a sound research design were employed, this study did suffer from sampling deficiencies. Subjects were drawn from a local

singles group and thus, did not constitute a representative sample of the general population. Moreover, these clients had been involved in a support group prior to the study. Their familiarity with one another, as well as the unknown effect of their participation in a support group, present further confounding variables to Fisher's work.

Thiessen, Avery, and Joanning (1980) developed and implemented a communication skills approach in trying to expedite post-divorce adjustment for 13 women. They identified several variables as central to the adjustment process, including the divorcee's: a) income, b) relationship to the initiation of divorce, c) age, d) self-esteem, e) social support system, and f) previous marital relationship. In particular, they emphasized the roles of self-esteem (Blair 1970), and social support (Raschke 1975), as having strong influences on post-divorce adjustment. They reasoned that a divorcee's income, age, previous marital relationship, and relationship to the initiation of divorce are all relatively fixed. Hence, only perceived social support and self-esteem held the greatest promise in terms of effective post-divorce intervention strategies. Since communication skills are critical in establishing and maintaining satisfying interpersonal relationships (e.g., Ginsberg, 1977; Miller, Nunnally, & Wackman, 1975; Satir, 1972; Schauble & Hill, 1976), they reasoned a communication skills based intervention would hold excellent potential for creating a positive social

support system. It was felt that self-esteem would also be enhanced through this process. Ultimately, it was hoped that increased social support combined with an improved sense of self-worth, would alleviate the distress associated with post-divorce adjustment.

In all, 28 divorced women were included in their study. Fifteen women were assigned to the control group, leaving 13 subjects to constitute the experimental group. Although ages ranged from 21 to 49, the mean age for both groups was 32.5 years. Importantly, all subjects had been divorced no more than 16 months, and had no experience in either interpersonal communication skills training or divorce counselling. A pre/post test design was utilized by the researchers.

Overall, the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale revealed that relative to the control group, the experimental group significantly increased their level of general post-divorce adjustment. Although the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) reflected no significant difference between the two groups, the self-esteem subscale for the Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale indicated a significant increase on this variable for the experimental group. The researchers speculated that the RSES (having only 10 items), may have measured gross, ordinal distinctions, and may not have been sensitive enough to monitor change in self-esteem over a 5-week period. Interestingly, this particular intervention did not affect a significant change between the groups in perceived social

support. The researchers cited the questionable quality of the instrument, the shortness of the intervention, and the structure of the training program, as possible explanations for this finding. They also conceded that it was possible that their particular intervention was not conducive to promoting social support.

Although the results suggested that recently divorced and separated individuals could benefit from a program in interpersonal communication skills, several key factors limited the generalizability of the study's results. In particular, the study only involved women who had been divorced or separated for longer than 9 months. In other words, the study did not evaluate the possible interaction affects had men also been included, nor did it address situations where individuals had been divorced or separated for longer or shorter periods of time. Further, a relatively small sample size suggests caution regarding a more global interpretation of the study's findings. A longer term follow-up evaluation could have yielded more conclusive results. An attempt to isolate what gains were attributable to learned communication skills, the group experience, or some combination thereof, would have been a valuable exercise.

In a one-month follow-up study, Goethal, Thiessen, Henton, Avery, and Joanning (1983), found that significant increases in both post-divorce adjustment and empathy skill had been maintained by the experimental group, relative to

the control group. Both groups showed marked improvement in self-esteem, the results tending toward significance. However, as in the original study, no significant difference between the two groups was reflected in the area of self-esteem. This particular study seemed to support the contention that a communication skills approach to post-divorce adjustment can aid this process, during and for some time after the training experience.

In addition to the aforementioned cautions regarding generalizability, it should be noted that only 25 of the original 28 subjects participated in the one-month follow-up study. In terms of an already small sample size, this drop-out rate could be quite important to the final results.

In 1981, Fetsch and Surdam developed a group counselling program to assist people in coping with divorce. Their program targeted students, staff, and faculty at the University of Wyoming. Their particular focus was based on the observation that the pressures and stresses unique to academic life contributed to the dissolution of many marriages. It was also noted that many formerly married people return to universities for additional education. The researchers used a cognitive approach designed to enrich skills for strengthening support systems and for coping with loss. The cognitive framework was based on an understanding of the stages of coupling and uncoupling, and addressed the following seven basic tasks: a) saying goodbye to the spouses, the marriages, and other losses; b) developing

authentic and workable support systems; c) developing autonomy and identify as whole, growing individuals; d) reevaluating marital relationships; e) making peace with the demands of reality; f) enabling members to learn coping mechanisms which they could use in dealing with other losses; and g) providing a cognitive structure for those experiencing this type of loss (Beatrice, 1978; Kessler, 1978).

Three men and four women met for two hours a week for a seven-week period. In terms of loss issues, participants ranked depression, loneliness, making new friends, rejection, communication skills, learning how to enjoy being single, guilt, support systems, saying goodbye, and ending relationships, as being particularly distressing.

Participants evaluated the program as a 5.6 on a value continuum, on which 1 indicated that the group was not at all helpful and 7 indicated that it was extremely helpful. Reported benefits included, the opportunity to share common problems and work through unfinished business related to divorce. Participants valued the support provided by the group each week.

Although this intervention appeared to assist in post-divorce adjustment, great caution should be exercised in generalizing the reported success. The extremely small sample size, as well as the subjectivity associated with self-report measures, limits the generalizability of the findings. Further, no attempt was made to control for

length and number of marriages, age of participant, educational level and other factors that could have a strong influence on the end results reported by the participants. For instance, it was clear from the intake interviews that some of the participants had already received counselling to help alleviate their distress.

In 1983, Connie Salts compared three treatment groups to determine their relative effects on divorce adjustment. A structured counselling group, an unstructured counselling group and a contrast group (comprised from participants who did not complete the program intervention), were assessed using Raschke's Postdivorce Problems and Stress Scale (PPSS). Salts used Maslow's Needs Hierarchy to provide a contextual background within which to interpret the pre-test, post-test results.

In total, 57 of the 80 original participants completed the program. Differences in mean scores showed that divorcees earning under \$6,000, who had children and had been divorced on average for longer periods of time, had poorer pre-test scores and dropped out of the program more frequently. Salts reasoned that divorcees faced with lower incomes and more children have greater difficulty meeting basic biological needs for physical comfort and survival. Further, Salts contended that faced with this reality, it was likely that safety needs for a stable, structured, and predictable environment were not being fully met. Hence, individuals primarily preoccupied with shelter, food, and

basic physical survival, would not easily avail themselves to intervention programs targeting third and fourth level needs for belonging, love and esteem. Consequently, Salts suggested a rigorous screening process to determine what human needs are most pressing for a participant (ie. what stage of adjustment they are in). She further contended that intervention programs would be more successful in effecting post-divorce adjustment when they were tailored to the needs of end-users.

Although insightful regarding specifically tailoring intervention programs to the needs of divorcees, Salts does little to address the immense complexity and cost associated with such a pursuit. It is apparent that such a strong conclusion may be somewhat premature, given the fact that only one instrument was utilized to compare the various groups. This criticism gains particular strength in light of the small numbers comprising the drop-out groups (eg. noshows, n = 8). Moreover, in the absence of any detail regarding the different treatments used, Salts appears to be making wide-sweeping generalizations. In fact, her call for more rigorous screening seems to support the importance of creating successful programs, rather than meeting the needs of all divorcees.

In 1985, Bloom, Hodges, Kern and McFaddin conducted one of the most extensive studies on post-divorce intervention. They ran a six-month preventative program and conducted four follow-ups at 6, 18, 30 and 48-months respectively. Their

intervention was designed to provide social support. It was also hoped that this particular approach would facilitate competence-building in areas of concern identified by newly separated individuals. These areas included: single parenting and child rearing, socialization, career planning and employment, housing and homemaking, and legal and financial issues. The program was led by a combination of paraprofessionals and by a number of subject-matter specialists. Four requirements for eligibility included: a) residence in Boulder County, Colorado, b) legal marriage and physical separation from spouse because of marital discord, c) a first marriage for the person making the inquiry about the program, c) length of separation not in excess of six months. The Composite Symptom Check-list as well as the Delighted-Terrible Scale were used to evaluate current life satisfaction and general post-divorce adjustment.

The original sample of 153 subjects was randomly assigned to a treatment group (N = 101), and an untreated control group (N = 52). In the final follow-up four years later, only 134 of the original sample participated.

After six months, five of the nine dependent measures of adjustment proved significant, in each case favouring the intervention group. Gender differences in improvement consistently favoured the women in the sample. In general, anxiety and fatigue were reduced, along with improvement in coping skills and in physical well-being. Although all

study participants showed improvement between the six-month and 18-month interviews, superior adjustment still favoured the intervention group. This was especially evident with respect to finances, socialization, life quality and general life satisfaction. By 18 months, men in both groups seemed to exhibit improvements in adjustment similar to those made by the women earlier in the study. Interestingly, men in the intervention group demonstrated the greatest gains, and in general, were doing better than men in the control group and women in both groups. Where significant gender differences were found, women were doing better than men on two fronts. These included, job satisfaction and a sense of personal growth and happiness emanating from the marital disruption. Initially, gains made by the intervention group were greater, then diminished as the study converged on the four-year follow-up. It was also interesting to note that the members of the intervention group viewed the program as significantly more helpful than did members of the control group. Control group scores on the life quality scale remained almost constant across all three testing periods.

The study revealed specific problem areas that, although decreasing over time, still remained as important concerns for the participants until the final testing, four years later. Loneliness was initially the most commonly reported problem, which after four years, still remained as a significant concern for more than one-quarter of the study participants. Other areas of note included: guilt and

self-blame; financial stress and securing employment; mental health problems; sexual satisfaction; feelings of incompetence; legal problems; development of friendships; homemaking difficulties and problems with physical health. Five work-related difficulties included: trouble concentrating, getting along poorly with others at work, missing work, notice by supervisor or co-workers of loss of effectiveness, and obtaining pleasure or satisfaction at work. Although the intervention group showed improvements over time in the ability to concentrate at work, the entire study population showed little change in getting along poorly with others, and on missing work.

Several separation-related benefits included, increases in personal growth, self-knowledge, and happiness; and relief from conflict. Initially (ie. at the time of the six-month interviews), the intervention group demonstrated significant increases, in contrast to the control group, on personal growth and self-knowledge. Interestingly, women reported significant increases in happiness, and this gender difference persisted at a constant level for the duration of the study.

In short, the intervention group showed rapid, steady, and continuous improvement. In contrast, the control group improved more slowly, plateauing on several measures after which improvement ceased. Initially, the differences between the groups was greater, then diminished over time.

Several observations also worth noting include:

1) divorce was nearly always the final outcome for this sample of newly separated (ie. 95% of the total sample divorced), 2) reconciliations were not common (eg. only 27% of the 15 reconciliations occurring in the first 30 months were still in effect by the end of the study), 3) remarriage was not very common, and not very successful (eg. 9 of 26 remarriages occurring within the first 30 months, ended in divorce by the end of the study).

In general, the researchers concluded that their six-month intervention had a significant and long-lasting positive effect on the rate of adjustment to divorce and separation. They noted that reported improvements were rarely linear in nature, and that neither improvements nor problems occur in both sexes in all areas simultaneously. In fact, certain changes for certain groups happened more slowly, while other changes occurred more quickly. In general, it was noted that over time, most differences in adjustment diminish between sexes and between groups. However, on certain dimensions, such as life quality, the program held definite advantages for the intervention group. Given these observations, Bloom et al recommend an intervention strategy aimed at identifying and meeting the different needs of participants. Like Salts, Bloom et al, recommend varying the emphasis of program content at certain times to better facilitate post-divorce adjustment.

Although quite insightful, this study does raise a few methodological questions. First, the sample was

characterized as upper middle-class, half being parents, 60% female, and highly educated. This sample is hardly representative of the general population of divorcees and hence, the findings of the study must be interpreted with cautious optimism. It should also be noted that the average duration of the separation at the time of entrance into the program was about eight weeks. Once again, this factor limits the generalizability of the results. Additionally, interviews which had originally taken place in-person, had been shortened considerably, and were all conducted by telephone by the time of the 30 and 48-month follow-ups. The possible influence of this methodological change was not considered in the researchers' analysis. Lastly, many more subjects were lost to the study by the final two follow-ups than had been lost at earlier points in the study. At the very least, an attempt to pursue the reasons behind subject drop-out would have provided valuable additional information.

In 1986, Graff and Whitehead conducted a group treatment with divorced women using cognitive-behavioural and supportive-insight methods. The researchers substantiated the use of cognitive-behavioural techniques by citing the success these methods have had with clients who are emotionally labile and depressed (Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1979; Brown & Lewinsohn, 1984; Murphy, Simons, Wetzel, & Lustman, 1984; Steinmetz, Lewinsohn, & Antonuccio, 1983). They also turned to evidence suggesting the efficacy

of such an approach in treating anxiety (Baither & Godsey, 1979; Daly & Burton, 1983; Gormally, Varvil-Weld, Raphael, & Sipps, 1981; Kanter & Goldfried, 1979; Kassinove, Miller, & Kalin, 1980; Rosen & Nelson, 1983; Valerio & Stone, 1982).

In total, 46 women participated in the study. Twelve clients were assigned to a cognitive-behavioural group, and twelve clients comprised the supportive-insight oriented group. Two control groups, a waiting-list control and a minimal-contact control, were formed from 22 additional clients.

A pre/post-test design was used to evaluate the four-week study, with an additional follow-up four months later. The Beck Depression Inventory, the Lubin Depression Check-list, the Eysenck Personality Inventory, and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory, were used to compare the two treatment conditions with each other, and to determine the long-term effectiveness of the treatment modalities.

Two female master's students in social work co-lead the two treatment modalities. They taught cognitive restructuring, and used visualization and homework assignments to assist the participants in the cognitive-behavioural group. Self-disclosure and discussion were the primary vehicles used in the supportive-insight group. The minimal-contact group received literature dealing with marital crisis, and were also contacted by telephone once each week to determine whether they had read this material. They were also informed that they should

feel better upon reflection of the material they had read. The minimal-contact group was included to assess the degree of improvement that might be ascribed to non-specific treatment effects such as faith, attention, and the expectation of mitigation. A promise of therapy, available subsequent to the termination of the study, was made to the wait-list group. However, participants in this group were not contacted until the end of the study. It was hoped that this group could serve to assess the degree of improvement from non-specific therapeutic changes occurring from the environment and from spontaneous remissions.

Results showed that the cognitive-behavioural group had significantly less neuroticism, greater self-esteem, and less trait-like and state-like depression at the end of the treatment than subjects in either the minimal-contact or wait-list control groups. The supportive-insight group had less neuroticism, higher self-esteem, and less trait-like depression than either control group. Although it had lower state-like depression than the waiting-list group, the supportive-insight group did not have lower state-like depression than the minimal-contact group.

Initially, the two treatment groups only differed significantly on neuroticism; the cognitive-behavioural group had less neuroticism than the supportive-insight group. However, by the time of the follow-up, the cognitive-behavioural group had less neuroticism, higher self-esteem, and less state-like depression than the

supportive-insight group. Although both treatment groups had positive effects on post-divorce adjustment, the cognitive-behavioural approach seemed to provide a more sustained benefit.

Several observations suggest caution regarding the generalizability of these findings. First, the counsellors appeared to be more enthusiastic and encouraging in the cognitive-behavioural group. The possible influence this may have had on the respective participants casts an interesting light on the study's findings. Moreover, the study advertised for depressed females having been divorced between 3 months and 2 years. Clearly, this was not a representative sample, and hence, this limits the generalizability of the study's findings. Further, women who actually participated in the study had been divorced from 8 to 18 months. Consequently, the study says little about treatment effectiveness for those individuals having been divorced for either shorter or longer periods of time. In general, however, both these treatments appeared to have been beneficial for women trying to cope with the rigours of divorce.

In 1990, Maria Vera used a single-case methodology to assess the changes in post-divorce adjustment. Vera measured changes in depression, self-esteem, and peer relations by administering Hudson's, Generalized Contentment Scale, Index of Self-Esteem, and Index of Peer Relations. A

composite score, called the Index of Well-Being, was obtained by averaging the scores on these three instruments.

Sixteen of an original 22 participants comprised two groups. Group A had 3 men and 5 women, and group B had 8 women. Five subjects were legally divorced; six subjects were separated, but not legally divorced from their spouses. Individuals exhibiting noticeable dysfunctional behaviour and those considered potentially disruptive in a group were referred elsewhere.

Individuals participated in a 10-week, semi-structured treatment program consisting of the following three components: 1) educational, 2) supportive, and 3) therapeutic. Discussion centred around the emotional, social, and psychological aspects of divorce. Individual concerns were addressed, allowing group members to support one another in identifying their roles in the divorce recovery process. Experiential tasks were assigned as homework to help participants deal with some of the difficult aspects of the divorce process.

In total, only 11 subjects completed the research instruments during the baseline and treatment periods. Six subjects completed and returned their follow-up instruments. The results demonstrated that Hudson's three scales were highly correlated (hence, the creation of the Index of Well-Being). The data indicated that subjects had experienced different degrees and patterns of improvement, and also suggested that subjects were experiencing different

levels of distress at the inception of the treatment. There were no significant differences found between the two groups. However, significant improvement was experienced by both groups in terms of the Index of Well-Being.

The study appeared to corroborate evidence in the literature identifying the presence of factors which appear to considerably influence divorce adjustment and hence, psychosocial well-being (Fisher, 1976). These factors included: the passage of time (ie. since separation/divorce), divorce-related losses (eg. friendships), other life events (eg. losing a job), characteristics of the divorce event (eg. infidelity, continued attachment to former spouse), and the presence or absence of support (eg. family). The study indicated a large variability in the impact of time on adjustment. Although divorce-related losses affected the adjustment process, it appeared as if an individual's ability to cope was more closely associated with the level of social support available.

Although both groups showed significant improvement on the Index of Well-Being, there was considerable variability in the magnitude and pattern of improvement. The researchers suggest this variability was attributable to factors which influenced the adjustment process. These factors included: the passage of time, initial levels of distress, other life events, multiple losses, concurrent

life events, lack of social support, reluctance or ambivalence regarding divorce, lack of avenues for self-expression, and an abbreviated period of separation.

Although the use of quantitative and qualitative methods (ie. multiple methodologies), strengthen the utility of the study's findings, there are still important deficiencies that warrant caution. In particular, the small sample size, the non-random assignment of subjects, the gender imbalance of the sample, the exclusion of certain subjects, and the significant drop-out rate; strongly limit the generalizability of the research findings. It is also important to note that all subjects had received psychological counselling at some time during the dissolution of their marriages. Despite the foregoing, positive contributions included Vera's recommendation regarding the use of multiple methodologies, and her observation regarding the variability in divorce adjustment, and its dependence on related factors.

In 1993, Vera reported on a social work intervention designed to assist separated and divorced persons in the adjustment process. The Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale (FDAS), was administered to obtain pre and post measures of 25 clients, who participated in five 10-week divorce adjustment groups. Researchers used six subscales from the FDAS to measure: feelings of self-worth, symptoms of grief, disentanglement from the love relation, feelings of anger, rebuilding social trust, and social self-worth. However,

the total score was the most significant value noted.

Subjects were recruited at the Outpatient Clinic of the Department of Psychiatry, University of Florida.

Individuals were permanently separated or divorced at the time of their request for group therapy. Potentially disruptive individuals were referred to other therapists or services.

The 10-week group was based on an adaptation of the "Divorce and Personal Growth Seminars" (Fisher 1978, Fisher and Hart-Fisher 1984). Groups had three components, supportive, educational, and therapeutic. Two clinicians facilitated open discussion, assigned reading materials, and fostered the expression of personally relevant issues. The intent was to illuminate the commonality of feelings, conflicts, and issues related to the divorce process. Although groups were limited to 8 people, members were encouraged to make contact with each other outside group meetings.

Data indicated that all but two of the participants experienced improvements in their adjustment to divorce. Differences in improvement between the five groups were not significant. In other words, all groups showed similar improvement by the end of the study. However, there was considerable variability in the degree and pattern of improvement among the subjects. Interestingly, none of the independent variables (ie. age, gender, marital status, role in the separation process, and group membership), proved to

be a significant predictor of score gain. Variability in divorce adjustment seemed more dependent on the specific circumstances surrounding marriage dissolution, rather than on any of the foregoing factors (Ambert, 1988; Chiriboga, 1982; Pais & White, 1979; Spanier & Casto, 1979; Spanier & Thompson, 1984).

This study offered interesting information on the adjustment process, but also suffered from a number of methodological limitations. No control group was used to determine the relative efficacy of the treatment group. The representativeness of the sample was compromised by the fact that women outnumbered men by a two to one ratio, and because nearly all of the participants had a college or university education. Although the findings are encouraging, caution needs to be invoked in terms of solely crediting the treatment for the reported improvements in divorce adjustment.

In 1990, Lee and Hett reported on a group intervention designed to facilitate post-divorce adjustment. The overall intent of the study was to teach coping skills to recently separated and divorced adults. The program attempted to enhance communication skills, familiarized subjects with the stages of coupling and uncoupling, and introduced cognitive-behavioural strategies (eg. visualization, goal-setting, and relaxation training). It was hoped that this approach would positively influence anxiety,

depression, spontaneity, independence, capacity for intimacy, and would encourage a "here and now" orientation.

Participants were randomly assigned to a treatment group (n = 12) and a wait-list group (n = 12). Pre/post measures were taken using the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI), the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), and the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI). In total, 21 women and 3 men participated in the 8-week study. Control group members were told a support group would be available to them subsequent to the study. Although they were invited to contact the group leaders if they required immediate counselling, none did so. Contact with the control group was limited to an occasional reminder of the upcoming group, and to get a brief account of how they were doing.

Pre-test scores did not reflect any significant differences between the two groups. However, post-test scores for the POI, BDI, and STAI all indicated a significant difference between the groups. The treatment group showed an improved capacity to "live in the moment", had become more self-supportive, less anxious, more spontaneous, and seemed to enjoy a greater capacity for intimacy.

The combination of teaching communication skills, providing information about stages of coupling and uncoupling, introducing cognitive-behavioural strategies, and allowing the free expression of feelings and concerns, appeared to be beneficial in facilitating post-divorce

adjustment. However, wide-sweeping conclusions based on this study would be premature. The small sample size, as well as its composition (21 women and 3 men), limit the generalizability of the study's findings. Further, subjects were of middle income, and were estimated as having average to superior intellectual ability. These factors limit the degree of extrapolation warranted by the study.

In 1983, Sprenkle and Storm reviewed 22 divorce therapy outcome research studies and reported some interesting findings. They subdivided these studies into six content areas including: mediation, conciliation court counselling, consumer evaluation, divorce groups, separation techniques, and marriage counselling with divorce as an unintended outcome. Each study was rated on ten dimensions: adequacy of outcome criterion, follow-up, random sample, specification and control of relevant therapist variable, inclusion of a control group, random sample or every case from an identified population, use of random assignment, relevant client variable, sample size, and standardization of treatment.

Several conclusions emerged from their review. Mediation appeared to work better than traditional methods in resolving custody and visitation disputes. This method was particularly successful with couples moderately in conflict, having relatively few issues, and who were reasonably able to negotiate. Conciliation court counselling appeared to temporarily increase the number of

reconciliations in the short-term. Court-related counselling appeared to be equally satisfying compared to other uncontrolled studies of family and marital therapy. Divorce education-adjustment groups appeared to enhance self-confidence, promote self-efficacy, and raise self-esteem over the short-term. The review also concluded that structured separation techniques seem to assist in alleviating rancour. A tentative assertion was made regarding the superiority of individual vs. conjoint therapy under some circumstances.

Although this review provided a relevant comparison between various approaches to the divorce process, their methodology in making the comparison is questionable. The authors personally categorized the studies, and later rated each on the aforementioned dimensions. A consensus agreement was used to resolve minor discrepancies. The high subjectivity associated with the methods used, encourages caution about the authors' final conclusions. A panel of independent evaluators would have strengthened the utility of this review.

### **Divorce and Separation: An Emotional Crisis**

The aforementioned studies illuminate the emotional brevity associated with divorce and separation. These varied approaches to post-divorce counselling underscore how complex the related issues are, and how vital it is to provide effective support strategies to address them.

The magnitude of this emotional crisis cannot be understated. Thiessen et al. (1980) have characterized the post-divorce adjustment period as a time of confusion; an often depressing time filled with doubt, uncertainty, and self-deprecation. Fetsch and Surdam (1981), speak poignantly about the pressures, strains, and losses associated with divorce. Bloom et al (1985), indicate that marital disruption often translates into high risk of psychological and physical disorders. They note the high incidence of alcoholism, homicide, suicide, and motor vehicle accidents associated with this life event. Huber (1983), writes about irrational beliefs that often become prevalent during and subsequent to divorce. He indicates the emotional fall-out (ie. the proneness to depression and loss of self-esteem), these beliefs can produce, and hence, speaks about the efficacy of using cognitive-behavioural strategies to alleviate this distress. Vera (1990), describes divorce as a time of considerable loss, which threatens an individual's integrity, and undermines their sense of security. Vera writes about the anxiety and depression that often accompany losing a mate, family, friends, financial security, social status, and the hopes and dreams associated with this constellation of social anchors. She sites the importance of marriage in terms of identity formulation and self-worth, and notes how the dissolution of marriage undermines (eg. guilt and rejection), an individual's self-esteem. Lee and Hett

(1990), communicate how divorce adjustment often includes feelings of helplessness, hostility, fear, depression, anxiety, rejection and abandonment.

In conjunction with the foregoing, many other researchers and clinicians have outlined the emotional upheaval associated with divorce and separation. Invariably, their discussion includes the tremendous blow marital dissolution has on an individual's self-worth (Fisher, 1976, 1978, 1981; Krantzler, 1974; MacKeen & Herman, 1974). Weingarten (1985), concurs, describing this emotional damage as low morale, and personal inadequacy. She does however, point to the potential personal growth that can emerge from such a life crisis. Weingarten indicates that many divorcees who have had an erosion in self-esteem, are eventually able to re-establish a positive sense of self. Still, others have described this loss of self-worth in terms of feelings of incompetence, and a lack of self-efficacy (Dreman, Orr, Aldor, 1990). Salts (1985), describes this experience in terms of lowering self-esteem and self-concept, but suggests there is little evidence regarding the intensity or duration of these feelings. Not surprisingly, many other researchers and clinicians extend this emotional damage (ie. self-deprecation) to children, adolescents, and even adult children of divorce (Wiehe, 1984; Omizo, Omizo, 1988; Healy, Malley, Stewart, 1990; Garber, 1991; Hett, Rose, 1991).

The emotional crisis precipitated by divorce and separation can often be one of the most traumatic life-experiences encountered by an individual. The adjustment process is frequently fraught with confusion, intense feelings, and a lack of direction in terms of how to adjust to rapidly changing circumstances. Many approaches have been utilized to assist this complex and difficult adjustment process. This study attempted to facilitate the healing process by trying to bolster self-esteem, which in itself, has been identified as one of the primary casualties of divorce.

#### **Rationale for a Self-Esteem Intervention**

In view of the foregoing, it would seem reasonable, even compelling, to include self-esteem as the primary focus of post-divorce intervention strategies. After all, there is overwhelming evidence indicating that individual's going through divorce experience a significant decline in their sense of self-worth. In fact, many people assume tremendous responsibility for the relationship break-up, regarding this crisis as conclusive proof of personal failure in life.

Indeed, these reasons alone, suggest a good case for trying to facilitate post-divorce adjustment through enhancing self-esteem. Equally compelling however, is the fact that self-esteem has been used in a wide cross-section of personal growth interventions.

For instance, Caserta and Lund (1993) describe self-esteem as an important intrapersonal resource for treating depression and grief in bereaved older adults. They go on to say how vital it is to recognize, enhance, and utilize personal strengths in order to facilitate adaptation to loss. The effectiveness of self-help groups in promoting life-skills, and hence, in enhancing self-esteem, is indicated.

A number of studies (Hughes, 1992; Jehu, 1992; Algert, Borman, 1992; Hoagwood, 1990; Gordy, 1983), outline the use of self-esteem in aiding children and adults who have been affected by sexually-related trauma. Included in this group are adults sexually molested as children, adult victims of childhood incest, and rape victims. Interestingly, Fehrenbach, Smith and Monastersky (1986), report on the prevalence of poor self-esteem among adolescent sexual offenders. Their findings corroborate existing evidence indicating the prevalence of negative self-worth among many sexual offenders. Naturally, the enhancement of self-esteem is a primary focus for many of the intervention programs designed to help these individuals. In these cases, work on self-esteem has been regarded as beneficial for both victims and perpetrators of sexual abuse.

Barnett and Balak (1986) report on the use of self-esteem to facilitate social adjustment for young women dealing with unplanned pregnancy. Their intervention helped

clients achieve a more efficient and effective lifestyle by:

- 1) teaching methods for setting personal boundaries,
- 2) introducing more flexible patterns of behaviour,
- 3) establishing more functional communication patterns, and
- 4) creating opportunities for nurturing.

Interestingly, Chamberlain and Kelly (1980), utilized a similar approach to help prevent teenage pregnancy.

Supportive education programs, which emphasize self-esteem, have also been used to facilitate social adjustment in people suffering from long-term mental illness (Unger, et al). Likewise, Whitman, Graves, and Accardo (1989), identified the importance of enhancing self-esteem for adults with mental retardation. Although initially, some individuals had severe coping difficulties, it was clear that a greater sense of self-worth led to more healthy adaptation to social roles (eg. as parents and as employees).

There is a proliferation of intervention strategies that have emphasized self-esteem as a primary component of treatment. Some of these programs include: sponsorship for adolescents with diabetes (Daley, 1992), promotion of psychosocial well-being for those with HIV-illness (Linn, Lewis, Cain & Kimbrough, 1993), supporting adult children of alcoholics (Sheridan, Green, 1993), treating psychological distress in young adults dealing with self-rejection and deprivation of social support (Kaplan, Robbins, Martin, 1983), managing aggression

in young children (Anderson, 1978), and attending to overlapping symptoms of substance abuse and learning handicaps (Fox, Forbing, 1991). The incredible diversity in these client populations, as well as the ubiquity of self-esteem interventions designed to help them, strongly intimate the possible utility such an approach could have in facilitating post-divorce adjustment.

## CHAPTER 3

### Method

#### Subjects

Participants for this study were men and women, varying in age and having been divorced or separated for different lengths of time. In total, 53 adult men and women participated in three separate groups.

The Regular Divorce Lifeline Group (RDLG), was comprised of 14 women and 4 men. Their ages ranged from 31 years to 46 years, with a mean age of 38.1 years. The RDLG had a mean of 14.4 years of education, extending from 12 years to 18 years. The average duration of marriage for this group was 11.9 years, but ranged from 14 months to 21 years. In total, this group was comprised of 14 first marriages, 3 second marriages, and 1 third marriage. Collectively, they parented 22 children, ranging in age from 6 to 15 years.

The Self-Esteem Group (SEG), was comprised of 18 women and 7 men. Their ages ranged from 28 years to 53 years, with a mean age of 37.3 years. The SEG had a mean of 14 years education, extending from 12 years to 17 years. The average duration of marriage for this group was 11 years, and ranged from 2 years to 18 years. In total, this group was comprised of 23 first marriages and 2 second marriages. Collectively, they parented 31 children, ranging in age from 6 to 13 years.

The Control Group (CG), was comprised of 6 women and 4 men. Their ages ranged from 22 years to 50 years, with a mean age of 39.2 years. The CG had a mean of 14.5 years of education, extending from 10 years to 20 years. The average duration of marriage for this group was 10.8 years, but ranged from 2 years to 26 years. In total, this group was comprised of 9 first marriages and 1 second marriage. Collectively, they parented 16 children, ranging in age from 2 years to 24 years.

Intake information also revealed that the majority of participants were separated from their spouses for less than two years. In almost every case, contact was still being kept between former spouses, although this was often related to legal concerns and/or custody arrangements.

At the time of the study, all participants resided in the Greater Victoria Region. Group sessions were conducted once a week for an hour and a half at the Divorce Lifeline. Meetings took place in moderately-sized rooms rented from First United Church. Despite this fact, there was no formalized religious component to any of the treatment interventions.

### **Instruments**

The following four instruments (see Appendix F) were used to measure possible differences between the three groups in the study:

### Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI)

This instrument measures evaluative attitudes toward the self. The questionnaire consists of 58 statements, which subjects are to respond to by indicating whether or not the statement accurately reflects a likeness. Certain parts of the questionnaire can be scored separately to reflect self-esteem particular to: school-academic, home-parents, social self-peers, general self, and a lie scale. Scored separately, higher scores on the lie scale indicate low defensive lie reactions. Conversely, higher scores on the remaining test statements reflect greater self-esteem. Coopersmith reports test-retest reliability as .88 over a five week period and .70 over three years (1967, p.10).

### The Personal Orientation Inventory (POI)

The POI attempts to measure self-actualization and therapeutic effect. It is a 150 item forced-choice instrument developed by Shostrom in 1966. The POI measures variables (such as locus of control), that closely parallel those related to post-divorce adjustment. Two such examples include: the Inner Directed Support Scale (127 items), which measures the tendency to act on and be guided by one's principles and motives; the Time Competency Scale (23 items), which measures a person's tendency to be

present-oriented, free from past or future concerns (Fisher, 1978; Bloxom, 1977). Bloxom reports that the reliability coefficients for these instruments range from .55 to .85.

#### Beck Depression Inventory

Developed by Beck in 1978, this inventory consists of 21 categories of symptoms and attitudes. Each of these categories describes specific behavioural indications or symptoms of depression. Four or five self-evaluative statements are to be ranked by the participant for each category. Ranking is used to indicate the severity of the symptom, and range from neutral to maximum severity. Reliability is reported to range from .79 to .91 (Strober, Green & Carlson, 1981).

#### State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI)

This scale is a self-report, Lickert-type instrument. Developed by Spielberger (1977), this scale consists of 40 items which measure state and trait anxiety separately. State anxiety is defined as a temporary emotional condition, characterized by feelings of apprehension, tension, worry, and nervousness. On the other hand, trait anxiety refers to a relatively stable inclination toward anxiety. Each item in the scale begins with the phrase "I feel", followed by a choice (a short phrase or word), that best describes how the subject feels at that moment. Reliability, ranges from .86

to .92 for Trait scores and from .83 to .92 for State scores.

### **Design and General Approach**

Subjects were enrolled in the Divorce Lifeline Program (DLP), having been self-referred or referred by their doctors or other community agencies. Participants were informed of the study through local newspapers, by Rogers Community Announcements, or by the researcher and/or staff of the Divorce Lifeline. Intake procedures were used to assess the likelihood that potential group members would benefit from the DLP. This evaluation was based on a client's reported circumstances and hence, their implied needs at the time of the intake interview. In addition, the intake process confirmed that participants had physically separated from their former spouses.

The study used a pre/post-test design with multiple dependent variables. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two treatment groups (ie. either the RDLG or the SEG). Individuals not receiving therapeutic support (ie. professionally led group support), comprised the wait-list group (ie. the CG). An attempt was made to control for the proportion of men and women assigned to each group. However, total numbers of men and women in each group varied with the initial proportions of men and women seeking help.

One intervention strategy (the RDL counselling program), covered core topic areas such as grieving, anger,

depression, relaxation, parenting, co-parenting, relationships, and assertive communication. A second intervention strategy (the SEG counselling program), covered these same core areas, but also emphasized the importance of enhancing self-esteem as a way to facilitate more functional social adaptation, and as a way to promote post-divorce adjustment. Participants in the SEG were invited to complete weekly take-home exercises intended to raise self-awareness and promote a more positive self-image. The CG did not receive any form of group intervention throughout the duration of the study.

Pre-test packages were disseminated in the first week of the study. They included: the instruments described in the foregoing; notes about the project (see Appendix D), indicating the nature and degree of participation; background information on the researcher (see Appendix C); and consent forms (see Appendix E) to be signed by all study participants. During this information exchange, questions about the study were answered, and a commitment regarding confidentiality was emphasized. Participants were assured that their anonymity would be maintained, and were invited to review the results of the study once they became available. Post-testing packages were disseminated in week 7 and participants were asked to bring the completed questionnaires back the following week (ie. the final week of the group).

## Treatment

### Regular Divorce Lifeline Group

Subjects in this group met once a week for eight consecutive weeks. Each session was approximately one and a half hours in duration and was led by an experienced divorce counsellor. The sessions were partly structured, allowing for both open participation and for predetermined exercises and content.

Although participation was encouraged, interaction depended almost entirely on an individual's volition. An effort was made to facilitate a conducive environment (ie. one that was accepting), for sharing feelings and concerns related to divorce. Reflective listening skills, empathic responses and group support (ie. affirmation through acknowledgement), was used to effect an emotionally supportive environment.

Core topics included: group rules, the stages of grieving, anger, relaxation, assertive communication, depression, suicide, parenting, co-parenting, relationships, and patterns of behaviour. These topics were discussed with respect to their impact on post-divorce adjustment. For instance, discussing the stages of grieving normalized the experience encountered by the participants since their separation. On the other hand, exploration of assertive communication skills was intended to improve both present and future relationships.

In essence, this format was intended to facilitate awareness regarding: how each individual contributed to his or her marital breakdown, what range of emotions he or she could expect to encounter throughout the process of divorce (ie. normalizing the experience), and finally, what alternatives existed to help cope with the emotional distress of divorce and to help re-build a positive life for the future.

### **Weekly Format**

#### Week One

Participants were welcomed to the Divorce Lifeline. The group facilitator introduced him or herself, commenting on qualifications, experience, and preferred working style. Attendance was taken, and any relevant announcements were made to the group. A general round of introductions was encouraged, and group members were invited to ask any questions they had concerning the facilitator or the group. Participants were invited to express their expectations regarding the group, and to comment on their personal goals for the program. The facilitator reflected his or her understanding of each participant's response. This exchange was followed by a communication of the group leader's expectations and personal goals regarding the group. A copy of the Parent Contract was circulated. It outlined guidelines with respect to confidentiality, attendance, and group commitment. Information regarding the Caught in the

Middle Program (ie. a parallel program for the children of the parent group), was also summarized in the Parent Contract. Emphasis was placed on respecting a child's readiness to share thoughts and feelings about the divorce process. Once these basic ground rules had been discussed, participants were invited to share what it would take for them to feel safe in the group. This information was recorded on a flip chart, and was used as an informal charter to guide group members in their interactions with one another. Participants were then invited to express how they were feeling about their present circumstances. This general feelings check-in (ie. temperature check), was followed by an exercise to draw a representation of their family. The group leader then facilitated a discussion to elicit how people were feeling about the family constellations they had depicted. During closure, participants were encouraged to comment on what the session had meant to them.

### Week Two

The facilitator announced information deemed pertinent to the group, and then invited participants to report on how they were feeling about their lives. Information was disseminated regarding the impact divorce often has on children. Individuals were invited to discuss the information, using concrete examples when possible to help apply the ideas outlined in the hand-out. An additional

hand-out, which outlined a child's perspective of divorce, was shared to increase awareness of relevant issues, and to expand the discussion. Depression, anger, loss, isolation, rejection, guilt (ie. feeling responsible), confusion, inability to concentrate, disturbed eating and sleeping patterns, and acting out, were all cited as possible impacts on children of divorce. A final hand-out listing examples of feelings was circulated. Group members were invited to use this information to help identify feelings they had been experiencing about the dissolution of their marriage. A parallel was drawn between their emotional experience, and that which their children might be encountering. The facilitator ended the night with a general invitation for group members to express what had been important to them in the session.

### Week Three

The facilitator communicated information germane to the group, and then encouraged group members to comment on how they were feeling that week. Patterns of communication were discussed, with particular emphasis on differentiating between effective and ineffective communication strategies. Effective communication strategies included: active listening (ie. indicating your understanding by summarizing what you believe someone has said), attending (eg. exhibiting interest in what someone is saying by eliminating distractions like television), and being respectful toward

others. Being respectful meant avoiding ineffective communication strategies such as interrupting, blaming, verbally attacking, and otherwise invalidating others. The group leader also introduced the concept of attending to an individual's behaviour (eg. the behaviour of an ex-spouse or child), as a method of hearing what was not being expressed verbally. Further discussion centered on matching outward behaviours to what were likely to be corresponding feelings. Participants were encouraged to become aware of how and what they were communicating verbally and non-verbally. Group members closed by sharing how they could begin to communicate more effectively in their lives.

#### Week Four

The group began with general announcements, followed by an update regarding how life was going for each participant. The facilitator introduced the subject of anger, and began a discussion of how this emotion is generally experienced. Information regarding the arousal cycle (ie. emotional triggers, escalation, crisis, recovery, and depression), and its related behaviours and feelings, was communicated to group members. Individuals were invited to share how they generally expressed anger, and were then helped to assess the interpersonal ramifications of their particular approach. A hand-out describing constructive ways to deal with anger was circulated and discussed. This involved identifying emotional triggers, communicating respectfully,

taking time out to calm down, physically venting anger (eg. exercising vigorously), journalling, and enlisting emotional support from others. Group members were invited to close the session by sharing what had been important to them.

#### Week Five

The facilitator communicated news relevant to the group, and then invited members to report on how they were feeling that week. This was followed by a brief review on anger, and included new information on basic interpersonal skills (eg. listening, attending, and validating), for managing anger and reducing conflict. This was followed by a discussion about stress, and how to manage it. The idea of stress inoculation (eg. reducing vulnerability to stress by having fun or exercising), was introduced, and was followed by a general discussion about ways to relax. Once again, check-out consisted of reporting on what had been important to participants.

#### Week Six

Once announcements had been made, group members expressed how they were feeling. This was followed by a more global discussion regarding current problems or specific issues they were facing. The facilitator spoke about how to pin-point or identify a problem by using communication skills, and by paying attention to emotional and behavioural cues. A differentiation was made between

problems of less importance, called Fly Bys, and problems of greater significance, called Keepers. Participants were helped to identify which of their present difficulties could be "let go" (because they were Fly Bys), and which deserved their time and energy (because they were Keepers). A basic method of problem-solving was introduced. Group members were then able to close the session by expressing what they had found helpful.

### Week Seven

The usual round of announcements and expression of feelings was followed by a discussion regarding the difference in life between acting and reacting. The empowerment associated with taking initiative, was compared to the friction often experienced when an individual simply reacts to circumstances. The concept of assertiveness (ie. representing one's own interests in a respectful manner), was introduced and discussed by the group. Myths regarding assertiveness (eg. that its selfish or uncaring), were also critically evaluated by the participants. This was followed by the usual check-out, which considered the personal importance of the material discussed in the session.

### Week Eight

Session eight followed a similar pattern as previous weeks. Announcements preceded an update regarding how

everyone was feeling, which in turn, preceded several discussion topics. The facilitator began a conversation about various family types (eg. blended, single-parent, intact), and encouraged discussion about the legitimacy of each. A second topic related to age appropriate responsibilities for children, and a hand-out on this subject was shared. The cycle of change was described. In particular, the concept of change as a non-linear process was emphasized. A final exercise engaged participants in sharing one thing they had appreciated about every other member of the group. The facilitator congratulated everyone for the progress they had made, and thanked the group for the opportunity to work with them.

### Self-esteem Group

The session format outlined in the foregoing was also followed in this treatment group. The fundamental difference between the two groups was the added emphasis on bolstering self-esteem. Exercises were used to develop awareness around self-esteem issues and to provide alternatives to self-defeating behaviours and thinking. Client feedback on these exercises was addressed within the context of divorce, and in particular, on how this life crisis can significantly undermine self-esteem.

More specifically, these exercises focused on key areas related to the development and maintenance of self-esteem. Subject areas included: rights and boundaries (eg. the right

to be treated with respect), self-talk (ie. an examination of positive ways to cognitively process one's experience), assertive communication skills, empowering language (eg. using "I" instead of "you"), and developing an awareness of both positive body language (eg. posture), and body image (eg. dress, exercise, diet).

In effect, self-esteem was manipulated by take-home exercises, by discussion and encouragement intended to increase self-awareness and self-worth, and by illuminating alternatives (ie. by promoting self-empowerment through choice). Core topic areas covered in both treatment groups were the same, however, home-work assignments (see appendix A), and emphasis (eg. interpretation of events or perspective), was used to ensure a self-esteem focus for the participants in the SEG.

#### Control Group

The control group was comprised of ten individuals, drawn from the Greater Victoria region. No group support was provided by the Divorce Lifeline for these participants, and CG members were not actively involved in any support group outside the agency. Individuals were invited to contact Divorce Lifeline personnel to discuss any pressing issues. No such contact was made. The intent of this arrangement was to allow CG group members to be as emotionally self-supporting as possible for the duration of the study. CG participants were informed about the

approximate starting date of the next Divorce Lifeline group, and were encouraged to consider this alternative.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### Data Collection and Analysis

An analysis of variance (ANOVA), was used to determine whether there were any significant differences in the mean scores (ie. pre and post scores), derived from the three study groups. Correlational analysis was performed to determine the strength of the relationship between the number of self-esteem exercises completed and participant scores. ANOVA's were then computed to determine any significant differences between the group means when at least one self-esteem exercise was completed. This analysis was repeated to evaluate any significant differences between the group means when at least four self-esteem exercises were completed. Time Competence (Tc), Time Incompetence (Ti), Inner-Directed (I), and Outer-Directed (O), subscales of the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) were evaluated. Overall mean scores were considered for the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI), Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), and the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI).

A one-way ANOVA on pre-test scores revealed no significant differences between the three groups on any of the measures. This result indicates that the study groups were comparable before treatment. Group means, standard deviations, and tests of significance for the pre-test scores are noted in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Pre-test Means, Standard Deviations, and Tests of Significance for POI Subscales: Time Competency (Tc), Time Incompetence (Ti), Other-Directed (O), and Inner-Directed (I); and for STAI, BDI, and CSEI.

Scale	RDLG (n = 18)		SEG (n = 25)		CG (n = 10)		F ratio	p
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Tc	16.06	2.51	14.76	3.55	14.6	4.97	0.853	.432
Ti	6.94	2.51	8.24	3.55	8.4	4.97	0.853	.432
O	41.06	12.15	46.36	12.54	41.5	14.95	1.058	.355
I	85.94	12.15	80.64	12.54	85.5	14.95	1.058	.355
BDI	10.22	7.54	13.72	11.03	17.2	15.53	1.348	.269
STAI	85.94	15.60	92.28	21.72	75.7	14.56	2.870	.066
CSEI	64.67	20.04	59.52	21.15	66.8	19.42	0.585	.561

p < .05

Analysis of the original sample (ie. when all 53 participants were considered), indicated no significant differences in the mean post-test scores between the groups. In fact, none of the five hypotheses were confirmed by the data: the mean post-test Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI) scores for both experimental groups did not prove significantly higher than the mean post-test scores for the control group (CG); the mean post-test CSEI score for the Self-Esteem experimental group (SEG), was not significantly higher than the corresponding scores for either the CG or the Regular Divorce Lifeline experimental group (RDLG); the mean post-test State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) scores for the experimental groups were not significantly lower than the corresponding score for the CG; the mean post-test Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) scores for the experimental groups were not significantly lower than the corresponding score for the CG; the mean post-test Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) scores for the experimental groups were not significantly better than the corresponding scores for the CG. Table 2 reflects these results.

TABLE 2

Post-test Means, Standard Deviations, and Tests of Significance for POI Subscales: Time Competency (Tc), Time Incompetence (Ti), Other-Directed (O), and Inner-Directed (I); and for STAI, BDI, and CSEI.

Scale	RDLG (n = 18)		SEG (n = 25)		CG (n = 10)		F ratio	p
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Tc	16.50	2.83	16.60	2.94	15.3	6.09	0.477	.623
Ti	6.50	2.83	6.40	2.94	6.7	3.92	0.033	.967
O	34.72	11.15	36.72	10.65	38.9	13.45	0.447	.642
I	92.11	11.28	90.28	10.65	88.2	13.49	0.386	.681
BDI	8.22	8.20	10.16	10.09	13.4	13.71	0.816	.449
STAI	80.50	15.67	84.60	24.29	71.6	11.84	1.542	.224
CSEI	70.11	22.86	65.68	24.23	73.5	18.95	0.471	.627

p < .05

A Pearson product-moment correlation however, revealed that a fairly strong relationship existed between the number of self-esteem exercises completed (ie. by members of the SEG) and many of the resulting difference scores (ie. the set of scores representing the difference between the subject's performance on two separate occasions, pre and post). For instance, it was found that a person's ability to stay focussed on the present (ie.  $T_c$ ) was positively correlated with the number of self-esteem exercises he or she had completed ( $r_{T_c} = .528$ ). In other words, the more self-esteem exercises a person completed, the higher their post-test score on  $T_c$  (ie. the more they focussed on matters at hand). Conversely, a negative correlation ( $r_{T_i} = -.528$ ) was found between  $T_i$  and the number of self-esteem exercises completed (suggesting less inclination to focus on either the past or the future).

Similarly, the more self-esteem exercises a person completed, the more inner-directed (I), and hence, less outer-directed (O), he or she became. In other words, a person's reliance on their own personal opinions, values and beliefs to direct life choices was positively correlated ( $r_I = .4295$ ) with the number of self-esteem exercises he or she completed. Conversely, completing more self-esteem exercises went hand in hand with an orientation less reliant on the opinions and advice of others (ie. a negative correlation existed between these two variables,  $r_O = -.4295$ ).

Anxiety (STAI), depression (BDI), and self-esteem (CSEI) were all negatively correlated ( $r_{STAI} = -.6465$ ,  $r_{BDI} = -.5304$ ,  $r_{CSEI} = -.0963$ ) with the number of self-esteem exercises completed. Although this relationship was only slight with respect to self-esteem, it is clear that completing more self-esteem exercises went hand in hand with lower post-test scores for both anxiety and depression. It is important to note that these correlations do not suggest causation, but rather indicate the tendency or strength of relationship between the variables considered. Table 3 reflects the relevant correlation coefficients and tests of significance.

TABLE 3

Correlation coefficients and ANOVA of difference scores by group with the number of exercises (for POI subscales, and BDI, STAI, and CSEI)

Scale	r	F	p
Dif-Tc	.5280**	10.87	.002
Dif-Ti	-.5280**	10.35	.002
Dif-O	-.4295**	8.13	.006
Dif-I	.4295**	8.25	.006
Dif-STAI	-.6465**	10.24	.002
Dif-BDI	-.5304*	5.75	.020
Dif-CSEI	-.0963	0.08	.783

r = correlation coefficient (significance = \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01)

A review of the Self-Esteem Checklist (see Appendix B), indicated that SEG members varied widely on the number of self-esteem exercises that each completed. This fact, in conjunction with the correlation found between the number of self-esteem exercises completed and difference scores, suggested further analysis of the data would be valuable.

In fact, when only the participants who had completed at least one self-esteem exercise were considered (ie. 16 of the original 25 SEG members), significant differences between the groups were found on four variables, time competence ( $F(2, 41) = 3.99, p < .026$ ), time incompetence ( $F(2, 41) = 4.40, p < .019$ ), outer-directed ( $F(2, 41) = 3.48, p < .04$ ), and inner-directed ( $F(2, 41) = 3.49, p < .04$ ). When only the participants who had completed four or more self-esteem were considered (ie. 13 of the original 25 SEG members), significant differences between the groups were found on five variables, time competence ( $F(2, 38) = 5.64, p < .007$ ), time incompetence ( $F(2, 38) = 6.37, p < .004$ ), outer-directed ( $F(2, 38) = 4.14, p < .024$ ), inner-directed ( $F(2, 38) = 4.15, p < .023$ ), and anxiety ( $F(2, 38) = 3.27, p < .049$ ).

A careful examination of the mean difference scores (ie. the average difference between the subject's performance on two separate occasions, pre and post), helps reveal an interesting pattern to the data. For instance, Table 5 shows that the mean difference score for time competence is significantly higher for the SEG than the

corresponding scores for either the RDLG or the CG. This suggests that members of the SEG (ie. those who have completed four or more self-esteem exercises), are more able to focus on the "here and now", than either of their counterparts in the RDLG or CG. Similarly, a significantly lower mean difference score on time incompetence, reveals that the SEG was less inclined to orient their focus of attention to past or future events. In effect, the SEG exhibited a greater degree of change over the two testing periods.

This pattern can be followed throughout Table 5, showing that in comparison to the RDLG and CG, the SEG was considerably more inner-directed versus outer-directed (ie. more inclined to make decisions based on personal beliefs and experiences, rather than deferring to outside influences in this regard), was considerably less anxious, and somewhat less depressed. Tables 4 and 5 reflect these results.

TABLE 4

ANOVA of the Difference Scores by group for POI Subscales, BDI, STAI, and CSEI, (When the Number of Self-Esteem Exercises Completed is Greater Than or Equal to One)

Scale	Group	N	Group Diff. Mean	Stdv.	F	p
Time Competence	1	18	0.44	2.28	3.99	.026 *
	2	16	2.69	2.06		
	3	10	0.70	3.20		
Time Incompetence	1	18	-0.44	2.28	4.40	.019 *
	2	16	-2.69	2.06		
	3	10	-1.70	2.31		
Outer Directed	1	18	-6.33	11.88	3.48	.040 *
	2	16	-12.63	10.01		
	3	10	-2.60	3.57		
Inner Directed	1	18	6.17	11.86	3.49	.040 *
	2	16	12.63	10.01		
	3	10	2.70	3.47		
State-Trait Anxiety Inventory	1	18	-5.44	13.19	1.80	.178
	2	16	-12.94	11.86		
	3	10	-4.10	16.41		
Beck Depression Inventory	1	18	-2.00	4.83	1.81	.177
	2	16	-5.50	4.68		
	3	10	-3.80	7.10		
Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory	1	18	5.44	18.83	0.02	.978
	2	16	6.00	13.62		
	3	10	6.70	8.51		

( \* indicates significance when  $p < .05$ )

Group 1 = Regular Divorce Lifeline Group

Group 2 = Self-Esteem Group

Group 3 = Control Group

TABLE 5

ANOVA of the Difference Scores by group for POI Subscales, BDI, STAI, and CSEI, (When the Number of Self-Esteem Exercises Completed is Greater Than or Equal to Four)

Scale	Group	N	Group Diff. Mean	Stdv.	F	p
Time Competence	1	18	0.44	2.28	5.64	.007 *
	2	13	3.23	1.79		
	3	10	0.70	3.20		
Time Incompetence	1	18	-0.44	2.28	6.37	.004 *
	2	13	-3.23	1.79		
	3	10	-1.70	2.31		
Outer Directed	1	18	-6.33	11.88	4.14	.024 *
	2	13	-14.08	10.22		
	3	10	-2.60	3.57		
Inner Directed	1	18	6.17	11.86	4.15	.023 *
	2	13	14.08	10.22		
	3	10	2.70	3.47		
State-Trait Anxiety Inventory	1	18	-5.44	13.19	3.27	.049 *
	2	13	-16.00	9.03		
	3	10	-4.10	16.41		
Beck Depression Inventory	1	18	-2.00	4.83	1.33	.276
	2	13	-5.15	4.52		
	3	10	-3.80	7.10		
Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory	1	18	5.44	18.83	0.03	.966
	2	13	6.77	14.91		
	3	10	6.70	8.51		

( \* indicates significance when  $p < .05$ )

Group 1 = Regular Divorce Lifeline Group

Group 2 = Self-Esteem Group

Group 3 = Control Group

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### Overview and Summary

The incidence of divorce in Canada has increased continuously over the years, and with it there has been a corresponding increase in the overall effect this is having on society. There were over 77,000 divorces in Canada in 1991 (Statistics Canada Year-book, 1992). A conservative extrapolation of these numbers reveals the enormity of this social phenomena. Seventy-seven thousand divorces translates into 144,000 ex-spouses, includes approximately 115,000 children (based on 1.5 children per marriage), and involves well over 200,000 parents of these divorcing adult children. When other family members (eg. siblings, grandparents), friends, and working associates are considered, the total number of people affected by divorce is staggering.

Estimates for Canada in 1992 indicate there will be over 833,000 single-parent families, 113,000 headed by males and 720,000 headed by females. Approximately 16.4% and 47.8% of these respective family totals will be living below the poverty line. This financial burden creates additional stress in the lives of parents and children experiencing divorce. Moreover, this prevalent life crisis has taxed social programs designed to manage the socioeconomic repercussions of divorce.

The emotional, physical, and psychological costs of divorce are well documented. Krantzler (1973), Heatherington and Cox (1978), Wallerstein and Kelly (1980), Weiss (1979), and countless others, point to the feelings of loss, helplessness, depression, fear, rejection, confusion, anger, and anxiety that accompany divorce. The possible impact this is having on helping professionals (eg. social workers, lawyers, counsellors, judges), has also been mentioned.

The alarming consequences of, and increasing trend toward divorce, have illuminated how vital it is to identify effective counselling interventions to address these matters. A review of the literature indicates that divorce deeply affects self-esteem, and that self-esteem interventions have been widely applied, and are effective in catalysing emotional adjustment. Hence, this study evaluated the efficacy of using a self-esteem intervention to facilitate post-divorce adjustment.

Participants were drawn from the Greater Victoria area. They had been referred to the program by their doctors, by other service agencies, or by Divorce Lifeline staff. Local newspapers and Rogers Community Announcements were also used to inform people about the program.

In total, 53 individuals participated in three groups (ie. a control group, a self-esteem group, and a regular Divorce Lifeline group). A pre/post test design was utilized to evaluate any differences between the groups.

The Beck Depression Inventory, State Trait Anxiety Inventory, Personal Orientation Inventory , and Coopersmith Self-Esteem inventory were administered at the beginning and end of an eight-week group intervention.

Analysis of pre-test scores indicated that all three groups were similar before treatment. An analysis of variance on post-test scores did not reveal any significant differences between the three groups. However, a correlational analysis indicated a positive correlation existed between the number of self-esteem exercises completed and several resultant scores. Post-hoc analysis (which considered only SEG members having completed four or more self-esteem exercises), revealed significant differences between the groups on five variables: Time Competence (Tc), Time Incompetence (Ti), Outer-Directed (O), Inner-Directed (I), and anxiety (STAI). In effect, participating SEG members (ie. those who had completed self-esteem exercises), faired significantly better across these variables than did their counter-parts in the CG or the RDLG.

## **Discussion**

It was not surprising to discover that there were no significant differences in the pre-test scores between the groups. It is reasonable to assume that divorce and separation present similar challenges and experiences to us all. In fact, the emotional rigours commonly associated

with this life crisis have been clearly outlined in the foregoing text.

However, it was surprising to review the data regarding the treatment's impact on self-esteem. It was hypothesized that the mean post-test scores on the CSEI would be significantly higher for both treatment groups when compared to the CG. It was also postulated that the SEG would show significantly more improvement on this variable than the RDLG. The study's findings do not support either of these assertions.

In fact, all three groups in the study experienced marked improvement in self-esteem over the course of the study. It is noteworthy, however, that the SEG experienced the greatest improvement on this variable. Although all three groups showed improvement, the SEG fared best, followed by the RDLG, followed by the CG. The fact that all three groups experienced an increase in self-esteem suggests this may be a common phenomenon in the adjustment process. It is reasonable to think that those, who initially experience a sense of personal failure in relationship dissolution, may gradually regain a more compassionate view of themselves. These findings seem to suggest however, that a conscious effort to focus on self-esteem may amplify this effect.

There may be several reasons for the non-significance of this result. First, it is possible that the treatment in the SEG did not sufficiently address this factor. For

instance, the SEG participants were merely invited to complete self-esteem exercises, and this resulted in a wide variation in responses. A second explanation holds more promise. It is more probable, for instance, that self-esteem is deeply entrenched in one's psyche, and thus, more resistant to short-term attempts to change it. One's self-concept is derived from a life-time of experiences, feelings and perceptions, and likewise, is more apt to change over an extended period of time (McKay & Fanning, 1987). Still, the positive improvement experienced on this variable is encouraging, and does suggest that one's self-esteem is not immutable.

A third hypothesis held that the mean post-test STAI scores for both treatment groups would be significantly lower than the mean post-test scores for the CG. The data does not support this idea. All three study groups showed improvement on this variable (ie. levels of anxiety decreased), over the course of the study. Once again, there was a variation in the level of improvement across groups. The SEG showed the most improvement, followed by the RDLG, followed by the CG. However, this variation in improvement was not enough to indicate that a significant difference existed between the treatment groups and the CG.

Several reasons may account for the non-significance of the STAI scores. For instance, it may be too optimistic to expect significant changes in levels of anxiety in just seven weeks. In fact, it is possible that some participants

experience an increase in their anxiety level over the course of the intervention program. Group members have often reported feeling more anxious as they begin to confront the enormity of their loss. Since one of the stages of post-divorce adjustment is denial, it is reasonable to expect changes in comfort level as people confront the reality of their predicament.

A second reason anxiety levels may not have significantly decreased for either the RDLG or the SEG, could involve the briefness of the intervention. Separation and divorce introduce feelings of loss, failure, rejection, isolation, depression, anxiety, helplessness, fear, anger, and deep anguish, into the lives of those affected by this life crisis (Heatherington & Cox, 1978; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Weiss, 1979). Moreover, participants continue to contend with financial, legal, emotional, and custody issues long after their initial break-up. In fact, the process of post-divorce adjustment, and the emotional healing necessary for most people affected by marital dissolution can take years.

In view of the foregoing, it is quite amazing that all three groups experienced the degree of improvement in anxiety indicated by the study's findings. It is understandable that individuals can experience tremendous relief when they are given the opportunity to share their concerns in a supportive social environment. Although both experimental groups provided this opportunity, it is merely

a matter of conjecture how CG participants may have benefited in a similar way.

It was also hypothesized that the mean post-test BDI scores for the experimental groups would be significantly lower than the respective scores for the CG. Although the data does not support this assertion, a similar pattern of adjustment between the groups is evidenced. Once again, the SEG made the greatest improvement on this variable, followed by the RDLG, followed by the CG. All three study groups experienced a decrease in levels of depression over the eight-week period. The difference in adjustment between the groups, however, was not significant.

This result is not altogether surprising, considering the view that depression seems to affect individuals at a deep emotional level (Beck, 1979). It is fair to say that like self-esteem, depression may be less malleable within the context of a short-term intervention. Depression is a common experience for many people who are affected by separation and divorce. In fact, it is not uncommon for individuals to experience this condition for extended periods of time, prior to, during, and after separation. The study's findings, however, make it abundantly clear that levels of depression can be positively influenced.

### **The Significance of Self-Esteem**

The data indicates a substantially different story for those people who completed four or more self-esteem

exercises. In fact, a significant difference was found on five variables (Tc, Ti, O, I, STAI), when this SE sub-group was compared with both the RDLG and the CG.

In contrast to the RDLG and the CG, these particular subjects made a significant improvement in alleviating their level of anxiety. This level of improvement was not indicated when only one self-esteem exercise had been completed, suggesting that the degree of concentration on self-esteem may be more important in moderating levels of anxiety.

A fifth and final supposition advanced by this study, concerned the possible impact the treatment groups would have on self-efficacy and on time orientation (ie. on Tc, Ti, I, and O). As previously mentioned, there were no significant differences found between groups, until the number of self-esteem exercises completed was taken into consideration.

The data reflects a significant difference between the SEG members (ie. those who had completed at least one self-esteem exercise), and both the RDLG and the CG. This SE sub-group was significantly more "here and now" oriented (ie. had significantly better scores on Tc and Ti). They were also significantly more inner-directed in their life choices (as indicated by significantly better scores on I and O), than either the RDLG or the CG.

Since the self-esteem exercises were designed to encourage a "me" focus, it is not surprising to note that

the SE sub-group was significantly more inner-directed than either the RDLG or the CG. It is reasonable to assume that as individuals begin to affirm and encourage themselves, they might also become less reliant on external influences concerning their life choices. Similarly, as people develop confidence in their lives, they are probably less likely to be overwhelmed by past difficulties, or be as preoccupied with future concerns. Rather, as individuals become empowered, it seems more likely they will exercise this new-found influence on the "here and now". It is reasonable to expect that individuals will choose to exert influence where it will be effective. This is more likely to include current life circumstances, rather than a past or future orientation.

The positive reinforcement people receive by taking initiative, likely accounts for both the reduced anxiety (as individuals begin to realize they can do something about their circumstances), and the elevation in self-worth (as individuals begin to re-discover themselves in the act of re-claiming their lives). In a sense, working on self-esteem, allows people to recognize themselves, to show respect and consideration for "self", to honour personal needs, and to invoke a process of self-responsibility. It's possible that this compassion toward self may facilitate viewing separation and divorce as more than just an ordeal to endure. Rather, consideration of self, may be

instrumental in helping individuals view their relationship crisis as an opportunity for personal-growth.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Invariably, research of this nature tends to offer learning beyond what was originally anticipated or hypothesized. This study is no different. It illuminates several opportunities for additional experimental rigour in subsequent research.

A perennial drawback of many research studies involves the use of small sample sizes, combined with relatively brief intervention periods. Although this study did involve 53 individuals, it is clear that the research results would have been strengthened had there been more participants. Likewise, an extended program intervention, combined with mid or long-term follow-up evaluations (eg. 3 and 6 month post-testing), would serve to strengthen the study's findings. In fact, it's possible that an extended program intervention could produce even more dramatic improvement than what has already been shown by this study.

A related consideration involves the composition of the study groups. Notably, group membership reflected a decided difference in the concentration of women compared to men. In fact, there was never less than a 2 to 1 ratio of women to men across the three groups. The RDLG had a 3 to 1 ratio of women to men. Furthermore, the constellation of participants varied with respect to length of marriage,

number of marriages, length of separation, relationship status (eg. separated, divorced, in a new relationship), number and custody status of children, and respective age. Although random assignment helps control for these possible influences, it is clear that more rigorous attention to these variables would strengthen the generalizability of the study's findings.

Another possible complication in this study relates to the various stylistic approaches that were used by different group leaders. There may be some credence to the idea that a particular leadership style could be more effective in facilitating post-divorce adjustment. In this study, it is possible that group members responded more receptively to certain personalities and/or leadership styles. However, given the myriad of personality combinations presented by potential group members, as well as the resulting interaction effects that would be possible, it seems unlikely that this variable could be adequately controlled. Moreover, it could be argued that using different leadership styles actually controlled for a leadership effect, and hence, was an actual strength of the study. A more promising tact would involve controlling for other, more amenable factors (eg. sample size and composition, length and content of intervention, and stage of adjustment).

A further consideration in this study concerns the tremendous value of participant feedback. It is clear that this additional information would have been helpful in the

overall interpretation of the study's findings. A qualitative component to the study could have identified additional improvements and/or deficiencies in program design. Information regarding: an individual's extended financial and emotional resources (supplementary counselling for instance), the potential affect of missed sessions, the possibility of multiple losses, and other influential life events, could have been evaluated for their impact on post-divorce adjustment. This expanded profile would have been invaluable in clarifying the quantitative information generated by the study. In short, a multiple-methodology approach to evaluating this kind of research is recommended.

A final thought concerns the approach used to enlist the participation of SEG members. In this study, individuals in the SEG were merely invited to complete self-esteem exercises. It is clear that the study's findings would have been strengthened had there been a higher participation rate by this group. It is recommended that an attempt be made in future research to form a SEG, where the completion of self-esteem exercises is mandatory. Naturally, there will always be individual choice in this matter. However, it is likely that a better response would be realized if there was an expectation that group membership also meant a commitment to complete all the self-esteem exercises.

### Implications of the Study

The literature indicates that education/insight support groups are effective in assisting individuals to cope with difficulties and challenges emanating from separation and divorce. This study provides additional evidence to support much of the research already completed on post-divorce adjustment. Overall, research findings indicate that group interventions based on education, insight, and mutual support, facilitate the adjustment process.

In particular, this study advances the idea that a treatment intervention which focuses on enhancing self-esteem, might provide additional benefit to group participants. The SEG in this study fared significantly better on five variables (ie. on Tc, Ti, I, O, STAI), than either the RDLG or the CG.

Individuals who worked on their self-esteem, showed an increased ability to live in the present. This ability to integrate past, present, and future experience is fundamental to the process of self-actualization. Hence, the improved time-competence experienced by the SEG sub-group, may be an indication that they are beginning to positively integrate the trauma of divorce into their lives.

Moreover, individuals in this SE sub-group became more "inner" directed in their life choices. This greater sense of autonomy reflects an increased tendency for individuals to be guided by personal principles. In other words, an improved score in this area reflects a better balance

between internal (ie. personal), and external (eg. societal) influences. This suggests that a self-esteem based intervention may be instrumental in re-establishing both emotional balance and life direction.

Finally, it appears that participants who focus on improving their sense of self-worth, also experience the added benefit of significantly lowering their level of anxiety. This may have more to do with an increased confidence in coping with anxiety, as well as the inclination to re-frame current circumstances as less traumatic. Nonetheless, a self-esteem approach to managing the crisis of separation and divorce, appears to considerably alleviate the stress associated with it.

Moreover, it is important to note that personal work on self-esteem was a voluntary component of this study. Individuals in the SEG were merely invited to complete exercises designed to enhance self-esteem. Consequently, an intervention strategy which places heavier emphasis on self-esteem, could be even more instrumental in facilitating post-divorce adjustment. In fact, a self-esteem intervention of greater duration, could promote more substantial changes in depression and self-concept. Since significant improvement (ie. on Tc, Ti, I, O, STAI), was realized over eight weeks, it is reasonable to anticipate greater success with self-esteem interventions of greater length. Additional research is necessary to lend support to this assertion.

The alarming increase in the rate and numbers of divorce in Canada has amplified the need for effective post-divorce intervention programs. It is increasingly clear as more and more people become affected by this traumatic experience, that counselling programs need to be evaluated to ensure this effectiveness. More research is essential, especially in light of the few outcome evaluations now available. It is hoped that this study will further the evaluation process and will ultimately contribute to the healing that is so vital to post-divorce adjustment.

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APPENDIX A

Week One

a) write down (5) qualities you like about yourself beginning with the sentence, "I like \_\_\_\_\_."

b) read these statements out loud to yourself once a day for the next week

Note: These exercises do not have to be returned. They are for your own use and as can be expected, will provide the most benefit to you the more they are utilized. Like most things in life, your self-esteem will only improve with practice. Make an investment in your "self". I think you're worth it. All the best.....Jody (477-2407)...call if you have any questions or concerns.

Week Two

a) write down (5) of the most important things that have happened to you in your life

b) each day for the next week, reflect on how much influence you had in making these things come about

Note: Most people are surprised to discover just how much they had to do with realizing important experiences in their lives. This is a chance to give yourself credit for playing such a crucial role in determining the most significant events of your life. Congratulations, you did an excellent job!

Week Three

a) try to observe the language you use, both to speak to others and when you are having an internal dialogue with yourself

b) substitute the words "I won't" whenever you notice yourself saying "I can't"

c) substitute the words "I could" whenever you notice yourself saying "I should"

d) try to use the word "I" whenever you are speaking of yourself...eg. you might say..."I" feel happy about what's going on...rather than..."You" or "One" feel(s) happy when things are going that way.

Note: Whenever I use "I won't" vs. "I can't" language, I become more powerful. "I won't" is a decision which I can make, whereas, "I can't" gives me no alternatives, and renders me powerless to do anything about my circumstances. Likewise, "I should" gives me no alternatives, and serves as a judgement about my conduct, whereas, "I could" gives me options and the power to choose them. Whenever I say "I", I am announcing to the world that I exist and that I matter. How you speak to yourself or others about yourself can have a dramatic effect on both your self-confidence and your self-esteem. For some of you, this will entail developing new language habits. Be patient with yourself; you deserve that kindness, and you have a right to take charge of your life. I know you can do it!

Week Four

a) take (5-10) minutes each day for the next week to list the good things you are doing for yourself and others

b) read your list at least once a day for the next week

Note: Its vital to realize that despite the emotional turmoil you may be experiencing right now, that there are good things still happening in your life. Moreover, its self-affirming to celebrate the fact that you have something to do with these positive events. Give yourself the credit you deserve, and remind yourself about the goodness of you.

Week Five

- a) list your abilities and talents
- b) read this list out loud to yourself each day for the next week
- c) begin each sentence with "I"...eg. "I am intelligent"

Note: People often focus on what they regard as their negative or undesirable qualities. More often than not, this tendency to see the worst in themselves is amplified during times of high stress. This exercise can be a reminder that you are a valuable and talented person in this world. Celebrate yourself!

Week Six

- a) reflect on a difficult experience you have overcome in your life
- b) list all the things you did to overcome this difficulty
- c) list the qualities (eg. perseverance, courage, etc.), that you exhibited in overcoming this difficulty
- d) reflect on what your attitude was during this difficult experience, and notice how thinking in this way helped you overcome this challenge
- e) reflect on this list each day for the next week

Note: It is self-supporting to remind yourself that, although things might feel rough right now, you have successfully overcome similar challenges in the past. It is good to know that you have the resources, the fortitude to meet and navigate your way through crisis situations when they have developed in your life. You have gained strength and wisdom for having done so. You will this time too!

Week Seven

a) list (5) of the most important ways that you are kind to others in your life

b) make a conscious effort to treat yourself with the same kindness for the next week

c) consult your list each day to remind yourself about what to do

Note: People often say they would be satisfied if others would only treat them in the same way they treat others. The irony is that they often do not treat themselves with the same consideration they afford others. Kindness to others begins with learning how to be kind to yourself. You deserve every consideration you give to others. Be kind to you!

**APPENDIX B**

Self-Esteem Check-list

Check the exercises you were able to do in the last seven weeks.

Week One.....\_\_

Week Two.....\_\_

Week Three...\_\_

Week Four....\_\_

Week Five....\_\_

Week Six.....\_\_

Week Seven...\_\_

Please feel free to provide any comments about your experience in using the self-esteem exercises:

Name and Group: \_\_\_\_\_

(\*Note: this is vital information and will not compromise your anonymity in any way. Call if you have any questions or concerns. Thanks.....Jody (477-2407).)

**APPENDIX C**

Dear Participant:

My name is Jody Pickard and I am completing a Masters Degree in Counselling Psychology at the University of Victoria. I am in my second year, which requires the completion of a major research study called a thesis. This is where I hope you come in.

Programs like those at the Divorce Lifeline play a crucial role in helping people adjust to some very difficult, and often, unexpected life changes. Your involvement in the proposed research also plays a crucial role in improving the important services provided by the agency. By participating in the study, I believe you also stand to gain tremendous insight into your current life circumstances. I trust this understanding will assist you in making fruitful choices for your future, as well as help you cope now with some very difficult times in your life.

I would like to personally thank you for your contribution and generosity of self. The staff at the Divorce Lifeline, in particular, Linda, Pam, Carol and Gabrielle, have all played important parts in developing and implementing the study you are now participating in. I would also like to thank them.

my very best,

Jody

APPENDIX D

### A Few Notes About the Project

This project is designed to assess your attitudes toward yourself and toward your life at a point in time when you are likely experiencing a range of emotions. You will be answering a series of questionnaires, which will be administered both at the beginning of the study, and once again, approximately eight weeks later.

Remember there are no right or wrong answers to the questionnaires, but rather, a reminder that whatever you're experiencing right now is a legitimate response to the life changes you're encountering. Complete the questions as quickly as you can by circling the answers which best characterize your present attitudes and experiences.

Participation in the study will help you better clarify and understand your present experiences. This understanding can be pivotal in helping you establish more satisfying directions in your life. Once you have this awareness, you have empowered yourself to make different, and more beneficial choices in your life.

Your participation will play a crucial role in future improvements to existing services provided by the Divorce Lifeline. I would therefore, be more than willing to meet with you as a group to discuss the results of the study.

I thank you once again for taking this opportunity to help yourself, and in doing so, for helping so many others who may require support in the future.

**APPENDIX E**

CONSENT FORM

I understand that by enrolling in the Divorce Lifeline Program, that I am taking part in a research project, and I hereby agree to participate in such a project. The purpose of the research has been explained to me by the group leader, and I am satisfied that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained.

I am aware that my participation is completely voluntary, and that I am under no obligation to participate. Non-participation in the project will in no way affect the availability of services (or relationships with) the Divorce Lifeline. I also understand that I may withdraw from the study any time I feel it appropriate.

I further agree to complete the assessment instruments as described to me, and I understand that, all completed forms will be locked safely away in a filing cabinet. Although there is a place to insert my name on some of the questionnaires, I know to ignore this request to ensure anonymity.

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX F**

SAMPLE ITEMS FOR THE  
STATE-TRAIT ANXIETY INVENTORY

FORM Y-1

by Charles D. Spielberger, R.L. Gorsuch, R. Lushene, P.R.  
Vagg, and G.A. Jacobs

A number of statements which people have used to describe themselves are given below. Read each statement and then circle the appropriate number to the right of the statement to indicate how you generally feel. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much Time on any one statement but give the answer which seems to describe your present feelings best.

<b>Anxiety</b>	not at	somewhat	moderately	very much
<b>Present</b>	all		so	so

I am  
tense.

**Anxiety**  
**Absent**

I feel  
calm.

I feel  
secure.

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SAMPLE ITEMS FOR THE  
COOPERSMITH SELF-ESTEEM INVENTORY - ADULT FORM

by Stanley Coopersmith, Ph.D.

You will find here a list of statements about feelings. If a statement describes how you usually feel, put an **X** in the column "Like Me." If the statement does not describe how you usually feel, put an **X** in the column "Unlike Me." There are no right or wrong answers.

Like	Unlike	
Me	Me	

---

1. It's pretty tough to be me.

---

2. I often feel upset with my work.

---

3. People usually follow my ideas.

---

4. Most people are better like than I am.

---

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SAMPLE ITEMS FOR THE  
**PERSONAL ORIENTATION INVENTORY**

by Everett L. Shostrom, PH.D.

This inventory consists of pairs of numbered statements. Read each statement and decide which of the two paired statements most consistently applies to you. ....Remember, try to make some answer to every statement.

1. a. No matter how hard I try, my feelings are often hurt.  
b. If I manage the situation right, I can avoid being hurt.
2. a. I can put off until tomorrow what I ought to do today.  
b. I don't put off until tomorrow what I ought to do today.
3. a. I strive always to predict what will happen in the future.  
b. I do not feel it necessary always to predict what will happen in the future.
4. a. My moral values are dictated by society.  
b. My moral values are self-determined.
5. a. I do what others expect of me.  
b. I feel free to not do what others expect of me.

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SAMPLE ITEMS FOR THE  
BECK DEPRESSION INVENTORY

by Aaron T. Beck

On this questionnaire are groups of statements. Please read each group of statements carefully. Then pick out the one statement in each group which best describes the way you have been feeling the PAST WEEK, INCLUDING TODAY! Circle the number beside the statement you picked. If several statements in the group seem to apply equally well, circle each one. Be sure to read all the statements in each group before making your choice.

1. 0 I do not feel sad.  
1 I feel sad.  
2 I am sad all the time and I can't snap out of it.  
3 I am so sad or unhappy that I can't stand it.
  
2. 0 I am not particularly discouraged about the future.  
1 I feel discouraged about the future.  
2 I feel I have nothing to look forward to.  
3 I feel that the future is hopeless and that things cannot improve.

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## VITAE

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Date of birth: October 17, 1959

### Educational Institutions Attended:

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UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA, VICTORIA                      1992 - 1994

### Degrees Awarded:

B. Com.                      University of Alberta                      1986

### Honours and Awards:

Honours Student      Red Lake District High School                      1974-1979

Highest Academic Standing      R.L.D.H.S.                      1978/1979

Griffith Mine Scholarship      Red Lake, Ontario                      1979

Legion Bursary                      Red Lake, Ontario                      1979

Campbell Mine Scholarship      Balmertown, Ontario                      1979

Ontario Scholar                      Province of Ontario                      1979

University of Windsor Scholarship                      1979

University of Alberta Scholarship                      1979


University of Western Ontario Scholarship                      1979

Certificate of Merit                      Province of Alberta                      1986

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Title of Thesis: Post-Divorce Adjustment: Group  
Interventions That Attempt to Heal the Pain

Author:   
Jody John Alexander Pickard

Date: Jan. 24/95